

The Gospel in Galatians

Unions	Churches	Members	Population*
Atlantic Union Conference	568	151,738	34,200,000
Canada Bible Church, Inc.	208	82,589	31,730,000
Columbia Union Conference	407	136,180	50,000,000
Latin Union Conference	505	86,200	26,470,000
Mid-American Union Conference	440	144,212	26,950,000
North Pacific Union Conference	424	87,713	33,540,000
Pacific Union Conference	590	222,708	56,237,000
Southern Union Conference	1,170	252,187	69,227,000
Southeastern Union Conference	508	103,889	37,118,000
Total	6,204	1,126,520	540,897,000

*Based on U.S. Department of Commerce, 1997-2010



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- Provide resources to train Bible workers and plant churches among refugee populations throughout North America.
- Children's Project: Train and equip Native American teens to share God's love through Vacation Bible School-type programs among Native American populations in North America.

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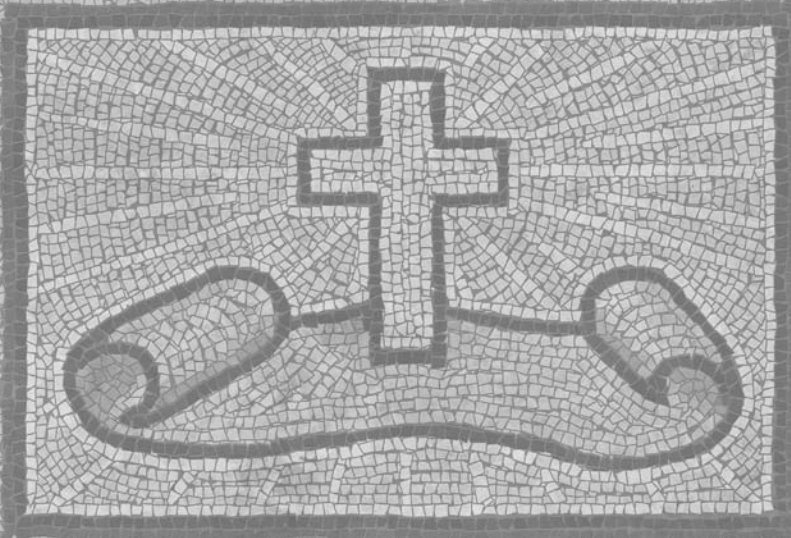
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THE GOSPEL IN GALATIANS

Paul's letter to the Galatians has been compared to spiritual "dynamite," and rightly so. Except for Romans, no other book in the Bible has sparked as much spiritual revival and reformation. One could argue that out of the pages of Galatians (along with Romans) Protestantism itself was born. It was while reading Galatians that Martin Luther first was touched with the glorious good news of righteousness by faith. "The Epistle to the Galatians," he said, "is my epistle. To it I am married."

In turn, it was Luther's gospel-centered writings that, on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, transformed the life of John Wesley, who then spearheaded a spiritual revival that swept not only through the British Isles but across the entire English-speaking world.

Seventh-day Adventists also are indebted to Galatians. Through the study of Galatians, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones helped the Adventist Church in the 1880s and 90s rediscover the truth of righteousness by faith.

What is it about Galatians that has made it such a backbone of spiritual revival? Why has it been able to touch the hearts of so many? In a manner unlike any other book in the Bible, Galatians addresses a number of themes crucial to the Christian soul. It is in Galatians that Paul tackles issues such as freedom, the role of the law in salvation, our condition in Christ, and the nature of the Spirit-led life, as well as the age-old question, How can sinful humans be made right before a holy and just God?

Of course, other books, such as Romans, address some of these same questions, but Galatians is different. Not only is it more succinct, but its rich themes are written in a powerfully personal and impassioned pastoral tone that can't help but touch hearts open to the Spirit of God, even today.

Although Paul's letter speaks to us personally, our understanding can be strengthened if we are aware of the original historical situation that Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was addressing.

Many scholars believe that Galatians may be the earliest of Paul's letters, perhaps written in A.D. 49, after the famous Jerusalem council (*Acts 15*). The book may be the oldest Christian document known. As Acts and Galatians make clear, the early church found itself in a fierce battle over the nature of salvation, especially in the case of Gentiles. According to a group of Jewish believers known as Judaizers, belief in Jesus alone was not good enough for Gentiles. Gentiles must also be circumcised and follow the laws of Moses (*Acts 15:1*). It is no surprise, then, that when Paul founded a church of Gentiles in Galatia, some of these Judaizers traveled there to "straighten things out."

When word of this problem reached Paul, he reacted fervently. Recognizing that this false gospel of salvation by faith and works threatened to undermine the work of Christ, Paul wrote the Galatians an impassioned defense of the gospel. In the strongest of words, he identified this false teaching for what it really was—legalism, pure and simple.

This quarter's Bible study guide invites us to journey with the apostle Paul as he pleads with the Galatians to remain true to Jesus. At the same time, it also gives us a chance to reflect on our own understanding of the gospel. It's my sincere hope that, over the course of this quarter, God's Spirit will spark a spiritual revival in our hearts as we rediscover what God has done for us in Christ.

It is in Galatians that Paul tackles issues such as freedom, the role of the law in salvation, our condition in Christ, and the nature of the Spirit-led life, as well as the age-old question, How can sinful humans be made right before a holy and just God?

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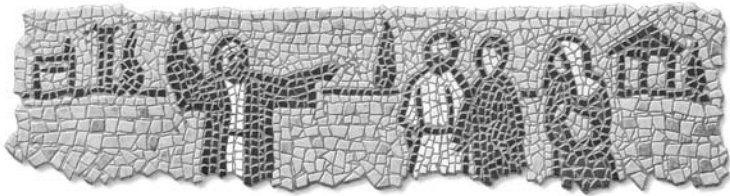
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Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 6:9–15; 9:1–9; 1 Sam. 16:7; Matt. 7:1; Acts 11:19–21; 15:1–5.*

Memory Text: “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’ ” (*Acts 11:18, NKJV*).

It's not that hard to understand Saul of Tarsus (also known as the apostle Paul after his conversion) and why he did what he did. As a devout Jew who was taught all his life about the importance of the law and about the soon-coming political redemption of Israel, the idea of the long-awaited Messiah being ignominiously executed like the worst of criminals was just too much for him to tolerate.

No wonder, then, he was convinced that the followers of Jesus were being disloyal to the Torah and, thus, hindering God's plan for Israel. Their claims that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah and that He had risen from the dead were, he believed, rank apostasy. There could be no tolerance for such nonsense or for anyone who refused to give up those notions. Saul was determined to be God's agent to rid Israel of these beliefs. Hence, he first appears in the pages of Scripture as a violent persecutor of his fellow Jews, those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

God, however, had far different plans for Saul, plans that he never could have anticipated for himself: not only was this Jew going to preach Jesus as the Messiah, he was going to do it among the Gentiles!

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 1.*

Persecutor of Christians

Saul of Tarsus first appears in Acts as one involved in the stoning of Stephen (*Acts 7:58*) and then in connection with the more wide-scale persecution that broke out in Jerusalem (*Acts 8:1–5*). Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul play a significant role in the book of Acts because they were involved in events that led to the spread of the Christian faith beyond the Jewish world. Stephen is of particular significance because his preaching and martyrdom appear to have had a profound influence on Saul of Tarsus.

Stephen himself was a Greek-speaking Jew, and one of the original seven deacons (*Acts 6:3–6*). According to Acts, a group of foreign Jews who had come to live in Jerusalem (*vs. 9*) entered into a dispute with Stephen over the content of his preaching about Jesus. It is possible, maybe even likely, that Saul of Tarsus was involved in these debates.

Read Acts 6:9–15. What charges were brought against Stephen? Of what do these charges remind you? (*See also Matt. 26:59–61.*)

The fierce hostility toward Stephen's preaching appears to have resulted from two different things. On the one hand, Stephen drew the ire of his opponents by not placing primary importance on the Jewish law and the temple, which had become the focal point of Judaism and were treasured symbols of religious and national identity. But Stephen did more than merely downplay these two treasured icons; he vigorously proclaimed that Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, was the true center of the Jewish faith.

No wonder, then, that he angered the Pharisee Saul (*Phil. 3:3–6*), whose zeal against the early Christians indicates that he probably belonged to a strict and militant wing of the Pharisees, one full of revolutionary fervor. Saul saw that the great prophetic promises of God's kingdom had not yet been fulfilled (*Daniel 2, Zech. 8:23, Isaiah 40–55*), and he probably believed it was his task to help God bring that day about—which could be done by cleansing Israel of religious corruption, including the idea that this Jesus was the Messiah.

Convinced he was right, Saul was willing to put to death those whom he thought wrong. While we need to have zeal and fervor for what we believe, how do we learn to temper our zeal with the realization that, at times, we just might be wrong?

Saul's Conversion

“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads’ ” (*Acts 9:5, NKJV*).

Although Saul's persecution of the early church begins rather inconspicuously (as he only holds the coats of Stephen's executioners), it quickly intensifies (*see Acts 8:1–3; 9:1, 2, 13, 14, 21; 22:3–5*). Several of the words Luke uses to describe Saul paint a picture of a wild, ferocious beast, or a pillaging soldier bent on the destruction of his opponent. The word translated as “ravaging” in Acts 8:3 (*ESV*), for example, is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (*Ps. 80:13*) to describe the uncontrolled and destructive behavior of a wild boar. Saul's crusade against the Christians was clearly not a half-hearted matter of convenience; it was a deliberate and sustained plan to exterminate the Christian faith.

Look at the three descriptions of Saul's conversion (*Acts 9:1–18, 22:6–21, and 26:12–19*). What role did the grace of God have in this experience? In other words, how much did Saul deserve the goodness that the Lord showed toward him?

Saul's conversion, from a human perspective, must have seemed impossible (hence the skepticism that many expressed when they first heard about it).

The only thing Saul deserved was punishment, but God extended grace to this fervent Jew instead. It is important to note, however, that Saul's conversion did not happen in a vacuum, nor was it forced.

Saul was no atheist. He was a religious man, though gravely mistaken in his understanding of God. Jesus' words to Paul, “ ‘It is hard for you to kick against the goads’ ” (*Acts 26:14, ESV*), indicate that the Spirit had been convicting Saul. In the ancient world, a “goad” was a stick with a sharp point used to prod oxen whenever they resisted plowing. Saul had resisted God's prodding for some time, but, finally, on his way to Damascus, through a miraculous encounter with the risen Jesus, Saul chose to fight no longer.

Think back to your own conversion experience. Maybe it wasn't as dramatic as Paul's (most aren't), but in what similar ways were you the recipient of God's grace? Why is it important never to forget what we have been given in Christ?

Saul in Damascus

During Saul's encounter with Jesus, he was blinded and then instructed to go to the house of a man named Judas and to wait there for another man, Ananias. No doubt Saul's physical blindness was a powerful reminder of the greater spiritual blindness that had led him to persecute the followers of Jesus.

The appearance of Jesus to him on the Damascus road changed everything. Where Saul had thought he had been so right, he had been dead wrong. Rather than working for God, he had been working against Him. Saul entered Damascus a different man from the proud and zealous Pharisee who had left Jerusalem. Instead of eating and drinking, Saul spent his first three days in Damascus in fasting and prayer as he reflected on all that had happened.

Read Acts 9:10–14. Imagine what must have been going on in the mind of Ananias: not only was Saul, the persecutor, now a believer in Jesus, but he was also Paul, God's chosen apostle, to take the gospel to the Gentile world (*see Acts 26:16–18*).

No wonder Ananias was a little confused. If the church in Jerusalem was hesitant to accept Paul some three years after his conversion (*Acts 9:26–30*), one can imagine what questions and concerns filled the hearts of the believers in Damascus only days after the event!

Notice, too, that Ananias was given a vision by the Lord telling him the surprising and unexpected news about Saul of Tarsus; anything less than a vision might not have convinced him that what he was told about Saul was true—that the enemy of the Jewish believers had now become one of them.

Saul had left Jerusalem with the authority and commission of the chief priests to root out the Christian faith (*Acts 26:12*). God had, however, a vastly different commission for Saul, one that rested on far greater authority. Saul was to take the gospel to the Gentile world, an idea that must have been even more shocking to Ananias and the other Jewish believers than was the conversion of Saul himself.

Where Saul had sought to curtail the spread of the Christian faith, now God would use him to spread it far beyond anything that Jewish believers ever would have imagined.

Read 1 Samuel 16:7, Matthew 7:1, and 1 Corinthians 4:5. What is the message of these texts in regard to why we must be careful in how we view the spiritual experience of other people? What mistakes have you made in your judgments about others, and what have you learned from those mistakes?

The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles

Where was the first Gentile church established? What events caused the believers to go there? *Acts 11:19–21, 26*. What does that remind you of from Old Testament times? See *Daniel 2*.

The persecution that broke out in Jerusalem after Stephen's death caused a number of Jewish believers to flee three hundred miles north to Antioch. As capital of the Roman province of Syria, Antioch was second only to Rome and Alexandria in significance. Its population, estimated at five hundred thousand, was extremely cosmopolitan, making it an ideal location not only for a Gentile church but for a starting base for the worldwide mission of the early church.

What occurred in Antioch that resulted in Barnabas's visit to the city and his subsequent decision to invite Paul to join him in Antioch? What kind of picture is presented of the church there? *Acts 11:20–26*.

It is difficult to construct a chronology of Paul's life, but it appears that some five years passed between his post-conversion visit to Jerusalem (*Acts 9:26–30*) and the invitation by Barnabas to join him in Antioch. What was Paul doing during all those years? It is hard to say for sure. But based on his comments in Galatians 1:21, he may have been preaching the gospel in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Some have suggested that perhaps it was during this time that he was disinherited by his family (*Phil. 3:8*) and suffered a number of the hardships he describes in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28.

The church in Antioch blossomed under the guidance of the Spirit. The description in Acts 13:1 indicates that the cosmopolitan nature of the city was soon reflected in the ethnic and cultural diversity of the church itself. (Barnabas was from Cyprus, Lucius from Cyrene, Paul from Cilicia, Simon presumably from Africa, and also there were all the Gentile converts.) The Spirit now sought to take the gospel to even more Gentiles by using Antioch as the base for more far-reaching missionary activities, beyond Syria and Judea.

Read again Acts 11:19–26. What can we learn from the church at Antioch, a very culturally and ethnically diverse church, that could help churches today emulate the good that existed there?

Conflict Within the Church

Of course, nothing human is perfect, and it wasn't long before trouble began within the early community of faith.

For starters, not everyone was pleased with the entry of Gentile believers into the early church. The disagreement was not over the concept of a Gentile mission but over the basis on which Gentiles should be allowed to join. Some felt that faith in Jesus alone was not sufficient as the defining mark of the Christian; faith, they argued, must be supplemented with circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses. To be a true Christian, they asserted, Gentiles needed to be circumcised. (We can, in Acts 10: 1–11:18, see the extent of the division between Jews and Gentiles through Peter's experience with Cornelius and the reaction that followed.)

The official visits from Jerusalem, which monitored Philip's work among the Samaritans (*Acts 8:14*) and the work with Gentiles in Antioch (*Acts 11:22*), may suggest some concern about the inclusion of non-Jews in the Christian community. Yet, the reaction to Peter's baptism of Cornelius, an uncircumcised Roman soldier, is a clear example of the disagreement that existed regarding the Gentile question among the earlier believers. The inclusion of an occasional Gentile such as Cornelius may have made some feel uncomfortable, but Paul's intentional efforts to open wide the doors of the church for Gentiles on the basis of faith in Jesus alone resulted in deliberate attempts by some to undermine Paul's ministry.

How did certain believers from Judea try to counteract Paul's work with Gentile Christians in Antioch? *Acts 15:1–5*.

Although the Jerusalem Council, in Acts 15, ultimately sided with Paul on the issue of circumcision, the opposition to Paul's ministry continued. About seven years later, during Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, many were still suspicious of Paul's gospel. In fact, when Paul visited the temple, he nearly lost his life when Jews from Asia cried out, "Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place" (*Acts 21:28*; see also *21:20, 21*).

Put yourself in the position of these Jewish believers who were concerned about Paul's teaching. Why do their concern and opposition make some sense? What can we learn from this about how our own preconceived ideas, as well as cultural (and even religious) notions, can lead us astray? How can we learn to protect ourselves from making the same kind of errors, no matter how well-intentioned we are?

Further Study: For the relationship between personal conversion and the church, read Ellen G. White, “Individual Independence,” pp. 430–434, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3. For a helpful map of the early life of Paul and commentary on his conversion, see *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 226–234.

“Paul had formerly been known as a zealous defender of the Jewish religion and an untiring persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Courageous, independent, persevering, his talents and training would have enabled him to serve in almost any capacity. He could reason with extraordinary clearness, and by his withering sarcasm could place an opponent in no enviable light. And now the Jews saw this young man of unusual promise united with those whom he formerly persecuted, and fearlessly preaching in the name of Jesus.

“A general slain in battle is lost to his army, but his death gives no additional strength to the enemy. But when a man of prominence joins the opposing force, not only are his services lost, but those to whom he joins himself gain a decided advantage. Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, might easily have been struck dead by the Lord, and much strength would have been withdrawn from the persecuting power. But God in His providence not only spared Saul’s life, but converted him, thus transferring a champion from the side of the enemy to the side of Christ. An eloquent speaker and a severe critic, Paul, with his stern purpose and undaunted courage, possessed the very qualifications needed in the early church.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 124.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What lesson can we learn from the fact that some of Paul’s harshest opponents were fellow Jews who believed in Jesus?
- ❷ How can you stand up for matters of religious principle and at the same time make sure that you are not fighting against God?

Summary: Saul’s encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road was the defining moment in his life and in the history of the early church. God changed the one-time persecutor of the church and made him His chosen apostle to bring the gospel to the Gentile world. Paul’s inclusion of Gentiles in the church by faith alone, however, proved a difficult concept for some within the church to accept—a powerful example of how preconceptions and prejudice can hinder our mission.

A Family Affair

Papa greeted his daughter Tamara as she entered his home. During her visit, she noticed an invitation to a Christmas program in another church in their city. She was curious and asked her father to go with her to the concert.

Papa was an elder in the Molokan church—an evangelistic, Bible-centered church in their homeland of Azerbaijan. Polina, Tamara's sister, wanted to attend the concert, too. She had sensed that something was missing from her family's faith and for months had been praying to know more about Bible truth.

The concert opened evangelistic meetings, and Tamara, Polina, and her father decided to attend. Tamara wondered who was sponsoring the meeting; but the greeters were busy, and Tamara forgot to ask.

When Tamara learned that the meetings were sponsored by Seventh-day Adventists, she was curious to know what the name *Adventist* meant and what Adventists believed. Every night she compared what the speaker said with what she read in her own Bible. She realized that these Seventh-day Adventists were preaching the truth.

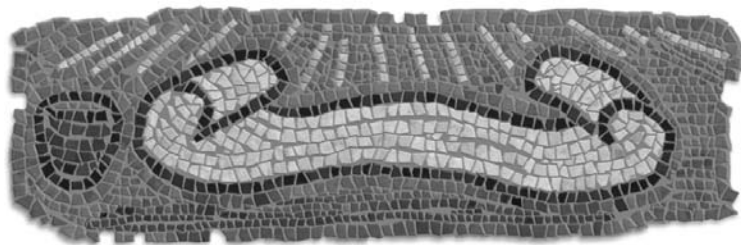
When the speaker invited people to a more in-depth Bible study, the whole family signed up for the course. Tamara called her sisters who lived in Siberia and told them what they were learning. The Siberian sisters were worried about this new religion onto which their family had stumbled.

The family visited the church on Sabbath for months; but because Papa was an elder in their church, the family hesitated to be baptized out of respect. About this time, Tamara visited her family in Siberia. Her brother and sisters peppered her with questions about this strange new religion in which they had become involved. Yuri, the only brother, had been an interrogator in the military, and as he heard her answers he became convinced that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was based on the Bible.

In time the Azerbaijan family members moved to Siberia to be near the rest of the family, and in time the sisters were baptized together. Several months later, Papa and Yuri were baptized as well. Now they are praying and working to lead their spouses and children to God.

Krasnoyarsk, Russia, where the family now lives, has several house churches but only one small church. Part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help to build a large church in the city that will help draw many more people to Christ. Thank you for your part in supporting this special offering and for giving faithfully to the mission offerings every week in church.

Paul's Authority *and* Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Pet. 3:15, 16; Galatians 1; Phil. 1:1; Gal. 5:12.*

Memory Text: “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (*Galatians 1:10, NKJV*).

Students at a university built a center on their campus where everyone—regardless of race, gender, social status, or religious beliefs—would be welcome. Imagine if, years later, these students returned to the campus only to discover that other students had redesigned the center. Instead of the large room with plenty of space for socializing—designed to bring a sense of unity to everyone there—the room had been subdivided into many smaller rooms with entrance restrictions based on race, gender, and so forth. The students responsible for the redesign might have argued that their authority to make these changes came from centuries-old established practice.

This is something like the situation that Paul faced when he wrote his letter to the churches in Galatia. His plan that Gentiles could join on the basis of faith alone was being challenged by false teachers who insisted that Gentiles must also be circumcised before they could become members.

This position, Paul saw, was an attack on the essence of the gospel itself; thus, he had to respond. The response is the letter to the Galatians.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 8.*

Paul, the Letter Writer

Read 2 Peter 3:15, 16. What do these verses tell us about how the early church viewed Paul's writing? What does this teach us about how inspiration works?

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was not trying to produce a literary masterpiece. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul was addressing specific situations that involved him and the believers in Galatia.

Letters such as Galatians played an essential role in Paul's apostolic ministry. As the missionary to the Gentile world, Paul founded a number of churches scattered around the Mediterranean. Although he visited these churches whenever he could, he couldn't stay in one place too long. To compensate for his absence, Paul wrote letters to the churches in order to give them guidance. Over time, copies of Paul's letters were shared with other churches (*Col. 4:16*). Although some of Paul's letters have been lost, at least thirteen books in the New Testament bear his name. As the above words from Peter show, too, at some point Paul's writings were viewed as Scripture. This shows just how much authority his ministry eventually gained early on in the history of the church.

At one time some Christians believed that the format of Paul's letters was unique—a special format created by the Spirit in order to contain God's inspired Word. This view changed in 1896 when two young scholars from Oxford, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, discovered in Egypt about five hundred thousand fragments of ancient papyri (documents written on papyrus, a popular writing material used several hundred years before and after Christ). In addition to finding some of the oldest copies of the New Testament, they found invoices, tax returns, receipts, and personal letters.

Much to everyone's surprise, the basic format of Paul's letters turned out to be common to all letter writers in his day. The format included (1) an opening salutation that mentioned the sender and the recipient and then included a greeting; (2) a word of thanksgiving; (3) the main body of the letter; and, finally, (4) a closing remark.

In short, Paul was following the basic format of his time, speaking to his contemporaries through a medium and style with which they would be familiar.

If the Bible were to be written today, what kind of medium, format, and style do you think the Lord would use to reach us now?

Paul's Calling

Though Paul's epistles generally follow the basic format of ancient letters, Galatians contains a number of unique features not found in Paul's other epistles. When recognized, these differences can help us to better understand the situation Paul was addressing.

Compare Paul's opening salutation in Galatians 1:1, 2 with what he writes in Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, and 2 Thessalonians 1:1. In what way is Paul's salutation in Galatians similar to and different from the others?

Paul's opening salutation in Galatians is not only a bit longer than his other opening salutations, but he goes out of his way to describe the basis of his apostolic authority. Literally, the word *apostle* means "someone who is sent" or "a messenger." In the New Testament, in the strictest sense, it refers to the original twelve followers of Jesus, and to others to whom the risen Christ appeared and commissioned to be His witnesses (*Gal. 1:19, 1 Cor. 15:7*). Paul declares that he belongs to this select group.

The fact that Paul so strongly denies that his apostleship rests on any human being suggests that there was an attempt by some in Galatia to undermine his apostolic authority. Why? As we have seen, some in the church were not happy with Paul's message that salvation was based on faith in Christ alone and not on works of the law. They felt that Paul's gospel was undermining obedience. These troublemakers were subtle. They knew that the foundation of Paul's gospel message was directly tied to the source of his apostolic authority (*John 3:34*), and they determined to launch a powerful attack against that authority.

Yet, they did not directly deny Paul's apostleship; they merely argued that it was not really too significant. They likely claimed that Paul was not one of Jesus' original followers; his authority, therefore, was not from God but from humans—perhaps from the church leaders from Antioch who commissioned Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (*Acts 13:1–3*). Or, perhaps, his authority came only from Ananias, who baptized Paul in the first place (*Acts 9:10–18*). Paul, in their opinion, was simply a messenger from Antioch or Damascus—nothing more! Consequently, they argued that his message was merely his own opinion, not the Word of God.

Paul recognized the danger these allegations posed, and so, he immediately defended his God-given apostleship.

In what ways, even subtly, is the authority of Scripture being challenged today within the confines of our church? How can we recognize these challenges? More important, how have they perhaps influenced your own thinking in regard to the authority of the Bible?

Paul's Gospel

In addition to defending his apostleship, what else does Paul emphasize in his opening greeting to the Galatians? Compare Gal. 1:3–5 with Eph. 1:2, Phil. 1:2, and Col. 1:2.

One of the unique features of Paul's letters is the way in which he links the words *grace* and *peace* in the greetings. The combination of these two words is a modification of the most characteristic greetings in the Greek and Jewish world. Where a Greek author would write "Greetings" (*chairein*), Paul writes "Grace," a similar-sounding word in Greek (*charis*). To this Paul adds the typical Jewish greeting of "Peace."

The combination of these two words is not a mere pleasantry. On the contrary, the words basically describe his gospel message. (In fact, Paul uses these two words more than any other author in the New Testament.) The grace and peace are not from Paul but from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What aspects of the gospel does Paul include in Galatians 1:1–6?

Although Paul has little space in his opening greeting to develop the nature of the gospel, he masterfully describes the essence of the gospel in only a few short verses. What is the central truth upon which the gospel resides? According to Paul, it is not our conformity to the law—the point that Paul's opponents were trumpeting. On the contrary, the gospel rests fully on what Christ accomplished for us through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Christ's death and resurrection did something that we never could do for ourselves. They broke the power of sin and death, freeing His followers from the power of evil, which holds so many in fear and bondage.

As Paul reflects on the wonderful news of the grace and peace that God created for us in Christ, he falls into a spontaneous doxology, which appears in verse 5.

In about as many words as Paul used in Galatians 1:1–5, write down your understanding of what the gospel is all about. Bring your words to class on Sabbath.

No Other Gospel

What normally follows the opening greeting in Paul's letters? How is Galatians different? Compare Gal. 1:6 with Rom. 1:8, 1 Cor. 1:4, Phil. 1:3, and 1 Thess. 1:2.

Although Paul addressed all kinds of local challenges and problems in his letters to the churches, he still made it a practice to follow his opening greeting with a word of prayer or thanksgiving to God for the faith of his readers. He even does this in his letters to the Corinthians, who were struggling with all kinds of questionable behavior (*compare 1 Cor. 1:4 and 5:1*). The situation in Galatia is so upsetting, however, that Paul omits the thanksgiving entirely and gets right to the point.

What strong words does Paul use that demonstrate the degree of his concern about what was happening in Galatia? Read Gal. 1:6–9, 5:12.

Paul does not hold back any words in his accusation against the Galatians. Simply put, he charges them with betraying their calling as Christians. In fact, the word *turning* (NJKV), which appears in verse 6, often was used to describe soldiers who gave up their loyalty to their country by deserting the army. Spiritually speaking, Paul is saying that the Galatians were turncoats who were turning their backs on God.

How were the Galatians deserting God? By turning to a different gospel. Paul is not saying that there is more than one gospel, but that there were some in the church who—by teaching that faith in Christ was not enough (*Acts 15:1–5*)—were acting as if there were another one. Paul is so upset by this distortion of the gospel that he desires that anyone who preaches a different gospel might fall under the curse of God (*Gal. 1:8*). Paul is so emphatic about this point that he basically says the same thing twice (*Gal. 1:9*).

There is, today, a tendency even in our church (in some places) to emphasize experience over doctrine. What matters most (we are told) is our experience, our relationship with God. However important experience is, what does Paul's writing here teach us about the importance of correct doctrine?

The Origin of Paul's Gospel

The troublemakers in Galatia were claiming that Paul's gospel was really driven by his desire to obtain the approval of others. What might Paul have done differently in his letter if he were merely seeking human approval? Consider *Gal. 1:6–9, 11–24*.

Why did Paul not require Gentile converts to be circumcised? Paul's opponents claimed it was because Paul wanted conversions at any cost. Maybe they thought that because Paul knew that Gentiles would have reservations about circumcision, he didn't require it. He was a people-pleaser! In response to such allegations, Paul points his opponents to the strong words he had just written in verses 8 and 9.

If all he wanted was approval, he would surely have answered otherwise.

Why does Paul say it is impossible to be a follower of Christ while trying to please people?

After Paul's statement in verses 11 and 12 that he received his gospel and authority directly from God, how do his words in verses 13–24 make his point?

Verses 13–24 provide an autobiographical account of Paul's situation before his conversion (*vss. 13, 14*), during his conversion (*vss. 15, 16*), and afterward (*vss. 16–24*). Paul claims that the circumstances that surrounded each of these events make it absolutely impossible for anyone to claim that he received his gospel from anyone but God. Paul is not going to sit by and allow anyone to disparage his message by questioning his calling. He knows what happened to him, he knows what he was called to teach, and he is going to do it, regardless of the cost.

How certain are you of your calling in Christ? How can you know for sure what God has called you to do? At the same time, even if you are sure of your calling, why must you learn to listen to the counsel of others?

Further Study: “In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. To these converts the Jewish teachers found ready access, and through them gained a foot-hold in the churches. It was impossible, by scriptural arguments, to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul; hence they resorted to the most unscrupulous measures to counteract his influence and weaken his authority. They declared that he had not been a disciple of Jesus, and had received no commission from him; yet he had presumed to teach doctrines directly opposed to those held by Peter, James, and the other apostles. . . .

“Paul’s soul was stirred as he saw the evils that threatened speedily to destroy these churches. He immediately wrote to the Galatians, exposing their false theories, and with great severity rebuking those who had departed from the faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pp. 188, 189.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, read your explanations of what you understand the gospel to be. What can you learn from the writings of each other?
- 2 In Paul’s greeting to the Galatians, he declared that Jesus’ death occurred for a specific reason. What was that reason, and what meaning does that have for us today?
- 3 In Galatians 1:14 Paul says he was extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. By “traditions” he probably means both the oral traditions of the Pharisees and the Old Testament itself. What place (if any) is there for traditions in our faith? What warning might Paul’s experience offer for us today in regard to the whole question of tradition?
- 4 Why was Paul so seemingly “intolerant” of those who believed differently from the way he did? Read again some of the things he wrote about those who had a different view of the gospel. How might someone who holds such a strong, uncompromising stance be viewed in our church today?

Summary: The false teachers in Galatia were trying to undermine Paul’s ministry by claiming that his apostleship and gospel message were not God-given. Paul confronts both of these accusations in the opening verses of his letter to the Galatians. He boldly declares that there is only one way of salvation and describes how the events surrounding his conversion demonstrate that his calling and gospel only could be from God.

A Second Chance

Naissance [nay-SAHNS] lives in a tiny shanty home in Haiti. Like many in her homeland, she cannot read or write. She makes a meager living by selling boiled eggs and bananas on the street.

Five years ago, her teenage son gave his life to God and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He urged his mother to attend church with him and even gave her Bible studies, but she resisted his efforts and refused to surrender her life to God. So her son turned to prayer.

Naissance was washing clothes when the earthquake rocked southern Haiti in January 2010. She dropped the wet clothes and fled outside, just in time to see the building next door topple over, crushing her little house. She watched in horror as the house on the other side of hers fell, crushing a young child. She cried out, “Jesus, are You going to let me die too?”

Naissance had nothing except the clothes she was wearing. She fled to the only place of safety she knew—her son’s church. A deacon invited her inside the gate and showed her where she could stay outside the church. No one ventured into the building for fear of another earthquake.

Church members gave Naissance what food they could, and someone found a tarp under which she could sleep. Dozens more people came to the church for safety, and soon the churchyard was filled with people.

Three days later, the evangelistic meeting that had been interrupted by the earthquake resumed outside the church. A woman preached powerfully but simply, and Naissance listened with an open heart. At last, she understood what her son had been trying to tell her—that God loves her and wants her to become His child. She responded and was baptized following the meetings, with almost 250 others.

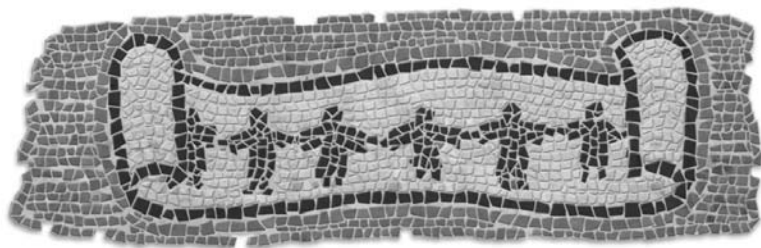
Naissance has joined a group of women who pray for people facing difficulties. “I can’t read or write, but I can pray,” she says. Her son is helping her learn Bible texts by repeating them to her. “At last God’s Word is finding root in my heart and my life. I praise Him for preserving me long enough to give my heart to Him.”

Our mission offerings help fund evangelism in Haiti and around the world. The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering taken last December will help rebuild many of the churches and school facilities that were damaged or destroyed in the worst disaster ever to strike Haiti. Thank you for sharing.



NAISSANCE SAINTE LÉENE (left) lives in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The Unity of the Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 2:1–14, 1 Cor. 1:10–13, Gen. 17:1–21, John 8:31–36, Col. 3:11.*

Memory Text: “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (*Philippians 2:2, ESV*).

Protestant reformer John Calvin believed that disunity and division were the devil's chief devices against the church, and he warned that Christians should avoid schism like the plague.

But should unity be preserved at the cost of truth? Imagine if Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, had in the name of unity chosen to recant his views on salvation by faith alone when he was brought to trial at the Diet of Worms.

“Had the Reformer yielded a single point, Satan and his hosts would have gained the victory. But his unwavering firmness was the means of emancipating the church, and beginning a new and better era.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 166.

In Galatians 2:1–14, we find the apostle doing all in his power to maintain the unity of the apostolic circle in the midst of attempts by some believers to destroy it. But as important as that unity was to Paul, he refused to allow the truth of the gospel to be compromised in order to achieve it. While there is room for diversity within unity, the gospel must never be compromised in the process.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 15.*

The Importance of Unity

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–13. What does this passage tell us about the importance with which Paul viewed unity in the church?

Having refuted the allegations that his gospel was not God-given, Paul directs his attention in Galatians 2:1, 2 to another charge being made against him. The false teachers in Galatia claimed that Paul's gospel was not in harmony with what Peter and the other apostles taught. Paul, they were saying, was a renegade.

In response to this charge, Paul recounts a trip he made to Jerusalem at least fourteen years after his conversion. Although we're not totally sure when that trip took place, no trip in antiquity was an easy affair. If he traveled by land from Antioch to Jerusalem, the three-hundred-mile trip would have taken at least three weeks and would have involved all kinds of hardships and dangers. Yet, in spite of such difficulties, Paul undertook the journey, not because the apostles had summoned him but because the Spirit had. And while he was there, he set his gospel before the apostles.

Why did he do that? Certainly not because he had any doubt about what he was teaching. He certainly did not need any kind of reassurance from the apostles. After all, he already had been proclaiming the same gospel for fourteen years. And though he did not need their permission or approval, either, he highly valued the other apostles' support and encouragement.

Thus, the accusation that his message was different was not only an attack on Paul but also an attack on the unity of the apostles, and on the church itself. Maintaining apostolic unity was vital, since a division between Paul's Gentile mission and the mother church in Jerusalem would have had disastrous consequences. With no fellowship between the Gentile and Jewish Christians, then "Christ would be divided, and all the energy which Paul had devoted, and hoped to devote, to the evangelizing of the Gentile world would be frustrated."—F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 111.

What are some issues that threaten the unity of the church today? More important, after we define these issues, how do we deal with them? What issues are more important than unity itself?

Circumcision and the False Brothers

Why was circumcision such a focal point in the dispute between Paul and certain Jewish Christians? See Gen. 17:1–22; Gal. 2:3–5; 5:2, 6; Acts 15:1, 5. Why is it not that hard to understand how some could have believed that even the Gentiles needed to undergo it?

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant relationship that God established with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Although circumcision was only for Abraham’s male descendants, everyone was invited into the covenant relationship with God. The sign of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17. This occurred *after* Abraham’s disastrous attempt—by fathering a child with his wife’s Egyptian slave—to help God fulfill His promise to him of a son.

Circumcision was a fitting sign of the covenant. It was a reminder that the best-laid plans of humans can never accomplish what God Himself has promised. Outward circumcision was to be a symbol of circumcision of the heart (*Deut. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4, Rom. 2:29*). It represented a stripping away of our confidence in ourselves and a faithful dependence on God instead.

During Paul’s time, however, circumcision had become a prized sign of national and religious identity—not what it was originally intended to signify. About one hundred fifty years before Jesus’ birth, some overly zealous patriots not only forced all uncircumcised Jews in Palestine to be circumcised, but they also required it of all men living in the surrounding nations who fell under their jurisdiction. Some even believed circumcision was a passport to salvation. This can be seen in ancient epigrams that confidently declare things such as, “‘Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna [hell].’” —C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1975), p. 172.

It would be a mistake to assume that Paul was opposed to circumcision itself. What Paul objected to was the insistence that Gentiles had to submit to circumcision. The false teachers said: “‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (*Acts 15:1, NKJV*). The issue, then, was not really about circumcision but about salvation. Salvation is either by faith in Christ alone, or it is something earned by human obedience.

Maybe today circumcision isn’t the issue. But what (if anything) do we as a church struggle with that parallels this problem?

Unity in Diversity

Read Galatians 2:1–10. Paul says that the false brothers “slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery” (*Gal. 2:4, ESV*). **What are Christians free from?** Read John 8:31–36; Rom. 6:6, 7; 8:2, 3; Gal. 3:23–25; 4:7, 8; Heb. 2:14, 15. **How do we experience for ourselves the reality of this freedom?**

Freedom, as a description of the Christian experience, is an important concept for Paul. He used the word more frequently than did any other author in the New Testament, and in the book of Galatians the words *free* and *freedom* occur numerous times. Freedom, however, for the Christian means freedom *in Christ*. It is the opportunity to live a life of unhindered devotion to God. It involves freedom from being enslaved to the desires of our sinful nature (*Romans 6*), freedom from the condemnation of the law (*Rom. 8:1, 2*), and freedom from the power of death (*1 Cor. 15:55*).

The apostles recognized that Paul “had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (*Gal. 2:7, ESV*). **What does this suggest about the nature of unity and diversity within the church?**

The apostles acknowledged that God had called Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, just as He had called Peter to preach to the Jews. In both cases, the gospel was the same, but the way it was presented depended on the people the apostles were trying to reach. Implicit in this verse “is the important recognition that one and the same formula is bound to be heard differently and to have different force in different social and cultural contexts. . . . It is precisely this oneness which is the basis of Christian unity, precisely as unity in diversity.”—James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 106.

How open should we be to methods of evangelism and witnessing that take us out of our “comfort zone”? Are there some forms of evangelism that bother you? If so, what are they, why do they bother you, and might you need to be more open-minded about these things?

Confrontation in Antioch *(Gal. 2:11–13)*

Some time after Paul's consultation in Jerusalem, Peter made a visit to Antioch in Syria, the location of the first Gentile church and the base of Paul's missionary activities as described in Acts. While there, Peter ate freely with the Gentile Christians, but when a group of Jewish Christians arrived from James, Peter—fearful of what they would think—changed his behavior entirely.

Why should Peter have known better? Compare Gal. 2:11–13 and Acts 10:28. What does his action tell us about just how powerfully ingrained culture and tradition can be in our lives?

Some have mistakenly assumed that Peter and the other Jews with him had ceased following the Old Testament laws about clean and unclean food. This, however, does not seem to be the case. If Peter and all the Jewish Christians had abandoned the Jewish food laws, a major uproar in the church certainly would have followed. If so, there would surely be some record of it, but there is not. It is more likely that the issue was about table fellowship with Gentiles. Because many Jews saw Gentiles as unclean, it was a practice among some to avoid social contact with Gentiles as much as possible.

Peter had struggled with this issue himself, and it was only a vision from God that helped him to see it clearly. Peter said to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, after he entered his house, “ ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean’ ” (*Acts 10:28, ESV*). Although he knew better, he was so afraid of offending his own countrymen that he reverted to his old ways. That's, apparently, how strong the pull of culture and tradition was in Peter's life.

Paul, though, called Peter's actions exactly what they were: the Greek word he used in Galatians 2:13 is *hypocrisy*. Even Barnabas, he said, was “carried away with their hypocrisy” (*NKJV*). Strong words from one man of God to another.

Why is it so easy to be a hypocrite? (Isn't it, perhaps, that we tend to blind ourselves to our own faults while eagerly looking for faults in others?) What kind of hypocrisy do you find in your own life? More important, how can you recognize it and then root it out?

Paul's Concern *(Gal. 2:14)*

The situation in Antioch surely was tense: Paul and Peter, two leaders in the church, were in open conflict. And Paul holds nothing back as he calls Peter to account for his behavior.

What reasons does Paul give for publicly confronting Peter? *Gal. 2:11–14.*

As Paul saw it, the problem was not that Peter had decided to eat with the visitors from Jerusalem. Ancient traditions about hospitality certainly would have required as much.

The issue was “the truth of the gospel.” That is, it wasn’t just an issue of fellowship or dining practices. Peter’s actions, in a real sense, compromised the whole message of the gospel.

Read Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11. How does the truth in these texts help us understand Paul’s strong reaction?

During Paul’s meeting in Jerusalem with Peter and the other apostles, they had come to the conclusion that Gentiles could enjoy all of the blessings in Christ without first having to submit to circumcision. Peter’s action now put that agreement in jeopardy. Where once Jewish and Gentile Christians had joined in an environment of open fellowship, now the congregation was divided, and this held the prospect of a divided church in the future.

From Paul’s perspective, Peter’s behavior implied that the Gentile Christians were second-rate believers at best, and he believed that Peter’s actions would place strong pressure upon the Gentiles to conform if they wanted to experience full fellowship. Thus, Paul says, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (*Gal. 2:14, ESV*). The phrase “to live like Jews” can be more literally translated as “to Judaize.” This word was a common expression that meant “to adopt a Jewish way of life.” It was used for Gentiles who attended a synagogue and participated in other Jewish customs. It is also the reason that Paul’s opponents in Galatia, whom he calls the false brothers, are often referred to as “the Judaizers.”

As if Peter’s actions weren’t bad enough, Barnabas got caught up in this behavior, as well—someone who should have also known better. What a clear example of the power of “peer pressure”! How can we learn to protect ourselves from being swayed in the wrong direction by those around us?

Further Study: For further study on the issue of unity and diversity in the church, read Ellen G. White, “Investigation of New Light,” pp. 45, 47, in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*; “An Explanation of Early Statements,” p. 75, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Tactfulness,” pp. 117–119, in *Gospel Workers*; and “Manuscript Release 898,” pp. 1092, 1093, in *1888 Materials*, vol. 3.

“Even the best of men, if left to themselves, will make grave blunders. The more responsibilities placed upon the human agent, the higher his position to dictate and control, the more mischief he is sure to do in perverting minds and hearts if he does not carefully follow the way of the Lord. At Antioch Peter failed in the principles of integrity. Paul had to withstand his subverting influence face to face. This is recorded that others may profit by it, and that the lesson may be a solemn warning to the men in high places, that they may not fail in integrity, but keep close to principle.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1108.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Very few people enjoy confrontation, but sometimes it is necessary. In what circumstances should a church condemn error, and discipline those who refuse to accept correction?
- ❷ As the Seventh-day Adventist Church grows around the world, it becomes more and more diverse. What steps can the church take to make sure that unity is not lost in the midst of such diversity? How can we learn to accept and even enjoy the diversity of cultures and traditions among us, while at the same time maintaining unity?
- ❸ When sharing the gospel in a different culture, what are the essential elements that should not change, and what can be changed? How do we learn to distinguish between what must remain and what we can, if necessary, let go?

Summary: The insistence by some Jewish Christians that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to become true followers of Christ posed a serious threat to the unity of the early church. Instead of letting this issue divide the church into two different movements, the apostles worked together, in spite of conflicts among themselves, to ensure that the body of Christ stayed united and faithful to the truth of the gospel.

Those Dreaded Adventists

Rudy Micelli grew up in a musical Christian family in Brazil. He's sung praises to God since he was a child. Often he would pretend to sing along with a favorite recording, and as he grew older, singing for God became his passion.

While studying some religion classes, Rudy took a class on cults. Rudy's teacher warned of many cults, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "Adventists perform blood rituals in their worship," the teacher said. "They are dangerous and should be avoided!"

Some time later, as he browsed through radio stations, Rudy came across a station playing a beautifully orchestrated hymn. He listened to the song and several more beautiful renditions of hymns he loved. "The music thrilled me. It was so well performed and gave glory to God." Then he heard the station identification and realized that he was listening to a Seventh-day Adventist radio station!

Quickly, he turned the radio off. But he wondered, *How can such beautiful music come from a bad sect?* He turned the radio back on, promising himself to listen only to the music, not the spoken messages.

Rudy continued listening to the Seventh-day Adventist station. He especially enjoyed the voice of one female vocalist. But he was careful not to tell his family that he was listening to "those dreaded Adventists."

One day he learned that his favorite recording artist would be singing in his city. He *must* go hear her, he decided. But to his dismay the concert would be held in the Seventh-day Adventist church. *Is this the devil's trap to get me into a Seventh-day Adventist church?* he wondered. But he rationalized that it was only a concert, and he did want to hear her sing. He decided to go. He prayed for God's protection and approached the concert with mixed excitement and dread.

He was greeted warmly as he entered the church and was ushered to reserved seats for visitors, in the front row. He scanned the room, but saw no evidence of a sacrificial altar or any other indication that this church worshipped darkness. As he sat down and prayed, a sense of the presence of God took him by surprise. It felt so right to be there.

At the end of the concert, he found the pastor and told him, "I want to study the Bible with you. Can we start right away?" The surprised pastor agreed, and six months later, Rudy was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist family.

Today Rudy sings with an Adventist music ministry that spans the world, leading people to Christ in many countries. And it all started with a song on the radio.

Radio continues to lead thousands to Jesus every year. Our mission offerings help support the ministry of Seventh-day Adventist radio around the world.

Justification *by* Faith Alone



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 2:15–21; Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:10–20; Gen. 15:5, 6; Rom. 3:8.*

Memory Text: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (*Galatians 2:20, ESV*).

As we saw last week, Paul publicly confronted Peter in Antioch for the lack of consistency between the faith he advocated and the behavior he displayed. Peter's decision no longer to eat with former pagans suggested that they were second-rate Christians, at best. His actions implied that if they really wanted to be part of the family of God and enjoy the blessings of full table fellowship, they must first submit to the rite of circumcision.

What did Paul actually say to Peter on that tense occasion? In this week's lesson, we will study what is likely a summary of what went on. This passage contains some of the most compressed wording in the New Testament, and it is extremely significant, because it introduces us for the first time to several words and phrases that are foundational both to understanding the gospel and to the rest of Paul's letter to the Galatians. These key words include *justification*, *righteousness*, *works of law*, *belief*, and not only *faith* but even the *faith of Jesus*.

What does Paul mean by these terms, and what do they teach us about the plan of salvation?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 22.*

The Question of “Justification” (*Gal. 2:15, 16*)

In Galatians 2:15, Paul writes, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners” (*ESV*). What point do you think he was making?

Paul’s words need to be understood in their context. In an attempt to win over his fellow Jewish Christians to his position, Paul starts with something with which they would agree—the traditional distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Jews were the elect of God, entrusted with His law, and they enjoyed the benefits of the covenant relationship with Him. Gentiles, however, were sinners; God’s law did not restrain their behavior, and they were outside the covenants of promise (*Eph. 2:12, Rom. 2:14*). While Gentiles were obviously “sinners,” in verse 16 Paul warns the Jewish Christians that their spiritual privileges do not make them any more acceptable to God, because no one is justified by “works of the law.”

Paul uses the word *justified* four times in Galatians 2:16, 17. What does he mean by “justification”? Consider *Exod. 23:7* and *Deut. 25:1*.

The verb *to justify* is a key term for Paul. Of the thirty-nine times it occurs in the New Testament, twenty-seven are in Paul’s letters. He uses it eight times in Galatians, including four references in Galatians 2:16, 17. *Justification* is a legal term, used in courts of law. It deals with the verdict a judge pronounces when a person is declared innocent of the charges brought against him or her. It is the opposite of *condemnation*. Additionally, because the words *just* and *righteous* come from the same Greek word, for a person “to be justified” means that the person also is counted as “righteous.” Thus, justification involves more than simply pardon or forgiveness; it is the positive declaration that a person is righteous.

For some of the Jewish believers, however, justification also was relational. It revolved around their relationship with God and His covenant. To be “justified” also meant that a person was counted as a faithful member of God’s covenantal community, the family of Abraham.

Read Galatians 2:15–17. What is Paul saying to you here, and how can you apply these words to your own Christian experience?

Works of the Law

Paul says three times in Galatians 2:16 that a person is not justified by “works of the law.” What does he mean by the expression “works of the law”? How do these texts (*Gal. 2:16, 17; 3:2, 5, 10; Rom. 3:20, 28*) help us understand his meaning?

Before we can understand the phrase “the works of the law,” we first need to understand what Paul means by the word *law*. The word *law* (*nomos* in Greek) is found 121 times in Paul’s letters. It can refer to a number of different things, including God’s will for His people, the first five books of Moses, the entire Old Testament, or even just a general principle. However, the primary way Paul uses it is to refer to the entire collection of God’s commandments as given to His people through Moses.

Therefore, the phrase “the works of the law” likely involves all the requirements found in the commandments given by God through Moses, whether moral or ceremonial. Paul’s point is that no matter how hard we try to follow and obey God’s law, our obedience never will be good enough for God to justify us, to have us declared righteous before God. That’s because His law requires absolute faithfulness in thought and action—not just some of the time but all of the time, and not just for some of His commandments but for all of them.

Although the phrase “works of the law” does not occur in the Old Testament and is not found in the New Testament outside of Paul, stunning confirmation of its meaning emerged in 1947 with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of writings copied by a group of Jews, called Essenes, who lived at the time of Jesus. Although written in Hebrew, one of the scrolls contains this exact phrase. The scroll’s title is *Miqsat Ma’as Ha-Torah*, which can be translated, “Important Works of the Law.” The scroll describes a number of issues based on biblical law concerned with preventing holy things from being made impure, including several that marked the Jews out as separate from the Gentiles. At the end the author writes that if these “works of the law” are followed, “you will be reckoned righteous” before God. Unlike Paul, the author does not offer his reader righteousness on the basis of faith but on the basis of behavior.

In your experience, how well do you keep God’s law? Do you really sense that you keep it so well that you can be justified before God on the basis of your law-keeping? See Rom. 3:10–20. If not, why not—and how does your answer help you understand Paul’s point here?

The Basis of Our Justification

“And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:9, NKJV).

We should not assume Jewish Christians were suggesting that faith in Christ was not important; after all, they were all believers in Jesus. They all had faith in Him. Their behavior showed, however, that they felt faith was not sufficient by itself; it must be *supplemented* with obedience, as if our obedience adds something to the act of justification itself. Justification, they would have argued, was by both faith and works. The way that Paul repeatedly contrasts faith in Christ with the works of the law indicates his strong opposition to this kind of “both/and” approach. Faith, and faith alone, is the basis of justification.

For Paul, too, faith is not just an abstract concept; it is inseparably connected to Jesus. In fact, the phrase translated twice as “faith in Christ” in Galatians 2:16 is far richer than any translation can really encompass. The phrase in Greek is translated literally as “the faith” or “the faithfulness” of Jesus. This literal translation reveals the powerful contrast Paul is making between the works of the law that we do and the *work* of Christ accomplished in our behalf, the works that He, through His faithfulness (hence, the “faithfulness of Jesus”), has done for us.

It’s important to remember that faith itself doesn’t add to justification, as if faith were meritorious in and of itself. Faith is, instead, the means by which we take hold of Christ and His works in our behalf. We are not justified on the basis of *our faith* but on the basis of Christ’s faithfulness for us, which we claim for ourselves through faith.

Christ did what every individual has failed to do: He alone was faithful to God in everything He did. Our hope is in Christ’s faithfulness, not our own. As one author puts it, “We believe in Christ, not that we might be justified by that belief, but that we might be justified by his faith (fulness) to God.”—John McRay, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 355.

An early Syriac translation of Galatians 2:16 conveys Paul’s meaning well: “Therefore we know that a man is not justified from the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus the Messiah, and we believe in him, in Jesus the Messiah, that from his faith, that of the Messiah, we might be justified, and not from the works of the law.”

Read Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; and Philippians 3:9. How do these texts, and what we read above, help us to understand the amazing truth that Christ’s faithfulness for us, His perfect obedience to God, is the only basis of our salvation?

The Obedience of Faith

Paul makes it clear that faith absolutely is foundational to the Christian life. It is the means by which we lay hold of the promises we have in Christ. But what is faith exactly? What does it involve?

What do the following texts teach us about the origin of faith? *Gen. 15:5, 6; John 3:14–16; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Gal. 5:6.*

Genuine biblical faith is always a response to God. Faith is not some kind of feeling or attitude that humans one day decide to have because God requires it. On the contrary, true faith originates in a heart touched with a sense of gratitude and love for God's goodness. That's why when the Bible talks about faith, that faith always follows initiatives that God has taken. In the case of Abraham, for example, faith is his response to the amazing promises God makes to him (*Gen. 15:5, 6*), while in the New Testament, Paul says that faith is ultimately rooted in our realization of what Christ did for us on the cross.

If faith is a response to God, what should that response include? Consider what the following texts say about the nature of faith. *John 8:32, 36; Acts 10:43; Rom. 1:5, 8; 6:17; Heb. 11:6; James 2:19.*

Many people define *faith* as “belief.” This definition is problematic, because in Greek the word for “faith” is simply the noun form of the verb “to believe.” To use one form to define the other is like saying “faith is to have faith.” It tells us nothing.

A careful examination of Scripture reveals that faith involves not only knowledge about God but a mental consent or acceptance of that knowledge. This is one reason why having an accurate picture of God is so important. Distorted ideas about the character of God actually can make it more difficult to have faith. But an intellectual assent to the gospel is not enough, for, in that sense, “even the demons believe.” True faith also affects the way a person lives. In Romans 1:5, Paul writes about the “obedience of faith.” Paul is not saying that obedience is the same as faith. He means true faith affects the whole of a person's life, not just the mind. It involves commitment to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as opposed to just a list of rules. Faith is as much what we do and how we live and in whom we trust as it is what we believe.

Does Faith Promote Sin?

One of the main accusations against Paul was that his gospel of justification by faith alone encouraged people to sin (*see Rom. 3:8, 6:1*). No doubt the accusers reasoned that if people do not have to keep the law to be accepted by God, why should they be concerned with how they live?

How does Paul respond to the accusation that a doctrine of justification by faith alone encourages sinful behavior? *Gal. 2:17, 18*.

Paul responds to his opponents' charges in the strongest terms possible: "God forbid!" While it is possible that a person might fall into sin after coming to Christ, the responsibility would certainly not belong to Christ. If we break the law, we ourselves are the law-breakers.

How does Paul describe his union with Jesus Christ? In what way does this answer refute the objections raised by his opponents? *Gal. 2:19–21*.

Paul finds the reasoning of his opponents simply preposterous. Accepting Christ by faith is not something trivial; it is not a game of heavenly make-believe where God counts a person as righteous while there is no real change in how that person lives. On the contrary, to accept Christ by faith is extremely radical. It involves a complete union with Christ—a union in both His death and resurrection. Spiritually speaking, Paul says we are crucified with Christ, and our old sinful ways rooted in selfishness are finished (*Rom. 6:5–14*). We have made a radical break with the past. Everything is new (*2 Cor. 5:17*). We have also been raised to a new life in Christ. The resurrected Christ lives within us, daily making us more and more like Himself.

Faith in Christ, therefore, is not a pretext for sin but a call to a much deeper, richer relationship with Christ than could ever be found in a law-based religion.

How do you relate to the concept of salvation by faith alone without the deeds of the law? Does it, perhaps, scare you a little, making you think that it can be an excuse for sin—or do you rejoice in it? What does your answer say about your understanding of salvation?

Further Study: “The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ. . . .

“There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”
—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 18, 19.

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

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In the first passage quoted above, Ellen G. White says no subject needs to be emphasized more than justification by faith. As a class, discuss whether her comments are as applicable for us today as they were when she wrote them over a hundred years ago and, if so, why.
- ❷ Why does Paul say that Christ would have died for no purpose, if justification were through the law? *Gal. 2:21*. What does he mean by that?

Summary: Peter’s behavior in Antioch suggested that former pagans could not be true Christians unless they were first circumcised. Paul pointed out the fallacy of such thinking. God cannot pronounce anyone righteous on the basis of that person’s behavior, for even the best humans are not perfect. It is only by accepting what God has done for us in Christ that sinners can be justified in His sight.

Those Evil Christians

Tawgy slowed his steps as he neared his home in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. “Dear Father,” he prayed, “help my parents not to be angry with me for going to church instead of doing my chores. Help them to understand that I’m not trying to disobey them, but that I want to obey You.”

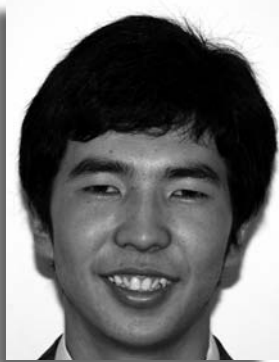
Thirteen-year-old Tawgy had been a Christian for only a few months, and his parents still were deeply concerned that he had joined “this evil sect.” Tawgy understood, for he, too, had heard the rumors that some extreme Christians committed suicide. He tried to convince his parents that he wasn’t at all involved with such an extremist group.

Tawgy was just 12 when his aunt invited him to visit the Seventh-day Adventist Church with her. He didn’t want to go; but he felt obligated to obey his aunt, so he went. He enjoyed the meeting and liked the young pastor who spoke. Tawgy attended the rest of the meetings and accepted Jesus as his Savior. His parents tried to dissuade him from attending church and often gave him work assignments to keep him home on Sabbath, but he stood his ground.

Tawgy’s classmates shunned him when he began associating with boys who drank and smoked. But when he became a Christian, his classmates thought that he had done something even worse! Tawgy stopped spending time with his former friends, and, in time, his classmates realized that he really had changed for the better. To his joy, Tawgy learned that four of his former friends had also become Christians.

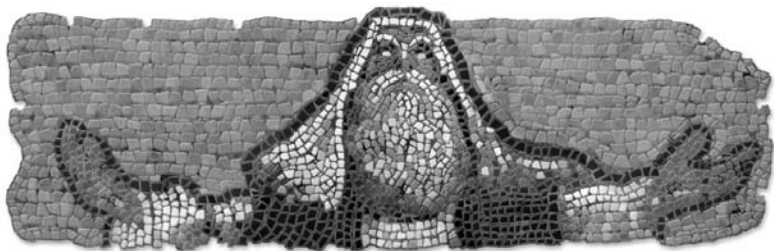
Always somewhat shy, Tawgy struggled to gain confidence. His church family has encouraged him, and now he finds it easy to talk to people. “My friends at church are like my family,” he says. “They pray for me and help me stay faithful to God when I’m weak. They make it easier for me to be the only believer in my family.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mongolia is just taking root. With fewer than 2,000 members, standing for one’s faith can be difficult. Pray for the believers in Mongolia, and remember that your mission offerings are helping the church to grow in regions such as Mongolia, one of the uttermost parts of the earth.



TAWGY (left) continues to study and share his faith in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Old Testament Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gal. 3:1–14; Rom. 1:2; 4:3; Gen. 15:6; 12:1–3; Lev. 17:11; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Memory Text: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ ” (Galatians 3:13, *ESV*).

A little boy made a little boat, all painted and fixed up beautifully. One day someone stole his boat, and he was distressed. In passing a pawnshop one day he saw his boat. Happily he ran in to the pawnbroker and said, ‘That is my little boat.’ ‘No,’ said the pawnbroker, ‘it is mine, for I bought it.’ ‘Yes,’ said the boy, ‘but it is mine, for I made it.’ ‘Well,’ said the pawnbroker, ‘if you will pay me two dollars, you can have it.’ That was a lot of money for a boy who did not have a penny. Anyway, he resolved to have it; so he cut grass, did chores of all kinds, and soon had his money.

“He ran down to the shop and said, ‘I want my boat.’ He paid the money and received his boat. He took the boat up in his arms, and hugged and kissed it, and said, ‘You dear little boat, I love you. You are mine. You are twice mine. I made you, and now I have bought you.’

“So it is with us. We are, in a sense, twice the Lord’s. He created us, and we got into the devil’s pawnshop. Then Jesus came and bought us at awful cost—not silver and gold, but His precious blood. We are the Lord’s by creation and by redemption.”—William Moses Tidwell, *Pointed Illustrations* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1951), p. 97.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.

The Foolish Galatians

Read Galatians 3:1–5. Summarize below what Paul is saying to the Galatians. In what sense could we be in danger of falling into the same spiritual pitfall, of starting out right and then falling into legalism?

Several modern translations have tried to capture the sense of Paul’s words in verse 1 about the “foolish” Galatians. The actual word Paul uses in Greek is even stronger than that. The word is *anoetoi*, and it comes from the word for mind (*nous*). Literally, it means “mindless.” The Galatians were not thinking. Paul does not stop there; he says that because they are acting so foolishly, he wonders if some magician has cast a spell on them. “Who has bewitched you?” His choice of words here may even suggest that the ultimate source behind their condition is the devil (*2 Cor. 4:4*).

What baffles Paul so much about the Galatians’ apostasy on the gospel is that they knew salvation was rooted in the Cross of Christ. It was not something that they could have missed. The word translated as “portrayed” or “set forth” (*KJV*) in Galatians 3:1 literally means “placarded” or “painted.” It was used to describe all public proclamations. Paul is saying that the Cross was such a central part of his preaching that the Galatians had, in effect, seen in their mind’s eye Christ crucified (*1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2*). In a sense, he’s saying that, by their actions, they are turning away from the Cross.

Paul then contrasts the current experience of the Galatians with how they first came to faith in Christ. He does this by asking them some rhetorical questions. How did they receive the Spirit, meaning How did they first become Christians? And from a slightly different perspective, Why did God give the Spirit? Was it because they did something to earn it? Certainly not! Instead, it was because they believed the good news of what Christ had already done for them. Having begun so well, what would make them think that now they had to rely upon their own behavior?

How often, if ever, do you find yourself thinking, *I’m doing pretty well. I’m a pretty solid Christian, I don’t do this and I don’t do that . . . and then, even subtly, thinking you’re somehow good enough to be saved? What’s wrong with that picture?*

Grounded in Scripture

So far, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul has defended his gospel of justification by faith by appealing to the agreement reached with the apostles in Jerusalem (*Gal. 2:1–10*) and to the personal experience of the Galatians themselves (*Gal. 3:1–5*). Beginning in Galatians 3:6, Paul now turns to the testimony of Scripture for the final and ultimate confirmation of his gospel. In fact, Galatians 3:6–4:31 is made up of progressive arguments rooted in Scripture.

What does Paul mean when he writes about the “Scripture” in Galatians 3:6–8? Consider *Rom. 1:2, 4:3, 9:17*.

It is important to remember that at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians there was no “New Testament.” Paul was the earliest New Testament writer. The Gospel of Mark is probably the earliest of the four gospels, but it likely was not written until around the time of Paul’s death (A.D. 65)—that is, about fifteen years after Paul’s letter to the Galatians. So, when Paul refers to the Scriptures, he has only the Old Testament in mind.

The Old Testament Scriptures play a significant role in Paul’s teachings. He does not view them as dead texts but as the authoritative and living Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16 he writes, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The word translated “inspiration” is *theopneustos*. The first part of the word (*theo*) means “God,” while the second half means “breathed.” Scripture is “God-breathed.” Paul uses the Scripture to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah (*Rom. 1:2*), to give instruction in Christian living (*Rom. 13:8–10*), and to prove the validity of his teachings (*Gal. 3:8, 9*).

It is difficult to determine exactly how many hundreds of times Paul quotes the Old Testament, but quotes are found throughout all his letters, except his shortest ones, Titus and Philemon.

Read carefully Galatians 3:6–14. Identify the passages Paul quotes from the Old Testament in those verses. What does that tell us about how authoritative the Old Testament was?

Do you at times find yourself thinking that one part of the Bible is more “inspired” than other parts? Given Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 3:16, what’s the danger of going down that path?

Reckoned as Righteous

Why do you think Paul first appeals to Abraham as he looks to the Scriptures to validate his gospel message? *Gal. 3:6*.

Abraham was a central figure in Judaism. Not only was he the father of the Jewish race, but Jews in Paul's time also looked to him as the prototype of what a true Jew should be like. Many not only believed that his defining characteristic was his obedience, but that God had declared Abraham righteous because of that obedience. After all, Abraham forsook his homeland and family, he accepted circumcision, and he was even willing to sacrifice his son at God's command. That's obedience! With their insistence on circumcision, Paul's opponents certainly argued along these same lines.

Paul, however, turns the tables by appealing to Abraham—nine times in Galatians—as an example of faith instead of law-keeping.

Consider Paul's quotation of Genesis 15:6. What does it mean when it says that Abraham's faith was "counted . . . to him for righteousness"? See also *Rom. 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24*.

Whereas justification was a metaphor taken from the legal world, the word *counted*, or *reckoned*, is a metaphor drawn from the domain of business. It can mean "to credit" or "to place something to one's account." Not only is it used of Abraham in Galatians 3:6, but it occurs another 11 times in connection with the patriarch. Some Bible versions translate it as *counted*, *reckoned*, or *imputed*.

According to Paul's metaphor, what is placed to our accounts is righteousness. The question is, however, *On what basis does God count us as righteous?* It surely cannot be on the basis of obedience—despite what Paul's opponents claimed. No matter what they said about Abraham's obedience, Scripture says that it was because of Abraham's *faith* that God counted him as righteous.

The Bible is clear: Abraham's obedience was not the ground of his justification; it was, instead, the result. He didn't do the things he did in order to be justified; he did them because he, already, *was* justified. Justification leads to obedience, not vice versa.

Dwell on what this means—that you are justified not by anything you do but only by what Christ has done for you. Why is that such good news? How can you learn to make that truth your own; that is, to believe it applies to you, personally, no matter your struggles, past and even present?

The Gospel in the Old Testament

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’ ” (*Gal. 3:8, ESV*). Paul writes that not only was the gospel preached to Abraham, but it was God who preached it; so, it must have been the true gospel. But when did God preach the gospel to Abraham? Paul’s quotation of Genesis 12:3 indicates he has in mind the covenant that God made with Abraham when he called him in Genesis 12:1–3.

Read Genesis 12:1–3. What does this tell us about the nature of the covenant that God made with Abraham?

The basis of God’s covenant with Abraham centered on God’s promises to him. God says to Abraham four times, “I will.” God’s promises to Abraham are amazing because they are completely one-sided. God does all the promising; Abraham promises nothing. This is the opposite of how most people try to relate to God. We usually promise we will serve Him, if only He will do something for us in return. But that is legalism. God did not ask Abraham to promise anything but to accept His promises by faith. Of course, that was no easy task, because Abraham had to learn to trust completely in God and not in himself (*see Genesis 22*). The call of Abraham illustrates, therefore, the essence of the gospel, which is salvation by faith.

Some mistakenly conclude that the Bible teaches two ways of salvation. They claim that in Old Testament times salvation was based on keeping the commandments; then, because that did not work very well, God abolished the law and made salvation possible by faith. This could not be farther from the truth. As Paul wrote in Galatians 1:7, there is only one gospel.

What other examples can you find in the Old Testament of salvation by faith alone? *See, for instance, Lev. 17:11, Ps. 32:1–5, 2 Sam. 12:1–13, Zech. 3:1–4.*

We often hear the phrase “cheap grace.” Yet, it’s a misnomer. Grace isn’t cheap—it’s free (at least for us). But we ruin it when we think that we can add to it by our works or when we think we can use it as an excuse to sin. In your own experience, which one of these two ways are you more inclined to lean toward, and how can you stop?

Redeemed From a Curse *(Gal. 3:9–14)*

Paul’s opponents were no doubt stunned by his bold words in Galatians 3:10. They certainly did not think themselves to be under a curse; if anything, they expected to be blessed for their obedience. Yet, Paul is unequivocal: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them’ ” (NKJV).

Paul is contrasting two completely different alternatives: salvation by faith and salvation by works. The covenant blessings and curses outlined in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 were straightforward. Those who obeyed were blessed, those who disobeyed were cursed. That means that if a person wants to rely on obedience to the law for acceptance with God, then the whole law needs to be kept. We do not have the liberty to pick and choose what we want to follow; nor should we assume that God is willing to overlook a few mistakes here and there. It is all or nothing.

This is, of course, bad news not only for Gentiles but also for Paul’s legalistic opponents, because we “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). No matter how hard we try to be good, the law can only condemn us as lawbreakers.

How did Christ deliver us from the curse of the law? See Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21.

Paul introduces another metaphor to explain what God has done for us in Christ. The word *redeem* means “to buy back.” It was used as the ransom price paid to release hostages or as the price paid to free a slave. Because the wages of sin is death, the curse of failing to keep the law was often a death sentence. The ransom paid for our salvation was not insignificant; it cost God the life of His own Son (John 3:16). Jesus ransomed us from the curse by becoming our sin-bearer (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). He voluntarily took our curse upon Himself and suffered in our behalf the full penalty of sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 as scriptural proof. According to Jewish custom, a person was under God’s curse if, after execution, the body was hung upon a tree. Jesus’ death on the cross was seen as an example of this curse (Acts 5:30, 1 Pet. 2:24).

No wonder, then, that the cross was a stumbling block for some Jews who could not fathom the idea that the Messiah was accursed by God. But this was exactly God’s plan. Yes, the Messiah bore a curse, but it was not His curse—it was ours!

Further Study: “Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Even today in our own church, some still have a hard time accepting salvation by faith alone—that God’s grace, through Christ, saves us, apart from our works. What’s behind the hesitancy of some to accept this crucial truth?
- ❷ Paul spoke very strongly about the theological error of salvation by works. What does that tell us about the importance of good theology? Why should we, as a church, stand up, forcefully if need be, when error is being taught among us?

Summary: From start to finish in the Christian life, the basis of our salvation is faith in Christ alone. It was because of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises that he was counted as righteous, and that same gift of righteousness is available for anyone today who shares Abraham’s faith. The only reason we are not condemned for our mistakes is that Jesus paid the price for our sins by dying in our place.

Unity From Chaos

by EDUARDA ARAÚJO

My family wasn't religious until my aunt invited my mother to attend a spirit worship center. My mother was trying to find her way to God, so she went with my aunt. My mother didn't really understand what she was getting into at the spirit center. She didn't know that these spirits were not from God, though she was uncomfortable when people called upon the spirits.

My father didn't like the spirit worship either and showed his disapproval by attending a traditional church. Church didn't change my father's life however, and he continued drinking. In fact, his drinking increased. Often he came home drunk. During this time, our family became increasingly unhappy, and mostly it was because of religion.

My brother and I were taking karate lessons during this time. Our teacher said all roads lead to God. Then he met a Seventh-day Adventist and began studying the Bible with him. Before long our teacher was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My brother and I noticed changes in our teacher's life, and he told us that he had been wrong, that there is only one way we can find God, and that is through Jesus Christ. But when he offered to study the Bible with my parents, they refused.

As the conflicts increased at home, my mother wondered whether studying the Bible could make a difference in our family. She agreed to study the Bible with our karate teacher, but my father wanted nothing to do with studying the Bible.

My mother became deeply interested in studying the Bible and began taking my brother and me with her to the studies. Dad wanted to be sure that we weren't learning anything we shouldn't, so he began attending the Bible studies with us.

My mother began attending a nearby Seventh-day Adventist church and took my brother and me with her. At first I didn't like the idea of going to church on Saturday, but, in time, I realized that these were God's choices for us.

Eventually, Dad accepted the truth he was learning and attended church with us. Our family was baptized together. At last our home was united in Christ.

I'm thankful that God put people in our lives to help us find Jesus. Your mission offerings helped lead us to God. Today, I'm studying in a Seventh-day Adventist academy, where I am learning how to share God's love with others. Mission offerings help support my school too. Thank you!

EDUARDA ARAÚJO lives in northern Brazil, where she studies at Instituto Adventista Agro-Industrial.

The Priority of the Promise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:15–20, Gen. 9:11–17, Matt. 5:17–20, Exod. 16:22–26, Gen. 15:1–6.*

Memory Text: “For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise” (*Galatians 3:18, ESV*).

Someone once asked a politician, “Have you kept all the promises that you made during the campaign?” He responded, “Yes . . . well, at least all the promises that I intended to keep.”

Who hasn't, at one time or another, been at one end or the other of a broken promise? Who hasn't been the one to break a promise or the one to have a promise made to him or her broken?

Sometimes people make a promise, fully intending to keep it but, later, don't; others make a promise, knowing—as the sounds leave their mouths or the letters their fingers—it's all a lie.

Fortunately for us, God's promises are of an entirely different order. God's Word is sure and unchanging. “ ‘I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it,’ ” says the Lord (*Isa. 46:11, ESV*).

In this week's lesson, Paul directs our attention to the relationship between God's promise to Abraham and the law given to Israel 430 years later. How should the relationship between the two be understood, and what implications does that have for the preaching of the gospel?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 5.*

Law and Faith *(Gal. 3:15–18)*

Even if his opponents conceded that Abraham’s life was characterized primarily by faith, Paul knew that they still would have questions about why God gave the law to Israel about four centuries after Abraham. Did not the giving of the law nullify any previous arrangement?

What is the point of Paul’s analogy between a person’s final will and testament and God’s covenant with Abraham? *Gal. 3:15–18*.

A covenant and a will are generally different. A covenant is typically a mutual agreement between two or more people, often called a “contract” or “treaty”; in contrast, a will is the declaration of a single person. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, never translates God’s covenant with Abraham with the Greek word used for mutual agreements or contracts (*syntheke*). Instead, it uses the word for a testament or a will (*diatheke*). Why? Probably because the translators recognized that God’s covenant with Abraham was not a treaty between two individuals where mutually binding promises are made. On the contrary, God’s covenant was based on nothing other than His own will. No string of “ifs, ands, or buts” was attached. Abraham was simply to take God at His word.

Paul picks up on this double meaning of “will” and “covenant” in order to highlight specific features of God’s covenant with Abraham. As with a human will, God’s promise concerns a specific beneficiary, Abraham and his offspring (*Gen. 12:1–5, Gal. 3:16*); it also involves an inheritance (*Gen. 13:15, 17:8, Rom. 4:13, Gal. 3:29*). Most important to Paul is the unchanging nature of God’s promise. In the same way that a person’s will cannot be changed once it has been put into force, so the giving of the law through Moses cannot simply nullify God’s previous covenant with Abraham. God’s covenant is a promise (*Gal. 3:16*), and by no means is God a promise-breaker (*Isa. 46:11, Heb. 6:18*).

Replace the word *covenant* with *promise* in the following passages. What is the nature of the “covenant” in each passage? How does understanding God’s covenant as a promise make the meaning of the passage clearer, and how does it help us understand better what a covenant is? *Gen. 9:11–17, 15:18, 17:1–21*. What does this also teach us about the character of God and how we can trust Him?

Faith and Law *(Rom. 3:31)*

Paul has argued strongly for the supremacy of faith in a person's relationship with God. He has repeatedly stated that neither circumcision nor any other "works of law" are a prerequisite to salvation, "because by works of the law no one will be justified" (*Gal. 2:16, ESV*). Moreover, it is not the works of the law but faith that is the defining mark of the believer (*Gal. 3:7*). This repeated negation of the works of the law raises the question, "Does the law have absolutely no value, then? Did God do away with the law?"

Because salvation is by faith and not by works of law, does Paul mean to say that faith abolishes the law? What do the following texts tell us? Compare *Rom. 3:31* with *Rom. 7:7, 12; 8:3* and *Matt. 5:17–20*.

Paul's argument in Romans 3 parallels his discussion about faith and law in Galatians. Sensing that his comments might lead some to conclude that he is exalting faith at the expense of the law, Paul asks the rhetorical question, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" (*ESV*). The word translated as "overthrow" in Romans 3:31 (*ESV*) is *katargeo*. Paul uses the word frequently, and it can be translated as "to nullify" (*Rom. 3:3, ESV*), "to abolish" (*Eph. 2:15*), "to be brought to nothing" (*Rom. 6:6, ESV*), or even as "to destroy" (*1 Cor. 6:13*). Clearly, if Paul wanted to endorse the idea that the law was somehow done away with at the cross, as some people today claim he taught, this would have been the time. But Paul not only denies that sentiment with an emphatic no, he actually states that his gospel "establishes" the law!

"The plan of justification by faith reveals God's regard for His law in demanding and providing the atoning sacrifice. If justification by faith abolishes law, then there was no need for the atoning death of Christ to release the sinner from his sins, and thus restore him to peace with God.

"Moreover, genuine faith implies in itself an unreserved willingness to fulfill the will of God in a life of obedience to His law. . . . Real faith, based on wholehearted love for the Saviour, can lead only to obedience."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 510.

Think through the implications if Paul did, indeed, mean that faith nullifies the need to keep the law. Would then, for instance, adultery no longer be sin or stealing or even murder? Think about the sorrow, pain, and suffering you could spare yourself if you merely obeyed God's law. What suffering have you or others gone through as a result of disobedience to God's law?

The Purpose of the Law

In Galatians 3:19–29 Paul makes multiple references to “the law.” To what law is Paul primarily referring in this section of Galatians?

Some, believing that the word *until* in verse 19 (*ESV*) indicates that this law was only temporary, have thought the passage must refer to the ceremonial law, since the purpose of that law was fulfilled at the cross and thus came to an end. Although this makes sense by itself, it does not appear to be Paul’s point in Galatians. While both the ceremonial and moral law were “added” at Sinai because of transgression, we will see by considering the following question that Paul appears to have the moral law primarily in mind.

Does Paul say that the law was added? To what was it added, and why? Compare *Gal. 3:19* and *Rom. 5:13, 20*.

Paul is not saying that the law was added to God’s covenant with Abraham as if it were some sort of addendum to a will that altered the original provisions. The law had been in existence long before Sinai (see tomorrow’s lesson). Paul means, instead, that the law was given to Israel for an entirely different purpose. It was to redirect the people back to God and the grace He offers all who come to Him by faith. The law reveals to us our sinful condition and our need of God’s grace. The law was not intended to be some kind of program for “earning” salvation. On the contrary, it was given, Paul says, “to increase the trespass” (*Rom. 5:20, ESV*); that is, to show us more clearly the sin in our lives (*Rom. 7:13*).

While the ceremonial laws pointed to the Messiah and emphasized holiness and the need of a Savior, it is the moral law, with its “Thou shall nots,” that reveals sin, that shows us that sin is not just a part of our natural condition but is, indeed, a violation of God’s law (*Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20; 7:7, 8, 13*). This is why Paul says, “Where there is no law there is no transgression” (*Rom. 4:15, ESV*). “The law acts as a magnifying glass. That device does not actually increase the number of dirty spots that defile a garment, but makes them stand out more clearly and reveals many more of them than one is able to see with the naked eye.”—William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 141.

The Duration of God's Law

Does Paul's statement about the law being added at Mount Sinai mean that it did not exist previously? If not, what was the difference before and after Mount Sinai? Read *Gen. 9:5, 6; 18:19; 26:5; 39:7–10; Exod. 16:22–26*.

God did not need to reveal His law to Abraham with thunder, lightning, and a penalty of death (*Exod. 19:10–23*). Why, then, did God give the law to the Israelites in that manner? It was because, during their bondage in Egypt, the Israelites had lost sight of God's greatness and His high moral standards. As a result, they needed to be made aware of the extent of their own sinfulness and the sacredness of God's law. The revelation at Sinai certainly did just that.

What does Paul mean when he says the law was added “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made”? *Gal. 3:16–19 (ESV)*.

Many have understood this text to mean that the law given at Mount Sinai was temporary. It entered 430 years after Abraham and ended when Christ came. This interpretation, however, conflicts with what Paul says about the law in Romans, as well as other passages in the Bible, such as Matthew 5:17–19.

The mistake readers often make with this passage is to assume that the word *until* always implies a limited duration of time. This is not the case. Describing the person who fears the Lord, Psalm 112:8 (*ESV*) says, “His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.” Does this mean that when he triumphs he will become afraid? In Revelation 2:25 (*ESV*) Jesus says, “Only hold fast what you have until I come.” Does Jesus mean that once He comes we no longer need to be faithful?

The role of the law did not end with the coming of Christ. It will continue to point out sin as long as the law exists. What Paul is saying is that the coming of Christ marks a decisive turning point in human history. Christ can do what the law could never do—provide a true remedy for sin, that is, justify sinners and, by His Spirit, fulfill His law in them (*Rom. 8:3, 4*).

Have you ever thought to yourself, *If only the Lord did this for me, or that, or the other, then I would never again doubt or question Him?* Think, though, about what happened at Sinai, about how powerful a manifestation of God's power the Israelites saw—and yet, still, what did they do? What should this tell you about what true faith is and how we obtain and maintain it? (*See Col. 2:6*.)

The Superiority of the Promise

“ ‘He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us’ ” (*Acts 7:38, NIV*).

In Galatians 3:19, 20, Paul continues his train of thought about how the law does not nullify the covenant of grace; this is important because, if the theology of his opponents were correct, the law would do just that. Think, then, what our position as sinners would be if we had to rely on our law-keeping, as opposed to God’s grace, to save us. We would, in the end, be without hope.

Although the details of Paul’s comments in Galatians 3:19, 20 are difficult, his basic point is clear: the law is subsidiary to the promise, because it was mediated through angels and Moses. The connection of angels to the giving of the law is not mentioned in Exodus, but it is found in several other places in Scripture (*Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Heb. 2:2*). Paul uses the word *mediator* in 1 Timothy 2:5 in reference to Christ, but his comments here strongly suggest he has Deuteronomy 5:5 (*ESV*) in mind, where Moses says, “I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord.”

As majestic as the giving of the law was on Sinai, with countless angels in attendance, and as important as Moses was as the lawgiver, the giving of the law was indirect. In stark contrast, God’s promise was made directly to Abraham (and, therefore, to all believers), for there was no need for a mediator. In the end, however important the law, it is no substitute for the promise of salvation through grace by faith. On the contrary, the law helps us to better understand just how wonderful that promise really is.

Describe the nature of Abraham’s direct encounters with God. What benefit was there to such immediacy with God? Consider *Gen. 15:1–6, 18:1–33, 22:1–18*.

Think about some of the other encounters people in the Bible had with God—Adam and Eve in Eden (*Genesis 3*); Jacob’s ladder (*Genesis 28*); Paul on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9*). Maybe you haven’t experienced anything as dramatic, but in what ways has God revealed Himself to you? Ask yourself, too, whether anything in your personal life might prevent you from having the kind of intimacy and immediacy that Abraham experienced with God. If so, what steps can you take to change?

Further Study: “In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage.

“But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God’s law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 371.

“The law of God, spoken in awful grandeur from Sinai, is the utterance of condemnation to the sinner. It is the province of the law to condemn, but there is in it no power to pardon or to redeem.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1094.

Discussion Questions:

1 Think about this whole idea of promises, especially broken ones. How did you feel about those who broke their promise to you? How much difference did it make whether a person intended to keep it and then either couldn’t, or changed his or her mind, or if you realized that the person never meant to keep it? What happened to your level of trust after the promise was broken, whatever the reason? What does it mean to you to know that you can trust God’s promises? Or perhaps the question should be, How can you learn to trust God’s promises in the first place?

2 In what ways are we in danger of being corrupted by our environment to the point that we lose sight of the important truths God has given us? How can we make ourselves aware of just what those corrupting influences are, and then how can we counteract them?

Summary: The giving of the law on Sinai did not invalidate the promise that God made to Abraham, nor did the law alter the promise’s provisions. The law was given so that people might be made aware of the true extent of their sinfulness and recognize their need of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants.

God's Perfect Plan

by CHINAMO MASHIRI

I'm from Zambia. My parents died when I was little, and my aunt and uncle took me in. They sent me to a boarding school to study. There I met some Seventh-day Adventist students who shared their faith with me. They taught me about God from the Bible, and I decided to attend church with them.

When I returned home for summer, I told my aunt and uncle what I had learned. They were angry and threatened to send me away from home, so I kept silent about my faith. They wouldn't let me attend the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Back at school, my Seventh-day Adventist friends continued teaching me, and I asked to be baptized. When I returned home and explained my faith to my family, they allowed me to attend the Seventh-day Adventist church. But when I returned to school, I discovered that my uncle was no longer paying my tuition. I didn't know what to do, except pray.

Every quarter I expected to be sent away from school, but it was as if the registrar overlooked my balance and I was allowed to register. By God's grace and with the help of friends at church, I graduated from high school.

I wanted to become a pastor, but I didn't see how I could. So I found a job and began saving money for university. I worked for a year, but I still didn't have enough money to enroll in school.

Then I learned that Zambia Adventist University had just opened, so I applied to study theology. Because it was a new school, there was much work to be done on the campus. I gladly worked six hours a day to help pay my school fees.

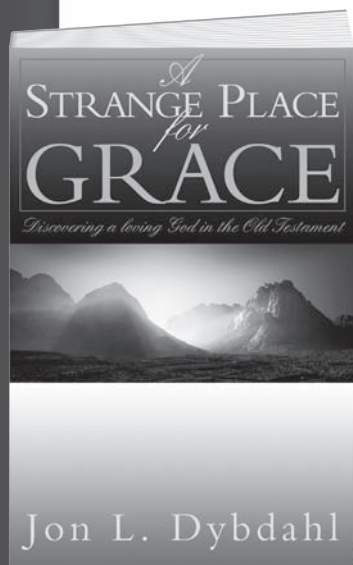
I couldn't afford to live in the dormitory, so some other students and I found another place to live—a chicken coop that we converted into a room. We cooked our rice and vegetables over a fire and managed to live this way while we studied to become ministers.

God sustained me, and I've finished my pastoral training. I praise God for making a way when there appeared to be no way. I see how God has provided for me, and I know He will continue to lead me. He is so faithful!

A recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering has helped construct a library on the campus of Zambia Adventist University. Little by little, the school is taking shape. It is God's school, and I praise Him for your generosity in helping this dream to become a reality.

CHINAMO MASHIRI *serves God in southern Zambia.*

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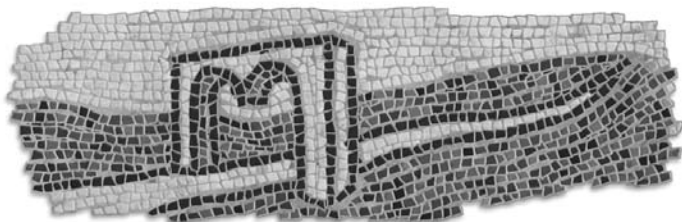
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In the past generation some 3 million people have found refuge in North America, refuge from war, famine, or oppression. They're strangers in a strange land. Few know the language; many can't find meaningful work or assimilate easily into the culture around them.

They find comfort living with others from their ethnic group. Many live their entire lives unnoticed and unhelped by those around them. They're the 'invisible ones; they are refugees, one of North America's largest unreached population groups.

These people are open to the gospel of Christ, if only someone would go to them and tell them in their own language, in terms they can understand, that Jesus died for them, that He is their Savior. Little by little Adventists in North America are reaching these people and bringing them to Christ. I want to help reach the strangers in the land. I'm glad that part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will reach even more for Jesus. For me, it's personal.

The Road *to* Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:21–25; Lev. 18:5; Rom. 3:9–19; 1 Cor. 9:20; Rom. 3:1, 2; 8:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (*Galatians 3:22, ESV*).

Homing pigeons long have been known for their ability to fly hundreds of miles a day and arrive at their destination with amazing accuracy. Yet, even the best homing pigeons at times have become disoriented, never returning to their starting point. The worst incident happened in England, when about twenty thousand birds (valued at more than six hundred thousand dollars) never came back to their lofts.

As most of us have experienced in one way or another, being disoriented, or lost, is not enjoyable. It fills us with fear and anxiety; it can lead us to moments of panic, as well.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Even after we accept Christ, we can get lost, or disoriented, even to the point of never returning to the Lord.

The good news is, however, that God has not left us to ourselves. He has mapped out the road to faith, as revealed in the gospel, and that path includes the law. Many people try to separate the law from the gospel; some even see them as contradictory. Not only is this view wrong, it can have tragic consequences. Without the law we would have no gospel. It's hard, really, to understand the gospel without the law.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.*

The Law and the Promise

“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” (*Gal. 3:21, ESV*).

Sensing that his comments might lead his opponents to conclude he had a disparaging view of the law, or that his comments about the priority of God’s promises were just a veiled put-down of Moses and the Torah, Paul asks the very question they were thinking: “Are you saying the law contradicts the promises of God?” To this Paul responds with an emphatic, “No!” Such a conclusion is impossible, because God is not opposed to Himself. God gave both the promise and the law. The law is not at odds with the promise. The two merely have different roles and functions in God’s overall plan of salvation.

What mistaken concepts did Paul’s opponents have about the role of the law? Compare *Gal. 3:21, Lev. 18:5, and Deut. 6:24*.

These people believed that the law was able to give them spiritual life. Their views probably arose out of a mistaken interpretation of Old Testament passages such as Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 6:24, where the law directs how life should be lived by those abiding in God’s covenant. The law did regulate life *within* the covenant, but they concluded that the law was the source of a person’s relationship with God. The Bible is clear, however, that the ability to “make alive” is a power exercised by God and His Spirit alone (*2 Kings 5:7, Neh. 9:6, John 5:21, Rom. 4:17*). The law cannot make anyone alive spiritually. This does not mean, however, that the law is opposed to God’s promise.

Seeking to prove the inability of the law to give life, Paul writes in Galatians 3:22, “Scripture has confined all under sin” (*ESV*). In Romans 3:9–19, Paul draws from a string of verses extracted from the Old Testament to show just how sinful we are. The passages are not strung together in a haphazard manner. He begins with the heart of the sin problem—the selfish attitude that plagues human hearts—and then moves to verses that describe sin’s pervasiveness and finally its universality.

His point? Because of the extent of sin and the limitations of the law, the promise of eternal life can come to us only through the faithfulness of Christ in our behalf.

Although the law cannot save us, what great benefits does our adherence to it have for us? That is, what practical good have you experienced in your own life through obedience to God’s law?

“Kept Under Law”

In Galatians 3:23, Paul writes that “before faith came, we were kept under the law.” By “we” Paul is referring to the Jewish believers in the Galatian churches. They are the ones acquainted with the law, and Paul has been speaking to them in particular since Galatians 2:15. This can be seen in the contrast between the “we” in Galatians 3:23 and the “you” in Galatians 3:26 (*ESV*).

Galatians 3:23 reads, “Before faith came”; but in the literal Greek it reads, “before the faith came.” Because Paul is contrasting the place of the law before and after Christ (*Gal. 3:24*), “the faith” is most likely a reference to Jesus Himself and not a reference to Christian faith in general.

Paul says the Jews were kept “under the law” before the coming of Christ. What does he mean by “under the law”? Compare *Gal. 3:22, 23* with *Rom. 6:14, 15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18*.

Paul uses the phrase “under the law” twelve times in his letters. Depending on its context, it can have a couple of different connotations.

1. “*Under the law*” as an alternative way of salvation (*Gal. 4:21*). The opponents in Galatia were trying to gain life-giving righteousness by obedience. However, as Paul has already made clear, this is impossible (*Gal. 3:21, 22*). Paul later will even point out that, by desiring to be under the law, the Galatians were really rejecting Christ (*Gal. 5:2–4*).

2. “*Under the law*” in the sense of being under its condemnation (*Rom. 6:14, 15*). Because the law cannot atone for sin, the violation of its demands ultimately results in condemnation. This is the condition in which all human beings find themselves. The law acts as a prison warden, locking up all who have violated it and brought upon themselves the sentence of death. As we will see in tomorrow’s lesson, the use of the word *guard* (*Gal. 3:23, NKJV*) indicates that this is what Paul means by “under the law” in this passage.

A related Greek word, *ennomos*, normally translated as “under the law,” literally means “within the law” and refers to living within the requirements of the law through union with Christ (*1 Cor. 9:21*). By “the works of the law,” that is, by trying to keep the law apart from Christ, it is impossible to be justified, because only those who through faith are righteous will live (*Gal. 3:11*). This truth doesn’t nullify the law; it shows only that the law can’t give us eternal life. It’s way too late for that.

The Law as Our “Guard”

Paul gives two basic conclusions about the law: (1) the law does not nullify or abolish God’s promise made to Abraham (*Gal. 3:15–20*); (2) the law is not opposed to the promise (*Gal. 3:21, 22*).

What role does the law actually play then? Paul writes that it was added “because of transgressions” (*Gal. 3:19*), and he expands on this idea using three different words or phrases in connection to the law: *kept* (*vs. 23*), *shut up* (*vs. 23*), and *schoolmaster* (*vs. 24*).

Read prayerfully and carefully Galatians 3:19–24. What is Paul saying about the law?

Most modern translations interpret Paul’s comments about the law in Galatians 3:19 in wholly negative terms. But the original Greek is not nearly so one-sided. The Greek word translated as “kept” (*vs. 23*) literally means “to guard.” Although it can be used in a negative sense, as to “hold in subjection” or to “watch over” (*2 Cor. 11:32*), in the New Testament it generally has a more positive sense of “protecting” or “keeping” (*Phil. 4:7, 1 Pet. 1:5*). The same is true of the word translated as “shut up” (*Gal. 3:23*). It can be translated “to close” (*Gen. 20:18*), “to shut” (*Exod. 14:3, Josh. 6:1, Jer. 13:19*), “to enclose” (*Luke 5:6*), or “to confine” (*Rom. 11:32*). As these examples indicate, depending on its context, this word can have either positive or negative connotations.

What benefits did the law (moral and ceremonial) provide the children of Israel? *Rom. 3:1, 2; Deut. 7:12–24; Lev. 18:20–30*.

While Paul can speak about the law in negative terms (*Rom. 7:6, Gal. 2:19*), he also has many positive things to say about it (*see Rom. 7:12, 14; 8:3, 4; 13:8*). The law was not a curse that God placed upon Israel; on the contrary, it was intended to be a blessing. Although its sacrificial system could not ultimately remove sin, it pointed to the promised Messiah who could; and its laws guiding human behavior protected Israel from many of the vices that plagued other ancient civilizations. In light of Paul’s positive comments about the law elsewhere, it would be a mistake to understand his comments here in a completely negative way.

Think of something good that is misused. For example, a drug created to treat a disease could be used by some people to get high. What examples have you seen in your own life of this principle? How does our knowledge of how something good can be misused help us to understand what Paul is dealing with here?

The Law as Our Schoolmaster

In Galatians 3:23, Paul describes the law as a guarding and protecting force. To what does he liken it in verse 24, and what does that mean?

The word translated “schoolmaster” (*KJV*) comes from the Greek word *paidagogos*. Some versions translate it as “disciplinarian” (*NRSV*), “tutor” (*NKJV*), or even “guardian” (*ESV*), but no single word fully can encompass its meaning. The *paidagogos* was a slave in Roman society who was placed in a position of authority over his master’s sons from the time they turned six or seven until they reached maturity. In addition to providing for his charges’ physical needs, such as drawing their bath, providing them with food and clothes, and protecting them from any danger, the *paidagogos* also was responsible for making sure the master’s sons went to school and did their homework. In addition, he was expected not only to teach and practice moral virtues but also to ensure that the boys learned and practiced the virtues themselves.

Although some pedagogues must certainly have been kind, as well as loved by their wards, the dominant description of them in ancient literature is as strict disciplinarians. They ensured obedience not only through harsh threats and rebukes but also by whipping and caning.

Paul’s description of the law as it refers to a pedagogue further clarifies his understanding of the role of the law. The law was added to point out sin and provide instruction. The very nature of this task means that the law also has a negative aspect, and that’s because it rebukes and condemns us as sinners. Yet, even this “negative” aspect God uses for our benefit, because the condemnation that the law brings is what drives us to Christ. Thus, the law and the gospel are not contradictory. God designed them to work together for our salvation.

“In this Scripture [Gal. 3:24], the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law. The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 234.

When was the last time you compared your actions and words and thoughts to the law? Do it now, comparing them not just to the letter of the law but also to the spirit (*Matt. 5:28, Rom. 7:6*). How well do you fare? What does your answer tell you about Paul’s point in this epistle?

The Law and the Believer (*Gal. 3:25*)

Many have interpreted Paul’s comment in Galatians 3:25 as a complete dismissal of the law. This makes little sense, however, in light of Paul’s positive comments about the law elsewhere in the Bible.

What does he, then, mean?

First, we are no longer under the law’s condemnation (*Rom. 8:3*). As believers, we are in Christ and enjoying the privilege of being under grace (*Rom. 6:14, 15*). That gives us the liberty of serving Christ wholeheartedly, without fear of being condemned for mistakes we might make in the process. This is what true liberty and freedom in the gospel is, which is something radically different from no longer having to obey the law—which is what some people claim is “freedom” in Christ. But disobedience to the law, instead, is sin—and sin is anything but freedom (*John 8:34*).

Read Romans 8:1–3. What does it mean to be no longer condemned by the law? How should this wonderful truth impact how we live?

As a result of being forgiven through Christ, our relationship to the law is now different. We are now called to live a life that is pleasing to Him (*1 Thess. 4:1*); Paul refers to this as walking in the Spirit (*Gal. 5:18*). This does not mean that the moral law is no longer applicable—that was never the issue. How could it be when we have seen so clearly that the law is what defines sin?

Instead, because the law is a transcript of God’s character, by obeying the law we simply reflect His character. But more than that, we follow not just a set of rules but the example of Jesus, who does for us what the law itself could never do: He writes the law on our hearts (*Heb. 8:10*) and makes it possible for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us (*Rom. 8:4*). That is, through our relationship with Jesus, we have the power to obey the law as never before.

Read Romans 8:4. What is Paul saying here? How have you seen this promise manifested in your own life? At the same time, despite whatever positive changes you have experienced, why must salvation always be based on what Christ has done for us and nothing else?

Further Study: “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments.

“Christ was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. The death of Abel was in consequence of Cain’s refusing to accept God’s plan in the school of obedience to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ typified by the sacrificial offerings pointing to Christ. Cain refused the shedding of blood which symbolized the blood of Christ to be shed for the world. This whole ceremony was prepared by God, and Christ became the foundation of the whole system. This is the beginning of its work as the schoolmaster to bring sinful human agents to a consideration of Christ the Foundation of the whole Jewish economy.

“All who did service in connection with the sanctuary were being educated constantly in regard to the intervention of Christ in behalf of the human race. This service was designed to create in every heart a love for the law of God, which is the law of His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 233.

“The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 235.

Discussion Questions:

1 We often struggle with the question of how we can overcome sin in our lives. What promises do we have in the Bible about victory over sin? How can we better position ourselves to help make these promises real? At the same time, why must we be so careful to make sure that we place our full hope of salvation not on whatever victories we get but on Christ’s victory for us?

2 We often hear Christians claim that the law has been done away with. Of course, these same Christians will speak out against sin, which means, of course, that they really don’t mean the law has been done away with. What, in fact, do they really mean by that claim? (Hint: In the context of what commandment does that claim usually arise?)

Summary: The law was given to point sinners to their need of Christ. As a custodian, it provides instruction about God and protection from evil. But, like a disciplinarian, it also points out our sinfulness and brings condemnation. Christ frees us from the law’s condemnation and writes His law upon our hearts.

Someone Is Watching

by DAVID ZHANG

I grew up in China, where religion wasn't a part of our lives except as we honored our ancestors during special times of the year. I moved to New Zealand when I was 12 years old and had to learn English. I also began learning a bit about God in the weekly Bible classes offered in New Zealand's schools.

I enjoyed hearing Bible stories and liked to draw pictures of Bible characters. The teachers didn't tell us we had to believe in God; they just told us Bible stories and let us draw our own conclusions. For me this religious training was just a bunch of interesting stories.

When I entered high school, I asked some of my friends how they felt about God. Some of my friends were quite religious and went to church regularly. I asked them casual questions while we were hanging out together, and in this way I learned a little more about God.

Little by little, I realized that religion should be more than simply a belief in God and you'll go to heaven, as some friends said. One friend told me that God has a plan for all of us, and this made me think. *If God really does have a plan for me, what does He expect of me? Is the God my religious friends talked about the same God who made the world? Or was Creation an accident?*

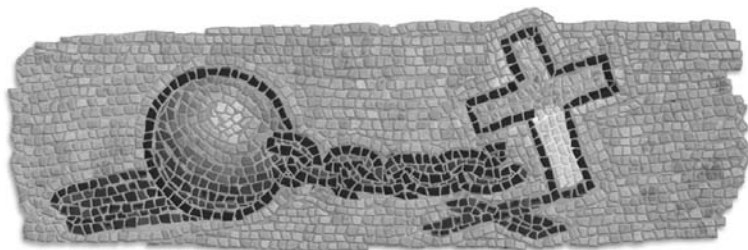
My Seventh-day Adventist friends seemed to know the most about what they believed and acted in accordance to their beliefs. So when one of my friends invited me to his church, I went. I had never been inside a Christian church before, so I watched what the people did. He invited me back again, and I went. Then he invited me to go with him to youth camp. There I learned much about what it means to be a Christian. I learned how to study the Bible and expressed my faith in Jesus.

When I told my parents I had become a Christian, they nodded. They don't know a lot about what it means to be a Christian, so I explain to them what I'm learning. They listen and sometimes ask me questions about what I believe.

My friends led me to Christ through their professions of faith, their lifestyles, their words, and their conduct. I'm learning to live my faith as they do, trusting Christ to make me a new creature. It's sometimes difficult, but God is patiently teaching me, and I am willing to learn. I urge others to be aware that people are watching them.

DAVID ZHANG lives his life for Christ in New Zealand.

From Slaves *to* Heirs



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:26–4:20; Rom. 6:1–11; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14, 15; Rom. 9:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (*Galatians 4:7, ESV*).

Paul tells the Galatians that they should not live and act as slaves but as the sons and daughters of God, with all the rights and privileges thereof. Their situation was similar to the story of a discouraged new convert who came to talk with Chinese Christian Watchman Nee.

“‘No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.’ Nee said, ‘Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ’s heir because it is for you that He died.’”—Lou Nicholes, *Hebrews: Patterns for Living* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2004), p. 31.

We, too, are God’s heirs, not because of our own merit but because of His grace. In Christ we have much more than we even had before Adam’s sin; this is one of the points that Paul was trying desperately to teach the Galatian believers, who were fast losing their way.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 19.*

Our Condition in Christ *(Gal. 3:26–29)*

Keeping Galatians 3:25 in mind, read Galatians 3:26. How does this text help us to understand our relationship to the law, now that we have been redeemed by Jesus?

The word *for* at the beginning of verse 26 indicates that Paul sees a direct connection between this verse and the preceding one. In the same way that a master's son was under a pedagogue only as long as he was a minor, Paul is saying that those who come to faith in Christ are no longer minors; their relationship with the law is changed because they are now adult "sons" of God.

The term *son* is not, of course, exclusive to males; Paul clearly includes females in this category (*Gal 3:28*). The reason he uses the word *sons* instead of *children* is that he has in mind the family inheritance that was passed on to the male offspring, along with the fact that the phrase "sons of God" was the special designation of Israel in the Old Testament (*Deut. 14:1, Hos. 11:1*). In Christ, Gentiles now also enjoy the special relationship with God that had been exclusive to Israel.

What is it about baptism that makes it such a significant event? *Gal. 3:27, 28; Rom. 6:1–11; 1 Pet. 3:21.*

Paul's use of the word *for* in verse 27 indicates once again the close logical development of his reasoning. Paul sees baptism as a radical decision to unite our lives with Christ. In Romans 6, he describes baptism symbolically as our uniting with Jesus, in both His death and His resurrection. In Galatians, Paul employs a different metaphor: baptism is the act of being clothed with Christ. Paul's terminology is reminiscent of wonderful passages in the Old Testament that talk about being clothed with righteousness and salvation (*see Isa. 61:10, Job 29:14*). "Paul views baptism as the moment when Christ, like a garment, envelops the believer. Although he does not employ the term, Paul is describing the righteousness which is conferred upon believers."—Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 145.

Our union with Christ symbolized through baptism means that what is true of Christ also is true of us. Because Christ is the "seed" of Abraham, as "joint-heirs with Christ" (*Rom. 8:17*), believers also are heirs to all the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants.

Dwell on this thought that what is true of Christ is also true of us. How should this amazing truth affect every aspect of our existence?

Enslaved to Elementary Principles

Having just compared our relationship to God with that of sons and heirs, Paul now elaborates on this metaphor by including the theme of inheritance in Galatians 4:1–3. Paul’s terminology evokes a situation in which an owner of a large estate has died, leaving all his property to his oldest son. His son, however, is still a minor. As is often the case with wills even today, the father’s will stipulates that his son is to be under the supervision of guardians and managers until he reaches maturity. Although he is master of his father’s estate by title, as a minor he is little more than a slave in practice.

Paul’s analogy is similar to that of the pedagogue in Galatians 3:24, but in this case the power of the stewards and managers is far superior and much more important. They are responsible not only for the upbringing of the master’s son, but they are also in charge of all the financial and administrative affairs until the son is mature enough to assume those duties himself.

Read Galatians 4:1–3. What is Paul saying here that, again, should help to clarify what the role of the law should be in our lives, now that we are in Christ?

Exactly what Paul means by the phrase “elementary principles” (*Gal. 4:3, 8, ESV*) is disputed. The Greek word *stoicheia* literally means “elements.” Some have seen it as a description of the basic elements that compose the universe (*2 Pet. 3:10, 12*), or as demonic powers that control this evil age (*Col. 2:15*), or as the rudimentary principles of religious life—the ABCs of religion (*Heb. 5:12*). Paul’s emphasis on humanity’s status as “minors” before the coming of Christ (*Gal. 4:1–3*) suggests that he is referring here to the rudimentary principles of religious life. If so, Paul is saying that the Old Testament period, with its laws and sacrifices, was merely a gospel primer that outlined the basics of salvation. Thus, as important and instructional as the ceremonial laws were to Israel, they were only shadows of what was to come. They never were intended to take the place of Christ.

To regulate one’s life around these rules instead of Christ is like wanting to go back in time. For the Galatians to return to those basic elements after Christ had already come was like the adult son in Paul’s analogy wanting to be a minor again!

While a childlike faith can be positive (*Matt. 18:3*), is it necessarily the same thing as spiritual maturity? Or could you argue that the more you grow spiritually, the more childlike your faith will be? How childlike and “innocent” and trusting is your faith?

“God Sent Forth His Son” (*Gal. 4:4*)

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (*Gal. 4:4, ESV*).

Paul’s choice of the word *fullness* indicates God’s active role in working out His purpose in human history. Jesus did not come at just any time; He came at the precise time God had prepared. From a historical perspective, that time is known as the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace), a two-hundred-year period of relative stability and peace across the Roman Empire. Rome’s conquest of the Mediterranean world brought peace, a common language, favorable means of travel, and a common culture that facilitated the rapid spread of the gospel. From a biblical perspective, it also marked the time that God had set for the coming of the promised Messiah (*see Dan. 9:24–27*).

Why did Christ have to take our humanity in order to redeem us?

John 1:14; Gal. 4:4, 5; Rom. 8:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14, 15.

Galatians 4:4, 5 contains one of the most succinct accounts of the gospel in Scripture. The coming of Jesus into human history was no accident. “God sent forth His Son.” In other words, God took the initiative in our salvation.

Also implicit in these words is the fundamental Christian belief in Christ’s eternal deity (*John 1:1–3, 18; Phil. 2:5–9; Col. 1:15–17*). God did not send a heavenly messenger. He, Himself, came.

Although He was the divine preexistent Son of God, Jesus was also “born of woman.” Although the virgin birth is implied in this phrase, it more specifically affirms His genuine humanity.

The phrase “born under the law” points not only to Jesus’ Jewish heritage, but also includes the fact that He bore our condemnation.

It was necessary for Christ to assume our humanity because we could not save ourselves. By uniting His divine nature with our fallen human nature, Christ legally qualified to be our Substitute, Savior, and High Priest. As the second Adam, He came to reclaim all that the first Adam had lost by his disobedience (*Rom. 5:12–21*). By His obedience He perfectly fulfilled the law’s demands, thus redeeming Adam’s tragic failure. And by His death on the cross, He met the justice of the law, which required the death of the sinner, thus gaining the right to redeem all who come to Him in true faith and surrender.

The Privileges of Adoption (*Gal. 4:5–7*)

In Galatians 4:5–7, Paul expands on his theme, stressing that Christ has now “redeemed those who were under the law” (*vss. 4, 5, ESV*). The verb *to redeem* means “to buy back.” It referred to the price paid to buy the freedom of either a hostage or a slave. As this context indicates, redemption implies a negative background: a person is in need of being liberated.

From what, though, do we need to be freed? The New Testament presents four things among others: (1) freed from the devil and his wiles (*Heb. 2:14, 15*), (2) freed from death (*1 Cor. 15:56, 57*), (3) freed from the power of sin that enslaves us by nature (*Rom. 6:22*), and (4) freed from the condemnation of the law (*Rom. 3:19–24, Gal. 3:13, 4:5*).

What positive purpose has Christ achieved for us through the redemption we have in Him? *Gal. 4:5–7; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15, 16, 23; 9:4, 5.*

We often speak about what Christ has accomplished for us as “salvation.” Although true, this word is not nearly as vivid and descriptive as Paul’s unique use of the word *adoption* (*huiiothesia*). Although Paul is the only New Testament author to use this word, adoption was a well-known legal procedure in the Greco-Roman world. Several Roman emperors during Paul’s life used adoption as the means of choosing a successor when they had no legal heir. Adoption guaranteed a number of privileges: “(1) The adopted son become[s] the true son . . . of his adopter. . . . (2) The adopter agrees to bring up the child properly and to provide the necessities of food and clothing. (3) The adopter cannot repudiate his adopted son. (4) The child cannot be reduced to slavery. (5) The child’s natural parents have no right to reclaim him. (6) The adoption establishes the right to inherit.” —Derek R. Moore-Crispin, “Galatians 4:1–9: The Use and Abuse of Parallels,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 3 (1989), p. 216.

If these rights are guaranteed on an earthly level, just imagine how much greater are the privileges we have as the adopted children of God!

Read Galatians 4:6, realizing that the Hebrew word *Abba* was the intimate word children used to address their father, like the words *Daddy* or *Papa* today. Jesus used it in prayer (*Mark 14:36*), and as God’s children we have the privilege of calling God “*Abba*,” as well. Do you enjoy that kind of intimate closeness to God in your own life? If not, what’s the problem? What can you change to bring about this closeness?

Why Turn Back to Slavery? *(Gal. 4:8–20)*

Read Galatians 4:8–20. On the lines below, summarize what Paul is saying here. How seriously does he take the false teachings among Galatians?

Paul does not describe the exact nature of the Galatians' religious practices, but he clearly has in mind a false system of worship that resulted in spiritual slavery. Indeed, he deemed it so dangerous and destructive that he had to write such an impassioned letter, warning the Galatians that what they were doing was akin to turning away from sonship to slavery.

Although he doesn't get into specifics, what does Paul say is so objectionable about the behavior of the Galatians? *Gal. 4:9–11.*

Many have interpreted Paul's reference to "days and months and seasons and years" (*Gal. 4:10, ESV*) as an objection not merely to ceremonial laws but to the Sabbath, as well. Such an interpretation, however, goes beyond the evidence. For starters, if Paul really wanted to single out the Sabbath and other specific Jewish practices, it is clear from Colossians 2:16 that he easily could have identified them by name. Second, Paul makes it clear that whatever it is the Galatians are doing, it has led them from freedom in Christ to bondage. "If observance of the seventh-day Sabbath subjects a man to bondage, it must be that the Creator Himself entered into bondage when He observed the world's first Sabbath!"—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 967. Also, why would Jesus not only have kept the Sabbath but taught others how to keep it, if its proper observance were in any way depriving people of the freedom that they have in Him? (*See Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 13:10–16.*)

Might there be any practices in Seventh-day Adventism that take away from the freedom that we have in Christ? Or, instead of the practices themselves being problematic, what about our attitudes toward the practices? How could a wrong attitude lead us into the kind of bondage that Paul warned the Galatians about so vehemently?

Further Study: “In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will. God wills that all men should be saved; for ample provision has been made, in giving his only-begotten Son to pay man’s ransom. Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus. The pride of man hinders him from accepting the provisions of salvation. But human merit will not admit a soul into the presence of God. That which will make a man acceptable to God is the imparted grace of Christ through faith in his name. No dependence can be placed in works or in happy flights of feelings as evidence that men are chosen of God; for the elect are chosen through Christ.”—Ellen G. White, “Chosen in Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, January 2, 1893.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of what it means, and what it does not mean, to be like children in our walk with the Lord. What aspects of children are we to emulate in regard to our faith and our relationship with God? At the same time, what are ways in which we can take this idea too far? Discuss.
- ❷ What is it about human beings that makes us so afraid of the idea of grace, of salvation by faith alone? Why is it that many people would rather try to work their way to salvation, if that were possible?
- ❸ As a class, go over the final question from Thursday’s lesson. In what ways can we as Seventh-day Adventists get caught up in the kind of slavery from which we have been ideally freed? How could this happen to us, how can we know if it does, and how can we be set free?

Summary: In Christ we have been adopted into God’s family as His sons and daughters. As God’s children, we have access to all the rights and privileges that such a family relationship entails. To relate to God on the basis of rules and regulations alone would be foolish. It would be like a son wanting to renounce his position and inheritance in order to become a slave.

A New Calling

by HARSHU KAMBLE

I was a religious and political leader in my village in western India. The people in the village looked up to me. I had a good-paying job selling alcohol, and I tasted plenty of alcohol myself. But in spite of my standing in the village, I felt spiritually unfulfilled.

Then one day a Seventh-day Adventist pastor visited the village. I'd never heard of Seventh-day Adventists before, but this pastor went from home to home, sharing God's love with us. I listened with interest as he told me that Jesus Christ can give me deliverance from alcohol and fill me with God's peace.

I was excited about this news and told others what this pastor was telling me. But some people didn't like what he was saying to the villagers; they turned against him and beat him. But three months later, the pastor returned to the village and visited me. This time no one tried to stop him. He held meetings, and about 50 people came to hear him speak of the love of God.

I was touched by what the pastor said, and I wondered how these people could have beaten this man. I saw the Holy Spirit at work as some of the very people who had beaten the pastor were now listening to him preach God's Word.

I wanted to become a Christian and asked the man what I must do. He told me to close my liquor business and accept Jesus as my Savior. I did just that and asked for baptism. Within six months, 45 other people were baptized, as well.

We built a small village church, where I enjoyed worshiping and learning the Bible. Then a year later, the man who had led me to Christ called me to serve God as a Global Mission pioneer. I accepted the challenge with joy.

So far I've worked in seven villages, all of which worship in the same religion I once did. As of today, some 150 people have accepted the wonderful message of God's love and have been baptized. God is blessing me wherever I go. The people listen to the message that God has asked me to deliver, and I pray that they will give their hearts to God, even as I did.

Your mission offerings help support these groups of new believers. Thank you for making it possible to reach many people with God's incredible love.

HARSHU KAMBLE *shares his faith in Maharashtra, western India.*

Paul's Pastoral Appeal



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 4:12–20, 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:17, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, 2 Cor. 4:7–12.*

Memory Text: “Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are” (*Galatians 4:12, NRSV*).

As we've seen so far, Paul did not mince words with the Galatians. His strong language, however, simply reflected the inspired passion he felt concerning the spiritual welfare of the church that he had founded. Besides the crucial theological issue with which Paul was dealing, the letter to the Galatians in a broad sense also shows just how important correct doctrine is. If what we believed were not that important, if doctrinal correctness did not matter all that much, then why would Paul have been so fervent, so uncompromising, in his letter? The truth is, of course, that what we believe matters greatly, especially in the whole question of the gospel.

In Galatians 4:12–20 Paul continues his discourse, although he changes his approach, at least a bit. Paul has made a number of detailed and theologically sophisticated arguments in his attempts to persuade the Galatians of their errors, and now he makes a more personal, pastoral appeal. Unlike the false teachers who had no true interest in the Galatians, Paul reveals the genuine concern, worry, hope, and love of a good shepherd for his wayward flock. He was not just correcting theology; he was seeking to minister to those whom he loved.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 26.*

The Heart of Paul

Read Galatians 4:12–20. What is the thrust of Paul’s message in these verses?

The initial indication of the concern that weighs heavily on Paul’s heart is his personal appeal in verse 12. The appeal follows immediately after Paul’s insistence that the Galatians “become as I am.” The significance of the word *entreat* or *beseech* is, unfortunately, not fully conveyed in some translations. The word in Greek is *deomai*. Although it can be translated as “to urge” (*NKJV*) or “to entreat” (*ESV*), the Greek word has a stronger sense of desperation connected to it (see *2 Cor. 5:20, 8:4, 10:2*). Paul is really saying, “I’m begging you!”

Paul’s concern was not simply about theological ideas and doctrinal points of view. His heart was bound up with the lives of the people who were brought to Christ through his ministry. He considered himself more than just a friend; he was their spiritual father, and they were his children. But even more than that, Paul likens his concern for the Galatians to the worry and anguish that accompany a mother in childbirth (*Gal. 4:19*). Paul had thought that his previous “labor” had been sufficient for their “safe delivery” when he founded the church. But now that the Galatians had wandered from the truth, Paul was experiencing those labor pains all over again in order to secure their well-being.

What goal did Paul have in mind for the Galatians? What result did he want to see from all his “labor” in their behalf? *Gal. 4:19*.

Having first described the Galatians as being formed in the womb, Paul now speaks of the Galatians as if they were expectant mothers themselves. The word translated as “formed” was used medically to refer to the development of an embryo. Through this metaphor Paul describes what it means to be Christian, both individually and collectively as a church. To be a follower of Christ is more than just the profession of faith; it involves a radical transformation into the likeness of Christ. Paul was “not looking for a few minor alterations in the Galatians but for such a transformation that to see them would be to see Christ.”—Leon Morris, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 142.

In what ways have you seen the character of Christ manifested in your life? In what areas do you still have a lot of growing to do?

The Challenge to Become

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9; and Acts 26:28, 29. What is Paul saying here that is reflected in Galatians 4:12? How are we to understand his point?

Paul encourages Christians to imitate his behavior several times throughout his letters. In each situation, Paul presents himself as an authoritative example that believers should follow. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9, Paul offers himself as an example of how the believers in Thessalonica should work to earn their own living and not be a burden on others. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to imitate him in placing the welfare of others first. Paul’s concern in Galatians appears to be somewhat different.

In Galatians 4:12, Paul does not ask the Galatians to imitate him; instead, he asks that they “become as” he is—he is talking about being, not acting. Why? The trouble in Galatia was not unethical behavior or an ungodly lifestyle, as it was in the church in Corinth. The issue in Galatia was rooted in the essence of Christianity itself. It was more about “being” than “behavior.” Paul was not saying *act* like me, but *be what I am*. The exact terminology in Galatians 4:12 occurs in Paul’s appeal to Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:29 (*ESV*) where Paul writes, “I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might *become such as I am*—except for these chains” (emphasis supplied). In other words, Paul is referring to his experience as a Christian, a foundation that rests on Christ alone, a faith that trusts in what Christ has done for him and not in his works of the law. The Galatians were placing greater value on their behavior than on their identity in Christ.

Although Paul does not specifically say how he wants the Galatians to become like him, the context of the situation in Galatians indicates it was not a blanket statement that covered every aspect and detail of his life. Because his concern was with the law-centered religion of the Galatians, Paul surely had in mind the wonderful love, joy, freedom, and certainty of salvation he had found in Jesus Christ. In light of the surpassing wonder of Christ, Paul had learned to count everything else as rubbish (*Phil.* 3:5–9)—and he longed for the Galatians themselves to have that same experience.

Is there someone you know (other than Jesus) who presents to you a good example? If so, what are the qualities of that person that you find so exemplary, and how can you better reveal those qualities in your life?

I Have Become as You Are

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. What does Paul say in these verses that can help us to understand better his point in the latter part of Galatians 4:12? See also Acts 17:16–34, 1 Cor. 8:8–13, Gal. 2:11–14.

Galatians 4:12 can seem a little confusing. Why should the Galatians become like Paul, if he had already become like them?

As we saw in yesterday's lesson, Paul wanted them to become like him in his complete faith and confidence in the all-sufficiency of Christ for salvation. His comment about having become like them was a reminder of how, although he was a Jew, he had become a Gentile "without the law" so that he might reach the Gentiles among them with the gospel. As the great missionary to the Gentile world, Paul had learned how to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, according to 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, although the gospel remained the same, Paul's method varied, depending on the people he was trying to reach.

"Paul was a pioneer in what we call today contextualization, the need to communicate the gospel in such a way that it speaks to the total context of the people to whom it is addressed."—Timothy George, *The New American Commentary: Galatians* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 321.

Paul's own comments in 1 Corinthians 9:21 indicate that he believed there were limits to how far someone should go in contextualizing the gospel. He mentions, for example, that while one is free to reach out in different ways to Jews and Gentiles, this freedom does not include the right to live a lawless lifestyle, for Christians are under the "law of Christ."

Although contextualization is not always easy, "insofar as we are able to separate the heart of the gospel from its cultural cocoon, to contextualize the message of Christ without compromising its content, we too should become imitators of Paul."—Timothy George, *Galatians*, pp. 321, 322.

It's so easy to compromise, isn't it? Sometimes the longer one is a Christian, the easier compromise gets. Why might that be so? Look at yourself, honestly. How much compromise has crept into your life, and what have been the ways you have justified it? How can you turn this around in areas where you need to?

Then and Now

Paul's relationship with the Galatian believers was not always as difficult and frigid as it had now become. In fact, as Paul reflects on the time when he first preached the gospel in Galatia, he speaks in glowing terms of how well they treated him. What happened?

What event seems to have led to Paul's decision to preach the gospel in Galatia? *Gal. 4:13*.

Apparently it had not been Paul's original intention to preach the gospel in Galatia. Some sort of illness, however, overtook him on his journey, forcing him either to stay longer in Galatia than expected or to travel to Galatia for his recovery. Mystery surrounds the exact nature of Paul's malady. Some have suggested that he contracted malaria; others (on the basis of Paul's reference to the Galatians' willingness to pluck out their eyes and give them to him) suggest that it was perhaps an eye disease. His illness may also have been connected to the "thorn in the flesh" he mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:7–9.

Whatever Paul was suffering from, he does tell us it was so unpleasant that it became a trial to the Galatians. In a world where illness was often seen as a sign of divine displeasure (*John 9:1, 2; Luke 13:1–4*), Paul's illness easily could have provided the Galatians with an excuse to reject both him and his message. But they welcomed Paul wholeheartedly. Why? Because their hearts had been warmed by the preaching of the Cross (*Gal. 3:1*) and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. What reason could they give now for their change of attitude?

What might have been God's reasons for allowing Paul to suffer? How could Paul minister to others when he was struggling with his own problems? *Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 4:7–12, 12:7–10*.

Whatever Paul's illness was, it certainly was serious, and it easily could have provided him with an excuse either to blame God for his problems or to simply give up on preaching the gospel. Paul did neither. Instead of letting his situation get the best of him, Paul used it as an opportunity to rely more fully on God's grace. "Time and again God has used the adversities of life—sickness, persecution, poverty, even natural disasters and inexplicable tragedies—as occasions to display his mercy and grace and as a means to advance the gospel." —Timothy George, *Galatians*, pp. 323, 324.

How can you learn to let your trials and suffering make you lean more upon the Lord? (What other options do you have?)

Speaking the Truth

Read Galatians 4:16. What powerful point is Paul making here? In what ways might you yourself have experienced something similar? See also John 3:19; Matt. 26:64, 65; Jer. 36:17–23.

The expression “speaking the truth” often has negative connotations, especially in our day and age, when it can be viewed as a hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, spare-no-enemies tactic of telling someone the facts, no matter how unpleasant or unwanted they may be. If it were not for Paul’s comments in Galatians 4:12–20 and a few other comments scattered throughout his letter (see Gal. 6:9, 10), one might mistakenly conclude that Paul’s interest in the truth of the gospel outweighed any expression of love. Yet, as we’ve seen, although Paul was concerned about the Galatians knowing the “truth of the gospel” (see Gal. 2:5, 14), that concern arose because of his love for them. Who hasn’t experienced personally just how painful it can be to have to chastise someone, or in plain terms speak truths to them that—for whatever reason—they don’t want to hear? We do it because we care about the person, not because we want to cause hurt, although at times the immediate effect of our words is hurt, or even anger and resentment against us. We do it anyway, because we know it is what the person needs to hear, no matter how much he or she might not want to do so.

In Galatians 4:17–20, what is Paul saying about those whom he is opposing? What else is he challenging, besides their theology?

In contrast to the candor of Paul’s gospel, by which he risked the possible ire of the Galatians, his opponents were actively courting the favor of the Galatians—not out of love for the Galatians but out of their own selfish motives. It is unclear exactly what Paul means when he says that his opponents “want to shut you out,” although this perhaps refers to an attempt to shut them out of the privileges of the gospel until they first submit to circumcision.

Think of some incident when your words, however truthful and needed, caused someone to be angry with you. What did you learn from the experience that could help you the next time you need to do something similar?

Further Study: “In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the gospel message. Christ, the true foundation of the faith, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism. The apostle saw that if the believers in Galatia were saved from the dangerous influences which threatened them, the most decisive measures must be taken, the sharpest warnings given.

“An important lesson for every minister of Christ to learn is that of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are alike needful; but these are to be exercised with proper discrimination. To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God. . . .

“Paul pleaded with those who had once known in their lives the power of God, to return to their first love of gospel truth. With unanswerable arguments he set before them their privilege of becoming free men and women in Christ, through whose atoning grace all who make full surrender are clothed with the robe of His righteousness. He took the position that every soul who would be saved must have a genuine, personal experience in the things of God.

“The apostle’s earnest words of entreaty were not fruitless. The Holy Spirit wrought with mighty power, and many whose feet had wandered into strange paths, returned to their former faith in the gospel. Henceforth they were steadfast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 385, 386, 388.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the whole question of suffering and how God can use it. How do we deal with situations in which nothing good appears to have come from suffering?
- ❷ Meditate on the idea of Christ being formed in us. What does this mean in practical terms? How can we know that this is happening to us? How do we keep from being discouraged if it’s not happening as quickly as we think it should?

Summary: Having made a number of detailed and theologically sophisticated arguments, Paul now makes a more personal and emotional appeal to the Galatians. He begs them to listen to his counsel, reminding them of the positive relationship they once shared and of the genuine love and concern he has for them as their spiritual parent.

Against the Tide

by FRIDAY NWAMAGA

I grew up in a family that worshiped idols, but I often wondered about my Christian friends' beliefs. When a friend invited me to attend church with him, I went. My parents were angry when they learned what I'd done. But something had moved me during the worship service, and from then on, I slept in the wild on Saturday night so I could attend church on Sunday. I joined my friend's church and became a youth leader. Eventually, my mother and brother joined the church, too.

James, a man who repaired my bicycle, gave me some books to read. Two of the books, *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*, opened my mind to truth I hadn't known before. He invited me to attend a Revelation Seminar, so I went. I had studied Revelation before, but I couldn't understand it. During the seminar, this book became so clear to me.

I was so happy that I sang all the way home. My mother confronted me. "Have you been attending the Seventh-day Adventist programs this week?" she asked. I nodded, and tears clouded her eyes. "Why?" she asked.

"I've found truth I never knew before," I told her. "And if you're willing, you can find it too." She pleaded with me to stop attending the meetings, but I told her that God had shown me the truth and I had to follow. "I've decided to be a Seventh-day Adventist," I said.

I invited members of my former church to a week-long revival program I was holding. Many came. I didn't preach doctrine, but I told them what Jesus was doing in my life and what He means to me. Near the end of the meetings, I told the youth that I was leaving that church because I had found greater truth. I invited them to follow me.

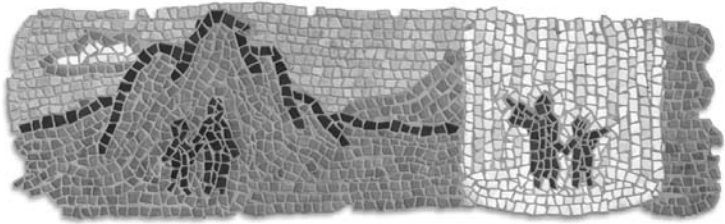
And within a year, 20 people from my former church became Seventh-day Adventists. Others accused the Seventh-day Adventists of snatching me away. I explained to them that no one had forced me to leave their church, and that Jesus had led me to greater truth in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

God called me to the ministry, so I'm preparing for His service at Babcock University. My church family helps as much as they can, and I trust God for the rest.

Your mission offerings and Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped build this fine Seventh-day Adventist school where young people in Africa can prepare to serve the Lord and hasten His coming. Thank you.

FRIDAY NWAMAGA is completing his studies at Babcock University in Nigeria.

The Two Covenants



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 4:21–31; Gen. 1:28; 2:2, 3; 3:15; 15:1–6; Exod. 6:2–8; 19:3–6.*

Memory Text: “But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother” (*Galatians 4:26, NIV*).

Christians who reject the authority of the Old Testament often see the giving of the law on Sinai as being inconsistent with the gospel. They conclude that the covenant given on Sinai represents an era, a dispensation, from a time in human history when salvation was based on obedience to the law. But because the people failed to live up to the demands of the law, God (they say) ushered in a new covenant, a covenant of grace through the merits of Jesus Christ. This, then, is their understanding of the two covenants: the old based on law, and the new based on grace.

However common that view may be, it is wrong. Salvation was never by obedience to the law; biblical Judaism, from the start, was always a religion of grace. The legalism that Paul was confronting in Galatia was a perversion, not just of Christianity but of the Old Testament itself. The two covenants are not matters of time; instead, they are reflective of human attitudes. They represent two different ways of trying to relate to God, ways that go back to Cain and Abel. The old covenant represents those who, like Cain, mistakenly rely on their own obedience as a means of pleasing God; in contrast, the new covenant represents the experience of those who, like Abel, rely wholly upon God's grace to do all that He has promised.

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

Covenant Basics

Many regard Paul's interpretation of the history of Israel in Galatians 4:21–31 as the most difficult passage in his letter. That's because it is a highly complex argument that requires a broad knowledge of Old Testament persons and events. The first step in making sense of this passage is to have a basic understanding of an Old Testament concept central to Paul's argument: the concept of the covenant.

The Hebrew word translated "covenant" is *berit*. It occurs nearly three hundred times in the Old Testament and refers to a binding contract, agreement, or treaty. For thousands of years, covenants played an integral role in defining the relationships between people and nations across the ancient Near East. Covenants often involved the slaughter of animals as part of the process of making (literally "cutting") a covenant. The killing of animals symbolized what would happen to a party that failed to keep its covenant promises and obligations.

"From Adam to Jesus, God dealt with humanity by means of a series of covenant promises that centered on a coming Redeemer and which culminated in the Davidic covenant (*Gen. 12:2, 3; 2 Sam. 7:12–17; Isaiah 11*). To Israel in Babylonian captivity, God promised a more effective 'new covenant' (*Jer. 31:31–34*) in connection with the coming of the Davidic Messiah (*Ezek. 36:26–28; 37:22–28*)." —Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2005), p. 4.

What was the basis of God's original covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden before sin? *Gen. 1:28; 2:2, 3, 15–17*.

While marriage, physical labor, and the Sabbath were part of the general provisions of the covenant of creation, its main focal point was God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. The basic nature of the covenant was "obey and live!" With a nature created in harmony with God, the Lord did not require the impossible. Obedience was humanity's natural inclination; yet, Adam and Eve chose to do what was not natural, and, in that act, they not only ruptured the covenant of creation, they made its terms impossible for humans now corrupted by sin. God had to restore the relationship that Adam and Eve had lost. He did this by immediately enacting the covenant of grace based on the eternal promise of a Savior (*Gen. 3:15*).

Read Genesis 3:15, the first gospel promise in the Bible. Where in that verse do you see an inkling of the hope that we have in Christ?

The Abrahamic Covenant

What covenant promises did God make to Abram in Genesis 12:1–5? What was Abram’s response?

God’s initial promises to Abram make up one of the more powerful passages in the Old Testament. These verses all are about God’s grace. It is God, not Abram, who makes the promises. Abram had done nothing to earn or merit God’s favor; neither is there any indication that suggests that God and Abram had somehow worked together to come up with this agreement. God does all the promising. Abram, in contrast, is called to have faith in the surety of God’s promise, not some flimsy so-called “faith” but a faith that is manifested by his leaving his extended family (at the age of seventy-five!) and heading to the land God promised.

“With the ‘blessing’ pronounced on Abraham and through him on all human beings, the Creator renewed His redemptive purpose. He had ‘blessed’ Adam and Eve in Paradise (*Gen. 1:28, 5:2*) and then ‘blessed Noah and his sons’ after the flood (*9:1*). This way God clarified His earlier promise of a Redeemer who will redeem humanity, destroy evil, and restore Paradise (*Gen. 3:15*). God confirmed His promise to bless ‘all peoples’ in His universal outreach.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, pp. 22, 23.

After ten years of waiting for the promised son to be born, what questions did Abram have regarding God’s promise? *Gen. 15:1–6*.

It often is easy to glorify Abram as the man of faith who never had any questions or doubts. Scripture, however, paints a different picture. Abram believed, but he also had questions along the way. His faith was a growing faith. Like the father in Mark 9:24, Abram basically said to God in Genesis 15:8, “I believe, help my unbelief.” In response, God graciously assured Abram of the certainty of His promise by formally entering into a covenant with him (*Gen. 15:7–18*). What makes this passage so surprising is not the fact that God enters into a covenant with Abram but the extent to which God was willing to condescend to do so. Unlike other rulers in the ancient Near East who balked at the idea of making binding promises with their servants, God not only gave His word, but, by symbolically passing through the pieces of slaughtered animals, He staked His very life on it. Of course, Jesus ultimately gave His life on Calvary to make His promise a reality.

What are some areas now where you have to reach out by faith and believe in what seems impossible? How can you learn to keep holding on, no matter what?

Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar

Why does Paul have such a disparaging view of the incident with Hagar? *Gal. 4:21–31, Genesis 16*. What crucial point about salvation is Paul making through his use of this Old Testament story?

Hagar's place in the Genesis story is directly related to Abram's failure to believe God's promise. As an Egyptian slave in Abram's household, Hagar likely came into Abram's possession as one of the many gifts Pharaoh gave to him in exchange for Sarai, an event associated with Abram's first act of unbelief in God's promise (*Gen. 12:11–16*).

After waiting ten years for the promised child to be born, Abram and Sarai remained childless. Concluding that God needed their help, Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a concubine. Although strange to us today, Sarai's plan was quite ingenious. According to ancient customs, a female slave legally could serve as a surrogate mother for her barren mistress. Thus Sarai could count any child born from her husband and Hagar as her own. While the plan did produce a child, it was not the child God had promised.

In this story we have a powerful example of how, when faced with daunting circumstances even a great man of God had a lapse of faith. In Genesis 17:18, 19, Abraham pleaded with God to accept Ishmael as his heir; the Lord, of course, rejected that offer. The only "miraculous" element in the birth of Ishmael was Sarah's willingness to share her husband with another woman! There was nothing out of the ordinary about the birth of a child to this woman, a child born "according to the flesh." Had Abraham trusted in what God had promised him instead of letting the circumstances overcome that trust, none of this would have happened, and a lot of grief would have been avoided.

In contrast to the birth of Ishmael, look at the circumstances surrounding Isaac's birth. *Gen. 17:15–19; 18:10–13; Heb. 11:11, 12*. Why did these circumstances require so much faith of Abraham and Sarah?

In what ways has your lack of faith in God's promises caused you some pain? How can you learn from these mistakes to take God at His word, no matter what? What choices can you make that can help strengthen your ability to trust God's promises?

Hagar and Mount Sinai (*Gal. 4:21–31*)

What type of covenant relationship did God want to establish with His people at Sinai? What similarities does it share with God's promise to Abraham? *Exod. 6:2–8, 19:3–6, Deut. 32:10–12.*

God desired to share the same covenant relationship with the children of Israel at Sinai that He shared with Abraham. In fact, similarities exist between God's words to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 and His words to Moses in Exodus 19. In both cases, God emphasizes what He will do for His people. He does not ask the Israelites to promise to do anything to earn His blessings; instead, they are to obey as a response to those blessings. The Hebrew word translated as "to obey" in Exodus 19:5 literally means "to hear." God's words do not imply righteousness by works. On the contrary, He wanted Israel to have the same faith that characterized Abraham's response to His promises (at least most of the time!).

If the covenant relationship God offered to Israel on Sinai is similar to the one given to Abraham, why does Paul identify Mount Sinai with the negative experience of Hagar? *Exod. 19:7–25; Heb. 8:6, 7.*

The covenant at Sinai was intended to point out the sinfulness of humanity and the remedy of God's abundant grace, which were typified in the sanctuary services. The problem with the Sinai covenant was not on God's part but rather with the faulty promises of the people (*Heb. 8:6*). Instead of responding to God's promises in humility and faith, the Israelites responded with self-confidence. " 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do' " (*Exod. 19:8*). After living as slaves in Egypt for more than four hundred years, they had no true concept of God's majesty nor the extent of their own sinfulness. In the same way that Abraham and Sarah tried to help God fulfill His promises, the Israelites sought to turn God's covenant of grace into a covenant of works. Hagar symbolizes Sinai in that both reveal human attempts at salvation by works.

Paul is not claiming that the law given at Sinai was evil or abolished. He is concerned with the Galatians' legalistic misapprehension of the law. "Instead of serving to convict them of the absolute impossibility of pleasing God by law-keeping, the law fostered in them a deeply entrenched determination to depend on personal resources in order to please God. Thus the law did not serve the purposes of grace in leading the Judaizers to Christ. Instead, it closed them off from Christ." —O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 181.

Ishmael and Isaac Today

Paul's brief sketch of Israel's history was designed to counter the arguments made by his opponents who claimed that they were the true descendants of Abraham and that Jerusalem—the center of Jewish Christianity and the law—was their mother. The Gentiles, they charged, were illegitimate; if they wanted to become true followers of Christ, they must first become a son of Abraham by submitting to the law of circumcision.

The truth, Paul says, is the opposite. These legalists are not the sons of Abraham but are illegitimate sons, like Ishmael. By placing their trust in circumcision, they were relying on “the flesh,” as Sarah did with Hagar and as the Israelites did with God's law at Sinai. Gentile believers, however, were the sons of Abraham not by natural descent but, like Isaac, by the supernatural. “Like Isaac they were a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham . . . ; like Isaac, their birth into freedom was the effect of divine grace; like Isaac, they belong to the column of the covenant of promise.”—James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 256.

What will the true descendants of Abraham face in this world?

Gal. 4:28–31, Gen. 21:8–12.

Being the promised child brought Isaac not only blessings but also opposition and persecution. In reference to persecution, Paul has in mind the ceremony in Genesis 21:8–10, where Isaac is being honored and Ishmael appears to make fun of him. The Hebrew word in Genesis 21:9 literally means “to laugh,” but Sarah's reaction suggests Ishmael was mocking or ridiculing Isaac. While Ishmael's behavior might not sound very significant to us today, it revealed the deeper hostilities involved in a situation when the family birthright was at stake. Many rulers in antiquity tried to secure their position by eliminating potential rivals, including siblings (*Judg. 9:1–6*). Although Isaac faced opposition, he also enjoyed all the privileges of love, protection, and favor that went along with being his father's heir.

As spiritual descendants of Isaac, we should not be surprised when we suffer hardship and opposition, even from within the church family itself.

In what ways have you suffered persecution, especially from those closest to you, because of your faith? Or ask yourself this hard question: might you be guilty of persecuting others for their faith? Think about it.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 363–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

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

“God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: ‘If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.’ Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. . . . Yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Is your own walk with the Lord more of an “old covenant” or a “new covenant” type? How can you tell the difference?
- ❷ What are some of the issues in your local church that are causing tension within the body? How are they being resolved? Although you might find yourself being the victim of “persecution,” how can you make sure, too, that you aren’t the one doing the persecuting? Where’s the fine line there? *See also Matt. 18:15–17.*
- ❸ How many times have you made promises to the Lord that you would not do this or that, only to do this or that? How does this sad fact help you understand the meaning of grace?

Summary: The stories of Hagar, Ishmael, and the children of Israel at Sinai illustrate the foolishness of trying to rely upon our own efforts to accomplish what God has promised. This method of self-righteousness is referred to as the old covenant. The new covenant is the everlasting covenant of grace first established with Adam and Eve after sin, renewed with Abraham, and ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

For God Alone

Jordy is 12 years old and lives in Ecuador. Although his family has suffered much, he feels that he is blessed, for his parents have shown him how to live for God alone.

His mother has a painful disease that has left her unable to walk. In spite of her pain, her love for Jesus shines through everything she does. And last year his father lost his job, so the family had no income. But they don't blame God for their problems. Instead, they praise Him for providing for their needs.

Jordy's parents sold their house and moved into a one-room apartment in order to pay for his mother's medical treatments. But Jordy doesn't mind. "My mother is more important than any house!" he says. "When we can't see how we'll manage, we remind ourselves that God provides for the sparrows. Surely, He will provide for us too. I give my worries to God and let Him handle things. Sometimes we've had no food in our house, and when we prayed someone brought us food. I know that God won't forget us."

But Jordy doesn't like to dwell on his family problems. He wants to talk about how God has blessed him and his family. Jordy used to be shy. Then someone invited him to preach in church. He wasn't sure he could do it, but he agreed to try. "I prayed a lot, and I realized that God can use me to reach people's hearts. It changed my life!" he says.

Now Jordy preaches often. He loves to tell others what God can do in their lives. He shares his faith with his neighbors and with his classmates at school too. "I want everyone to know that God loves them and has a plan for their lives," he says.

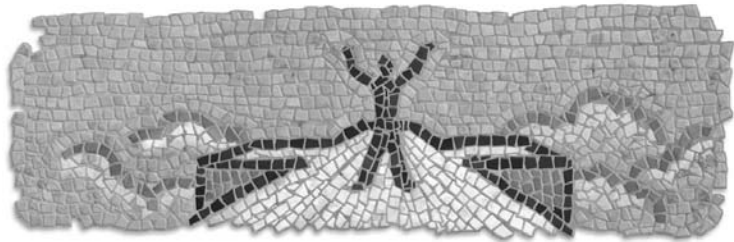
When Jordy's uncle was married, he invited Jordy to preach the sermon for the wedding. Jordy agreed, but he was shocked to find 800 people at the wedding. He prayed for God's blessing, and he felt God speaking through him. "Afterward when people thanked me for my sermon, I told them it wasn't from me; it was from God," Jordy said. "I don't want credit for what God does. It's for God's glory."



Jordy wants everyone to know Jesus and love God as he does. "I tell them that they are God's children; they just didn't know it until someone told them." Jordy has dedicated his life to God alone, and he invites everyone to do the same. We can share God's love with others we meet and through our mission offerings. Thanks for living as Jordy does, for God alone.

JORDY ESTRADA (left) lives in Quito, Ecuador.

Freedom *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 5:1–15; 1 Cor. 6:20; Rom. 8:1; Heb. 2:14, 15; Rom. 8:4; 13:8.*

Memory Text: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (*Galatians 5:13, ESV*).

In Galatians 2:4, Paul briefly referred to the importance of protecting the “freedom” that we have in Christ Jesus. But what does Paul mean when he speaks about “freedom,” which he so often does? What does this freedom include? How far does this freedom go? Does it have any limits? And what connection does freedom in Christ have to the law?

Paul addresses these questions by warning the Galatians of two dangers. The first is legalism. Paul’s opponents in Galatia were so caught up trying to earn God’s favor through their behavior that they lost sight of the liberating nature of Christ’s work, of the salvation that they already had in Christ through faith. The second threat is the tendency to abuse the freedom Christ has obtained for us by lapsing into licentiousness. Those who hold this view mistakenly assume that freedom is antithetical to the law.

Both legalism and licentiousness are opposed to freedom, because they equally keep their adherents in a form of slavery. Paul’s appeal to the Galatians, however, is to stand firm in the true freedom that is their rightful possession in Christ.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 10.*

Christ Has Set Us Free

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (*Gal. 5:1*).

Like the rallying command of a military leader to his wavering troops, Paul charges the Galatians not to surrender their freedom in Christ. The forcefulness and intensity of Paul’s tone cause his words nearly to leap off the page into action. In fact, this seems to be exactly what Paul intended. Although this verse is connected thematically to what precedes and what follows, its abruptness and lack of syntactical connections in Greek suggest that Paul wanted this verse to stand out like a gigantic billboard. Freedom in Christ sums up Paul’s entire argument, and the Galatians were in danger of giving it away.

Read Galatians 1:3, 4; 2:16; and 3:13. What are some of the metaphors used in these verses, and how do they help us understand what Christ has done for us?

Paul’s words, “for freedom Christ has set us free” (*Gal. 5: 1, ESV*), may suggest that he has another metaphor in mind here. The wording of this phrase is similar to the formula used in the sacred freeing (*manumission*) of slaves. Because slaves had no legal rights, it was supposed that a deity could purchase their freedom, and in return, the slave, though really free, would legally belong to the god. Of course, in actual practice the process was fiction; it was the slave who paid the money into the temple treasury for his or her freedom. Consider, for example, the formula used in one of the nearly one thousand inscriptions found at the temple to Pythian Apollo at Delphi that date from 201 B.C. to A.D. 100: “‘For Freedom, Apollo the Pythian bought from Sosibus of Amphissa a female slave whose name is Nicaea. . . . The purchase, however, Nicaea has committed unto Apollo for freedom.’ ”—Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 340.

This formula shares a basic similarity with Paul’s terminology, but there is a fundamental difference. In Paul’s metaphor, no fiction is involved. We did not provide the purchase price ourselves (*1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23*). The price was far too high for us. We were powerless to save ourselves, but Jesus stepped in and did for us what we could not do (at least not without forfeiting our lives). He paid the penalty for our sins, thus freeing us from condemnation.

Look at your own life. Do you ever think that you could save yourself? What should your answer tell you about how grateful you need to be for what we have been given in Jesus?

The Nature of Christian Freedom

Paul's command to stand firm in freedom is not made in isolation. An important statement of fact precedes it: "Christ has set us free." Why should Christians stand firmly in their freedom? Because Christ has already set them free. In other words, our freedom is a result of what Christ has already done for us.

This pattern of a statement of fact followed by an exhortation is typical in Paul's letters (*1 Cor. 6:20; 10:13, 14; Col. 2:6*). For example, Paul makes several indicative statements in Romans 6 about the facts of our condition in Christ, such as, "We know that our old self was crucified with him" (*Rom. 6:6, ESV*). On the basis of this fact, Paul can then issue the imperative exhortation, "Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies" (*Rom. 6:12, NRSV*). This is Paul's way of saying essentially, "Become what you already are in Christ." The ethical life of the gospel does not present the burden of trying to do things in order to prove that we are God's children. Rather, we do what we do because we already are His children.

From what has Christ freed us? *Rom. 6:14, 18; 8:1; Gal. 4:3, 8; 5:1; Heb. 2:14, 15.*

The use of the word *freedom* to describe the Christian life is more prominent in Paul's letters than anywhere else in the New Testament. The word *freedom* and its cognates occur 28 times in Paul's letters, in contrast to only 13 times elsewhere.

What does Paul mean by freedom? First, it is not a mere abstract concept. It does not refer to political freedom, economic freedom, or the freedom to live any way we might please. On the contrary, it is a freedom that is grounded in our relationship to Jesus Christ. The context suggests that Paul is referring to freedom from the bondage and condemnation of a law-driven Christianity, but our freedom includes much more. It includes freedom from sin, eternal death, and the devil.

"Outside of Jesus Christ, human existence is characterized as bondage—bondage to the law, bondage to the evil elements dominating the world, bondage to sin, the flesh, and the devil. God sent his Son into the world to shatter the dominion of these slave-holders."—Timothy George, *Galatians*, p. 354.

To what things do you feel enslaved in life? Memorize Galatians 5:1 and ask God to make the freedom you have in Christ a reality in your life.

The Dangerous Consequences of Legalism *(Gal. 5:2–12)*

The way in which Paul introduces Galatians 5:2–12 indicates the importance of what he is about to say. “Look” (*ESV*), “Listen!” (*NRSV*), “Mark my words!” (*NIV*), “I, Paul, say to you” (*ESV*). Paul is not fooling around. By his forceful use of the word *look*, he not only calls for his readers’ full attention, but he even evokes his apostolic authority. He wants them to understand that if the Gentiles are going to submit to circumcision to be saved, then the Galatians need to realize the dangerous consequences involved in their decision.

Read Galatians 5:2–12. What does Paul warn about in regard to the whole question of circumcision?

The first consequence of trying to earn God’s favor by submitting to circumcision is that it obligates the person to keep the entire law. Paul’s language in verses 2 and 3 includes an interesting play on words. Christ, he says, will not benefit them (*ophelesei*); rather, they will be obligated (*opheiletēs*) to the law. If a person wants to live according to the law, he or she cannot just pick and choose the precepts to follow. It is all or nothing.

Second, they will be “cut off” from Christ. A decision to be justified by works involves at the same time a rejection of God’s way of justification in Christ. “You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to receive Christ, thereby acknowledging that you cannot save yourself, and then receive circumcision, thereby claiming that you can.” —John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p. 133.

Paul’s third objection to circumcision is that it hinders spiritual growth. His analogy is of a runner whose progress toward the finish line has been deliberately sabotaged. In fact, the word translated “hindered” (*vs. 7, ESV*) was used in military circles to refer “to breaking up a road or destroying a bridge or placing obstacles in the way of an enemy, to halt his advance.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 978.

Finally, circumcision removes the offense of the Cross. How? The message of circumcision implies that you can save yourself; as such, it is flattering to human pride. The message of the Cross, however, is offensive to human pride, because we have to acknowledge that we are dependent completely on Christ.

Paul is so outraged at these people for their insistence on circumcision that he says that he wishes that the knife would slip and they would castrate themselves! Strong words, but Paul’s tone simply reflects how seriously he views this issue.

Liberty Not Licentiousness (*Gal. 5:13*)

Galatians 5:13 marks an important turning point in the book of Galatians. Whereas up to this point Paul has focused entirely on the theological content of his message, he now turns to the issue of Christian behavior. How should a person who is not saved by works of law live?

What potential misuse of freedom did Paul want to keep the Galatians from committing? *Gal. 5:13*.

Paul was well aware of the potential misunderstanding that accompanied his emphasis on the grace and the freedom that believers have in Christ (*Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 2*). The problem, however, was not Paul's gospel but the human tendency for self-indulgence. The pages of history are littered with the stories of people, cities, and nations whose corruption and descent into moral chaos were directly related to their lack of self-control. Who hasn't felt this tendency in his or her own life, as well? That's why Paul so clearly calls followers of Jesus to avoid indulging in the flesh. In fact, he wants them to do the opposite, which is "through love serve one another" (*NKJV*). As anyone who serves others out of love knows, this is something that can be done only through death to self, death to the flesh. Those who indulge their own flesh are not the ones who tend to serve others. On the contrary.

Thus, our freedom in Christ is not merely a freedom from the enslavement to the world but a call to a new type of service, the responsibility to serve others out of love. It is "the opportunity to love the neighbor without hindrance, the possibility of creating human communities based on mutual self-giving rather than the quest for power and status."—Sam K. Williams, *Galatians* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 145.

Because of our familiarity with Christianity and the wording of modern translations of Galatians 5:13, it is easy to overlook the startling power these words would have conveyed to the Galatians. First, the Greek language indicates that the love that motivates this type of service is not ordinary human love—that would be impossible; human love is far too conditional. Paul's use of the article (*the*) before the word *love* in Greek indicates he is referring to "the" divine love that we receive only through the Spirit (*Rom. 5:5*). The real surprise lies in the fact that the word translated as "serve" is the Greek word for "to be enslaved." Our freedom is not for self-autonomy but for mutual enslavement to one another based on God's love.

Be honest: have you ever thought you could use the freedom you have in Christ to indulge in a little bit of sin here and there? What's so detrimental about that kind of thinking?

Fulfilling the Whole Law (*Gal. 5:13–15*)

How do you reconcile Paul’s negative comments about “do[ing] the whole law” (*Gal. 5:3*) with his positive statement about “fulfill[ing] all the law” (*Gal. 5:14*)? Compare *Rom. 10:5*; *Gal. 3:10, 12*; *5:3* with *Rom. 8:4*; *13:8*; *Gal. 5:14*.

Many have seen the contrast between Paul’s negative comments about “doing the whole law” and his positive assertions about “fulfilling the whole law” as paradoxical. They really aren’t. The solution lies in the fact that Paul intentionally uses each phrase to make an important distinction between two different ways of defining Christian behavior in relation to the law. For example, it is significant that when Paul refers positively to Christian observance of the law, he never describes it as “doing the law.” He reserves that phrase to refer solely to the misguided behavior of those who are living under the law and are trying to earn God’s approval by “doing” what the law commands.

This is not to imply that those who have found salvation in Christ do not obey. Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul says they “fulfill” the law. He means that true Christian behavior is much more than the outward obedience of just “doing” the law; it “fulfills” the law. Paul uses the word *fulfill* because it goes far beyond just “doing.” This type of obedience is rooted in Jesus (*see Matt. 5:17*). It is not an abandonment of the law, nor a reduction of the law only to love, but it is the way through which the believer can experience the true intent and meaning of the whole law!

Where, according to Paul, is the full meaning of the law found? *Lev. 19:18*; *Mark 12:31, 33*; *Matt. 19:19*; *Rom. 13:9*; *James 2:8*.

Although it is a quotation from Leviticus, Paul’s statement in Galatians is ultimately rooted in Jesus’ use of Leviticus 19:18. Jesus, however, was not the only Jewish teacher to refer to Leviticus 19:18 as a summary of the whole law. Rabbi Hillel, who lived about a generation before Jesus, said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole law.” But Jesus’ perspective radically was different (*Matt. 7:12*). Not only is it more positive, but it also demonstrates that law and love are not incompatible. Without love, the law is empty and cold; without law, love has no direction.

What’s easier, and why: to love others or simply to obey the Ten Commandments? Bring your answer to class.

Further Study: “Genuine faith always works by love. When you look to Calvary it is not to quiet your soul in the nonperformance of duty, not to compose yourself to sleep, but to create faith in Jesus, faith that will work, purifying the soul from the slime of selfishness. When we lay hold of Christ by faith, our work has just begun. Every man has corrupt and sinful habits that must be overcome by vigorous warfare. Every soul is required to fight the fight of faith. If one is a follower of Christ, he cannot be sharp in deal, he cannot be hardhearted, devoid of sympathy. He cannot be coarse in his speech. He cannot be full of pomposity and self-esteem. He cannot be overbearing, nor can he use harsh words, and censure and condemn.

“The labor of love springs from the work of faith. Bible religion means constant work. ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’ ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ We are to be zealous of good works; be careful to maintain good works. And the true Witness says, ‘I know thy works.’

“While it is true that our busy activities will not in themselves ensure salvation, it is also true that faith which unites us to Christ will stir the soul to activity (MS 16, 1890).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1111.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, go over your answers to the last question from Thursday’s lesson. Which option did most people find easier, and why? What important truths does your answer suggest to you about what it means to fulfill the law?
- 2 Paul says that faith “works” through love. What does he mean?
- 3 Examine the idea of seeking to use your freedom in Christ to indulge in sin. Why is that so easy to do? When people think that way, what trap are they falling into? See 1 John 3:8.

Summary: *Freedom* is one of Paul’s favorite words for defining the gospel. It includes both what Christ has done for us in freeing us from bondage to the world and also how we are called to live the Christian life. We need to be careful, however, that our liberty does not fall prey either to legalism or licentiousness. Christ did not set us free so that we could serve ourselves but so that we might give our lives in ministry to our neighbors.

God's Thousand Ways

by PRESCILLA CANILANG

I live in Sydney, Australia. Like most Australians, I had read the Bible some, but I wasn't terribly interested in God. However, when I received a brochure advertising a prophecy seminar, it caught my interest and I decided to attend. I learned so much about Daniel and Revelation—two books that had always puzzled me.

I learned about the Discover Bible studies, which are offered on the Internet. I logged on and began studying the Bible online. I was pleased to see that everything the course discussed was backed up by the Bible. And it was so convenient! I could study on my own schedule.

After the prophecy seminar ended, I continued studying the Bible online. I finished four different courses in one year. They were so interesting that I could hardly wait to study the next lesson. The lessons covered things that I had learned in the prophecy seminar, plus new information that filled in the gaps in my knowledge. A health course even helped me learn how to take better care of myself and to be more careful about what I ate, how I exercised, and even how much I rested.

I realized that my religious background was based more on tradition than on God's Word, but the Seventh-day Adventists really did know a lot about their Bible. I gave my life totally to Christ and felt his blessing and love. I knew that I had been freed from false beliefs and bad habits.

The church where I had attended the prophecy seminar was far from my home. Then I learned of a church closer to my home, and I worshiped there. I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist family a few months later.

I thank God for all the ministries that helped lead me to Him. The prophecy seminar sparked my interest, and the Discover Bible lessons on the Internet were there when I needed them with high quality Bible study guides. Looking back I know that the Holy Spirit was leading me step by step. I feel so loved!

Now I'm sharing my faith with people at work, with friends, and even with people God puts in my path. It's not easy in such a secular culture, but I pray that people will see Jesus in me and will accept God's love in their own life.

God has a thousand ways to lead people to Himself. Thank you for giving your mission offerings, which help make it possible for people anywhere in the world to find Christ through personal evangelism or the Internet.

PRESCILLA CANILANG lives in Sydney, Australia. For Internet Bible studies go to www.Bibleschools.com.

Living *by the* Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 5:16–25; Deut. 13:4, 5; Rom. 7:14–24; Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Matt. 22:35–40.*

Memory Text: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (*Galatians 5:16, ESV*).

One of the most beloved Christian hymns is Robert Robinson’s “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Robinson, however, was not always a man of faith. The death of his father left him angry, and he fell into debauchery and drunkenness. After hearing the famous preacher George Whitefield, Robinson surrendered his life to the Lord, became a Methodist pastor, and wrote that hymn, which originally included the lines: “Oh, to grace how great a debtor / Daily I’m constrained to be! / Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, / Bind me closer still to Thee.”

Uncomfortable with the line about the Christian heart’s wandering, someone changed the words to read: “Prone to worship, Lord, I feel it, / Prone to love the God I serve.”

Despite the editor’s good intentions, the original words accurately describe the Christian struggle. As believers we possess two natures, the flesh and the Spirit, and they are in conflict. Although our sinful nature will always be “prone” to wander from God, if we are willing to surrender to His Spirit, we do not have to be enslaved to the desires of the flesh. This is the thrust of Paul’s message in the texts for the week.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 17.*

Walking in the Spirit

Read Galatians 5:16. What does the concept of “walking” have to do with a life of faith? *Deut. 13:4, 5; Rom. 13:13; Eph. 4:1, 17; Col. 1:10.*

“Walking” is a metaphor drawn from the Old Testament that refers to the way a person should behave. Paul, himself a Jew, makes use of this metaphor often in his letters to describe the type of conduct that should characterize the Christian life. His use of this metaphor is also likely connected to the first name that was associated with the early church. Before the followers of Jesus were called Christians (*Acts 11:26*), they were known simply as followers of “the Way” (*John 14:6, Acts 22:4, 24:14*). This suggests that, at a very early date, Christianity was not merely a set of theological beliefs that centered on Jesus but was also a “way” of life to be “walked.”

In what way is Paul’s metaphor about walking different from that found in the Old Testament? *Compare Exod. 16:4; Lev. 18:4; Jer. 44:23 with Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4.*

Conduct in the Old Testament simply was not defined as “walking” but more particularly as “walking in the law.” *Halakhah* is the legal term Jews use to refer to the rules and regulations found in both the law and the rabbinic traditions of their forefathers. While *Halakhah* usually is translated “the Jewish law,” the word actually is based on the Hebrew word for “to walk” and literally means “the way of going.”

Paul’s comments about “walking in the Spirit” are not contrary to obedience to the law. He is not proposing that Christians should live in a way that violates the law. Again, Paul is not opposed to the law or to obedience to the law. What he is opposed to is the legalistic way in which the law was being misused. The genuine obedience that God desires never can be achieved by outward compulsion but only by an inward motivation produced by the Spirit (*Gal. 5:18*).

What has been your own experience of “walking in the Spirit”? How do you do that? What practices in your life make this kind of walk more difficult?

The Christian's Conflict

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (*Gal. 5:17; see also Rom. 7:14–24*). How have you, in your own life as a believer, experienced the harsh and painful reality of these words?

The struggle that Paul describes is not the struggle of every human being; it refers specifically to the inward tug-of-war that exists in the Christian. Because humans are born in harmony with the desires of the flesh (*Rom. 8:7*), it is only when we are born anew by the Spirit that a real spiritual conflict begins to emerge (*John 3:6*). This does not mean that non-Christians never experience moral conflict; they certainly do. But even that conflict is ultimately a result of the Spirit. The struggle of the Christian, however, takes on a new dimension, because the believer possesses two natures that are at war with each other, the flesh and the Spirit.

Throughout history, Christians have longed for relief from this struggle. Some have sought to end the conflict by withdrawing from society, while others have claimed that the sinful nature can be eradicated by some divine act of grace. Both attempts are misguided. Although by the Spirit's power we certainly can subdue the desires of the flesh, the conflict will continue in various ways until we receive a new body at the Second Coming. Fleeing from society does not help, because no matter where we go, we take the struggle with us, and we will until death or the Second Coming.

When Paul writes in Romans 7 about the inward conflict in Christians preventing them from doing what they want, he is underscoring the full extent of that conflict. Because we possess two natures, we are literally on both sides of the battle at once. The spiritual part of us desires what is spiritual and detests the flesh. The fleshly part of us, however, longs for the things of the flesh and opposes what is spiritual. Because the converted mind is too weak to resist the flesh by itself, the only hope we have of subduing the flesh is by making a daily decision to side with the Spirit *against our sinful selves*. This is why Paul is so insistent that we choose to walk in the Spirit.

From your own experience of the battle between these two natures, what advice would you give to a Christian who is trying to come to terms with this never-ending struggle with self?

The Works of the Flesh

Having introduced the conflict that exists between the flesh and the Spirit, Paul, in Galatians 5:18–26, elaborates on the nature of this contrast by means of a list of ethical vices and virtues. The catalog of vices or virtues was a well-established literary feature present in both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. These lists identified behavior to be avoided and virtues to be emulated.

Carefully examine the vice and virtue lists in the passages below. In what ways are Paul’s lists in Galatians 5:19–24 similar to, yet different from, these lists? *Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Mark 7:21, 22; 1 Tim. 3:2, 3; 1 Pet. 4:3; Rev. 21:8.*

Although Paul was well aware of vice and virtue lists, there are significant differences in the way he uses the two lists in Galatians. First, even though Paul contrasts the two lists, he does not refer to them in the same manner. He labels the vice list as the “works of the flesh” but the virtue list as the “fruit of the Spirit.” This is an important distinction. As James D. G. Dunn writes, “The flesh *demands*, but the Spirit *produces*. Where the one list breathes an air of anxious self-assertiveness and frenetic self-indulgence, the other speaks more of concern for others, serenity, resilience, reliability. The one features human manipulation, the other divine enabling or engracing, reinforcing the point that inner transformation is the source of responsible conduct.”—*The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 308.

The second intriguing difference between Paul’s two lists is that the vice list is deliberately labeled as plural in number: “works of the flesh.” “Fruit of the Spirit,” however, is singular. This difference may suggest that the life lived in the flesh can promote nothing more than division, turmoil, divisiveness, and disunity. In contrast, the life lived in the realm of the Spirit produces one fruit of the Spirit, which manifests itself in nine qualities that foster unity.

In this context, some people claim that what a person believes about God does not really matter as long as he or she is sincere. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Paul’s list of vices suggests the opposite: corrupt views about God lead to distorted ideas about sexual behavior and religion and ethics, resulting in the breakdown of human relationships. Furthermore, they can lead to the loss of eternal life (*Gal. 5:21*).

Look through the list of “works of the flesh.” In what ways can you see each as a violation of one or more of the Ten Commandments?

The Fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22–24*)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (*Gal. 5:22, 23, ESV*). In what ways does obedience to the Ten Commandments reflect the fruit of the Spirit as it is expressed in these verses? *See also Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28; 22:35–40.*

The Ten Commandments are not an alternative to love; they help guide us in how we are to show love, both to God and to humankind. However much it might transcend the letter of the law, love is not in conflict with the law. The idea that love for God and love for our neighbor void the Ten Commandments makes about as much sense as saying that love for nature voids the law of gravity.

Also, in contrast to the 15 one-word descriptions of the works of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit is described in nine elegant virtues. Scholars believe these nine virtues are organized into three clusters of three, but there is little agreement on the significance of their order. Some see an implicit reference to the Trinity in the number three; others believe the three triads reflect the ways in which we should relate to God, to our neighbor, and, finally, to ourselves; and others see the list as essentially a description of Jesus. Although each of these views has some merit, the most significant point not to be overlooked is the supreme importance Paul places on love in the Christian life.

The fact that Paul lists love as the first of the nine virtues is not accidental. He has already highlighted the central role of love in the Christian life in Galatians 5:6 and 13, and he includes it in his virtue lists elsewhere (*2 Cor. 6:6, 1 Tim. 4:12, 6:11, and 2 Tim. 2:22*). Whereas all the other virtues appear also in non-Christian sources, love is distinctly Christian. All this indicates that love should be seen not merely as one virtue among many but as the cardinal Christian virtue that is the key to all other virtues. Love is the preeminent fruit of the Spirit (*1 Cor. 13:13, Rom. 5:5*), and it should define the life and attitudes of every Christian (*John 13:34, 35*), however difficult at times it might be to show love.

How much self-denial is involved in love? Can you love without self-denial? What does Jesus teach us about love and self-denial?

The Way to Victory

Although an inward conflict between the flesh and the Spirit always will rage in the heart of every believer, the Christian life does not have to be dominated by defeat, failure, and sin.

According to Galatians 5:16–26, what is the key to living a life where the Spirit reigns over the flesh?

Galatians 5:16–26 contains five key verbs that describe the type of life in which the Spirit reigns. First, the believer needs to “walk” in the Spirit (*vs. 16*). The Greek verb is *peripateo*, which literally means “to walk around or to follow.” The followers of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle came to be known as the Peripatetics because they followed Aristotle everywhere he went. The fact that the verb is in the present tense implies that Paul is not talking about an occasional walk but rather a continuous daily experience. In addition, since it is also a command “to walk” in the Spirit, it implies that walking in the Spirit is a choice we have to make on a daily basis.

The second verb is “to be led” (*vs. 18*). This suggests that we also need to allow the Spirit to lead us where we should go (*compare Rom. 8:14, 1 Cor. 12:2*). It is not our job to lead but to follow.

The next two verbs appear in Galatians 5:25. The first is “to live” (*zao* in Greek). By “live,” Paul is referring to the new-birth experience that must mark the life of every believer. Paul’s use of the present tense points to a new-birth experience that is to be renewed daily. Because we live by the Spirit, Paul goes on to write that we also need “to walk” by the Spirit. The word translated as “walk” is different from the one in verse 16. Here the word is *stoicheo*. It is a military term that literally means “to draw up in a line,” “to keep in step,” or “to conform.” The idea here is that the Spirit not only gives us life but should direct our lives on a daily basis also.

The verb Paul uses in verse 24 is “to crucify.” This is a little shocking. If we are to follow the Spirit, we must make a firm decision to put to death the desires of the flesh. Of course, Paul is speaking figuratively. We crucify the flesh by feeding our spiritual life and by starving the desires of the flesh.

What changes and choices must you make in order to have the victories you are promised in Christ—victories that now continually elude you?

Further Study: “The life of the Christian is not all smooth. He has stern conflicts to meet. Severe temptations assail him. ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.’ The nearer we come to the close of this earth’s history, the more delusive and ensnaring will be the attacks of the enemy. His attacks will grow fiercer and more frequent. Those who resist light and truth will become more hardened and unimpressible, and more bitter against those who love God and keep His commandments (MS 33, 1911).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1111.

“The influence of the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in the soul. We do not see Christ and speak to Him, but His Holy Spirit is just as near us in one place as in another. It works in and through every one who receives Christ. Those who know the indwelling of the Spirit reveal the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (MS 41, 1897).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1112.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the idea of crucifying the desires of the flesh. What does that mean? How do we do it? How often do we have to do it? Why would Paul use such a strong verb? What does his use of the word *crucify* tell us about just how hard the battle with self is?
- 2 What role, if any, does human effort play in producing the fruit of the Spirit? What does your own experience tell you about this role?
- 3 Paul says that those who practice the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. How do you reconcile this statement with the fact that Paul says we are saved by faith and not by works?
- 4 In your own walk with the Lord, what’s the biggest struggle you face? Is it not sin and what sin does to your relationship with God? What Christian hasn’t felt alienation, doubt, and disappointment as a result of the sin in his or her life, especially because we have the promise of victory over that sin? Given this fact in the context of victory over sin, why must we always remember that our salvation rests totally upon what Jesus has done for us?

Summary: Although in the life of all believers a conflict exists between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, the Christian life does not have to be doomed to failure. Because Christ has conquered the power of sin and death, the Christian life can be a life where the Spirit reigns, bringing a daily supply of God’s grace that enables us to keep the desires of the flesh at bay.

Internet Evangelism in Finland

by A. ESANSAARI

A few years ago, a friend offered me some CDs of sermons from his pastor. I wondered why Seventh-day Adventist pastors in Finland didn't offer their sermons on CDs. It would be a great way to reach out beyond the church community as well as keep in touch with members who were ill or away. I asked around and realized that some Seventh-day Adventist churches in Finland had recorded a few sermons, but virtually no churches had digital audio materials that could be uploaded to the Internet. In many churches, the pastor's sermons weren't even recorded.

I felt impressed that we were to make these excellent sermons available to everyone via the Internet, so I began gathering recorded sermons to transfer to a digital format. I started with only 10 sermons, but as word spread about my quest, I soon had more than one hundred sermons to transfer into MP3 files for the Internet.

Today, we have more than six hundred sermons in our Finnish audio bank on the Internet. In addition we have uploaded several of Ellen G. White's books that are recorded in Finnish as well as some inspirational music. We've also set up a chat room where people can talk about sermons or books that they've listened to on the Web site. This is a tremendous way to get people involved in the message that they've heard.

I'm convinced that the Internet will play a key part in finishing the work of reaching people around the world for Christ. I learned that one man downloads the sermons and shares them with people he meets as his missionary outreach. And so far, we know two people who have come to know Christ and the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of this outreach.

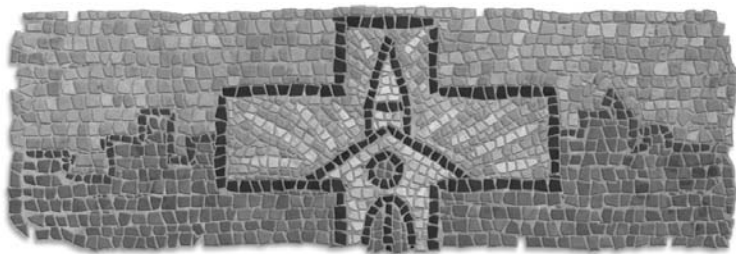
One unexpected blessing from our audio bank of sermons came to light recently. While most of the sermons on our Internet site are listened to by individuals, some sermons have been used during worship services in congregations that have no full-time pastor of their own. The worshipers can listen to a first-class sermon via the Internet even when there is no live person to present it.

I realize that what we're doing in Finland to spread the good news of Jesus to others isn't new. But I hope other language groups around the world will do the same. It's an easy form of evangelism, and it's effective wherever people have access to a computer. This ministry can be a blessing for countless numbers of people.

God wants us to use every means available to lead people to Christ, whether it's through personal evangelism, the mission offering, or the Internet. The end result will be souls saved for God's kingdom.

A. ESANSAARI lives in Oulu, Finland.

The Gospel *and the* Church



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 6:1–10, Matt. 18: 15–17, 1 Cor. 10:12, Rom. 15:1, John 13:34, Luke 22:3.*

Memory Text: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (*Galatians 6:10, ESV*).

Some potato farmers decided to save the biggest potatoes for themselves and to plant the smaller potatoes as seed. After a few disappointing harvests, they discovered that nature had reduced their potato crops to the size of marbles. Through this disaster, those farmers learned an important law of life.

“They could not have the best things of life for themselves and use the leftovers for seed. The law of life decreed that the harvest would reflect the planting.

“In another sense, planting small potatoes is still common practice. We take the big things of life for ourselves and plant the leftovers. We expect that by some crazy twist of spiritual laws, our selfishness will be rewarded with unselfishness.”—*International Student Fellowship Newsletter*, March 2007.

Paul applies this principle in Galatians 6:1–10. Instead of members “bit[ing] and devour[ing] one another” (*Gal. 5:15*), the church should be a place where the Spirit leads us to put others before ourselves. Understanding that we are saved by grace should make us humble and more patient and compassionate in how we treat others.

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

Restoring the Fallen

While Paul has lofty expectations for the nature of the Christian life (*Gal. 5:16*), his counsel to the believers in Galatians 6:1 also is refreshingly realistic. Humans are not perfect, and even the most dedicated Christians are not immune to mistakes. In Greek, Paul's words in Galatians 5:16 indicate that he is envisioning a situation that is likely to happen in the church at some time. Paul gives the Galatians practical advice on how to deal with such situations when they arise.

How should Christians respond when a fellow believer falls into some sinful behavior? *Gal. 6:1, Matt. 18:15–17.*

To benefit from Paul's advice in Galatians 6:1, we need to understand the precise type of situation that Paul has in mind. This revolves around two words used in the first half of the sentence. The first word is *caught* (*ESV*) or *overtaken* (*KJV*). It literally means "to be detected, overtaken, or surprised." The context and different nuances associated with this word suggest that Paul has two aspects in mind. It refers not only to a believer who "catches" another believer in the act of some wrongdoing but also to the process by which a person finds himself "overtaken" by a behavior (*see Prov. 5:22*) that, under the best of circumstances, he would have chosen to avoid.

The likelihood that the wrongdoing Paul is discussing is not deliberate is evident from the terminology he uses. The word translated "fault" (*KJV*) or "sin" (*NIV*), which comes from the Greek word *paraptoma*, does not refer to a deliberate sin but rather to a mistake, a stumble, or a false step. The latter makes particular sense in light of Paul's previous comments about "walking" in the Spirit. Although this in no way excuses the person's mistake, it makes clear that Paul is not dealing with a case of defiant sin (*1 Cor. 5:1–5*).

The proper response in such circumstances should not be punishment, condemnation, or disfellowship but restoration. The Greek word translated "restore" is *katartizo* and means "to mend" or "to put in order." In the New Testament it is used as "mending" fishnets (*Matt. 4:21*), and in Greek literature it is used as a medical term describing the process of setting a broken bone. In the same way that we would not abandon a fellow believer who fell and broke a leg, as members of the body of Christ we should gently care for our brothers and sisters in Christ who may stumble and fall as we walk together on the path to God's kingdom.

Instead of practicing Matthew 18:15–17, why do we so often talk badly about the person with whom we're angry, let our anger simmer against the person, or even plan revenge?

Beware of Temptation

“And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7).

The seriousness of Paul’s words in Galatians 6:1—to guard our own lives lest we also follow into temptation—should not be overlooked. An indication of the urgency and personal concern behind Paul’s counsel can be seen in the way he makes his appeal. The word translated “considering” (*KJV*) or “take care” (*NRSV*) literally means “to look at carefully” or “to pay careful attention to” (*compare Rom. 16:17, Phil. 2:4*). So, what Paul literally is saying is, “keep a careful eye on yourself” lest sin also takes you by surprise. To highlight this warning, Paul switches from the second person plural (“you all”) in the first half of Galatians 6:1 to the second person singular (“you”) in the last half of the verse. This is no general warning that applies to the whole congregation; it is a personal warning addressed to each individual within the church.

Paul does not explicitly identify the nature of the temptation that he so strongly warns the Galatians against. Perhaps he didn’t have one specific trespass in mind but was simply referring to the danger of committing the same sin, whatever it is, from which they are trying to restore another. At the same time, his words in Galatians 5:26 against becoming “conceited” (*NKJV*) suggest that he is warning them against feeling that they are in some way spiritually superior to those whom they are restoring.

Why would Paul need to warn the Galatians against spiritual pride?

Consider 1 Cor. 10:12, Matt. 26:34, 2 Sam. 12:1–7.

One of the greatest dangers to the Christian walk is a sense of spiritual pride that makes us think we are somehow immune to committing certain types of sin. The sobering fact is that we all have the same sinful nature—a nature that is opposed to God. Thus, without the restraining power of God’s Spirit, we could stoop to just about any sin, given the right circumstances. Such an awareness of our true identity outside of Christ can keep us from falling into the sin of self-righteousness, and it also can give us greater sympathy for others who make mistakes.

How many times have you found yourself condemning others (maybe even only in your heart) for doing sins that, one day, you were guilty of yourself?

Burden Bearing (*Gal. 6:2–5*)

In addition to restoring the fallen, what other instructions does Paul give to the believers in Galatia? *Gal. 6:2–5; see also Rom. 15:1, Matt. 7:12.*

The Greek word translated “burden” in Galatians 6:5 is *baros*. It literally referred to a heavy weight or load that someone had to carry a long distance. Over time, however, it became a metaphor for any type of trouble or difficulty, such as the burden of a long day’s work on a hot day (*Matt. 20:12*). While the immediate context of Paul’s injunction to “bear one another’s burdens” certainly includes the moral lapses of the fellow believers mentioned in the preceding verse, the concept of burden bearing that he has in mind is much broader. Paul’s instructions reveal several spiritual insights about the Christian life that should not be overlooked.

First, as Timothy George notes, “All Christians have burdens. Our burdens may differ in size and shape and will vary in kind depending on the providential order of our lives. For some it is the burden of temptation and the consequences of a moral lapse, as in verse 1 here. For others it may be a physical ailment, or a mental disorder, or a family crisis, or lack of employment, or demonic oppression, or a host of other things; but no Christian is exempt from burdens.”—*Galatians*, p. 413.

Second, God does not intend for us to bear all our burdens alone. Unfortunately, we often are far more willing to help others to carry their burdens than we are in allowing others to help us shoulder our own. Paul condemns this attitude of self-sufficiency (*Gal. 6:3*) as human pride—when we refuse to admit that we also have needs and weaknesses. Such pride not only robs us of the comfort of others but also prevents others from fulfilling the ministry that God has called them to perform.

Finally, God calls us to bear the burdens of others because it is through our actions that God’s comfort is made manifest. This concept is built on the fact that the church is the body of Christ. An illustration of this is in Paul’s words, “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (*2 Cor. 7:6, ESV*). Notice that “God’s comfort was not given to Paul through his private prayer and waiting upon the Lord but through the companionship of a friend and through the good news that he brought.

“Human friendship, in which we bear one another’s burdens, is part of the purpose of God for His people.”—John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, p. 158.

What keeps you from seeking help—pride, shame, lack of trust, a sense of self-sufficiency? If in need, why not seek out someone whom you trust and ask this person to share your burdens?

The Law of Christ (*Gal. 6:2–5*)

Paul connects burden bearing with fulfilling the law of Christ. What does he mean by “the law of Christ”? *Gal. 5:14, 6:2, John 13:34, Matt. 22:34–40.*

Paul’s use of the phrase “the law of Christ” (*ton nomon tou Christou*) occurs nowhere else in the Bible, although he uses a similar expression in 1 Corinthians 9:21 (*ennomos Christou*). The uniqueness of this phrase has resulted in a number of different interpretations. Some mistakenly argue that this is evidence that the law of God given at Sinai has been replaced by a different law, the law of Christ. Others claim the word *law* simply means a general “principle” (*see Rom. 7:21*), meaning that in bearing the burdens of others we are following the example of Jesus. While the latter interpretation has some merit, the context and similar terminology with Galatians 5:14 suggest that “fulfilling the law of Christ” is another reference to fulfilling the moral law through love. Paul showed earlier in his letter that the moral law was not annulled with the coming of Christ. Instead, the moral law as interpreted by love continues to play an important role in the Christian life. This is the epitome of what Jesus taught during His earthly ministry and also practiced throughout His life and even in His death. In bearing the burdens of others, we are not only following in the footsteps of Jesus, we are also fulfilling the law.

Another issue arises in these texts, the apparent contradiction between Galatians 6:2 and 6:5. This problem, however, is easily resolved when one realizes that Paul is using two different words to describe two different situations. As we have already seen, the word for burden in verse 2 (*baros*) refers to a heavy load that has to be carried for a long distance. The word *phortion* in verse 5, however, refers to a ship’s cargo, a soldier’s backpack, or even a child in the womb. Whereas the former burdens can be laid aside, the latter cannot. A pregnant mother must carry her own child. As this example suggests, there are some burdens that people can help us bear but others that no human can bear for us, such as the burden of a guilty conscience, suffering, and death. For these, we must rely on God’s help alone (*Matt. 11:28–30*).

While you can get help from other people with some burdens, some you have to take to the Lord alone. How can you learn to give to the Lord the things that you, yourself, just can’t bear?

Sowing and Reaping (*Gal. 6:6–10*)

In Galatians 6:7, the word translated “mocked” (*mukterizo*) occurs only here in the New Testament, although it often appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It literally means “to turn up one’s nose in contempt.” In the Old Testament it typically refers to the despising of God’s prophets (*2 Chron. 36:16, Jer. 20:7*), and it even is used once to describe graphically a rebellious attitude toward God (*Ezek. 8:17*).

Paul’s point is that people may ignore God or even flout His commandments, but they cannot outwit God. He is the ultimate judge, and in the end they will have to pay the price for their actions.

Read Galatians 6:8. What does Paul mean here? What examples can you find in the Bible of characters sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit? See, for example, Acts 5:1–5, Luke 22:3, Dan. 1:8, Matt. 4:1.

Paul’s metaphor about sowing and reaping is not unique. It is a fact of life that appears in many ancient proverbial sayings. What is significant, however, is how Paul uses it to highlight his previous comments about the flesh and the Spirit. James D. G. Dunn notes, “A modern equivalent is that we are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choice.”—*Galatians*, p. 330.

Although God does not always deliver us from the earthly consequences of our sins, we should not be overcome with despair for the bad choices we have made. We can rejoice that God has forgiven us of our sins and adopted us as His children. We should capitalize on the opportunities we have now to invest in those things that will yield a heavenly harvest.

Galatians 6:10, meanwhile, illustrates the point that “Christian ethics has a dual focus: one is universal and all-embracing, ‘Let us do good to all people’; the other is particular and specific, ‘especially to those who belong to the family of believers.’ Paul’s universalistic appeal was based on the fact that all persons everywhere are created in the image of God and are thus infinitely precious in his sight. Whenever Christians have forgotten this primary datum of biblical revelation, they have inevitably fallen victim to the blinding sins of racism, sexism, tribalism, classism, and a thousand other bigotries that have blighted the human community from Adam and Eve to the present day.”—Timothy George, *Galatians*, pp. 427, 428.

You are sowing, either for good or bad. Look at yourself. What kind of harvest are you going to reap?

Further Study: “The Spirit of God keeps evil under the control of conscience. When man exalts himself above the influence of the Spirit, he reaps a harvest of iniquity. Over such a man the Spirit has less and less influence to restrain him from sowing seeds of disobedience. Warnings have less and less power over him. He gradually loses his fear of God. He sows to the flesh; he will reap corruption. The harvest of the seed that he himself has sown, is ripening. He has a contempt for God’s holy commandments. His heart of flesh becomes a heart of stone. Resistance to truth confirms him in iniquity. It is because men sowed seeds of evil, that lawlessness, crime, and violence prevailed in the antediluvian world.

“All should be intelligent in regard to the agency by which the soul is destroyed. It is not because of any decree that God has sent out against man. He does not make man spiritually blind. God gives sufficient light and evidence to enable man to distinguish truth from error. But He does not force man to receive truth. He leaves him free to choose the good or to choose the evil. If man resists evidence that is sufficient to guide his judgment in the right direction, and chooses evil once, he will do this more readily the second time. The third time he will still more eagerly withdraw himself from God and choose to stand on the side of Satan. And in this course he will continue until he is confirmed in evil, and believes the lie he has cherished as truth. His resistance has produced its harvest (MS 126, 1901).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1112.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In a practical sense, what does it really mean to “restore” a fellow believer who has fallen into sin? In what ways does the nature of the sin committed affect the restoration process? Does restoration mean that everything will be the same as before? Discuss.
- ② Because there are some burdens that people must bear on their own (*Gal. 6:5*), how does a believer determine if he or she should try to help someone?
- ③ How does your church measure up to Paul’s instructions in Galatians 6? What can you do personally to make a difference?

Summary: The indication of God’s presence among His people is in the Christlike spirit manifest within the church. It can be seen in the way forgiveness and restoration are extended to those who err, in how they help each other in trials, and in intentional acts of kindness shared not only among themselves but also with unbelievers.

United at Last

by SUMAKWEL LAVIÑA

“Look,” I told my three teenagers, “we need to be united in our faith. We go to one church, and your new mom goes to another. But you don’t like either church. Then find a faith we all can follow.” It was a challenge, but I didn’t really expect them to meet it. However, God had other plans.

I’m from a tribal area of southern Philippines, and my wife is from an island. We belonged to different Christian churches, and I wanted to be united in our faith. So I sent my children to my wife’s church. But they found it boring. We talked about it and decided to find a church we all could agree on, one we’d all attend.

My wife met a man at the school where she teaches. They talked a bit, and when she learned that he was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, she asked him to come and study the Bible with us. A day or two later, the man came by and introduced himself. He wanted to be sure that it was OK to come and study the Bible with me. We decided to meet on Sundays.

We studied the Bible together with varying degrees of interest. Another Protestant asked to study with us, so we had two Bible studies on Sundays for more than a year. Eventually, we visited the Seventh-day Adventist church and really enjoyed it.

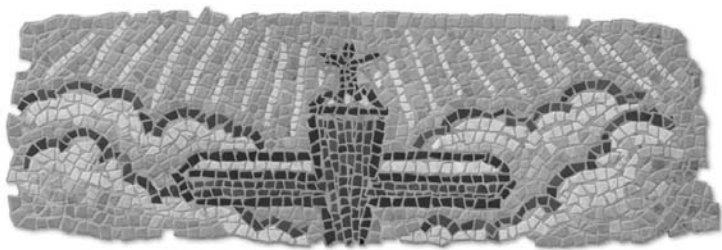
First my daughter and then my sons decided to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They challenged my wife and me to follow their example and become a family united in faith. I felt that the Adventists taught the truth, and I was reminded that we had begun these Bible studies to be united in one faith. We all attended church together, so I asked my wife to join me in making the Seventh-day Adventist Church our home. But her family pressured her to stay in the church of her childhood. So I took my stand alone.

A ministerial intern needed a place to stay, so we invited him to live with us. He taught us how to have family worship and showed us the beauty of praising God together and discussing what we were learning. Family worship helped convince my wife to step out in faith and join the family in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

At last we’re united in Christ. I never dreamed that our children and their example of faithfulness would lead to where God wanted us to be. I thank God for them and for faithful Seventh-day Adventists in our town and around the world who make mission and outreach an important part of being a Seventh-day Adventist.

SUMAKWEL LAVIÑA *and his family live in Zamboanga, Philippines.*

Boasting *in the* Cross



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 6:11–18; Rom. 6:1–6; 12:1–8; 2 Cor. 4:10; 5:17; 11:23–29.*

Memory Text: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (*Galatians 6:14, ESV*).

This study on Galatians has been intense. That's because the letter itself is intense. Knowing his calling, knowing the truth of what he preached (after all, as he said numerous times, that truth came from the Lord), Paul wrote with the inspired passion of the Old Testament prophets, of an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, a Hosea. Just as they pleaded with the people of God in their time to turn away from their error, Paul here is doing the same with those in his time.

No matter how different the immediate circumstances were, in the end the words of Jeremiah could just as easily apply to the Galatians as they did to those in Jeremiah's day: “Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (*Jer. 9:23, 24*).

Nowhere do our “glorious” human wisdom, our riches, and our might appear more clearly in all their futility and vanity than before the Cross of Christ—the focus of Paul's letter to his erring flock in Galatia.

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

Paul's Own Hand

Compare Paul's closing remarks in Galatians 6:11–18 to the final remarks he makes in his other letters. In what way is the ending of Galatians similar to, and different from, them? See the final remarks in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Paul's closing remarks are not always uniform, but a number of common elements appear in them: (1) greetings to specific individuals, (2) a final exhortation, (3) a personal signature, and (4) a closing benediction. When these typical features are compared to Paul's final remarks in Galatians, two significant differences appear.

First, unlike many of Paul's letters, Galatians contains no personal greetings. Why? As with the absence of the traditional thanksgiving at the beginning of the letter, this is probably a further indication of the strained relationship between Paul and the Galatians. Paul is polite but formal.

Second, we must remember that it was Paul's custom to dictate his letters to a scribe (*Rom. 16:22*). Then after finishing, Paul often would take the pen himself and write a few brief words with his own hand to end the letter (*1 Cor. 16:21*). In Galatians, however, Paul deviates from his practice. When he takes the pen from the scribe, Paul is still so concerned with the circumstances in Galatia that he ends up writing more instead. He simply cannot put the pen down until he pleads with the Galatians once more to turn from their foolish ways.

In Galatians 6:11 Paul stresses that he wrote the letter with large letters. We really don't know why. Some have speculated that Paul was not referring to the size of the letters but to their misshaped form. They suggest that perhaps Paul's hands were either so crippled from persecution or gnarled from tent making that he could not form his letters with precision. Others believe his comments provide further evidence of his poor eyesight. Although both views are possible, it seems far less speculative to conclude simply that Paul was intentionally writing with large letters in order to underscore and reemphasize his point, similar to the way we might emphasize an important word or concept by underlining it, putting it in *italics*, or writing it in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Whatever the reason, Paul certainly wanted the readers to heed his warning and admonitions.

Boasting in the Flesh

Read Galatians 6:12, 13. What is Paul saying in these verses?

Although Paul has hinted previously about the agenda and motivation of his opponents (*see Gal. 1:7, 4:17*), his remarks in Galatians 6:12, 13 are the first explicit comments he makes about his opponents. He describes them as wanting “to make a good showing in the flesh” (*ESV*). The phrase “a good showing” in Greek literally means to put on “a good face.” In fact, the word for “face” is the same in Greek as the word for an actor’s mask, and this word was even used figuratively to refer to the role played by an actor. In other words, Paul is saying that these people were like actors seeking the approval of an audience. In a culture based on honor and shame, conformity is essential, and those teaching the errors appear to have been seeking to improve their honor rating before their fellow Jews in Galatia and other Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem.

Paul makes an important point about one of their motives—the desire to avoid persecution. Although persecution can certainly be understood in its more dramatic forms involving physical abuse, it can be just as damaging even in its more “mild” forms of harassment and exclusion. Paul and other fanatical zealots in Judea had once carried out the former type (*Gal. 1:13*), but the latter also had its effect on Christians.

The Jewish religious leaders still had significant political influence in many areas. They had the official sanction of Rome; hence, many Jewish believers were eager to maintain good relations with them. By circumcising Gentiles and teaching them to observe the Torah, the troublemakers in Galatia could find a point of common ground with the local Jews. Not only would this allow them to maintain friendly contact with the synagogues, but they could even strengthen their ties with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, who had a growing suspicion about the work being done with the Gentiles (*Acts 21:20, 21*). No doubt, too, in one sense their actions could have made their witness to the Jews more effective.

Whatever situation Paul has in mind, his meaning is clear: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (*2 Tim. 3:12, NKJV*).

Think through the reason these people had for teaching their errors. It sounds pretty reasonable, all things considered. What should this tell us about how even the “best” of motives can lead us astray if we aren’t careful? When was the last time you ended up doing wrong things for the right motives?

Boasting in the Cross *(Gal. 6:14)*

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” *(Gal. 6:14)*.

Having exposed the motives that prompted some to insist on circumcision, Paul presents his gospel message to the Galatians one final time, although only in summary form. For Paul, the gospel is based on two fundamental tenets: (1) the centrality of the Cross (*vs. 14*) and (2) the doctrine of justification (*vs. 15*). In today’s lesson the focus is on the former.

Living in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to comprehend the shock that Paul’s comments about the Cross (*Gal. 6:14*) originally conveyed. Today the cross of Christ is a common and cherished symbol that evokes positive feelings for most people. In Paul’s day, however, the cross was not something to boast of but something to be despised. Jews found the idea of a crucified Messiah offensive, and Romans found crucifixion so repulsive that it was not even mentioned as a form of punishment suitable for a Roman citizen.

The contempt with which the ancient world looked upon the cross of Christ is clearly seen in the earliest drawing of the crucifixion on record. Dating back to the early second century, a piece of ancient graffiti depicts the crucifixion of a man with the head of a donkey. Below the cross and adjacent to a drawing of a man with his hands raised in worship, an inscription reads, “Alexander worships his god.” The point is clear: the cross of Christ is deemed ridiculous. It is in this context that Paul boldly declares that he can boast of nothing other than the cross of Christ!

What difference did the cross of Christ make in Paul’s relationship to the world? *Gal. 6:14, Rom. 6:1–6, 12:1–8, Phil. 3:8.*

The cross of Christ changes everything for the believer. It challenges us not only to reevaluate how we view ourselves but also how we relate to the world. The world—this present evil age and all that it entails (*1 John 2:16*)—stands in opposition to God. Because we have died with Christ, the world no longer has the enslaving power it once held over us, and the old life that we once lived for the world is no longer. Following Paul’s analogy, the break between the believer and the world should be as if the two died to each other.

What has the Cross done to affect your relationship to the world? What difference has it made in your life? How differently do you live now than you did before giving yourself to the Lord, who died for you?

A New Creation

Having emphasized the centrality of the cross of Christ to the Christian life, Paul now emphasizes the second fundamental tenet of his gospel message: justification by faith.

As we have seen all quarter, Paul has basically pitted circumcision against the gospel. Yet, he's not against the practice itself. Paul has made several strong statements against circumcision (*see Gal. 5:2–4*), but he does not want the Galatians to conclude that being uncircumcised is more pleasing to God than being circumcised. That is not his point, because one can be just as legalistic about what one does as about what one doesn't do. Spiritually speaking, the issue of circumcision by itself is irrelevant. True religion is not rooted in external behavior but in the condition of the human heart. As Jesus Himself said, a person can look wonderful on the outside but be spiritually rotten on the inside (*Matt. 23:27*).

What does it mean to be a new creation? Gal. 6:15, 2 Cor. 5:17. How have you yourself experienced what this means?

Ktisis is the Greek word translated “creation.” It either can refer to an individual “creature” (*Heb. 4:13*) or to all of the “created” order itself (*Rom. 8:22*). In either case, the word implies the action of a Creator. That is Paul's point. Becoming a “new creature” is not something that can be brought about by any human effort—whether it be circumcision or anything else. Jesus refers to this process as the “new birth” (*John 3:5–8*). It is the divine act in which God takes a person who is spiritually dead and breathes spiritual life into him. This is yet another metaphor to describe the saving act that Paul typically describes as justification by faith.

Paul refers to this new creation experience in greater detail in 2 Corinthians 5:17. In this verse, Paul explains that becoming a new creation means far more than just a change in our status in the books of heaven; it brings about a change in our lives today. As Timothy George notes, it “involves the whole process of conversion: the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit leading to repentance and faith, the daily process of mortification and vivification, continual growth in holiness leading to eventual conformity to the image of Christ.”—*Galatians*, p. 438.

Becoming a new creature, however, is not what justifies us. This radical change is, instead, the unmistakable manifestation of what it means to be justified.

Final Remarks *(Gal. 6:16–18)*

Paul bestows his blessing on those who, he says, “follow this rule” (*Gal. 6:16, NIV, NRSV*). Given the context, what “rule” do you think Paul is talking about?

The word translated “rule” literally refers to a straight rod or bar used by masons and carpenters for measuring. The word eventually took on a figurative meaning referring to the rules or standards by which a person evaluates something. For example, when people talk about the New Testament canon, they are referring to the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, which are seen as authoritative for determining both the belief and practice of the church. Therefore, if a teaching does not “measure up” to what is found in these books, it is not accepted.

What are the “marks of the Lord Jesus” that Paul bears on his body? What does he mean when he writes that no one should “trouble” him because of them? Might Galatians 6:14 help answer this question? *Gal. 6:17, 2 Cor. 4:10, 11:23–29.*

The word *mark* comes from the Greek word *stigmata*, from which the English word *stigma* also is derived. Paul may be referring to the common practice of the branding of slaves with the insignia of their master as a form of identification, or to the practice in some mystery religions where a devotee branded himself or herself as a sign of devotion. In any case, “by ‘the marks of the Lord Jesus’ Paul doubtless refers to the scars left upon his body by persecution and hardship (*see 2 Cor. 4:10, 11:24–27*). His opponents now insist on compelling his Gentile converts to accept the mark of circumcision as a token of their submission to Judaism. But Paul has marks that indicate whose slave he has become, and for him there is no other loyalty than to Christ. . . . The scars Paul had received from his enemies while in the service of his Master spoke most eloquently of his devotion to Christ.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 989.

What are the “marks,” physical or otherwise, that you have accumulated because of your faith in Jesus? In other words, what has your faith cost you?

Further Study: “The cross of Calvary challenges, and will finally vanquish every earthly and hellish power. In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence goes forth. It is the great center of attraction; for on it Christ gave up His life for the human race. This sacrifice was offered for the purpose of restoring man to his original perfection. Yea, more, it was offered to give him an entire transformation of character, making him more than a conqueror.

“Those who in the strength of Christ overcome the great enemy of God and man, will occupy a position in the heavenly courts above angels who have never fallen.

Christ declares, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.’ If the cross does not find an influence in its favor, it creates an influence. Through generation succeeding generation, the truth for this time is revealed as present truth. Christ on the cross was the medium whereby mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. This is the means that is to move the world (MS 56, 1899).”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1113.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What significance do you find in the fact that Paul both begins and ends his letter with reference to God’s grace? Compare *Gal. 1:3* and *6:18*.
- 2 In light of Paul’s statement about having been “crucified . . . to the world” (*Gal. 6:14*), what relationship should Christians have with the world today? How should Christians relate to issues dealing with the environment, racism, abortion, and so on, if they have died to the world?
- 3 How does a person know if he or she has experienced the “new creation” about which Paul writes?
- 4 Based on what you have learned this quarter, how would you summarize Paul’s views on the following topics: the law, works of law, justification by faith, the old and new covenants, the work of Christ, and the nature of the Christian life?

Summary: True religion does not consist of outward behavior but the condition of the heart. When the heart is surrendered to God, a person’s life will more and more reflect the character of Christ as he or she grows in faith. The heart must be subdued by Christ; when that happens, all else will follow.

The Stranger

by GERALDO MAKINANO

I slumped onto a fallen tree in the thick forest to wait for my partner and fellow student missionary to catch up to me. We still had 20 miles to hike, and we were tired and thirsty.

Suddenly, I realized that we were in rebel territory, where soldiers roam searching for “the enemy.” They might shoot us before we could explain who we are. “Lord,” I whispered, “please protect us.” A few minutes later, we started up the trail again. I saw a stranger watching our every move.

“Hello, Brother!” I called to him.

“Military?” he asked.

“No, we’re missionary teachers,” I answered.

He smiled. “Do you have a minute? I have some questions.” We sat down again to talk.

The man introduced himself as a rebel leader who had killed many people. Then he asked, “Who are you—really? I know you are teachers providing our people free education. But why are you risking your lives in these mountains for our children?”

“We are Seventh-day Adventists,” I said. “We are in these mountains to tell people about a better life, a life when conflicts will end and Jesus will reign. We teach people to read so they can read for themselves the truths of God before it’s too late.”

I noticed that the stranger seemed to be in a hurry. “Does what I’ve said make sense to you?” I asked.

“Yes, but pray for me,” he said as he stood abruptly and pointed. “Take this trail. The other one is dangerous.” We thanked him and took the trail he pointed out.

The next day, we learned that rebel and government soldiers had fought on the trail we had planned to take. If we had continued on that trail, we would have been caught in the cross fire.

A month later, at an area-wide worship in our village, we were surprised to meet the stranger from the trail. “Friends,” he said smiling, “I’m now a Seventh-day Adventist! After we met on the trail that day, I wanted to know more truth. Now I’m saved. Thank you!”

“Praise God!” I said. “And had you not told us about the other trail that day, we would have been caught in the cross fire. We, too, were saved by God’s grace.”

Our mission offerings help support the outreach of schools such as Mountain View College, where students learn to share God’s love with others in some of the most difficult places on earth.

GERALDO MAKINANO *continues his studies at Mountain View College.*

Next quarter, the Adult Bible Study Guide, entitled *Glimpses of Our God*, by Jo Ann Davidson, will look at God, at various aspects of Him as they have been revealed to us, and at what these things mean for us on a practical level. The lesson study will begin by examining the Trinity: the amazing teaching that God is One God and yet composed of three Persons. From there, the study will focus on God as Creator, the doctrine that forms the foundation of all that we believe. But being created isn't enough. We need to be redeemed as well. So we will look also at His work of redemption, as a God of both grace and judgment. We will look at His holiness, His law, and the Sabbath—all of which stem from the essence of His character and help us to understand more about what He is like. How grateful we should be, then, for every bit of light the Lord casts our way. This quarter we will look at some of that light. It is up to each of us, individually, as to how faithfully we will walk in it.

Lesson 1—The Triune God

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Oneness of God** (*Exodus 3:13–15*)

MONDAY: **The Deity of Christ** (*Philippians 2:6*)

TUESDAY: **The Holy Spirit** (*Genesis 1:2*)

WEDNESDAY: **In Unity and Equality** (*Genesis 1:26, 27*)

THURSDAY: **The Trinity and Salvation** (*John 14–16*)

Memory Text—*Jude 20–21*

Sabbath Gem: Scripture contains references and hints to the deity and unity of the divine Godhead. The distinctions among God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit found in the Bible, must be understood as being the way God is in Himself, however difficult this is for our fallen minds to grasp.

Lesson 2—In the Beginning

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Creation Week** (*Genesis 1:1*)

MONDAY: **The Heart of the Creator** (*Job 38:4–7*)

TUESDAY: **The Heavens Declare** (*Psalms 19*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Cross and Creation** (*John 1:1–13*)

THURSDAY: **Creation and Re-creation** (*Isaiah 66:22, Revelation 21:4*)

Memory Text—*Colossians 1:16*

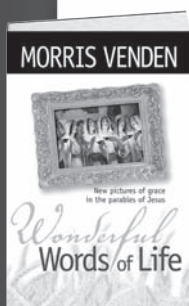
Sabbath Gem: The doctrine of Creation, a literal six-day Creation, is foundational to all the biblical truth that follows.

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

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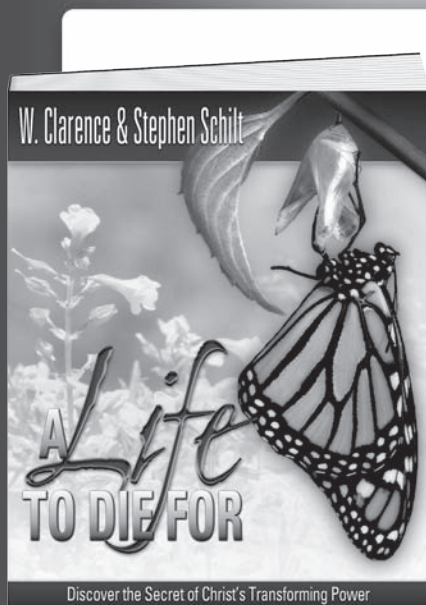
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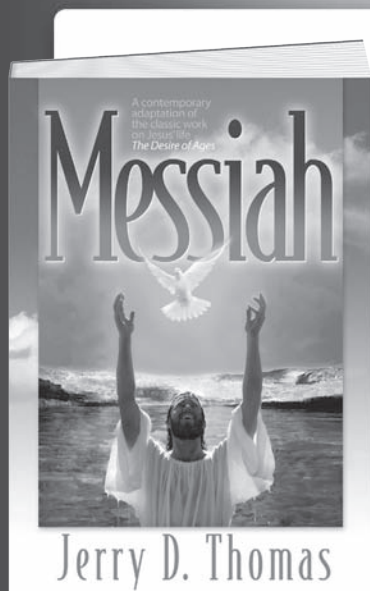
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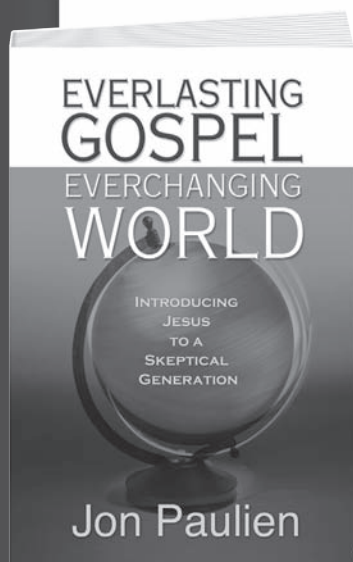
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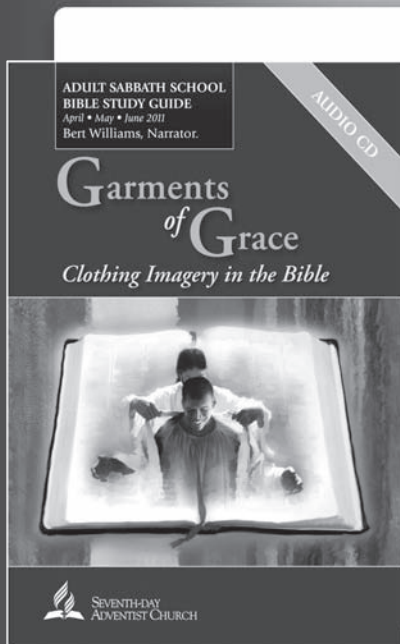
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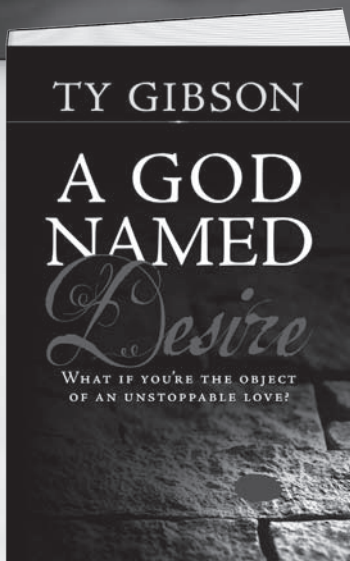
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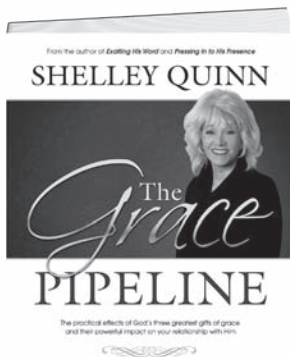
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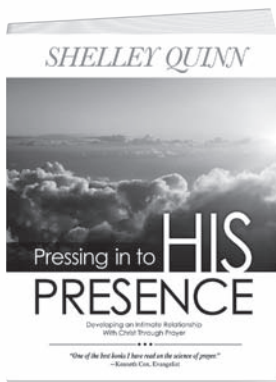
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