

# Supporting Church Leaders



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 11

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Psalm 51:3, 4, 10; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Instead, we will speak the truth in love. We will grow up into Christ [Jesus] in every way. He is the Head" (Ephesians 4:15, NIV).

**TO BE A LEADER IN THE CHURCH IS NOT ALWAYS EASY.** We live at a time when people do not trust their church leaders. Many people believe church leaders are involved in politics. And many people believe politics involves power, self-serving, and dishonesty. Unfortunately, church leadership has at times done wrong things.

More than ever, the church needs good leaders. We must use the best possible ways to choose these leaders. When these leaders are in power, we must hold them responsible for the decisions they make. But even more important is that we support them in all ways possible.

This week, we look at how we should relate to our church leaders.

**A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Does the idea that we are all equal before God mean that we do not need church leaders? In what ways are we all unequal? Who is the Head of the church? What does the Bible teach about why church leaders are necessary?

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

## SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 12

**ALL CHURCH MEMBERS ARE EQUAL (1 Peter 2:9).**

The sixteenth-century Reformation<sup>1</sup> taught that all people have the same standing before God. We do not need other humans as our mediators.<sup>2</sup> We all can reach our heavenly Father through Jesus as our Mediator (Hebrews 10:19).

**How does Peter show that we are all equal in God's eyes? 1 Peter 2:9; Exodus 19:6.**

The idea of a priesthood of all believers was one of the great truths of the Protestant Reformers.<sup>3</sup> The priesthood of all believers teaches that every church member has a spiritual ministry (work) to do. Ordained ministers do not have a more special ministry than other church members have. The ministers just do a different work. All members have spiritual gifts. We need to remember that all members have important contributions to make.

**What other promise is there that supports our equal standing before God? Galatians 3:28.**

“God does not recognize any differences in groups of people. He is the Maker of all people. All people are of one family by creation. All people are one through salvation. Jesus came to remove every wall of separation. He threw open every room of the temple so every soul is free to reach God. Jesus' love is so broad, so deep, so full, that His love spreads everywhere. Jesus' love lifts out of Satan's circle the people whom he has deceived. His love places them within reach of God's throne, which is surrounded by the rainbow of promise.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's (Jesus') Object Lessons*, p. 386.



We are all within reach of God's throne.

<sup>1</sup>Reformation—a movement started by Martin Luther in the 1500s to bring people closer to the truth according to the Bible.

<sup>2</sup>mediators—neutral leaders helping to settle arguments between groups or people. Because Jesus is the Mediator between God and humans, we do not need humans as mediators.

<sup>3</sup>Protestant Reformers—church leaders during the Middle Ages such as Martin Luther who were opposed to false Catholic teachings.

**Why is the priesthood of all believers so important? Spiritual pride is the most dangerous of all sins. How can the priesthood of all believers be a cure for spiritual pride? What useful changes would you see in your own church if church members really believed in the priesthood of all believers?**

3. Deborah/Judges 4:4, 5

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4. David/1 Samuel 16:1-13

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**MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 13**

**WE EACH HAVE DIFFERENT DUTIES (Mark 3:13-19; Judges 4:4, 5).**

We all are equal in God’s eyes. But we do not all have the same duties. God wants there to be order in the church. He also expects the church to have leaders. “The priesthood of all believers” does not mean that we do not need leaders. From the earliest days, we have proof that God chose leaders for His people.

5. The twelve disciples/Mark 3:13-19

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6. Stephen and other deacons/Acts 6:1-7

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7. Elders/Titus 1:5

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**How do the following verses show that God’s people need good leaders?**

1. Moses/Exodus 3

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2. Helpers for Moses/Exodus 18:14-27

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**Deborah was a leader in Israel.**

The Bible does not give a detailed model for church leadership. But God is a God of order. He wants His people to do things in an orderly manner. Planning and leadership are necessary. So the church should be responsible for choosing the right kind of leaders.

## TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 14

### EVEN SAINTS ARE NOT PERFECT (Psalm 51:3, 4, 10).

Reading stories about famous missionaries and great religious leaders can be very inspiring. Often a person wonders: Would I have been able to show that same courage? Would I have been able to continue under such hardships? Would I have had the faith and spiritual strength to help and direct the people? We think of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and of the energy, courage, and faith of many of the first Adventists. Then we are very impressed and inspired.

**List some of the people in the Bible who succeeded as leaders against great hardships and challenges. What was the secret of their success? Hebrews 11.**

The Bible gives us inspiring examples of faith. But the Bible also informs us that even the greatest leaders

were not perfect. It is not hard to find examples of how great leaders made serious mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes were so bad, the leaders could not continue in their work. But in many examples, God was willing to continue working through them.

**Choose four or five leaders in Hebrews 11. What mistakes did these leaders make? What message do their lives teach us about judging our leaders?**



**Samson was a leader in Israel. But he was not perfect.**

Leaders, too, are sinners in need of grace, forgiveness, advice, and encour-

<sup>4</sup>standards—rules; examples.

agement. At the same time, to be a leader is a great honor. With this honor comes responsibility. Our leaders are not perfect. But they are still our leaders. As our leaders, they should be expected to follow rules.

**Should church leaders be expected to follow higher spiritual standards<sup>4</sup> than someone who is not a leader? Explain your answer.**

### WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 15

#### **SUPPORTING OUR LEADERS (Matthew 10:9, 10; 2 Thessalonians 3:1).**

We are responsible for supporting our leaders however we can. Aaron and Hur supported Moses and helped him to reach out to heaven. We also have a duty to help our leaders in their ministry (work) (Exodus 17:12).

**What may people who are full-time ministers in the gospel ministry expect from the members of the church? Matthew 10:9, 10; Romans 16:23.**

God has arranged for a system of support for people who serve Him as full-time ministers. This support will fill their material needs while they preach the gospel and help church members

grow in their faith. If all church members gave according to God's plan, there would be more than enough to meet the needs of many more church workers.

**What other support for our ministers and other leaders is just as important as the support of money? Ephesians 6:18, 19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1.**

“Leaders know that support is important. Support comes through regular prayer, and encouragement through calls, conversations, notes, ideas, and group discussions. Often support is simple such as asking a leader, ‘What can I do to help you?’”—Adapted from Leith Anderson, *A Church for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), pp. 230, 231.

Support for leaders should not be blind. We should not just do whatever leaders say we should do. But true support also means that we support leaders even when we might not fully agree with everything they do. Then we should try to support their decisions as best we can, because we respect the work leaders must do.

**What attitude<sup>5</sup> toward your church leaders do you have? Are you showing them the mercy<sup>6</sup> Jesus has shown you? What changes**

<sup>5</sup>attitude—how you think or feel about something.

<sup>6</sup>mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

might you need to make in relating to your leaders?

### THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 16

**JESUS IS OUR LEADER**  
(Ephesians 4:15; Ephesians 2:20;  
1 Peter 2:25).

**What do the following verses say about Jesus and His church?**

Ephesians 1:22, 23 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Ephesians 4:15 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Colossians 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
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We have learned this week that we are all equal in the sight of God. But this does not suggest that we should not have any leaders. The Bible teaches that there is an organization and that the church does have leaders.

However, we and our chosen leaders must remember that Jesus is the Head of the church. He alone is the Source<sup>7</sup> of the church's authority. Jesus is the Head of each person. He is the Head of the church. As persons, and as leaders, we can be faithful only as long as we are faithful to Jesus. When we follow Him in faith, repentance,<sup>8</sup> and obedience, we can do whatever work He asks us to do.

"It is Jesus who makes the church important. Church members are not the ones that make the church important. As His body, the church receives its importance from Him. The church is what it is because of who Jesus is.

"The symbol of the body also suggests surrender. As Jesus' body, the church surrenders to His authority. He is 'the head over all things to the church' (Ephesians 1:22). We recognize that Jesus' authority in the church is the highest authority. Recognizing that Jesus' authority is supreme prevents any church leader from being too important. The church needs organization. But no organization should cover up Jesus' authority."—Adapted from Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997), p. 215.

<sup>7</sup>source—where something comes from. The church's authority comes from Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>repentance—to say you are sorry for your sins and to turn away from a life of sin.

**How can people who lead out in the local church or hold some position of leadership in the conference make sure they never forget that Jesus is the main Leader of the church? If you could give some useful advice to any of our leaders on what is the best way to let Jesus lead the church through them, what would you say?**

#### FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 17

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “Since He went to heaven, Jesus has carried forward His work through chosen leaders. Through these leaders, He speaks to people and cares for their needs. Jesus, the great Head of the church supervises His work through the work of people God has chosen to show the world His character.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>9</sup> p. 360.

“There have ever been in the church people who are always trying to be too independent. They do not seem to understand that being too independent can cause them to have too much confidence in themselves. They will perhaps trust their own judgment more than the judgment of church leaders. God has

given His church special authority and power. No one has the right to ignore this power. Whoever does ignore this power rebels against God’s voice.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. It is important to work with church leaders. But at what point should a person openly challenge leaders? Is challenging leaders the Christian way? What Bible or historical examples can you use to explain your answer?
2. When our leaders sin, we like to be harder on them than on other church members who sin. Why do you think we are harder on our leaders? Should we be harder on our leaders?

**SUMMARY:** We must never forget the fact that we are all equals before God. But it is God’s purpose that not all church members have the same responsibility. God calls some members to be leaders. The leaders must be responsible workers. But we must not expect them to be perfect. We owe our leaders our full support and our prayers. But both the followers and the leaders must always remember that Jesus is the Head of His church.

<sup>9</sup>apostle—Jesus’ disciples were called “apostles” after Jesus returned to heaven.