

Love *and* Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (*Romans 12:2*).

However much Paul was seeking to disabuse the Romans of their false notions of the law, he also calls all Christians to a high standard of obedience. This obedience comes from an inward change in our heart and mind, a change that comes only through the power of God working in a person surrendered to Him.

Romans contains no hint that this obedience comes automatically. The Christian needs to be enlightened as to what the requirements are; he or she must desire to obey those requirements; and, finally, the Christian should seek the power without which that obedience is impossible.

What this means is that works are part of the Christian faith. Paul never meant to depreciate works; in chapters 13 to 15 he gives them strong emphasis. This is no denial of what he has said earlier about righteousness by faith. On the contrary, works are the true expression of what it means to live by faith. One could even argue that because of the added revelation after Jesus came, the New Testament requirements are more difficult than what was required in the Old. New Testament believers have been given an example of proper moral behavior in Jesus Christ. He and no one else is the pattern we are to follow. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5*).

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

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

Living Sacrifices

With chapter 11, the doctrinal part of the book of Romans ends. Chapters 12 through 16 present practical instruction and personal notes. Nevertheless, these concluding chapters are extremely important, because they show how the life of faith is to be lived.

For starters, faith is not a substitute for obedience, as if faith somehow nullifies our obligation to obey the Lord. The moral precepts are still in force; they are explained, even amplified in the New Testament. And no indication is given, either, that it will be easy for the Christian to regulate his or her life by these moral precepts. On the contrary, we're told that at times it could be difficult, for the battle with self and with sin is always hard (*1 Pet. 4:1*). Christians are promised divine power and given assurance that victory is possible, but we are still in the world of the enemy and will have to fight many battles against temptation. The good news is that if we fall, if we stumble, we are not cast away but have a High Priest who intercedes in our behalf (*Heb. 7:25*).

Read Romans 12:1. How does the analogy presented here reveal how we as Christians are to live? How does Romans 12:2 fit in with this?

In Romans 12:1, Paul is alluding to Old Testament sacrifices. As, anciently, animals were sacrificed to God, so now Christians ought to yield their bodies to God, not to be killed but as living sacrifices dedicated to His service.

In the time of ancient Israel, every offering brought as a sacrifice was examined carefully. If any defect was discovered in the animal, it was refused, for God had commanded that the offering be without blemish. So, Christians are bidden to present their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” In order to do this, all their powers must be preserved in the best possible condition. Though none of us are without blemish, the point is that we are to seek to live as spotlessly and as faithfully as we can.

It's always so easy to come up with excuses for our sins and faults, isn't it? What's your common excuse for falling into the same thing again and again? Isn't it about time to start putting away the excuses and claim the promises, for isn't God's power greater than your excuses?

Thinking of Oneself

We have talked a great deal this quarter about the perpetuity of God’s moral law and have stressed again and again that Paul’s message in the book of Romans is not one that teaches the Ten Commandments are done away with or somehow made void by faith.

Yet, it’s easy to get so caught up in the letter of the law that we forget the spirit behind it, and that spirit is love—love for God and love for one another. While anyone can profess love, revealing that love in everyday life can be a different matter entirely.

Read Romans 12:3–21. How are we to reveal love for others?

As in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, after dealing with the gifts of the Spirit, Paul exalts love. Love (Greek *agape*) is the more excellent way. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Therefore, love describes the character of God. To love is to act toward others as God acts and to treat them as God treats them.

Paul here shows how that love is to be expressed in a practical manner. One important principle comes through, and that is personal humility, a willingness of a person “not to think of himself more highly than he ought” (Rom. 12:3), a willingness to “give preference to one another in honor” (vs. 10, *NASB*), and a willingness not to “be wise in your own opinion” (vs. 16, *NKJV*). Christ’s words about Himself, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), catch the essence of it.

Of all people, Christians should be the most humble. After all, look at how helpless we are, look at how fallen we are; look at how dependent we are, not only upon a righteousness outside of ourselves for salvation but on a power working in us in order to change us in ways we never can change ourselves. What have we to brag of, what have we to boast of, what have we in and of ourselves to be proud about? Nothing at all. Working from the starting point of this personal humility, not only before God but before others, we are to live as Paul admonishes us to in these verses.

Read Romans 12:18. How well are you applying this admonition in your own life right now? Might you need some attitude adjustments in order to do what the Word tells us here?

Relationship to Government

Read Romans 13:1–7. What basic principles can we take from these verses about how we are to relate to the civil power of government?

What makes Paul’s words so interesting is that he wrote during a time when a pagan empire ruled the world, one that could be incredibly brutal, one that was at its core corrupt, and one that knew nothing about the true God and would, within a few years, start a massive persecution of those who wanted to worship that God. In fact, Paul was put to death by this government! Yet, despite all this, Paul was advocating that Christians be good citizens, even under a government like that?

Yes. And that’s because the idea of government itself is found throughout the Bible. The concept, the principle of government, is God-ordained. Human beings need to live in a community with rules and regulations and standards. Anarchy is not a biblical concept.

That being said, it doesn’t mean that God approves of all forms of government or how these governments are run. On the contrary. One doesn’t have to look too far, either in history or in the world today, to see some brutal regimes. Yet, even in situations like these, Christians should, as much as possible, obey the laws of the land. Christians are to give loyal support to government so long as its claims do not conflict with the claims of God. One should consider very prayerfully and carefully, and with the counsel of others, before embarking on a path that puts him or her in conflict with the powers that be. We know from prophecy that one day all of God’s faithful followers will be pitted against the political powers in control of the world (*Revelation 13*). Until then, we should do all that we can, before God, to be good citizens of whatever country in which we live.

“We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. . . .

“We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

Relationships to Others

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). How are we to understand this text? Does it mean that if we love, we have no obligation, then, to obey the law of God?

As Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul here amplifies the precepts of the law, showing that love must be the motivating power behind all that we do. Because the law is a transcript of the character of God, and God is love, to love, therefore, is to fulfill the law. Yet, Paul is not substituting some vague standard of love for the precisely detailed precepts of the law, as some Christians claim. The moral law is still binding, because, again, it is what points out sin—and who is going to deny the reality of sin? However, the law truly can be kept only in the context of love. Remember, some of those who brought Christ to the cross then ran home to keep the law!

Which commandments did Paul cite as samples to illustrate the principle of love in law-keeping? Why these in particular? *Rom. 13:9, 10.*

Interestingly, the factor of love was not a newly introduced principle. By quoting Leviticus 19:18, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” Paul showed that the principle was an integral part of the Old Testament system. Again Paul appealed to the Old Testament to support his gospel preaching. Some argue from these texts that Paul is teaching that only the few commandments mentioned here are in effect. If so, does this mean, then, that Christians can dishonor their parents, worship idols, and have other gods before the Lord? Of course not.

Look at the context here. Paul was dealing with how we relate to one another. He was dealing with personal relationships, which is why he specified the commandments that centered on these relationships. His argument certainly shouldn’t be construed as nullifying the rest of the law. (*See Acts 15:20, 1 Thess. 1:9, 1 John 5:21.*) Besides, as the New Testament writers point out, by showing love to others, we show our love to God (*Matt. 25:40; 1 John 4:20, 21*).

Think about your relationship to God and how it is reflected in your relationships with others. How big a factor is love in those relationships? How can you learn to love others the way God loves us? What stands in your way of doing just that?

Nearer Than We Believed

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11).

As we have stated all quarter, Paul had a very specific focus in this letter to the Romans, and that was to clarify for the church at Rome, especially the Jewish believers there, the role of faith and works in the New Covenant context. The issue was salvation and how a sinner is deemed righteous and holy before the Lord. To help those whose whole emphasis had been on law, Paul put the law in its proper role and context. Though, ideally, Judaism even in Old Testament times was a religion of grace, legalism arose and did a lot of damage. How careful we as a church need to be that we don't make the same mistake.

Read Romans 13:11–14. What event is Paul talking about here, and how should we be acting in anticipation of that event?

How fascinating that Paul here was talking to the believers, telling them to wake up and get it together because Jesus was coming back. The fact that this was written almost two thousand years ago doesn't matter. We must always live in anticipation of the nearness of Christ's coming. As far as we all are concerned, as far as our own personal *experiences* go, the Second Coming is as near as the potential for our own death. Whether next week or in 40 years, we close our eyes in death, and whether we sleep only 4 days or for 400 years—it makes no difference to us. The next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus. With death always potentially just around the corner for any of us, time is indeed short, and our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Though Paul doesn't deal much in the book of Romans with the Second Coming, in the Thessalonian and the Corinthian letters he covers it in much more detail. After all, it's a crucial theme in the Bible, especially the New Testament. Without it, and the hope it offers, our faith is, really, meaningless. After all, what does “justification by faith” mean without the Second Coming to bring that wonderful truth to complete fruition?

If you knew for certain that Jesus was coming next month, what would you change in your life, and why? Now, if you believe you need to change these things a month before Jesus comes, why shouldn't you change them now? What is the difference?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “An Explanation of Early Statements,” pp. 66–69, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Practical Godliness,” pp. 540, 541, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Our Attitude Toward the Civil Authorities,” pp. 394, 395, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 352, 353, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Spirituality of the Law,” pp. 49–51, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

“In the Bible the will of God is revealed. The truths of the Word of God are the utterances of the Most High. He who makes these truths a part of his life becomes in every sense a new creature. He is not given new mental powers, but the darkness that through ignorance and sin has clouded the understanding is removed. The words, ‘A new heart also will I give you,’ mean, ‘A new mind will I give you.’ A change of heart is always attended by a clear conviction of Christian duty, an understanding of truth. He who gives the Scriptures close, prayerful attention will gain clear comprehension and sound judgment, as if in turning to God he had reached a higher plane of intelligence.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 24.

“The Lord . . . is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. If we can but see the King in His beauty we shall be forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry aloud: ‘Homeward bound!’ We are nearing the time when Christ will come in power and great glory to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 253.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What were the answers folk gave, and how did they justify them?
- 2 The question of how we are to be good citizens and good Christians can at times be very complicated. If someone were to come to you seeking advice about standing for what he or she believed was God’s will, even though it would put him or her in conflict with the government, what would you say? What counsel would you give? What principles should you follow? Why is this something that we should proceed on only with the utmost seriousness and prayerful consideration? (After all, not everyone thrown into the lions’ den comes out unscathed.)
- 3 What do you think is harder to do: to keep strict adherence to the letter of the law or to love God and love others unconditionally? Or, could you argue that this question presents a false dichotomy? If so, why?

The Enthusiastic Converts

by G. DEVADASS

When a group of believers wanted to start a new church plant in a suburb of Chennai (formerly Madras), India, several church members paired up into twos and went visiting from house to house in that neighborhood. During our visiting, we met Elkana and Jeba-Kumari.

Elkana and his wife were devoted Christians and active members of a charismatic church. They operated a hostel (home) for poor children, supported by donations from other believers. But they were willing to listen as we read from the Bible and explained the fundamental beliefs of Adventists.

We visited with Elkana and Jeba-Kumari every week, and they began attending the Adventist church. In time they were baptized into the Adventist family of believers.

This dedicated couple told their family members of their decision to become Seventh-day Adventists. They shared what they were learning from the Bible that they hadn't known before, and some of their relatives began attending church with them.

The pastor invited Elkana and his wife to share their faith in their own part of town, and they agreed. For six months the pastor trained them how to share God's word and urged them to invite people to the church. Then they went out on their own.

Elkana and Jeba-Kumari took up their new commission with energy, and within 10 months 28 more people from the neighborhood were attending the Adventist church. This group of new believers formed the core of a new congregation that now numbers more than 30 people. They have no church in which to worship and must meet in a rented room.

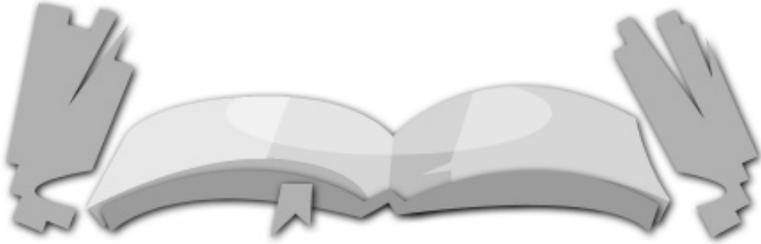
Jeba-Kumari is an especially gifted soul winner, and the couple continues to share their faith with those they meet. They hope to find land and build a church for their little congregation soon, knowing that when they do, their membership will grow.

Meanwhile, the members of the original church who first visited Elkana's neighborhood have moved on to a new community to claim more souls for Christ. In this way the work in the great city of Chennai is flourishing.



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All the Rest Is Commentary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 14–16.*

Memory Text: “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (*Romans 14:10*).

Someone approached a famous rabbi of antiquity and asked him to explain the whole meaning of the Torah while standing on one leg. “Do not do to another,” the rabbi said on one leg, “what seems to you to be hurtful; that is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary.”

Whether or not one agrees with the rabbi's statement, he does have a point. Some aspects of our faith are foundational and others mere “commentary.” This week's lesson looks at some of that “commentary.” What this means is that all that came before focused very much on the foundational principles of salvation. What is the role of the law—be it the whole Old Testament system or just the Ten Commandments—in the area of salvation? Paul needed to define clearly what are the grounds upon which God accepts a person. Perhaps the whole thing could be summarized by the pagan jailer's question, “What must I do to be saved?” (*Acts 16:30*).

With that explained, Paul now engages in some “commentary.” Though very strong on some points, Paul takes a much freer attitude regarding other things. That's because these things are nonessentials, “commentary,” as it were. Yet, at the same time, though the issues themselves might not have been crucial, the attitude the Christians had toward each other in dealing with these issues was.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 25.*

The Weak Brother

In Romans 14:1–3, the question was the eating of meats that may have been sacrificed to idols. The Jerusalem council (*Acts 15*) ruled that Gentile converts should refrain from using such foods in their diet. But there was always the question as to whether meats sold in public markets had come from animals sacrificed to idols (*see 1 Cor. 10:25*). Some Christians didn’t care about that at all; others, if there were the slightest doubt, chose to eat vegetables instead. The issue had nothing to do with the question of vegetarianism and healthful living. Nor is Paul implying in this passage that the distinction between clean and unclean meats has been abolished. This is not the subject under consideration. If the words “he may eat all things” (*Rom. 14:2*) were taken to mean that now any animal, clean or otherwise, could be eaten, they would be misapplied. Comparison with other New Testament passages would rule against such an application.

Meanwhile, to “receive” one weak in the faith meant to accord him or her full membership and social status. The person was not to be argued with but given the right to his or her opinion.

What principle should we take, then, from Romans 14:1–3?

It’s important, too, to realize that Paul in verse 3 does not speak negatively of the one “weak in the faith.” Nor does he give this person advice as to how to become strong. So far as God is concerned, the overscrupulous Christian (judged overscrupulous, apparently, not by God but by his or her fellow Christians) is accepted. “God hath received him.”

How does Romans 14:4 amplify what we’ve just looked at?

Though we need to keep in mind the principles seen in today’s lesson, are there not times and places where we need to step in and judge, if not a person’s heart, at least the actions? Are we to step back and say and do nothing in every situation? Isaiah 56:10 describes watchmen as “dumb dogs, they cannot bark.” How can we know when to speak and when to keep silent? How do we strike the right balance here?

With What Measure You Mete

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

We tend to judge others harshly at times, and often for the same things that we ourselves do. How often, though, what we do doesn't seem as bad to us as when others do the same thing. We might fool ourselves by our hypocrisy, but not God, who warned us: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?" (*Matt. 7:1-4*).

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

The citation from Isaiah 45:23 supports the thought that *all* must appear for judgment. "Every knee" and "every tongue" individualizes the summons. The implication is that each one will have to answer for his or her own life and deeds (*vs. 12*). No one can answer for another. In this important sense, we are *not* our brother's keeper.

Keeping the context in mind, how do you understand what Paul is saying in Romans 14:14?

The subject is still foods sacrificed to idols. The issue is, clearly, not the distinction between the foods deemed clean and unclean. Paul is saying that there is nothing wrong per se in eating foods that might have been offered to idols. After all, what is an idol anyway? It is nothing (*see 1 Cor. 8:4*), so who cares if some pagan offered the food to a statue of a frog or a bull?

A person should not be made to violate his or her conscience, even if the conscience is overly sensitive. This fact the "strong" brethren apparently did not understand. They despised the scrupulosity of the "weak" brethren and put stumbling blocks in their way.

Might you, in your zeal for the Lord, be in danger of what Paul is warning about here? Why must we be careful not to seek to be the conscience of others, no matter how good our intentions?

Giving No Offense

Read Romans 14:15–23 (*see also 1 Cor. 8:12, 13*). Summarize on the lines below the gist of what Paul is saying. What principle can we take from this passage that we can apply in all areas of our lives?

In verses 17–20 Paul is putting various aspects of Christianity into proper perspective. Although diet is important, Christians ought not to quarrel over the choice on the part of some to eat vegetables instead of flesh meats that might have been sacrificed to idols. Instead, they ought to focus on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. How might we apply this idea to questions of diet today in our church? However much the health message, and especially the teachings on diet, can be a blessing to us, not everyone sees this subject the same way, and we need to respect those differences.

In verse 22, amid all this talk about leaving people to their own conscience, Paul adds a very interesting caveat: “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (NIV). What warning is Paul giving here? How does this balance out the rest of what he is saying in this context?

Have you heard someone say, “It is none of anyone’s business what I eat or what I wear or what kind of entertainment I engage in”? Is it really? None of us lives in a vacuum. Our actions, words, deeds, and even diet can affect others, either for good or for bad. It’s not hard to see how. If someone who looks up to you sees you doing something “wrong,” he or she could be influenced by your example to do that same thing. We fool ourselves if we think otherwise. To argue that, well, you didn’t force the person is beside the point. As Christians, we have a responsibility to one another, and if our example can lead someone astray, we are culpable.

What kind of example do you present? Would you feel comfortable with having others, particularly young people or new believers, following your example in all areas? What does your answer say about you?

Observance of Days

In this discussion about not judging others who might view some things differently than we do, and not being a stumbling block to others who might be offended by our actions, Paul brings up the issue of special days that some want to observe and others don't.

Read Romans 14:4–10. How are we to understand what Paul is saying here? Does this say anything about the fourth commandment? If not, why not?

About what days is Paul speaking? Was there a controversy in the early church over the observance or nonobservance of certain days? Apparently so. We get a hint of such controversy in Galatians 4:9, 10, where Paul berates the Galatian Christians for observing “days, and months, and times, and years.” As we noted in lesson 2, some in the church had persuaded the Galatian Christians to be circumcised and to keep other precepts of the law of Moses. Paul feared that these ideas might harm the Roman church, as well. But perhaps in Rome it was particularly the Jewish Christians who had a hard time persuading themselves that they need no longer observe the Jewish festivals. Paul here is saying, Do as you please in this matter; the important point is not to judge those who view the matter differently from you. Some Christians, apparently, to be on the safe side, decided to observe one or more of the Jewish festivals. Paul’s counsel is, Let them do it, if they are persuaded they should.

To bring the weekly Sabbath into Romans 14:5, as some argue, is unwarranted. Can one imagine Paul taking such a laid-back attitude toward the fourth commandment? As we have seen all quarter, Paul placed a heavy emphasis on obedience to the law, so he certainly wasn’t going to place the Sabbath commandment in the same category as folk who are uptight about eating foods that might have been offered to idols. However commonly these texts are used as an example to show that the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer binding, they say no such thing. Their use in that manner is a prime example of what Peter warned that people were doing with Paul’s writings: “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

What has been your experience with the Sabbath? Has it been the blessing it was meant to be? What changes can you make in order to experience more fully what the Lord offers you in the Sabbath?

Fitting Benediction

Read Romans 15:1–3. What important Christian truth is found in these texts?

In what way do these texts capture so much of what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

What other verses teach the same idea? Most important, how can you, yourself, live out this principle?

As Paul brought his letter to a close, what varied benedictions did he utter? *Rom. 15:5, 6, 13, 33.*

The God of patience means the God who helps His children to endure steadfastly. The word for “patience,” *hupomone*, means “fortitude,” “steadfast endurance.” The word for “consolation” may be translated “encouragement.” The God of encouragement is the God who encourages. The God of hope is the God who has given hope to humankind. Likewise, the God of peace is the God who gives peace and in whom one may have peace.

What a fitting benediction in a letter whose dominant theme is righteousness by faith—encouragement, hope, peace! How sorely our present world needs these.

After numerous personal greetings, how did Paul bring his letter to a close? *Rom. 16:25–27.*

Paul ends his letter in a glorious ascription of praise to God. God is the one in whom the Roman Christians, and all Christians, can safely put their trust to confirm their standing as redeemed sons and daughters of God, justified by faith and now led by the Spirit of God.

Paul is thrilled to be the herald of such glorious news. He calls this news “my gospel.” What he means is the gospel he proclaims. But what he preaches has been confirmed by the preaching of Jesus and by the messages of the prophets. It was kept secret, not because God did not want humanity to know, but because people refused light from heaven, preventing God from giving them further light. Moreover, there were some aspects of the plan that people would be unable to grasp until the Messiah came in human flesh. He gave a demonstration, not only of what God is like but also of what humanity may become by laying hold of divine power. The new kind of life would be one of “obedience of faith”; that is, obedience springing from faith in the Lord, who through grace justifies sinners by the righteousness given to all who claim it for themselves.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Unity and Love in the Church,” pp. 477, 478; “Love for the Erring,” pp. 604–606, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Helping the Tempted,” p. 166, in *The Ministry of Healing*; p. 719, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6.

“I was shown the danger of the people of God in looking to Brother and Sister White and thinking that they must come to them with their burdens and seek counsel of them. This ought not so to be. They are invited by their compassionate, loving Saviour to come unto Him, when weary and heavy-laden, and He will relieve them. . . . Many come to us with the inquiry: Shall I do this? Shall I engage in that enterprise? Or, in regard to dress, Shall I wear this or that article? I answer them: You profess to be disciples of Christ. Study your Bibles. Read carefully and prayerfully the life of our dear Saviour when He dwelt among men upon the earth. Imitate His life, and you will not be found straying from the narrow path. We utterly refuse to be conscience for you. If we tell you just what to do, you will look to us to guide you, instead of going directly to Jesus for yourselves.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 118, 119.

“We are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. . . . Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

“There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

Discussion Questions:

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

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

Reunited in Christ

by KRISTINA MUELHAUSER

Juma was just a boy when war separated Juma from his family. His mother had traveled to their grandparents' home with her children while their father remained in Juba, Sudan. During the war Juba was captured by the military, and Juma's family couldn't return home. Juma grew up not knowing his father.

But finally peace has come to southern Sudan, and families are reuniting. Meanwhile the city is struggling to rebuild.

It's a time of spiritual rebuilding as well. Recently Seventh-day Adventist pastors, evangelists, and Bible workers from Sudan, the Middle East Union, and the Trans-European Division held city-wide evangelistic meetings to share God's love with the people of Juba.

The truck carrying the evangelists, pastors, and lay evangelists bounced along the dirt road toward Juba. Its wheels stirred up huge clouds of gray-brown dust that settled on everything and everyone nearby. The truck lumbered to a stop in a rubbish-filled open area near the city that would be the site of one of the evangelistic meetings. The evangelists would have to clear the rubbish before they could set up the tent to hold the meetings. Then they would visit the people and invite them to attend.

And the people would come. They are thirsty—not just for physical water, but for the Water of Life the team had come to bring them.

The teams braved heat, dust, and flies as they shared God's love with the people of Juba. When the meetings began and singing filled the air, the people came. They listened to health talks, heard children's stories, and learned of God's love.

The devil tried to destroy the meetings. When high winds blew up just as the pastors began to speak, church members grabbed the tent poles to prevent the tent from blowing away. The wind died down, and rain poured from the sky, although it was the dry season. In another location the tent was almost empty when the meeting was scheduled to start. But the sudden rain sent people to the tent for shelter, and a full house heard the message that night.

So far 45 have been baptized in Juba, including Juma's father. Many more are preparing to join the family of God in this region that has been cut off from the gospel and from the outside world. Please pray for the people of southern Sudan as they seek to reconnect with their families and learn to love their Savior. And praise God for the mission offerings that helped make the Juba evangelism possible.

KRISTINA MUELHAUSER and her husband, Darrel, work as missionaries in the South Sudan Field.

History—both secular and sacred—is often told through stories. Next quarter’s Bible study guide, *Background Characters in the Old Testament*, by Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil, looks at some of the overlooked and forgotten figures in the Old Testament. The lives of these characters might not seem so important, a feeling most of us can identify with. As we study them, let us remember the power of our own lives and examples. Our stories can become powerful tools in our witness to others about what God has done for us. As with these background characters, we become part of the great story of salvation, even if we might not be the main characters in the grander scheme of the cosmic drama that unfolds around us.

Lesson 1—Story and History

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: People and Plots (*Job 1:1–12*)

MONDAY: Where and How? (*1 Sam. 24:1–6, Gen. 39:6–12*)

TUESDAY: From Victory to the “Dark Ages” (*Josh. 3:9–17*)

WEDNESDAY: Of Kings and Princes (*1 Sam. 8:3–20*)

THURSDAY: Rehoboam’s Folly (*1 Kings 12:1–16*)

Memory Text—*2 Timothy 3:16*

Sabbath Gem: The Bible is so contemporary because it is full of stories. Not legends, not “cleverly devised myths” (*2 Pet. 1:16, ESV*), but historical and personal stories that reveal truth about God and His interaction with fallen humanity. These stories describe real people, battling with real-life problems and interacting with the living God, who offers answers to these problems.

Lesson 2—Caleb: Living With the Wait

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: “The Facts” (*Num. 13:26–14:2*)

MONDAY: Standing Tall When It Counts (*Num. 13:30*)

TUESDAY: Claiming God’s Promises (*Joshua 14*)

WEDNESDAY: Passing on the Legacy (*Ps. 92:12–15*)

THURSDAY: Giving Freely (*Judg. 1:14, 15*)

Memory Text—*Psalms 130:6, 7*

Sabbath Gem: Caleb exhibits strong courage and faith in God. He is a great leader who is willing to take risks and to lead by example. His story is relevant for us as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

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.