

Reformation:¹ Healing Broken Relationships



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1–25; 2 Corinthians 10:12–15; Romans 5:8–11; Matthew 18:15–17.

MEMORY VERSE: “Once we were God’s enemies. But we have been brought back to him because his Son has died for us. Now that God has brought us back, we are even more secure [safe]. We know that we will be saved because Christ lives” (Romans 5:10, NlrV).

EVEN AFTER PENTECOST,² AT TIMES THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS AND QUARRELING AMONG BELIEVERS. The New Testament gives examples of how church leaders and members dealt with such challenges. These principles (important rules) are very important for the church today. They show the positive results that can come when we use principles from the Bible to deal with problems.

In this week’s lesson we will learn about restored (renewed) relationships. Great spiritual revivals (awakenings) in the past led to healed relationships. This is because the Holy Spirit brings people closer to God and to one another. The Holy Spirit breaks down the barriers in our relationship with God. He also breaks down barriers in our relationships with one another. The greatest example of the power of the gospel is not what the church says but how the church lives.

“ ‘If you love one another, everyone will know you are my disciples’ ” (John 13:35, NlrV). Without this love, all our talk about revival³ and reformation will do nothing.

1. reformation—the ongoing process in which a person changes his or her lifestyle in order to follow God’s will after having accepted Christ as Savior.

2. Pentecost—the time when Jesus’ followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

3. revival—renewed interest in God and the desire to improve one’s spiritual life.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 15

**FROM A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP
TO FRIENDSHIP
(Colossians 4:10, 11)**

Paul and Barnabas worked together in witnessing for Jesus. But they had some disagreement between them (Acts 15:36–39). Paul could not trust John Mark. The possible dangers of preaching the gospel had caused John Mark at one point to leave Paul and Barnabas and return home.

“Mark’s leaving caused Paul to judge him roughly. But Barnabas was more forgiving to Mark because of Mark’s inexperience. Barnabas thought that Mark should not leave the ministry [work done for God] because Barnabas knew that Mark had talents which would fit him to be [make him] a useful worker for Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*, page 170.

God used all these men. But the problems between them needed to be solved. Paul, who preached grace,⁴ needed to give grace to the young preacher who had disappointed him. The apostle of forgiveness (Paul) needed to forgive. John Mark grew under the supportive coaching of Barnabas. Later, Paul’s heart seemed to be touched by the changes.

Read Colossians 4:10, 11 and 2 Timothy 4:11. How do Paul’s letters from prison to Timothy and the church at Colossae⁵ show his

respect for John Mark and his work as a young preacher?

It is true that there may not be many details of Paul’s peace with John Mark. But the Bible record is clear. John Mark became one of the Paul’s trusted helpers. Paul highly recommended John Mark as a “fellow worker” to the church at Colossae. At the end of Paul’s life, he strongly encouraged Timothy to bring John Mark with him to Rome because John Mark was “useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11, NKJV). Paul’s ministry was greatly helped by the young preacher. Clearly, Paul had forgiven Mark. The barrier between them was broken, and they were able to work together in the cause (work) of the gospel.

How can we learn to forgive those who have hurt or disappointed us? At the same time, why does forgiveness not always restore (repair) a broken relationship?



Paul, the apostle of forgiveness, needed to forgive.

4. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

5. Colossae—a city in Turkey.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 16**FROM SLAVE TO SON
(Philemon 1–25)**

While he was in prison in Rome, Paul met a runaway slave named Onesimus. Onesimus had escaped from Colossae to Rome. Paul personally knew Onesimus' master. The letter to Philemon is Paul's personal plea (request) to his friend about a restored relationship with the runaway slave.

Relationships were important to Paul. The apostle knew that broken relationships are harmful to spiritual growth. Philemon was a church leader in Colossae. If Philemon had any bitterness toward Onesimus, it would stain his Christian witness.

Read Philemon 1–25. What important principles about restored relationships can we learn from these verses? Remember, the key word is *principles*.

At first, it seems somewhat surprising that Paul did not speak more powerfully against the evils of slavery. But Paul's plan was a better one. The gospel breaks down all group separations (Galatians 3:28). The apostle sent Onesimus back to Philemon, not as a slave but as his son in Jesus and as Philemon's "beloved brother" in the Lord (Philemon 16).

Paul knew that runaway slaves had little future. They could be arrested at any time. They were doomed to a hard and poor life. But now, as

Philemon's brother in Christ and a willing worker, Onesimus could have a wonderful future. His food, lodging, and job could be made safe under Philemon. So, the restored relationship could make a big difference in Onesimus' life. He became a "faithful and beloved brother" and fellow worker in the gospel with Paul (Colossians 4:9, NKJV).

From the principles of the gospel, what can you use to help you to deal with any broken relationships that you have with others?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 17**CALLED TO COOPERATION, NOT
COMPETITION
(1 Corinthians 3:5–11)**

As we learned in an earlier lesson, the church at Corinth had deep problems. What principle does Paul list in 1 Corinthians 3:5–11; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11; and 2 Corinthians 10:12–15 for healing and restoration (renewal)? Why are all of them so important for revival and reformation?

In these verses, the apostle Paul lists important principles of church unity (oneness). He points out that Jesus uses different workers for different ministries that need to be done in His church. But each one is working together for the building up of God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:9).

God calls us to cooperation, not

competition. Each believer is gifted by God to cooperate in ministering to (working to serve) the body of Christ and serving the community (1 Corinthians 12:11). There are no greater or lesser gifts. All are necessary in Christ's church (1 Corinthians 12:18–23). And our God-given gifts are not for selfish purposes or for showing off. They are given by the Holy Spirit to be used for service.

All comparisons with others are unwise. This is because they will make us become discouraged or big-headed. If we think that others are far “better” than we are, we will feel discouraged when we compare⁶ ourselves to them. If we think our work for Christ is better than the work of others, we will feel proud. Both of these attitudes (feelings) cripple (limit) us in our service for Christ. As we do the work that Christ has given us, we will find joy in our witness for Christ. Our labors (work) will support the efforts (work) of other members. And the church of Christ will encourage fast growth for the kingdom.

Can you think of someone whose gifts in ministry have made you jealous? At the same time, how often have you felt proud that your gifts are better than the gifts of others? How can we learn the unselfish attitudes that will help us to avoid the traps here?



There are no greater or lesser gifts of the Spirit. All are necessary in Christ's church.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 18

FROM BITTERNESS TO FORGIVENESS (Luke 23:31–34)

What is forgiveness? Does forgiveness make right the actions of someone who has terribly wronged us? Does our forgiveness depend on how sorry the person is about harming us? What if the one with whom we are upset does not deserve our forgiveness?

How do Romans 5:8–11; Luke 23:31–34; 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21; and Ephesians 4:26–30 help us to understand forgiveness from the Bible?

Christ took the first step in bringing us back to Himself. It is “the goodness of God [that] leads you to repentance [sorrow for sin]” (Romans 2:4, NKJV). In Christ, we were reunited (brought together) to God while we were still

6. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

sinner. Our repentance and confession (admitting our sins) do not create oneness with God. Christ's death on the cross did. Our part is to accept what was done for us.

It is true that we cannot receive the blessings of forgiveness until we confess our sins. This does not mean that our confession creates forgiveness in God's heart. Forgiveness is in His heart all the time. But confession helps us to receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Confession, therefore, is very important. This is not because it changes God's attitude toward us. It is important because it changes our attitude toward Him. We are changed when we surrender to the Holy Spirit's power and repent (sorrow for) and confess (admit) our sin.

Forgiveness is also so important for our own spiritual health. If we do not forgive someone who has done wrong to us, it can hurt us more than it hurts him or her. Suppose a person has done wrong to you and the pain grows worse inside because you fail to forgive. Then you are letting him or her hurt you even more.

Forgiveness is setting a person free from our judgment against him or her. This is because Christ has set us free from His judgment against us. That does not make a wrong that another person has done to us right. We can be made right with someone who has wronged us. This is because Christ made us right with Him when we wronged Him. We can forgive because Christ forgives us. We can love because Christ loves us. Forgiveness is a choice. We can choose to for-

give. It does not matter what the other person's actions or attitudes are. This is the true spirit of Jesus.

How can the knowledge of being forgiven by Christ help us to learn to forgive others?



Forgiveness means setting a person free.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 19

FROM ANGER TO RESTORATION (Matthew 18:15–17)

Read Matthew 18:15–17. What three steps does Jesus give us to help us to solve problems when we are wronged by another church member? How can we use these words in today's situations?

Jesus gives the advice of Matthew 18 because He wants to keep problems in as small a group as possible. His plan is for the problem to be solved by the two people involved. This is why Jesus says, “ ‘If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone’ ” (Matthew 18:15, NKJV).

When there are more people involved in a problem that is between two individuals, it may lead to more problems. People take sides. And the battle starts to be between two opposing groups. But when Christians try to settle their differences privately, there is a better chance for the spirit of Christian love and mutual (done together) understanding to work. And the situation is right for the Holy Spirit to work with them as they try to solve their disagreements.

However, there are times when private meetings held to solve problems fail to work. Then Jesus invites us to take one or two others with us. But this second step must always be done after the first step fails to work. The purpose is to bring people together. It is not to pull them farther apart. The extra one or two persons who join the first two are not coming to prove a point or to join in blaming the other person. They come in Christian love and mercy as counselors (advisors) and prayer partners who want to help to solve the problem between the first two people.

There are times when all efforts to solve the problem fail. In this case, Jesus tells us to bring the issue (problem) before the church. Jesus is not talking about holding up the Sabbath morning worship service with a personal quarrel. If the first two steps have failed to solve the problem, the right place to go is to the church board. Again, Christ wants to make peace among people. He does not want to blame one person and excuse the other.

“Do not let anger lead to worse feelings. Do not let the wound break out in poisoned words. These words may cause a negative influence upon the minds of those who hear. Do not let bitter thoughts continue to fill your mind and his. Go to your brother and humbly talk with him about the problem.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, page 499.



If your brother sins against you, tell him his fault when you are alone with him.

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 20

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Suppose [imagine that] the workers have Christ living in their own souls. Suppose all selfishness is dead. Suppose there is no argument about one person being better than another. Suppose they humble themselves so much that love for one another is seen and felt. Then the showers of the grace of the Holy Spirit will surely come upon them. And

God's promise will never fail at all."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 175.

"Suppose we stand in the great day of the Lord with Christ as our safety and high tower. Then we must put away all jealousy and struggles for power over others. We must destroy the roots of these unholy things, so that they may not come up again into life. We must put ourselves wholly on the side of the Lord."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, page 190.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read Colossians 3:12–17 in class. Discuss the good traits (points) of Christian character (who someone is) that the apostle Paul encourages the church at Colossae to have. Why are these traits the basis (foundation) for solving problems among people? How do they guide us as we carry out the principles that Jesus gives us in Matthew 18:15–18?
- ② Review again Colossians 3:12–17 and the teachings found in these verses. Why are these things so important for the revival and reformation that we need in the church?
- ③ If we think about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, what is the greatest thing holding us back from revival and reformation needed to reach the world? Is it our teachings and doctrines (beliefs)? Of course not! These are the very things that God has given us to preach to the world. The problem is with us only. We are the ones with human weaknesses, such as our jealousies, our quarrels, our selfishness, our desire for power over others, and a lot of other things. Why must you, yes, you, and not just the person next to you in church, pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to bring positive changes? And why must we pray so that we can see revival and reformation in the whole church?