

The “Restoration of All Things”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 1:26, 27; Deut. 6:5; Gen. 3:8–19; James 4:4; Gal. 4:19; Mark 2:1–12; John 10:10.*

Memory Text: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Genesis 1:27, NIV*).

All one has to do is look around, at the world, at the neighborhood, at oneself, to see the point. And the point is? Something is terribly wrong.

It’s called the Fall. It’s called sin. It’s called rebellion, and it’s called the great controversy.

And yet, the good news is that it’s not permanent. It’s not going to last forever. Jesus came, died for the sins of the world, and promised to come again. And when He does, nothing of this world will remain. Instead, a new kingdom, His eternal kingdom, will begin. “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*).

What a restoration!

But we don’t have to wait until the Second Coming for the restoration to begin. Those who are in Christ are a new creation now (*2 Cor. 5:17*), and we are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus now (*Rom. 8:29*). Also, He calls us and empowers us, as His church, so that we can work toward the restoration of others as well.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.

The Image of God

The Bible says that humanity was originally created in the “image” (*Gen. 1:27*) of God. An image may be either two-dimensional, such as a mirror reflection or photograph, or three-dimensional, such as a statue or hologram. An image can also be intangible, such as a mental image, an idea that we have in our heads. What does the Bible mean?

Read Genesis 1:26, 27. How does Scripture explain what being made in God’s “image” means? See also *Gen. 1:31, Deut. 6:5, and 1 Thess. 5:23*.

With the creation of our first parents, God set a new standard for life on earth: man and woman. They alone, among all the other creatures made during that time, were in God’s image. They were not evolved apes. As human beings, they and we are radically different from all of the other life forms on earth, and any theology that lessens this difference degrades humanity.

God “called their name Adam” (*Gen. 5:2*). That is, both of them, male and female, though different and distinct beings, were still one. Together, in their fullness and completeness, they represented the image of God.

The nature of God’s image is wholistic: “When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his *physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker*.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15. (Italics supplied.)

The word for “image” in Hebrew is *tselem*; the word for “likeness” is *demuth*. These words can connote the physical (*tselem*) and the inward (*demuth*), which includes the spiritual and mental aspects of humanity. Ellen G. White recognizes this when she says man was made in God’s image, “both in outward resemblance and in character.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

Deuteronomy 6:5 mentions the various dimensions of the human being: soul (spiritual), heart (mind, mental), and strength (physical body). There is a similar pattern in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. A human being made in God’s image would naturally include all of these dimensions.

Though there’s much more to this idea of being made in “the image of God,” the Bible is clear: human beings are a distinct and unique creation here on earth. No other creature comes close. Why is it important for us to always keep this distinction in mind?

The Fall and Its Aftermath

The Bible does not say how long a period of time existed between the finished Creation and the Fall. Days, weeks, years, we just don't know.

What we do know, however, was that there was a Fall, and the consequences were immediate and apparent.

The first mentioned result of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was their sudden realization of their nakedness (*Gen. 3:7*). They sought to cover themselves from the presence of God. Their robes of light now disappeared. (See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 57.) Their intimacy with God was disrupted because of their newly discovered intimacy with the self-centeredness of evil. God then sought to educate the first couple in regard to the consequences that their sin had created for them.

Read the following texts and identify the immediate consequences of Adam and Eve's sin as seen in each passage. Also, how are these same consequences manifested today?

Gen. 3:8–10 _____

Gen. 3:12 _____

Gen. 3:13 _____

Gen. 3:16 _____

Gen. 3:17–19 _____

No question, the Fall was real. The Fall was hard, and the Fall was terribly consequential for our race. The long, sad story of human history, right up to current events, reveals the tragic consequences of sin.

How thankful we can be, then, for the promise that one day the tragedy of sin is going to be over and done and never repeated.

What are ways that we, every day, live with the consequences of our own sins?

Enmity and Atonement

Read Genesis 3:14, 15. What does God mean when He says to Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers” (*Gen. 3:15, NIV*)? What hope can we find here for ourselves?

The word *enmity* in Hebrew shares its root with the Hebrew word *hate* and the word *enemy*. By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the couple placed themselves and all humanity at enmity with God (*see Rom. 5:10, Col. 1:21, James 4:4*). God’s promise here implies that God would set in motion His plan to draw humanity back to Himself, thus shifting their enmity to Satan. Thus, by shifting the enmity from Himself to Satan, God would establish an avenue through which He could save humanity while, at the same time, not violating the principles of His divine government. This is what is known in the original sense as “atonement,” what God has done and is doing in order to ultimately restore what had been lost in the Fall.

What do the following texts reveal about atonement? *Lev. 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 John 1:9.*

Theologians sometimes use the word *expiation* to talk about how this atonement works. The Latin root, *expiare*, means “to atone for,” and the idea involves reparation for a wrong deed. Someone did something wrong, he or she violated a law, and justice demands a penalty to pay for that wrong. In English, it is sometimes said that the guilty person owes a “debt to society” because of what he or she did.

In our situation we sinned, but in the plan of salvation, the atonement, Christ’s sacrificial death, relieves us from the *legal* consequences of that wrongdoing. Instead, Christ Himself paid the penalty for us. The punishment that legally (yes, God’s government has laws) should have been ours was given to Jesus instead. That way, the demands of justice were met, but they were met in Jesus instead of us. Though we are sinners, though we have done wrong, we are pardoned, forgiven, and justified in His sight. This is the crucial and foundational step in the “restoration of all things” (*Acts 3:21, NKJV*).

Restoration in Jesus

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19, NKJV).

We were originally created as perfect and complete beings in a perfect and complete world. Unfortunately, this pre-Fall paradise was lost through sin, and the world as we know it is filled with death, violence, suffering, fear, and ignorance. The plan of salvation was created in order to bring this world back to its original perfection. Christ came in order to regain what was lost in the Fall.

“In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man. To bring him back to the perfection in which he was first created is the great object of life—the object that underlies every other.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595. Though this restoration won’t be completed until the new heavens and the new earth, the process already has begun in us now!

Read Galatians 4:19. Whatever his immediate concerns, what important spiritual point is Paul making here?

In Hebrews 1:3 Christ Himself is presented as the image of God—“the express image of His person” (NKJV). (Compare with *John 14:9*, *2 Cor. 4:4*, *Col. 1:15*.) He desires to unite with us in order to restore God’s image in us. If we consent, Christ, who is the image of God, can be in us: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (*Col. 1:27, NKJV*).

The ultimate experience of being restored in His image will occur at Jesus’ second coming (see *1 Cor. 15:49*, *1 John 3:2*). However, when Christ is in us, and we in Christ, the process of being restored in God’s image begins on this side of heaven. When that happens, we will long to bring those in our community to the One who can restore them as well.

Though the work begins now in us, to restore us, why must we always remember that restoration won’t be totally complete until the second coming of Jesus?

The Restoring Role of the Church

As we have seen, our world, though created perfect, had fallen, with devastating results. But God had not abandoned us to what would have been our fate, eternal destruction (the fate that science says awaits us). Instead, even before the world began, the plan of salvation was formulated (*see 1 Pet. 1:2*), and at great personal cost to Himself, Jesus came to this world, suffered on the cross, and promises to return. And by the time everything is over and sin is destroyed, the world that had been lost will be fully restored.

What's amazing, though, is that God calls us, His church, even now, to have a part to play working toward this restoration.

Read in Mark 2:1–12 the story of how some friends persistently worked together to bring a paralytic to Jesus. How does this story illustrate the role of the church in healing and restoring people?

The house was crowded because Jesus was there. His love for people drew crowds. The four men made a very large hole in the roof in order to bring the spiritually, mentally, and physically sick man to Jesus. Then Jesus restored him by forgiving his sins, giving him peace of mind, and commanding him to get up and walk. Jesus demonstrated that no one is really healed unless he or she is wholistically restored.

How did the apostle John describe the reason Christ appeared on this earth? What hope can we draw from these promises? *Read John 10:10, 1 John 3:8.*

It has been said that John 10:10 is the Seventh-day Adventist message in a nutshell. It was clearly Christ's mission statement. A major role for Christ's body, His church, is to follow in His footsteps and undo the work of the devil by replacing death with abundant life (*see Acts 10:38, 1 John 2:6*). The church is called to partner with Christ in moving people toward being restored in God's image—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Who are people in need of your help right now, help that you are especially equipped to give?

Further Thought: See other passages on restoring God’s image: Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15, 3:9–11, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 5:17. Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” “The Temptation and Fall,” and “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 44–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

As a people, we have been called by God to work for others, for the good of others, to seek to point others to the promises of hope and restoration that we have been given in Jesus. There are different ways the Lord can work through us to do this. Some churches provide physical restoration to the people in their community with health programs and services. Also, the church’s system of hospitals and clinics works toward this same goal. Mental restoration and enrichment can take place through classes that equip community members to meet their life needs. Churches also may establish or improve local schools, teach job skills, provide literacy education, tutoring, mentoring, and psychological counseling, and so on. As they continue their quest for restoration and an abundant life, many people in the community will realize that they need spiritual and moral restoration too, even though they didn’t originally think so. In fact, this is a key facet of restoration to God’s image (see *Eph. 4:22–24*). The church is uniquely positioned and equipped to meet these spiritual needs, better than any secular social or health organization.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Give examples of what your church is already doing toward the physical, mental, and spiritual restoration of the people in your community. What is your church doing in this area? Share with your class your ideas for expanding your church’s restorative ministries in your community.
- 2 How do we understand this idea of physical restoration? After all, no matter what we do to help others regain their health, unless the Lord comes back in their lifetime, most will eventually succumb to disease and the ravages of old age. Why is this more proof that full restoration can come only after Jesus returns?
- 3 Discuss the idea of what it means to start being restored into God’s image now. How does that work? How can we know whether we are making progress? Why must we have a clear picture of God in order for that restoration to happen? How can we learn not to give up in discouragement if we don’t see the progress that we think we ought to have?

Dismissed but Determined: Part 1

by ISAIAH MALEK GARANG, South Sudan

The visiting Anglican archbishop barely looked at the priest kneeling before him as he dipped his finger into a bowl of ash and painted a small cross on the priest's forehead. It was Ash Wednesday, and we felt honored to have such a high church official visiting southern Sudan. But when my turn came to step forward and kneel, I did not go forward. My fellow priests urged me to kneel and receive the cross, but I refused. In all my years as a priest in Sudan, I had never found a reference to such a service in the Bible. And if it was not in the Bible, I felt I should not take part.

The archbishop reported my actions to the church, which took swift action. Within two days, another priest and I were dismissed from our positions for refusing the ashen cross. Ten years of dedicated service to the church were as dust beneath our feet. The elders of the 17 churches I had overseen were called in and questioned. Any of them deemed loyal to me were relieved of their church duties. Before the dust settled, 82 people—from church leaders to innocent members—had been dismissed from church office or membership.

I was deeply shaken. *What did I do that was such a threat to my church?* I wondered. I was forbidden even to enter the church I had so recently led. Some church members feared that if they were seen speaking to me, they too would be dismissed. But in time, I heard that others were unhappy about what had happened.

I needed to know the truth about God, the truth that had resulted in my dismissal. I spent hours a day studying the Bible, searching to know God's truth. Sometime later, Solomon, a distant cousin, came to visit my family. Conversation turned to spiritual matters, and I asked him about his beliefs. Solomon told me that he was a Seventh-day Adventist. Later, I mulled over what Solomon had said about the Sabbath.

I had heard of Sabbath keepers before, but I thought that they were like Jews and did not believe in Jesus. I remembered that while studying in the seminary I had asked the priest why the holy day had been changed from Saturday to Sunday. But he could not give me a satisfactory answer. Some said Jesus had made the change; others said that it was changed to honor Jesus, who rose from the dead on Sunday. These answers left me unsatisfied.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.