

Christ's Other Sheep



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 10:16; John 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 14:1-12.*

Memory Text: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (*John 10:16, NIV*).

However committed we should be to our message, we mustn't read more into it than is there, such as the belief that we alone as Seventh-day Adventists are saved. That view has not, nor has ever been, the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: “We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.”—*General Conference Working Policy* (1999–2000), p. 494, Policy O 100, art. 1. The question for us this week is How should we relate to these other Christians, those who, for all we know, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ?

The Week at a Glance: If you don't have to be an Adventist to be saved, why should we seek to reach other Christians with our beliefs? What advantages does our faith give us over those who might be Christians but in another denomination? How should we relate to other Christians?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.*

Other Sheep

Read John 10:16. What point was Jesus making here? (Keep in mind to whom He was speaking.) What principle can we, today, pull from His words, especially in the basic context of this week’s lesson?

For any of us to proclaim dogmatically who is or is not saved is to play God. It is to take prerogatives that belong only to Him. The Lord alone knows the heart; the Lord alone can judge motives; the Lord alone knows those who are His. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are called to preach our message to the world; we are not called to pass judgment upon who is or is not saved.

“God has children, many of them, in the Protestant churches, and a large number in the Catholic churches, who are more true to obey the light and to do [to] the very best of their knowledge than a large number among Sabbathkeeping Adventists who do not walk in the light.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 386.

What are the following texts saying that help reinforce the point the Lord made in John 10:16?

Mark 9:38-40

Acts 10:35

2 Tim. 2:19

The fact is that, all over the world, the Lord has His faithful people, those who are living in accordance with all the light they have. Our job, in a sense, is to give them more light, to lead them into light that points more directly to Jesus Christ and the events surrounding His return. All people, no matter of what faith, need to hear what we have to say. How people respond is, basically, between them and God. All we can do is preach, teach, and reveal to people in our lives the love and grace of God.

If you don’t have to be an Adventist to be saved, then what’s the purpose of trying to evangelize? Keep in mind Revelation 14:12 as you answer.

Key Text: *John 10:16.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand that God has faithful people in other religions who are living up to all the light they have been given.
2. To reveal the importance of reaching out to others with the gospel message.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Other Sheep and Present Truth.

- A. Our commission is not to judge but to share the gospel.
- B. Only the Lord knows the heart.
- C. Seventh-day Adventists are not the only ones who will be saved.
- D. Our task is to share present truth with the world.
- E. The Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of Revelation 14 presents a unique message that no other denomination is preaching.

II. The Adventist Difference.

- A. The Advent message unveils the great controversy and where we are in history.
- B. The Advent message contains many vital truths, not the least of which includes light on the Sabbath, tithing, the state of the dead, earth's final events, the health message, the sanctuary, the judgment, and, most importantly, the grace of Christ.

III. Loving Those Other Sheep.

- A. Love knows no boundaries.
- B. We are to reach out lovingly to members of other denominations.
- C. Seventh-day Adventist pastors should reach out to ministers of other denominations to share the gospel.

Summary: “As an earthly shepherd knows his sheep, so does the divine Shepherd know His flock, that are scattered throughout the world. . . .

“Every soul is as fully known to Jesus as if he were the only one for whom the Saviour died.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 479, 480.

COMMENTARY

I. Present Truth.

What is it that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other Christians? Does it involve something specific to the seventh-day Sabbath, state of the dead, or vegetarianism, to name some well-known examples?

The answer to that would be a clear and definite Yes or No. All of these things do indeed distinguish (some) Seventh-day

Present Truth

How did you answer the last question in Sunday’s study? If you don’t have to be an Adventist to be saved, then why should we bother even trying to witness to Christians of other denominations? After all, salvation comes only from Jesus Christ and what He did for humanity at the Cross; it doesn’t come from joining any particular religious community, including our own. Thus, why bother witnessing to Christians in churches other than our own?

Read 2 Peter 1:12. What insights does that, though expressed in a context different from ours today, give us regarding our Seventh-day Adventist message and the need for us to spread it around the world?

The fact remains that no one else is preaching what we as Seventh-day Adventists are preaching. And this point becomes important, especially in the context of the last days, when the whole world is to be divided into those who fit the description in Revelation 14:12 and those who don’t.

Read Revelation 14:1-12. What’s at stake here?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been called to preach to everyone the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. Christ’s other sheep need to know the things we know; they need to understand how the deep issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan are going to be manifested at the close of time. We have been called to point these people not only to the texts that make prominent the “faith of Jesus” but to the “commandments of God,” with the special emphasis on the fourth commandment. Again, because we don’t know the hearts of anyone, we must tell everyone—“faithful Christians” in other denominations—the present-truth message as found in Revelation 14. They need to know what we know, especially as we near the closing crisis.

Read Revelation 18:4. Whom is the Lord calling out of Babylon, and why? How does this text help us better understand how we are to relate to faithful Christians of other denominations?

Adventists from people of other denominations, but in every instance one can find non-Adventists who practice or believe one or more of these things. So one would have to say that while these things may be important, it is not any one of them that definitively distinguishes Seventh-day Adventism.

What makes Seventh-day Adventists different from others who may or may not accept some or all of these practices/beliefs is the claim of *present truth* that Seventh-day Adventism holds as the last-day remnant church. We must therefore ask ourselves what present truth, or Present Truth, is and how it differs—if in fact it does—from *past truth*.

Does the idea of present truth imply some form of relativism? In other words, does it mean that what is true today might not have been true yesterday and might well not be true tomorrow? Could someone come forward with some truth that appears to contradict what we thought was truth yesterday?

The answer is a definite No—or Yes. Truth does not change in the sense that what is truth today does not flatly—or subtly, for that matter—contradict what was legitimately true yesterday. But on the other hand, our understanding of truth may—individually or collectively—be progressive. It may even show what we thought was truth previously to be false or mistaken. If you don't believe it, observe how many people, with quite convincing passion, still insist that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.

We can know the difference in the usual, nonesoteric way: study, prayer, and time with God. The truth does indeed set one free.

II. Useful Quotes on Present Truth.

“ ‘God has called His church in this day, as He called ancient Israel, to stand as a light in the earth. By the mighty cleaver of truth, the messages of the first, second and third angels [of Revelation 14], He has separated them from the churches and from the world to bring them into a sacred nearness to Himself. He has made them the depositories of His law, and has committed to them the great truths of prophecy for this time. Like the holy oracles committed to ancient Israel, these are a sacred trust to be communicated to the world.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 50, cited in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 580.

“There are many precious truths contained in the Word of God, but it is ‘present truth’ that the flock needs now. I have seen the danger of the messengers running off from the important points of present truth, to dwell upon subjects that are not calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 63.

“The revealed truths of former times were of divine origin, and were sufficient for the time in which they were given. But the new historical context, in which the Messiah had fulfilled his mission on

The Adventist Difference: Part 1

However important the issues surrounding the mark of the beast (as depicted in Revelation 14), our message isn't just limited to warnings about end-time persecution. There's so much we have been given that can be a blessing in a very practical and personal way now. That's why we must share it, even with Christians of other denominations.

Below are some texts that are tied in with our message. Write down some of the benefits we have, here and now, from understanding these important truths:

Exod. 20:8-11

Eccles. 9:10

Mal. 3:8-10

Rom. 8:34; Heb. 8:1, 2

1 Cor. 6:19

Though, of course, some of these truths are understood, to some degree, by various Christians, we alone have them tied nicely into a complete package. And, indeed, these special *Adventist* truths don't depict mere marginal differences with other Christians. They represent important biblical concepts, and people who do not know about them miss out on something that can make a major difference in their Christian experience. The Adventist message helps us to know where we are in human history. It unveils the great-controversy perspective, which shows us the larger picture of what God is doing for our rebellious planet. It tells us about the ongoing heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ and the hope He presents for us as erring sinners.

The Adventist message also helps us to follow through on our commitment to Christ in very concrete ways: in finding physical and spiritual rest on God's holy day, in living a life of faithful stewardship of all that has been entrusted to us, and in learning how to take care of our bodies while we're still in this mortal clay.

If asked by a Christian of another denomination how the Adventist faith is different from what most other evangelical Christians believe, what would you say?

earth and had ascended to heaven, made it vitally important to be ‘established’ in this additional truth. Former truth was no longer sufficient. The expression ‘present truth’ implies truth that is peculiarly appropriate in the present historical situation.

“In a similar sense, Seventh-day Adventists sometimes refer to the three angels’ messages (Rev. 14:6-12) as ‘present truth,’ thereby characterizing them as God’s appointed message for the last days, immediately prior to the second coming of Christ.”—“Present Truth,”

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Luke 6:37, 12:48, Acts 4:8-13, Acts 10, 11, Romans 3:27, Philippians 1:15-18.*

- 1 Officially, the Seventh-day Adventist Church always has recognized that other Christian denominations have some valuable things to offer. Discuss whether or not the recognition that other Christians have something of value to contribute causes the unique Seventh-day Adventist message to be devalued.
- 2 While we are told not to judge others, we have a nearly irresistible tendency to do so. Discuss if it is ever proper to draw conclusions about another person’s spiritual state.
- 3 Some people choose to remain ignorant about God’s salvation. What are the consequences of willful ignorance? What benefits does a person gain from receiving as full a knowledge of God as possible even in this present age?
- 4 Religion has been responsible for conflicts between groups of people. Discuss how Christians might contribute to such conflicts.
- 5 How can we develop the ability to discern other’s needs without feeling superior to them? Why do we not have the right to feel superior?
- 6 It is natural for people who share the same religious beliefs to associate with one another. Why is it healthy to do so? In light of this week’s lesson, when do such associations become elitist?
- 7 In the world of the apostles, why were Jews and Gentiles estranged? What cultural groups are estranged today, and why? What implications does such alienation have regarding the spread of the gospel? What principles do we find in the story of Cornelius’s conversion that can help us with the issues that arise from converting estranged groups of people?

The Adventist Difference: Part 2

Just because someone is a Christian doesn't mean there's no more truth for him or her to learn. On the contrary. Many of Paul's letters were written to Christians, often on the assumption that these people already knew the Lord and were already in the faith. Indeed, most of the New Testament was written to those already in the faith. Nevertheless, that didn't stop Paul (and the others) from giving the churches more light.

Read **Romans 1:1-7, Galatians 1:1-5, Ephesians 1:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.** How do these texts help affirm the above paragraph?

As we relate to other Christians, we must remember: The issue isn't that we judge who's saved and who isn't (remember the Ellen White quote in Sunday's section); rather, the issue is, Do we have something to say, not just to the world at large but to other Christians? The answer, of course, is that we most definitely do.

For instance, millions of Christians believe the dead go right to heaven or right to hell immediately at death. Others believe in purgatory, where the dead are purged from worldliness before entering into heaven. Most of these people have no protection, therefore, against spiritualism of any kind, and who knows how many fear that right now some loved ones are suffering the flames of eternal torment?

Others believe final events will unfold with a massive Mideast war, in which some future antichrist power will make a pact with the Jews in Israel, an event that will begin a seven-year tribulation period, before which all true Christians are taken to heaven. Most who believe this way have no concept as to how final events regarding Rome, America, and the issue of the Sabbath will unfold.

All over the world, many Christians have no knowledge of health principles; thus, they eat, drink, and live like so much of the non-Christian world.

Millions of others believe salvation can be found in Jesus only through the mediation of their church body and that they must perform various works in order for the merits of Christ to be applied to them.

Most of the Christian world totally ignore not just the seventh-day Sabbath but the whole concept of a serious rest day. Not only do they miss out on the spiritual blessings of the Sabbath but they also miss out on the physical renewal that Sabbath keeping offers.

What other things do we as Seventh-day Adventists teach that could be a blessing, even now, to other Christians?

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1996), vol. 2, p. 381.

“People have always asked the same basic question. What is the meaning of the world and our lives in it?”

“Christians claim that the faith of the Bible gives true and satisfying answers to this question and the many that flow from it. Christianity is not just true in what it teaches about God and salvation. It is also true to the way things are.”—*Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief*, p. 38.

“We should . . . keep in mind that new truth does not invalidate established truth. What it does is add new dimensions and luster.”—B. B. Beach and John Graz, *101 Questions Adventists Ask* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2000), p. 33.

III. The Bible on Present Truth.

“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have” (*2 Pet. 1:12, NIV*).

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (*Isa. 8:19, NIV*).

Witnessing

Cornelius, a Roman officer, was a God-fearing man. He and his household regularly prayed to God and helped those in need. But Cornelius did not know all there was to know about salvation until the angel of the Lord led him to Peter. After meeting Cornelius and learning that he was an upright man, Peter proclaimed, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him” (*Acts 10:34, 35*).

Peter then shared the full gospel story with Cornelius and those of his household. Once Cornelius heard the words of Peter, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius. There were other non-Jews present who also received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jews had on the Day of Pentecost.

There are many Christians of other denominations who love and serve the Lord. They may not yet know or understand the gospel in its fullness, but they live according to what they do know. The Holy Spirit patiently works with them, leading them to know His complete will. Those who are sincere will in time come to a full acceptance of the truth. Discuss ways we can be a light to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not from our fold. Why is it so important for us to live by the truth, in addition to knowing it?

Love One Another

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34, 35).

Read the above quote, the words of Jesus. How are all to know who are Christ’s disciples? How well have His disciples followed that command?

There’s no question: Christians are to show their love to one another. Sadly, that has hardly been the case. History is filled with examples not just of hatred between different churches but of violence, as well.

Whatever the immediate context of Christ’s words, we can hardly believe they meant we were to love only those of our own denomination, whatever that denomination or church body happens to be. Love should know no denominational boundaries and certainly not be limited only to those who know the truth. Indeed, there’s no more powerful witness for truth than the love compelled and generated by that truth.

Of course, loving someone isn’t the same as agreeing to his or her beliefs; rather, it’s acknowledging the value of this person in the sight of God and the commonality we have as followers of Jesus, however different our expressions might at the present time be.

As Seventh-day Adventists, with the understanding we have been given of God’s love for us, particularly as revealed in the context of present truth, we should be the most loving of all Christians. And that’s because to whom much has been given much is expected, and because we have been given much, we should give much, not just to the world at large but to our brothers and sisters in other churches, as well. And nothing we can give means anything without love.

Examine your own relationship with Christians in other churches. Do you look down on them? Do you see anything in them that you could learn from them? Do you feel a need to tell them what we know? Based on what we’ve studied this week, what changes, if any, in your attitude toward them should you make?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The blue-footed booby nests on the ground on various islands in the Pacific Ocean. The mother booby forms a ring of droppings around the nest to define the boundaries of her responsibility. Any chick outside the ring is an outsider and is considered to be another mother's responsibility. When food gets scarce, the largest chick often pushes the weaker chicks out of the nest. The outsiders die of starvation. (See James A. and Priscilla Tucker, *Glimpses of God's Love*, vol. 3, July 7.)

Church members who make the family of faith unpleasant are like the selfish booby chick. How can Adventist Christians provide a nurturing nesting place for Christians of other faiths?

Thought Questions:

- ① Every member is to be a shepherd (*Matt. 28:19, 20; John 21:16, 17*). Yet, Jesus also calls us His sheep. How can *sheep* also be *shepherds*?
- ② Based on the duties of a shepherd and the characteristics of sheep, what level of care is needed for a church to be a safe haven?
- ③ What other things besides shepherd and sheep can we use to describe the task of those who “go” (*Matt. 28:19, 20*)?

Application Questions:

- ① How can Adventist Christians maintain their dress code without condemning the dress code of other Christians?
- ② When should an Adventist Christian go beyond modeling Christian dress to a more pointed teaching of Christ's standards?
- ③ It is relatively nonthreatening for Adventists to dialogue with other Christians about outlandish styles of dress on which most Christians agree. However, what guidelines can you list to guide Adventists in honestly conversing about more controversial topics, such as entertainment, diet, and doctrine?
- ④ As Adventists, we are especially mindful of the significance of the times in which we live. How should this awareness affect the encounters we have with people as we travel, take part in community events, sports gatherings, etc.? What differences should there be in our approach and content between long-term relationships and one-time or chance encounters with other Christians?

Further Study: Ellen G. White has a lot to say about our attitude to other Christians. See, for instance, *Evangelism*, section 17, “Laboring for Special Classes,” pp. 552–586.

“Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ’s messengers, we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 78.

“You may have opportunity to speak in other churches. In improving these opportunities, remember the words of the Saviour, ‘Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.’ Do not arouse the malignity of the enemy by making denunciatory speeches. Thus you will close doors against the entrance of truth. Clear-cut messages are to be borne. But guard against arousing antagonism. There are many souls to be saved. Restrain all harsh expressions. In word and deed be wise unto salvation, representing Christ to all with whom you come in contact. Let all see that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and good will to men. Wonderful are the results we shall see if we enter into the work imbued with the Spirit of Christ. Help will come in our necessity if we carry the work forward in righteousness, mercy, and love. Truth will triumph, and bear away the victory.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 563, 564.

Discussion Questions:

- ① **Imagine that you are given the pulpit in another church; it will be your only opportunity to preach there. What would you say, what wouldn’t you say, and why?**
- ② **Is it wrong to worship with Christians in their church on Sunday, or not? Justify your answer.**

Summary: All our relationships with other Christians should be marked by warm respect for them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. But, at the same time, we must also be sure of our reason for existence as Seventh-day Adventists, and we must be ready, when the right opportunity arises, to tell them the things we believe that they need to know. And, just as important, they need to see in our lives the reality of our experience with Christ, a reality that will be manifested by our unconditional love.