

The Right Use of Power in the Church



SABBATH—DECEMBER 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 5:23–27; Matthew 20:25–28; 2 Timothy 2:15; Matthew 16:19; Galatians 6:1, 2; Matthew 28:18–20.

MEMORY VERSE: “It must not be that way with you. But whoever wants to be great [important] among you, let him care for you. Whoever wants to be first among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26, 27, NLV).

WE ARE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS. We believe that God saves us only by our faith in the things that Jesus did for all humans. We do not need a church or a group of religious leaders to help give us the things that Jesus did for us. What we need, we get from Jesus. He is our High Priest. A high priest is a religious leader who works to save his people. Jesus works as our High Priest in heaven's sanctuary. Heaven's sanctuary is the place in heaven where Jesus works right now to save us.

Yes, we do not need a church to give us the things Jesus did for us. But God made the church. God put the church on earth for us to help us show everyone His saving plan. Jesus made the church to do the work of sharing the Good News with everyone on earth. So, the church is important because it helps us to do God's work. The church also brings us all together in unity. Unity is agreement. Jesus joins believers as one in heart, mind, and the truth.

This week, we study why the church is important to the work that God gave His followers to do. We also will look at how the church brings all believers together in unity.



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JESUS IS THE LEADER OF THE CHURCH (Ephesians 5:23–27)

We learned in an earlier lesson that the Bible uses the word picture of the “body” to show us the church. The church is the “body” of Jesus. This word picture helps us see several different parts of the church and the connection between Jesus and His people. The church depends on Jesus for its life. He is the “Head [Leader]” of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22). Jesus gives life to the church. If we do not have Jesus, there is no church.

Jesus also gives the church its identity. Our identity is our understanding of who we are as a church. Jesus gave the church its truth and its teachings. Yes, these teachings are important. But the church gives us more than teachings. What decides who and what the church is? The answer is Jesus and the Bible. So, we can learn more about the church and what it means from Jesus and the Bible.

In Ephesians 5:23–27, Paul talks about the connection between Jesus and His church. Paul uses this connection to show how a husband and wife should love each other. What does Paul in these verses tell us about the connection between Jesus and His church and the closeness that Jesus wants to have with His followers?



The church is the “body” of Jesus. He is the “Head [Leader]” of the church. Jesus gives life to the church. Without Jesus, there is no church.

We must accept Jesus’ control over our lives. Some people may have a problem with giving control to anyone because they do not like how some leaders acted in the past. Those leaders did not use their power in the right way. But the church is under Jesus, who is loving and the church’s Leader. Our loyalty belongs to Jesus and to no one else. God has given the church power, but Jesus always must control that power. He is the true Leader of our church.

“The church is built on Jesus. It must obey Him. He is its Leader. The church must not depend on humans or be under human control. Many people say that their work in the church gives them the power to decide what other people shall believe and what they shall do. But God does not accept that wrong use of power. Jesus says, ‘You are all brothers.’ Everyone in the church can behave in wrong ways and make mistakes. So, we should not depend on any human to guide us. Jesus is our Rock of faith. The weakest believer may depend on Him. The members who think they are strong must depend on Him, or they will become weak.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 414, adapted.

SERVANT LEADERS (Matthew 20:25–28)

During His time on earth, Jesus no doubt felt sad because His followers wished to have power. Jesus' followers wanted to become powerful leaders in Jesus' kingdom (Mark 9:33, 34; Luke 9:46). When Jesus' followers ate the Last Supper together, many of them were filled with the wish to control each other and to be number one (Luke 22:24).

Jesus shared His thoughts about how a spiritual leader should behave with God's people. What important rule in Matthew 20:25–28 do we learn from Jesus about how to be a good leader? How can we make this rule an important part of our lives? How can we follow this rule in our churches?

"In these verses, Jesus shows us two examples of power. The first is the Roman idea of power. In the example of Roman power, the rulers can boss everyone around. The rulers have the power to make decisions. They expect everyone to follow what they say. Jesus clearly does not like this example of power. He tells His followers, 'Do not let things be that way with you.' Then Jesus shows His followers a new example to follow. This example of power was so different from what His followers saw every day." —Darius Jankiewicz, "Serving Like [the same as] Jesus: Authority [power] in God's Church," *Adventist Review*, March 13, 2014, page 18, adapted.

In the story about the right way to use power, Jesus uses two important Greek words: "diakonos," which means "servant," and "doulos," which means "slave." In some Bible translations, the word "diakonos" is written as "leader" (Matthew 20:26, ERV). The word "doulos" is often written as "servant" or "slave" (Matthew 20:26, 27, ERV). Written that way in English, both words lose much of their meaning. Jesus did not want to stop all power. No. Jesus wanted to make it clear that church leaders must first act as servants and slaves to God's people. Church leaders must not try to control God's people or boss them around. They must not try to be famous or important in other people's eyes. "Jesus started His kingdom on different rules. He chose men to serve other people, not control them. He chose the strong to help the weak."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 550, adapted.



"Jesus chose the strong to help the weak."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 550, adapted.

THE SECRET TO LASTING PEACE IN THE CHURCH (2 Timothy 2:15)

In 2 Timothy 2:15 and Titus 1:9, Paul gives advice to both Timothy and Titus about what church leaders should do. What does Paul say about loyal church leaders and their work?

Do you see that Paul feels we must protect church teachings and beliefs? That is because our teachings are very important for our unity. Unity is agreement in mind, spirit, and the truth. Our teachings join us as one church. Our church is made of many different groups of people. So, we must find our agreement in something that joins us as one in Jesus. Our unity comes from the truth that Jesus gives our church. What happens if we get confused about our teachings? Then we will argue and separate from each other. That will happen more and more as we near the end of time.

“These words are from my heart to you. I say this before [in front of] God and Jesus Christ. Some day He will judge those who are living [all who are alive] and those [people] who are dead. It will be when Christ comes to bring [get] His holy nation. Preach the Word of God. Preach it when it is easy and people want to listen and when it is hard [also] and people do not want to listen. Preach it all the time. Use the Word of God [the Bible] to show people they are wrong. Use the Word of God to help them do right. You must be willing to wait for people to understand what you teach as [when] you teach them. The time will come [one day] when people will not listen to the truth. They will look for teachers who will tell them only what they want to hear. They will not listen to the truth. Instead, they will listen to stories made up by men” (2 Timothy 4:1–4, NLV).

These words are Paul’s advice to Timothy about what Timothy should do to get ready for Jesus to come back. Paul warns that false teachings will be everywhere in the end time. So, Timothy should preach the truth. That is the work that God gave to Timothy.

As part of that work, Timothy should invite, teach, and encourage believers. The Bible itself guides us in the same way (2 Timothy 3:16). Timothy must follow Bible truth and teach it to other people. He must be patient and show love to people when he does this work. Our scolding sinners does not often bring them to Jesus. With the Holy Spirit’s help, Timothy’s work will join the church as one in Jesus.



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LEADERS MUST TRAIN MEMBERS TO DO RIGHT (Matthew 16:19)

One of the important jobs that church leaders must do is to teach believers to do what is right and to punish wrong behavior. We must be careful how we talk about this important subject, because members easily can misunderstand it. The important work of teaching and punishment helps the church to stay in unity. Unity, as we have learned, is agreement in mind, spirit, and in Bible truth. The Bible shows us that leaders in the church teach and punish members for two important reasons: (1) to protect the truth and (2) to protect the church.

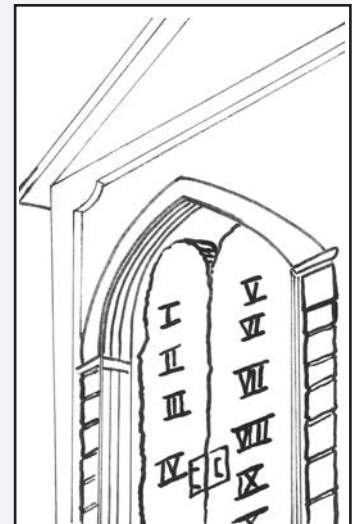
As we saw already, the New Testament writers talk about how important it is to protect our Bible teachings any time false teachings attack the truth. It also is important to protect the church from bad behavior, lies, and sex that breaks God's law. God gave us the Bible to protect us from false teachings and bad behavior. That is why Paul says that the Bible is "useful for teaching and for showing people what is wrong in their lives. It is useful for fixing faults and teaching the right way to live" (2 Timothy 3:16, ERV).

In Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus gives the church some important rules to follow when its leaders must punish members for doing wrong. What are these rules?

The Bible supports the idea of punishment when needed. The Bible also says that we are responsible to each other in our spiritual lives. That means that we choose to do what is right and live holy lives. We know that our behavior can change other people's lives. What is one of the things that makes the church different from other groups on the earth? Its members separate themselves from the way of life lived by people who do not know or obey God. The lives of Christians look different from the lives of other people. In the New Testament, we find examples of how the church had to punish sin and bad behavior in the church. We must continue to honor God's law in the church.

Matthew 7:1–5 and Galatians 6:1, 2 talk about important rules that we must follow when we try to solve difficult problems in the church. What are these rules?

When we punish members, we need to be loving and kind.



We must continue to honor God's law in the church.

OUR WORK FOR GOD TODAY (Matthew 28:18–20)

In our lesson study this quarter, we learned again and again that Jesus started our church and joined us as one in Him to do His work. We are not just a social club for people who want to spend time together talking about the truth that we love (but that can be an important thing to do too). The real reason God brought us together as a church was for us to share with everyone on the earth the truth for the end time.

In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus gave His followers final commands to follow in the work that He gave them to do on this earth. What are the important words in Jesus’ command? What do these words tell the church today?

Jesus’ command to His followers includes four important verbs: (1) go, (2) make followers, (3) baptize, and (4) teach. In the Greek language, the most important verb is “to make followers.” The other three verbs tell us how we can make followers. We make new followers for Jesus when we go to all the countries and people on the earth and preach the Good News to them, baptize them, and teach them to do the things that Jesus did.

When we do this work, God’s kingdom gets bigger. More and more people from all over the earth accept Jesus as their Savior. They obey Jesus’ command to be baptized. They follow His teachings. These new members become part of God’s worldwide family. Jesus’ new followers are safe in knowing that Jesus is with them every day as they make new followers for Him. They have the promise that Jesus and God the Father will be with them. The book of Matthew starts with the announcement that the birth of Jesus means that “ ‘God [is] with us’ ” (Matthew 1:23, NLV). The book of Matthew ends with Jesus’ promise to His followers that He always will be with them until He comes back again at the Second Coming.

“Jesus does not tell His followers that their work will be easy. . . . But He promises them that He will be with them. If they will follow Jesus in faith, then God Himself will protect them. Jesus tells His followers to be brave. . . . He will give them everything they need to do their work. He will make sure the work is a success. As long as His followers obey His word and work with Him, then Jesus’ followers cannot fail.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 29, adapted.



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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Individual [personal] Responsibility [the things God gives us to take care of] and Christian Unity [agreement],” pages 485–505, in *Testimonies [messages] to Ministers [pastors] and Gospel [Good News] Workers*; “Unity [agreement] in [among] Diversity [differences],” pages 483–485, and “Church Discipline [punishment for doing wrong] in *Gospel [Good News] Workers*. Read the articles “Church,” pages 707–710, and “Church Organization [leadership],” pages 712–714, in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*.

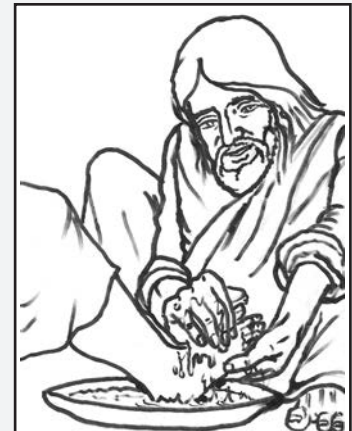
“The leader in the church must do more than any normal leader does. The church leader also must be a servant.

“But how can a person lead and serve at the same time? A leader is someone that other people honor, right? A leader also is someone who commands people and expects them to obey him, yes? So, how can a leader be a servant who follows orders?

“If we want to solve this ‘puzzle,’ we must look at Jesus. Jesus showed us an important rule about leadership. He showed us how to be a leader who also serves other people. Jesus served people His whole life. At the same time, Jesus was the best leader that anyone on this earth ever saw.”—G. Arthur Keough, *Our Church Today: What It [our church] Is and [what it] Can Be* (Washington, D.C. and Nashville: Review and Herald, 1980), page 106, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think some more about the idea of a servant leader. Who is a good example of a servant leader in history or in the news today?
- ② Read Matthew 20:25–28 again. What do these verses tell us about what God thinks the word “important” (Matthew 20:26, NIV) or “great [powerful]” (Matthew 20:26, NLT) really means?
- ③ One of the jobs that church leaders must do is protect the peace and agreement in the church. What should we do when our leaders make mistakes, fail, or are not perfect examples?
- ④ Why is it important for us to show people mercy and be kind to them when we must punish them for doing wrong?



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