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The Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).
Everyone believes in something. Even those who claim to believe in nothing, or in nothing absolute, still believe in something (in this case, their relativism). Beliefs are important because they greatly impact the way in which we live. For some Christians, the feeling of belonging or a sense of community is more important than belief or behavior. Yet community must be based on shared beliefs, shared goals, and common concerns.

For Seventh-day Adventists—people from almost every conceivable manifestation of humanity—what holds us together as a community are our “fundamental beliefs,” all 28, which are foundational for growing in Christ and living as a community of faith in the light of eternity.

Some argue that what matters is our love of Christ, not doctrine. This sounds nice, but the Bible never separates a love for Christ from a love for the truth. We are told that by “speaking the truth in love,” we may grow into Christ (Eph. 4:15, 16). Knowing doctrine is not mere accumulation of correct data; rather, knowing doctrine results in love for God (2 John 6–10). Furthermore, the Bible is concerned about “sound doctrine” because, among other things, it affects the ethical life (1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Titus 2:1–5).

The 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not a creed in the sense that one could not expect any further development of the truths expressed in
them (or that even more teachings could be added). And though we must always be open to more light, a firm consensus on these beliefs is crucial to the unity and mission of the church. What else has brought together millions of people from all over the world into a unified movement other than our shared doctrines?

This quarter, then, we are going to focus on some of those teachings. Though we believe that all 28 are foundational and fundamental to our identity as Seventh-day Adventists, we cannot study them all in one quarter. But we do hope to present a systematic and coherent guide to some of these beliefs. Special attention will be given to belief number 11, “Growing in Christ,” accepted by the General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2005 (see lessons 5–7). This belief, in and of itself, didn’t add new or previously unknown teaching; rather, in response to needs in certain parts of the world, it helps to clarify the church’s understanding of God’s power to give believers in Christ victory over the forces of evil. In fact, all the lessons this quarter will be framed within the context of the struggle between Christ and those forces of evil—what we call “the great controversy.”

Within the great-controversy motif, and directly related to it, salvation in Christ is the thread that runs through all our doctrines. The great controversy, and the issues it has generated, sets the stage for the plan of redemption, which is what underlies and permeates all 28 of our fundamental beliefs.

Doctrines, then, are not an end in and of themselves. They are a means to an end, and that end is Jesus, as well as the knowing of Jesus for ourselves and our growth in Him. Or, more subjectively, all 28 of our doctrines should lead us to a deeper understanding of what Jesus has done for us through the plan of salvation; this, in turn, should lead us to a deeper love of God, to a life more committed to the revealing of that love to the world, and to “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10).

Yes, everyone believes in something. The goal of this quarter is to help us to not just believe in Truth (John 14:6), but to love Him even more and to grow in His grace.

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How to Use
This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
The Great Controversy:
The Foundation

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “‘And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’” (Genesis 3:15, NKJV).

Key Thought: The great-controversy motif is the overarching concept that gives cohesion to Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs.

Necessity,” it has been said, “is the mother of invention.” The word mother, in this case, means “the source,” “the driving force,” and “the foundation”; in other words, it’s the need, the necessity, for something that moves people to action. For instance, the need for cleaner air is the foundation, the driving force, behind the move for energy sources other than fossil fuels.

Just as with physical inventions, a belief system also needs a foundation or a principle that explains it.

Seventh-day Adventists profess a body of 28 fundamental beliefs. These beliefs have a foundation in a concept that we call the “great controversy.” Each of the 28 fundamentals deals with a particular aspect of this cosmic controversy. The beliefs that will be studied this quarter make the best sense against the backdrop of the great-controversy motif. This week we will look at some of the key points of this foundation.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 6.*
The Controversy and Its Players

All throughout recorded history, people have sensed that humanity is in some sort of battle, a war, a struggle between competing forces. The poet T. S. Eliot wrote, “In all of my years, one thing does not change. / However you disguise it, this thing does not change: / The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.”—*The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952), p. 98. However common that understanding, people have radically different views regarding what the conflict is about, who’s involved, what’s at stake, and how it is going to end. As Seventh-day Adventists, however, we have a decidedly supernaturalist perspective regarding this battle, a perspective that comes from our understanding of the Bible and how the Bible depicts what we call “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.”

**Study** Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:1–17. Who are the key players in the controversy? While symbols are sometimes used to depict the players, why do we believe that the powers described here are real, literal beings? What would happen to our whole belief system were we to spiritualize away the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and our role in it?

It is not unusual for people to use terms such as the devil, angels, or even God when they mean something very different from the meaning usually attached to those words. For example, there are some whose interest in the use of the word *God* focuses only on the function that the word performs in human language and society; they have no interest in whether “God,” in any form, exists.

Whatever the symbols used to describe them, the Bible teaches that these figures are real entities engaged in a real conflict. That’s how we, as Seventh-day Adventists, understand them. Most of the doctrines studied this quarter will not make sense if the players identified in the controversy are not taken literally, which often puts us decidedly at odds with the prevailing culture.

In fact, while secularism has taken many shapes and forms over the last two centuries, nothing characterizes secularism more than the push to eliminate all “otherworldly” language from human discourse. With the success of science, people in some cultures are more and more inclined to think about issues scientifically. Angels and demons do not fare well in the scientific mode of thinking. Hence, contemporary culture is witnessing a gradual demise of belief in the supernatural.

*How strongly is your own culture impacted by the scientific, secular worldview? How much have you been impacted by it? Against what aspects of this worldview must we particularly guard?*
Lucifer’s Fall

Although the Bible does not explicitly tell us the issues involved in the controversy between God and Satan, they can be inferred from some pertinent scriptural passages, such as Isaiah 14:4–21 and Ezekiel 28:12–19. In their original settings, these passages represented pagan kings of Tyre and Babylon; but, when read carefully, they provide details that go beyond these ancient, Near Eastern rulers. Indeed, they point to the origin, position, and fall of Satan.

In 1 Timothy 3:6, Paul warns against ordaining a new convert, cautioning that such an act might cause the person to become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. How does Paul’s statement throw light on the two passages above, and in what way do these three passages together help us to understand some issues in the controversy?

At least three issues are raised in the texts cited above: pride, autonomy, and independence. The Old Testament portrays a created, dependent being aspiring to be self-sufficient and independent. But independence is always independence from something or somebody. First John 3:8 says that the devil has sinned from the beginning; 1 John 3:4 defines sin as “lawlessness.” It follows, then, that Satan’s sin—which manifested itself as a quest for independence and autonomy—represented a desire to be freed from the “restraints” of God and His laws. Thus, by refusing to allow himself to be brought under the authority of God’s law, Satan showed that he wanted to live under a different set of conditions. This rebellion would also imply that the system of laws in heaven was not ideal, that something was, indeed, wrong with it. But because God’s law is a reflection of God’s character, a defect in the law would amount to a defect in God’s character. In short, Satan’s rebellion was as much against God Himself as it was against anything else.

*Pride, autonomy, independence.* What images do these words conjure up in your own mind? In what ways are all of us in danger of falling into the traps, which are sometimes very subtle, that pride, autonomy, and independence can set for us? After all, under the right conditions, what’s wrong with any of these concepts?
God’s Weapon

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). In what way is the great controversy revealed in this text?

The cryptic language of Genesis 3:15, in which the controversy is here predicted, gives us a hint of God’s rules of engagement in this conflict. We can see that the conflict, which had just begun on earth between the serpent and the woman, was going to take shape by involving the followers of the initial contestants: the “seed” of the woman and the “seed” of the serpent. In due course, as we know, the conflict would climax into a mortal clash between Satan and a male descendant of the woman, Jesus of Nazareth. God’s weapon of choice was Jesus, who would come to fight on behalf of the woman, suffer “bruises,” but ultimately deliver a deadly blow to the serpent. To be the weapon of choice was an act of sacrifice by Jesus, an act of selfless love.

How do the following texts help us to understand some of the issues involved in the great controversy? How is the plan of salvation central to it?

Compare Gen. 4:4 with Heb. 11:4_____________________________________

Compare Gen. 12:3, 22:18 with Gal. 3:16______________________________

Compare Exod. 25:8 with Heb. 4:2____________________________________

Compare Isa. 53:6 with Rom. 5:8______________________________________

Matt. 16:18, 18:16–20____________________________________________________________________

Heb. 8:1, 2____________________________________________________________________________
Satan’s Fight

If you looked carefully at yesterday’s study, you would have seen a progression of how God manifested Himself and His truth in the midst of the great controversy. God worked through the patriarchal and Israelite sanctuary services, through Christ’s sacrificial atoning death, through the church, and through Christ’s own ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Satan, however, has worked tirelessly to try to undermine the Lord’s plans. So much of the great controversy has been, and is now, fought over these very issues.

For instance, the sacrificial system practiced by the patriarchs, and in Israel’s sanctuary service, was designed by God to remind humankind of the Creator and to keep the hope of redemption alive.

How did Satan seek to usurp and destroy the truth about the plan of salvation, especially as revealed in the sacrificial system? See Rom. 1:20–28; Deut. 32:17, 18.

Of course, the incarnation of Christ, His ministry on earth, and His atoning sacrificial death on the cross were the central parts of how God chose to defeat Satan in the great controversy. The death of Christ would guarantee the undoing of Satan, who had worked tirelessly against Him.

What do these texts (Matt. 2:1–18, 4:1–11, 16:21–23, 27:39–42) tell us about the ways in which Satan worked against Jesus?

After His death and resurrection, Christ established His church on earth to proclaim to lost humanity the good news of salvation. From the inception of the church, Satan has determined to weaken and destroy it. The following passages show some of Satan’s tactics against the church (see Acts 5:17, 18; 7:54–60; 2 Thess. 2:1–4; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 12:13–17).

Meanwhile, the book of Hebrews tells of a real sanctuary in heaven where Christ entered after His ascension (Heb. 4:14–16, 9:24), performing a priestly function on behalf of sinful humanity (Heb. 7:27). In Daniel 8:11–14, we can see Satan’s activity in connection with Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and his attempt to usurp that ministry.

It’s one thing to read 1 Peter 5:8, 9 and have an intellectual understanding of its warning; it’s another to actually live out that warning in your daily life. How do you, in reality, resist the devil? How often during a single day are you aware of Satan’s efforts against you?
Destinies

“‘And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’” (Josh. 24:15, NKJV). How does this text reveal what is, in many ways, the most foundational issue in the great controversy?

Prophecy provides us with a view of the closing scenes of the conflict between God and Satan. For a period of 1,260 years (Dan. 7:25, 12:7, Rev. 11:2, 12:14, 13:5), Satan sporadically, but persistently, persecuted God’s people. In a final showdown described in Revelation 12 and 13, Satan will employ two earthly powers: a leopardlike beast (Rev. 13:1–10) and a two-horned beast (Rev. 13:11–17). These beasts will employ all the tactics of Satan that were discussed in yesterday’s lesson.

Revelation 14 is a description of the countermoves to Satan’s maneuvers that God will use during the struggle’s final stages in order to bring the struggle to an end. What does Revelation 14:6–13 tell us about the ways in which some of the issues in the great controversy are going to be made manifest?

From God’s perspective, a clear proclamation of the issues involved in the conflict (represented here as being sent by three angels) is necessary before the conflict comes to a close. Humanity needs to be intelligently informed in order for people to make up their minds about the issues.

In the final conflict there will be people who stand loyal to God. In Revelation 14 they are symbolized by the number 144,000, possibly representative of an innumerable people from all the nations of the earth (Rev. 7:4). But they remain obedient to the commandments of God in a time of great distress and are wholeheartedly devoted to the worship of their Creator God. They receive the approval of God and are victorious with Him while the impenitent are destroyed in the ensuing harvest (Rev. 14:14–20). The point is that one day this great controversy will be over.

One thing about the great controversy: no one can be neutral. You’re either on one side or the other. Anyone can claim to be on the Lord’s side (see John 16:2); how do you know, for sure, that you really are? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 190.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the quotation from the book *Education* given above, Ellen G. White writes that the great controversy enters into every phase of human experience. How true has this been in your own life? Has your understanding of the great-controversy motif been a source of strength or frustration as you cope with the issues of daily living in the world of sin and suffering?

2. Some speak about a “delay” in the second coming of Christ. With the amount of injustice and senseless suffering in the world, it seems that every additional day of life on earth is one too many. Have the class members share their individual perspectives regarding the great-controversy motif from the point of view of the so-called “delay.”

3. How confident can we be about the final resolution of the conflict between good and evil? What gives you assurance that evil will be overcome in the end? What reasons do we have for believing that? How, for instance, does the prophecy of Daniel 2 help to give us assurance about the ultimate outcome?

4. In class, go over your answers to the final question on Thursday. The answer is especially relevant because of our understanding of just who the persecutors are going to be in the last days. How, then, can we be sure we will be on the right side?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Genesis 3:15

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Outline the events of the great controversy between God and Satan and the ways in which they affect every aspect of the Christian’s life and belief system.

**Feel:** Sense the eternal significance of individual choice in this great conflict.

**Do:** Accept Christ’s sacrifice on his or her behalf and cooperate in the sharing of this gospel as an essential part of the great controversy.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Big Picture

A. What critical events have happened up to the present date, and what events will take place in the future that will eradicate evil from the cosmos?

B. In what ways does the conflict between good and evil affect everything that both Christians and non-Christians do and think during their daily lives?

II. Feel: Choosing for Eternity

A. What part do daily decisions play in the shaping of eternal destinies?

B. Why is it so important to protect everyone’s ability to choose between God’s way and Satan’s way, as well as educate others regarding the eternal choices that God calls them to make?

III. Do: Cooperating With Divine Agencies

A. Why is it essential that we accept Christ’s sacrifice on a daily basis?

B. What opportunities are available to us every day to share the gospel?

C. What are the best ways in which to cooperate with heavenly agencies in the sharing of the gospel message during these last days?

**Summary:** The great conflict between good and evil has affected every life in the universe. The essential issue centers on each person’s choice between God and Satan.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Life is a constant warfare between good and evil, Christ and Satan. As we study this conflict and the ways in which it impacts our lives and destinies, the central question to contemplate should be: on whose side should we choose to be—Christ’s or Satan’s?

**Just for Teachers:** In an age that refuses to acknowledge the need for moral and spiritual allegiance to God, it is essential to recognize that we are engaged in a real spiritual war. Understanding this war and how we shall gain victory in it is the central focus of our lesson this week.

**Opening Activity:** Gautama, heir to the throne of Kapilavastu in ancient Nepal, was the sole object of his father’s love and concern. The king shielded the prince from any knowledge or experience of pain, suffering, and death. But one day as a teenager, the prince rode out of the palace and for the first time saw the afflictions of old age, sickness, and death. Much distressed, Gautama left the palace, as well as his young wife and child, to wander through the forests, enduring years of self-affliction, fasting, and meditation—until one day he claimed to have found the answer to the question of evil. Thus was born the Buddha, whose essential teaching was this: the answer to the problem of suffering is to be found in the renunciation of all desire.

That is one answer. Hinduism offers another: death is nothing but a door to a new form of life in the endless cycle of reincarnation. In other words, some would deny the reality of sin while others would see death as the normal end of a biological process. But what does the Bible say about the origins of and solution to pain, suffering, and death? *See Gen. 3:1–23, Rom. 5:12, 6:23, Isa. 14:12–15, Rev. 12:1–4, 20:7–15.*

**Discuss:** From the above verses and other passages, what are pain, suffering, and death results of? Where did sin originate, and how did it result in the conflict known as the great controversy between God and Lucifer? When will the great controversy end, and what will be the final outcome?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: Lead the class in a brief review of the great controversy in regard to its nature, origin, contenders, and final conclusion.

I. The Great Controversy: Its Origin

“There was war in heaven” (Rev. 12:7). The very phrase is a paradox and a mystery. How can there be war in heaven—the place where God’s throne is located (Isa. 66:1) and where absolute holiness, righteousness, love, and peace dwell? The word war indicates that there arose in heaven someone who was contrary to God’s will. Revelation 12:7–9 identifies the rebel as the “dragon,” “the great dragon,” and “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan” (NKJV). Further, the same passage says that Satan and his angels fought with “Michael and his angels” (vs. 7). Michael, a name used only in apocalyptic passages (see Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) to represent Christ in direct conflict with Satan, prevailed in the war. This led to the expulsion of Satan and his hosts to the earth, where the old serpent deceived Adam and Eve and plunged the world into sin (Gen. 3:1–15). Thus began the great controversy, a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, the forces of good and evil.

Consider This: To act contrary to God’s will, as Lucifer did, is an act of war against God’s throne. Why didn’t God simply exterminate sin and Satan at the first signs of the uprising before it turned into a full-scale war that ended in the expulsion of Satan and his rebel angels to earth? What does the answer reveal about God’s justice and mercy?

II. The Great Controversy: Its Nature

Various biblical passages, such as Isaiah 14:12–15, Ezekiel 28:12–17, Genesis 3:1–15, and Revelation 12:1–17, reveal some of the basic aspects of the great controversy.

First, the great controversy is a battle between creature and the Creator over God’s character of love and sovereignty. By its very essence, the Creator-creature relationship has a built-in boundary line. The Creator extends life, love, and fellowship to the creature, and the creature is to respond with love, obedience, and praise. A crossing of this line is rebellion. That was one of Lucifer’s first sins, in addition to envy and unholy ambition. He boasted, “I’ll be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14, GW Translation). The boast led
to arrogance, pride, and lawlessness, all of which culminated in a revolt against God’s authority.

Second, the great controversy is a battle for allegiance. Do we belong to God or Satan? “Instead of seeking to make God supreme in the affections and allegiance of His creatures, it was Lucifer’s endeavor to win their service and homage to himself. And coveting the honor which the infinite Father had bestowed upon His Son, this prince of angels aspired to power which it was the prerogative of Christ alone to wield.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 494.

Third, the great controversy is a universal battle that affects each individual until it ends with Satan’s destruction (*Rev. 20:7–10*). Ever since Satan introduced this cosmic conflict into the history of the human race, through the deception of Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:1–15*), the whole creation has become the battleground of Christ and Satan. No one can escape the battle, and all can avail of the victory available through Christ.

**Consider This:** A sobering thought: every act of life reveals whose side of the great controversy you are on—Christ’s or Satan’s. Try to truly grasp the full implication of this thought. Why is it a fatal deception to believe anything less than this reality? Why is there truly no neutral ground in this conflict, and what does that truth say about all involved, whether they be small and great, rich and poor, or free and bonded?

III. The Great Controversy: Its Conclusion

The cosmic conflict has its origin in Satan’s accusation that God is arbitrary, His love is false, and His law cannot be kept. Although the conflict in heaven was resolved when Christ crushed its roots and Satan was cast out to earth, the arch-enemy of God continues the conflict on earth, where he hopes to deceive the entire human race and become the ruler of this world. He determined that if he could not own this earth by obtaining the power of creation, he would do so by deceiving the earth’s inhabitants and turning them against God. But God did not leave this earth unguarded and, indeed, had a plan to meet such a contingency of the evil one: through His Cross and the Resurrection, Christ has won the final victory over sin and Satan. The conflict, however, awaits its final consummation at the end of the millennium when sin and sinners will be no more and the devil himself will be cast “into the lake of fire” (*Rev. 20:7–10*).

**Consider This:** In Section Two, we read in Ezekiel 28:12–17 how Lucifer once walked back and forth amid the stones of fire in heaven. Whatever else these stones may signify, one thing is clear. Lucifer walked with impunity among them, unburned and impervious to the flame. He was “fire-proof.” But at the final consummation of the great controversy, Satan will be flammable and will burn until he is nonexistent. This contrast contains
a spiritual lesson for us: our God is a consuming fire. So, we have one of two alternatives: allow Him to refine us in the furnace of affliction during this probationary period, purging the dross from our characters until the pure gold of His image shines through, or refuse to yield and endure the refining process in the lake of fire. Both choices burn up the sin in us. But one consumes only the sin and results in eternal life; the other consumes us and ends in eternal death. What protection does God give to us now, as He gave to Daniel’s three friends, to fireproof us in the furnace of affliction even as its fires purify and refine?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** The Bible is a great lesson book on the subject of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Through the failures and triumphs of many of the biblical characters, through the ups and downs in the history of Israel, through the prophetic warnings and blessings, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and through the final events of earth’s history, we must believe that God is in control of history and that He will bring those who trust in Him to inevitable triumph.

**Application Questions:**

1. Why is the study of the great controversy important for Christian living?


**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** For every human being assaulted by the power of sin and Satan, the Cross is the assurance of triumph. Emphasize this lesson to the class as powerfully as you can.

**Activity:** Read the following quotation as a class. Discuss Satan’s hope for victory and how this hope was dashed. Why does Satan keep persisting even though he knows he must finally die?

“When Jesus was laid in the grave, Satan triumphed. He dared to hope that the Saviour would not take up His life again. He claimed the Lord’s body, and set his guard about the tomb, seeking to hold Christ a prisoner. . . . When he saw Christ come forth in triumph, he knew that his kingdom would have an end, and that he must finally die.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 782.
Lesson 2  *October 6–12

(Read for This Week’s Study: 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; Heb. 11:6; Exod. 3:1–14.

Memory Text: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1, 2, NKJV).

Key Thought: However important it is to understand the way in which biblical inspiration works, it’s more important to know the God who is revealed to us through that inspiration.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Ps. 19:1). What they don’t declare, however, is that our God loves us, died for us, and is actively working to save us from the consequences of our sinful choices.

The bottom line is this: whatever we can learn about God from other sources, the key source has to be the Bible. There are great truths, especially about the nature of God and His activity in this world, that we would know nothing about were they not revealed to us. As we have seen already, while people can sense something of a battle going on between good and evil, how else would they know of the great controversy were it not taught in the Scriptures?

This week we’ll focus on two things: first, we’ll look at what the Bible says about itself and how it was inspired. Next, we’ll see what it teaches us about the God who inspired it.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 13.
The Doctrine of Scripture

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21. What do these verses tell us about how the New Testament authors regarded the Scriptures?

Peter affirms that the prophecies of the Old Testament were not of human origin. His argument is that the prophets spoke because they were “moved by the Spirit of God.” The expression “moved by the Spirit of God” means that the impulse that led to the writing of the Scriptures came from the Holy Spirit. In short, the Bible writers were inspired by the Lord Himself.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. What do these verses tell us about the Bible and the ways in which it’s to be used?

It’s very clear that Paul wished Timothy to understand that because the Scriptures are divinely produced, they are dependable and valuable for the building up of the believer. Paul leaves no question as to Scripture’s truthfulness, authority, and origin. Notice, too, that he is talking about “all Scripture.” Paul doesn’t leave us the option to pick and choose which parts we think are inspired and which parts aren’t. Not everything (such as the ceremonial laws) is still binding on us, but that fact is radically different from the claim that some parts of the Bible are inspired and others aren’t, or that some parts aren’t as inspired as other parts (whatever that’s supposed to mean).

Read Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 22:41–46; John 10:34, 35. What crucial truth about Scripture and the authority of Scripture can we take from these texts?

No matter what we believe, we need a starting point, a foundation upon which to base that belief. For Seventh-day Adventist Christians, that foundation is the Bible—the ultimate standard and arbiter of truth.

How much time do you spend in the Word? How much of your life is patterned by what it teaches? Think back on the past 24 hours. What have you done, or not done, in that time frame that was based on the authority of Scripture?
The Nature of Inspiration

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. How do these words help us to understand how biblical inspiration works?

In the whole question regarding inspiration, people sometimes get obsessed with what are often deemed as problematic texts. Consider, for example, the wording of the inscription above Jesus’ cross as depicted in the Gospels. According to Matthew 27:37, it said, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”; according to Mark 15:26, “THE KING OF THE JEWS”; according to Luke 23:38, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” How are we to understand these differences?

As the Bible says, “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” and is trustworthy; yet, we are given different accounts of the inscription on Jesus’ cross. These two points together can give us insight into the way in which inspiration works. This case shows that inspiration permits different expressions of an idea or event to the extent that the expressions adequately depict it. When a general approximation is an adequate expression, as in the inscriptions on the cross, inspiration accommodates it. On the other hand, where specificity is required, as in 1 Kings 6:1, inspiration provides it and should be accepted as such.

*Compare* Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5. In what ways do these accounts of Judas’ death seem to differ?

For a long time, critics of the Bible claimed that these verses gave conflicting accounts of Judas’ death. However, recent research has shown that the word translated as “falling headlong” in Acts 1:18 also means “swelling up.” Therefore, it’s likely that, after hanging himself, Judas was not discovered until his corpse had swelled up, causing his intestines to burst open. The point is, what at first seemed to be contradictory is now shown not to be. The vast majority of the Bible is not problematic. In the few places where some questions remain about apparent “errors” or “contradictions,” the prudent attitude would be humility. Who knows how many people have made a shipwreck of faith by focusing on “problem” texts. We have not been called to stand in judgment over the Word; we have been called, instead, to obey it.
The Mystery of the Triune God

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26).

Understanding how inspiration works, however important, is only a means to an end, and that end is to know God. A deep understanding of how the Bible was written, or even a deep understanding of the truths revealed in it, mean nothing if we don’t know the Lord for ourselves (John 17:3).

And one thing that the Bible explicitly affirms about the Lord is His oneness.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29. What crucial truth is found in these texts?

The expression in the Bible about the oneness of God precludes any idea of many gods. There is only one God. However, the total picture we get from the Bible is that there is an inner “content” to Him, even in His oneness.

Read Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; John 1:1–3, 18; 20:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19. How do these texts begin to clarify the inner reality of God?

The Old Testament’s suggestion of plurality provides hints about the nature of the inner being of God. When we couple this with the New Testament’s statement about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we start to realize that there’s a lot about God’s nature that we don’t fully understand and probably never will. The triune aspect of God is one mystery, among many, with which we will have to learn to live.

The information that the Bible gives about God, including His three-part nature, is not provided in order for us to engage in speculative philosophizing but in order to further our understanding of His activities, especially His redemptive work on our behalf as the great controversy unfolds and is finally ended.

Who doesn’t have a lot of questions that only God can answer? How can we learn to trust Him until the time comes when He will give us answers?
The Attributes of Our Creator

The Bible reveals to us truths about God that we aren’t going to find anywhere else. Among those truths is that He is the Creator. In fact, that’s the first thing the Bible tells us about God, that He created “the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

One of the many fascinating things about this text is that the Bible simply assumes the existence of God without trying to prove or show it. The Bible spends a great deal of time teaching us about what God is like, particularly as His character is revealed through His interaction with fallen humanity. But it spends no time trying to prove that He exists. It just assumes His existence.

Read Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 10:17. What do they say about God and the role that His Word plays in bringing us awareness of His existence?

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Conviction about the existence of God cannot come from rational arguments alone. The Bible teaches that a person is convinced of God’s existence through personal experience with Him as the Holy Spirit impresses one’s heart and mind with the fact of His existence. In many cases, people may come to believe in God first; only afterward do they start to build a logical and intellectual foundation for faith in a God whom they cannot see.

Read Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; 1 John 4:8, 16; and 2 Chronicles 6:18. What do these texts tell us about the attributes of God? What other attributes of God are revealed in the Word?

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Dwell on the attributes of God as expressed in the Scriptures. How many of them could you know from other sources, that is, from nature or from personal experience? What does your answer teach you about how crucial the Scriptures are to our understanding of what God is truly like?
The Activities of God

Even the most cursory reading of the Bible reveals that God is actively involved in humanity and in what happens here on earth. He is not distant, detached, or removed, as some ancient Greek concepts of God taught, or as even some Christian theologians try to depict Him. Though radically different from what He created, the Lord has intimately tied Himself to His creation.

As we saw yesterday, the Bible depicts the Lord as our Creator, an act that shows just how intricately tied to this world He really is. What do the following texts tell us about God’s other activities here on earth, especially in the context of the great controversy?

Gen. 11:9

Gen. 19:24

Exod. 3:1–14

John 3:16

1 Thess. 4:17

Without a doubt, the Bible reveals a God who is greatly involved with humanity. The whole great-controversy scenario is, really, about how the Lord is working to save humanity from the clutches of sin and Satan. From the first act of the earth’s creation (Gen. 1:1) to the cross (John 19:18) to the re-creation of the earth (2 Pet. 3:12, 13), the Bible shows us unequivocally the Lord’s intimate activity with humanity.

In what ways have you, personally, experienced the activity of God? In what ways have you seen Him work in your life and in the lives of others? In what ways can you learn to draw comfort from knowing God’s closeness and intimacy with us?

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

“In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. ‘Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.’ 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 8, 9.

Discussion Questions:

1. Apart from information we may obtain from the Bible, how confident can we be about our conclusions concerning God? Is there any room at all for an understanding of God from other sources? If so, what are those sources, and how can we be sure that the information they give us is correct?

2. Why is any worldview that denies the supernatural in fatal contradiction to the Word of God?

3. Science and technology have, in many ways, been a great blessing to humanity. In some ways, too, science has helped us to better understand the power of God (for instance, look at what it has shown us about the utter complexity of life!). What, though, are the obvious limits to what science can teach us about God? When, too, can science work against a true understanding of God?

4. Why is the doctrine of a triune God (no matter how difficult to understand) so important to us as Seventh-day Adventists? Think what it would mean, for instance, if Christ were anything other than fully God?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Hebrews 1:1, 2

The Student Will:

Know: Discuss the critical role of the divinely inspired Scriptures as a means of getting to know and understand God.
Feel: Respond on a personal and intimate level to the drawing power of the Holy Spirit.
Do: Actively pursue the study of God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture and develop a personal relationship with Him.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: God-Breathed Words of Life
   A What role does the Holy Spirit take in inspiring human thoughts and words in order to illuminate God’s nature and purpose?
   B What role does Scripture have in helping followers of Christ to develop faith and a personal relationship with Him?

II. Feel: Intimacy With the Unseen God of the Universe
   A How are Christ’s disciples drawn into an intimate knowledge of, and relationship with, the unseen God of the universe?
   B How does God’s revelation of Himself through history and through the personal experiences of many biblical authors build faith and trust?

III. Do: In Pursuit of God
   A How has God actively pursued His children, as revealed through Scripture?
   B How, in return, do His children actively pursue a revelation of, and relationship with, Him? What does this pursuit look like on a day-to-day basis?

Summary: The Scriptures, as breathed by the Holy Spirit through the thoughts and words of Bible writers, reveal the nature of God and His dealings with men and women, and draw His children into relationship with Him.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Accepting Scripture’s divine inspiration, we consequently strive to listen to our Creator God’s voice in its pages and live out our gratitude in response to the unfolding story of redemption.

Just for Teachers: This week’s study explores the statements that Scripture makes about its own inspiration and what it teaches about the God who inspired it. However, an intellectual belief that Scripture is inspired is not enough. The Word of God is also a Living Word to be personally experienced. Your goal in Step 1 is to encourage your class members to share their experiences with God’s inspired Word in response to the questions in the following activity: (Please note: You will want to allot no more than 5-6 minutes to this activity in order to ensure that you have at least 15 minutes to devote to Step 2, with 30 minutes for Step 3, ending with 5 minutes for Step 4.)

Opening Activity: Ask your class members the following questions:

• How old were you the first time you read the Bible, and what do you remember?
• Describe a time when you discovered a new story, principle, or truth from your reading of the Bible that changed an attitude or behavior in your life.
• In view of your sharing, what is your testimony about God’s inspired Word?

Discuss: Invite your class members to share their favorite method of personal Bible study and the ways in which this particular manner of learning has influenced their spiritual growth.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: In this section, we will explore the purpose and function of the inspired Word, as well as introduce a methodical approach to Bible study.
I. Why Study the Bible? (Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17 with your class.)

Regardless of age, profession, or background, most of us have a deep yearning to learn how to study the Bible in a manner that will draw us nearer to God and also equip us to share its truths with others.

In the passage that we just read, Paul encourages Timothy to remain inspired by, motivated by, and confident in the trustworthiness of the “holy scriptures.” Why? Paul explains that Scripture is able to “instruct” you; that is, give the believer the ability to grasp God’s saving purpose for his or her life when Jesus Christ is accepted by faith as Savior and Lord.

The beginning words of verse 16 tell us that the nature of Scripture is that it is “inspired by God.” While Paul is referring to the Old Testament in this verse (as the New Testament books had not yet formed part of what later would become the Holy Bible), today we accept the entire Old and New Testaments as inspired by God.

Understanding that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (NASB), one can then rely on its value and usefulness as a source for teaching and doctrine, as well as for the pointing out of error and as a way of setting one in the right direction. The phrase “for training in righteousness” (NASB) indicates Scripture’s profit and value in constructive education in how to live the Christian life.

Why study the Bible? Notice the ultimate function in the closing words of verse 17: “So that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (NASB). Paul indicates that with strong and solid scriptural training, the believer becomes skilled, able, and efficient to engage “in every good work;” that is, in all of the opportunities and responsibilities that may face the Christian believer in the process of participating in good works.

Consider This: How does the Bible serve as our “teacher”? What does its status as an inspired document mean for all aspects of our Christian walk?

II. How to Study the Bible (Read Hebrews 11:6 with your class.)

Many statistics indicate that a low percentage of church-attending members read their Bibles daily. While this may reflect the influence of a secular culture or the busyness of life, for many the case is that they lack a method of study and/or the skills that allow for discovery of deeper insights into biblical truths in a fashion that is relevant and connects these truths to their everyday lives.

How then might we study the Bible in a manner that will connect its study to our life experiences? A starting point is to develop a methodical approach to that study called inductive Bible study. The inductive Bible study method, by its
nature, develops and builds skills. Learning how to use the tools of inductive Bible study (referred to as observation, interpretation, personalization, and application) is a process that allows the reader to slow down when studying Scripture so as not to miss the deeper levels of meaning. It also facilitates listening to God’s Word, which, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, speaks to the soul and heart and allows the Word to transform lives.

**Consider This:** Why is the belief in the existence of God a requisite to drawing near to Him? How do we “listen” to God’s Word, and how does life transformation through a study of God’s Word take place?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Read Mark 5. Divide its passages into sections to be read by several class members, and then work through the chapter, utilizing the questions as a way in which to exercise each inductive Bible study skill.

**Inductive Bible Study Skills:**

1. **Observation:** This skill helps us to answer the question, “What does it say?” We become alert to the details of the text, finding key words, contrasts, comparisons, repetitions, and the use of questions. Let’s practice by answering the following questions in connection to Mark 5:
   - What did the people in Decapolis of the Gadarenes know about “the demon man”?
   - Now observe what Jesus wanted His “trophy of grace” to do in verses 18–20. Compare this with what the man wanted.

2. **Interpretation:** This tool answers the question, “What does it mean?” This step raises questions about the observations made of the text, such as “What does this word, phrase, or statement mean?” and “Why has the author used this particular word or phrase?” “What does this illustration imply?” These are called questions for understanding. This step is possible only after thorough time has been spent in observation.
   - Read verses 18–20 again. What are the implications between the comparison of what the man wanted and what Jesus wanted him to do?
   - What would such implications mean to the characters involved in these verses?

3. **Personalization:** This tool assists in answering the question, “What does this passage, insight, et cetera, mean for my life?” We look to identify with the characters, actions, or circumstances in the text.
• Review verses 21–25 while scanning to the end of the chapter. Identify with the father. What must this experience have been like for him?

• Observation: While urgently trying to get to the house, Jesus is interrupted by a sickly, nameless woman, and He takes vital time to hear her story.

• Question: As the father, what attitudes and feelings do you think you would have had?

• What would you have wanted to say?

• Identify with the woman and answer the same questions.

• Try to identify with the disciples.

• Questions for personalization: In relationship to Mark 5, which of these statements would Jesus say to you, and where do you need to go in order to find healing?

  “ ‘Go in peace, and be healed’ ” (vs. 34, NKJV).

  “ ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe’ ” (vs. 36, NIV).

  “ ‘I say to you, arise’ ” (vs. 41, NKJV).

4 Application: This last step in the inductive Bible study method is the most important. You must ask yourself: what is one thing I can do today or this week that will help me to begin living according to the biblical principle(s) that I have discovered? What will I specifically do, keep, or obey?

▶ STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following activity with your class. Begin by distributing 3 x 5 cards (or small pieces of paper) and writing utensils, if supplies are available. Alternately, this exercise can be conducted without the use of cards or writing utensils by substituting discussion in the place of the supplies.

Activity: Ask the class members to write down one thing for which they are grateful and a specific action they will carry out as a result of today’s Scripture study. Please be sure to emphasize that it must be specific. For example, this Thursday at 6:00 p.m. I will share dinner and one Bible highlight with my new neighbor.

In closing, encourage your class members to try the skills of inductive Bible study, and tell them to plan on sharing next week how God’s inspired Word is coming alive in their Bible study.
Mankind: God’s Handiwork

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3).

Key Thought: God created humanity in His own image; sin defiled that image. God’s plan is to restore that image in us.

A nineteenth-century thinker, Arthur Schopenhauer, while deep in thought about the essence of human identity, accidently bumped into someone on the street. The person whom he hit angrily demanded, “Who do you think you are?”

“Who am I?” Schopenhauer responded. “I wish I knew.”

Who am I? Who are we as a race? What are we doing here? How did we get here, and why?

These are ancient questions that humans still debate today. Scripture, however, answers them all. That’s because there is an inseparable link between the question of our identity and the doctrine of creation. The answer to all those questions is found there; no other biblical doctrine is as central to our understanding of humanity as is creation, because it focuses on our origin, not merely our beginning. “Beginning” simply may refer to the fact of coming to be; “origin” attaches the idea of purpose to that fact of coming to be.

Therefore, the Bible teaching on the creation of humanity is radically opposed to evolution, which argues that there is no purpose for our existence (we are here by chance alone). Rarely have there been two teachings that present starker or more irreconcilable alternatives not only to our existence but to our identity as human beings.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 20.*
Creation and Human Origins

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). What does this text tell us about our origins that is so radically different from, even openly contradictory to, other views of human beginnings, such as evolution?

It is impossible to miss the point that, as a conscious act of God, humanity’s creation had a purpose behind it. Scripture has no room for any idea of chance. We were made with a distinct purpose, and we were given a distinct nature and essence right from the start.

Made “in the image of God” is about as concrete and distinct an essence, a purpose, as could be imagined. This point is important because some thinkers have argued that humans have to create their own meaning, their own purpose, because we are born without any meaning or purpose inherent in us. If, for instance, evolution were true, one could make the point that—because evolution teaches that we didn’t come with any purposes—we have to make up our own. In contrast, according to the Bible, we were made in the image of God and created to bring glory to Him.

Origins deal with history. Read Jude 14, Romans 5:12–21, and 1 Corinthians 15:20–22. How do these texts help us to understand the historicity of Adam in Genesis 1, 2? Why is it important to understand Adam as a historical person?

It’s amazing how many Bible scholars dismiss the historicity of Adam: he’s a myth, they say, a symbol for humanity but not a real person. One can hold those beliefs only through greatly distorting the texts themselves, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Dwell on the fact that you were made in the image of God. What should that tell you about your own inherent self-worth, regardless of your faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings?
The Image of God: Part 1

As we saw yesterday, Adam and Eve were literal people, not symbols or myths but actual flesh-and-blood beings made “in the image of God.” Obviously, being made in the image of God is something good, something sacred, something that bestows inherent value on us. What, however, does that really mean?

Read Genesis 1:26 carefully. What statement of intention seems to be linked to the creation of man in God’s image? That is, God says that humanity is to be made in His image, and then something immediately follows as a result. What is that something, and how does it help us in our understanding of the concept of “the image of God”?

Genesis 1:26 is God’s statement of intention. God creates man in His image and then commands him to do something. Being created in God’s image appears to be necessary for a certain function; in this case, to have “dominion” over the rest of what God had created. Therefore, “the image of God” points to physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual endowments needed in order for humanity to fulfill God’s purpose for it. Whatever it meant to have “dominion over” the rest of the creation, it certainly entailed respect, care, and good stewardship. Humanity was, perhaps, to interact in a dynamic way with the “lower” created order in a manner that reflected how God interacted with humans themselves. And being made in the image of God also meant that humans were to represent God in the world.

What a responsibility!

Read Mark 12:13–17. How do these verses help us to understand what it means to be made in God’s image?

Jesus’ practical message seems to be “‘Give your money to Caesar; it has his image on it, and thus it belongs to him. But give yourselves to God. You bear his image, and you belong to him.’”—Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 515.

How is this translated into practical terms? Most likely, we also show that we bear God’s image in our love, commitment, and loyalty to Him, as well as in the ways in which we treat others. Again, being made in the image of God, whatever else it entails, is something manifested by our actions.
The Image of God: Part 2

Whatever else it means to be “made in the image of God,” it also shows that we were made to be in relationships. What are those relationships, and how should we, made as we are, behave in them?

Read Genesis 2:19, 20. What does that tell us right away about humanity’s relationship to the world?

Notice the autonomy, the freedom, given to Adam here. He was to name the creatures that God had created. God didn’t do the naming Himself; He left that work to Adam. The text suggests that God was going to accept whatever names Adam gave to the creatures.

Read Genesis 2:20–25. How do these verses reveal more about the relational aspects for these beings made in God’s image?

A lot of commentary has been written over the centuries about the meaning of these verses. What is fascinating here, among other things, is the closeness and the intimacy that was meant to exist between Adam and Eve. Adam was created out of the soil and Eve out of Adam (something that helps to distinguish her from every other earthly created being). To be made in God’s image, then, certainly entails the capacity for close and loving relationships—something that surely reflects the relationship in the Godhead itself.

Now study Genesis 1:27 together with Genesis 3:20 and Acts 17:26. In what way is the unity between the first pair of humans extended to cover the unity of the entire human race? What does the unity of humanity have to say about ethical issues such as justice, racism, et cetera?
A Defiled Image

One of the many great obstacles for those who read evolution into the biblical creation account is the Fall. In the Bible, the world and humanity were perfect when created, a teaching that contradicts evolution at the most basic level. Only through transgression did suffering and death enter the world, a concept that’s contrary to the evolutionary model, in which suffering and death are part of the very means of creation itself.

Imagine what it would say about the character of God if He had created us in the manner that evolution teaches. According to that false theory, God uses processes of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong against the weak in order to create a morally flawless and selfless being who “falls” into a state of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong over the weak—a state from which he has to be redeemed or else face final punishment.

Think, too, of what evolution does to the plan of salvation. The Lord incarnates into an evolved ape that was created through the vicious and painfully murderous cycle of natural selection, all in order to abolish death, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26)? But how can death be the “enemy” when it was one of God’s chosen means for creating humans? The Lord must have expended plenty of dead Homo erectus, Homo heidelbergensis, and Homo neanderthalensis in order to finally get one creature into His own image (Homo sapiens). So, Jesus comes to save humankind from the very process God used to create humankind in the first place? The whole idea is foolish and unbiblical.

Read Romans 5:12–19 and Colossians 3:10. How do these verses help us to understand what sin has done to humanity? How does the great controversy play into this whole picture? See 1 John 3:8.

Sin has touched all aspects of human life, and even the earth itself. Ellen G. White talked about a “threefold” curse that has rested on the world, the first resulting from Adam’s fall, the second from Cain’s murder of Abel, and the third from the damage caused by the Flood. Theologians also talk about “total depravity,” the idea that every aspect of humanity, life, and personality has been damaged by sin. As we look around at the world, and even at ourselves, it’s not hard to see, is it?

Some believe that violence, suffering, and death were all part of how God created humanity. Others believe that violence, suffering, and death were all part of how Satan seeks to destroy the humanity that God created. Think about the differences in the character of God that these two opposing views present.
Restoration

As deep and pervasive as the effects of sin have been on humanity, our plight is not irreversible. The Bible speaks about the possibility of renewal and restoration of the image of God in us, at least to some degree.

Study the following passages carefully: Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; and Eph. 4:23, 24. What hope is presented in them?

The Bible clearly holds up the hope for us to be remade in God’s image. The renewal of the image of God in humanity is accompanied by a reduction of the effects that sin has had on us and our relationships. None of this, however, is the result of man’s own achievement. The Bible points to Christ as being the basis of hope for man’s renewal. Also, whatever changes are wrought in our lives, our hope of salvation must rest always on what Christ has accomplished for us and on the offer of salvation based on His righteousness, not our own.

How is 2 Corinthians 5:17 related to the re-creation of man in God’s image? Does being a new creature place a person beyond the reach of sin and its effects on the human experience? What does your own experience tell you about the answer?

Overall, the evidence from Scripture leads to the conclusion that spiritual renewal comes at the cost of watchfulness in spiritual warfare. It is warfare between the flesh and the spirit (Gal. 5:16, 17). Those who are being renewed in God’s image find this spiritual warfare to be the reality of the human experience, and thus they embrace the challenge in the strength of the Lord (Eph. 6:10–13). To choose to be remade in the image of God is to place oneself on the side of God in the great controversy. Writing about those who have experienced the renewing power of Christ, Ellen G. White noted, “But because this experience is his, the Christian is not therefore to fold his hands, content with that which has been accomplished for him. He who has determined to enter the spiritual kingdom will find that all the powers and passions of unregenerate nature, backed by the forces of the kingdom of darkness, are arrayed against him. Each day he must renew his consecration, each day do battle with evil. Old habits, hereditary tendencies to wrong, will strive for the mastery, and against these he is to be ever on guard, striving in Christ’s strength for victory.”—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 476, 477.

“In the beginning, man was created in the image of God. He was in perfect harmony with the nature and the law of God; the principles of righteousness were written upon his heart. But sin alienated him from his Maker. He no longer reflected the divine image. His heart was at war with the principles of God’s law. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Romans 8:7. But ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son,’ that man might be reconciled to God. Through the merits of Christ he can be restored to harmony with his Maker. His heart must be renewed by divine grace; he must have a new life from above. This change is the new birth, without which, says Jesus, ‘he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 467.

“The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. 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.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what way does the teaching of evolution fit into the great-controversy scenario? How has Satan used this doctrine to undermine faith in the Bible?

2. Go through the New Testament and look up all the texts that talk about Adam. How clear is it that the New Testament writers all believed Adam to be a real person? Why is that understanding so important to our understanding of who we are, how we got into the situation we are in, and the hope that we have in Jesus?

3. Dwell more on the idea of being restored into God’s image. In what way are we meant to understand this ideal, especially as beings who are subject to decay, death, sickness, and disease?

4. The two most foundational teachings in physics—quantum theory and general relativity—directly contradict each other. What should that tell us about how careful we need to be when accepting something as “fact” merely because science says it is so?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Psalm 110:3

The Student Will:

Know: Compare and contrast biblical and evolutionary views of human origin, nature, and the purpose of existence.

Feel: Ponder the honor of being created in God’s likeness and the corresponding responsibilities that come with this origin.

Do: Accept the grace that Christ offers for a new life in Him and cooperate with Him in battling temptation.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Divinely Designed

A What philosophies of human nature and purpose are associated with a belief in evolution?

B What philosophies of human nature and purpose are associated with the belief in divine design and creation?

II. Feel: The Image of God

A What emotions are evoked by the realization that humankind was made in the likeness of God?

B Similarly, how must God feel upon seeing His image marred so severely as a result of sin?

C What responsibilities for service and relationship accompany a proper sense of divine heritage?

III. Do: A New Creation

A Though men and women can no more re-create themselves than they could have created themselves in the beginning, what part do they play in God’s plan of restoration?

B How do Christians who are a “new creation” face temptation and evil hereditary tendencies?

Summary: A belief that humans were originally created in the image of God carries with it recognition of God-given responsibilities. While the Fall marred God’s image, He has purposed to restore His image as His children accept Christ’s merits, and cooperate with Him in resisting temptation.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** “In the beginning God created . . .” (Gen. 1:1). These words declare humankind’s origins. The first chapters of Genesis also reveal the entrance of sin into humanity’s history, as well as hope for restoration to all that was lost.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson highlights Creation, the entrance of sin into the human experience, and God’s plan of restoration. Your goal in Step 1 is to encourage the class members to reflect upon the significance of this knowledge within the scope of what it tells us about God and ourselves.

**Opening Activity:** Share and discuss the following information with your class. Today, we know that genetics influences not only our physical appearance but also our temperaments. Many times it also influences our special talents, aptitudes, and even propensity toward certain inherited disease factors, such as high cholesterol. Therefore, being aware of our ancestral origins is cause for appreciation and, at times, cause for taking rigorous measures in order to avoid a negative, inherited family propensity.

**Discuss:** What is one special feature that is predominant in your family of origin that you really appreciate? How important is it to know that all of the generations that have existed in the past and that are living in the present have one beginning and one Creator God? What does Genesis 1 tell us about this Creator God? What do we learn about ourselves in relationship to the first created beings?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** Today, we have a great need to think deeply about God, observe His work, and reflect upon the implications that this need has for our daily relationship with Him and the way in which we view ourselves as bearers of His image.

Reading the Creation story is only the beginning. We must delve more thoroughly into the theological themes of sin, judgment, and grace. How do all these matters come together with the promise of restoration and the gospel story?
It is important that in the reading of the first section of the Bible Commentary, “In the beginning God,” that you read the text of Genesis 1:1–2:3 slowly and invite your class members to read and listen to the story as if for the first time. Instruct class members to take notes of new insights they are gathering about the Creator God in the story. Invite them to identify with how He might have felt as He experienced relationship with the first humans.

I. In the Beginning God *(Read Genesis 1:1–2:3 with your class.)*

There is nothing like starting at the beginning of everything, and this is what the study of the book of Genesis accomplishes. The first verse of the Bible, with its opening words “In the beginning God . . . ,” may be the most profound statement, bringing us face-to-face with the Creator God—the God through whom we have our breath, being, and salvation.

We learn that God stands at the beginning of, and behind, all things. Pastor and biblical scholar James Montgomery Boice comments, “Grammatically speaking, there is only one subject in all these verses: God himself. Everything else is object. Objects are acted upon. Light, air, water, dry land, vegetation, sun, moon, stars, fish, birds, land animals—all are objects in a creative process where God alone is subject. In these verses we are told that God ‘saw’ *(vss. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25)*, ‘separated’ *(vss. 4, 7)*, ‘called’ *(vss. 5, 8, 10)*, ‘made’ *(vss. 7, 16, 25)*, ‘set’ *(vs. 17)*, ‘created’ *(vss. 21, 27)*, and explained to the man and woman what he had done *(vss. 28–30)*. Moreover, before that, God spoke *(vss. 3, 6, 9, 14, 20)*, as a result of which everything else unfolded.”—*Genesis, an Expositional Commentary*, vol. 1, Genesis 1–11 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), pp. 81, 82.

It is in this beginning portrayal of God that we learn the value placed upon all Creation as we hear the Creator declare, “And it was very good.”

**Consider This:** The opening chapters of Genesis, which depict the Creation week, paint a portrait of our Creator God. What does that portrait of God look like? What does that portrait tell us about who He is?

II. Created in God’s Image *(Read Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3 with your class.)*

The first chapters of Genesis so beautifully depict the fact that, in the
beginning, Creation was enveloped in divine blessing. Animal life, human beings, and the Sabbath were all specifically blessed by the Creator God. Genesis also gives us a glimpse of the experience of the first human beings, made in the image of God, enjoying sovereignty over the creatures of the earth. Can you imagine what Sabbath “observance” might have been like before sin entered into history? What a blessed beginning.

The book of Genesis also vividly describes the experience of the seductive temptation, the entrance of sin, and the ruin of the human race. It is here that we find the unvarnished record of the loss of the image of God in humanity as Adam and Eve fall away from what the Creator God had originally intended for them to be.

Consider This: At this juncture, we need to pause and reflect upon the actions of Adam and Eve that led to sin. What were those actions? How does reflecting upon what led to their fall help us to be more aware of our own inclination to disobey our Creator God? What might this reveal about our relationship with our God and how we might be reflecting God’s image?

III. Sin  (Read Genesis 3:1–15 with your class.)

Today we have the advantage of being able to look back to the Creation story in regard to sin. We learn that in Adam and Eve’s experience, and in their encounter with evil and sin, there first existed a preliminary attitude that seems to indicate that they desired to know “good and evil” and not just “good.” They experienced firsthand that knowing both evil and good marred the blessings intended in God’s Creation.

The first humans desired to be wise and ended up hiding in fear from their Creator. Today we know theologically that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and obedience to His Word.

Our first father and mother were carried away with the appearance of beauty and goodness of the forbidden fruit. Scripture teaches that we must be satisfied with what God provides and calls good.

Consider This: What is sin a result of, and what is it about sin that causes us to “hide” from God? What is the difference between the fear that comes from wanting to hide from God and the “fear of the Lord” that leads to wisdom? What is the only source of wisdom and true understanding? How does the Genesis account of the Fall serve as a warning against the spurious idea that a knowledge of evil or sin is necessary in order to truly understand what is good?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Having reflected deeply in Step 2 on the reading of Genesis, your class members will now have some ideas, concepts, and insights with which to work. With that in mind, have them work through the following activity and questions, allowing enough time and expression of thought to discuss at a deeper level the theological themes of Genesis and the implications that these themes hold for their lives.

Activity: Have two or three members of your class paraphrase the Creation story in their own words. Follow this by having two or three other members paraphrase the story of the temptation, Fall, and promise of Genesis 3:15.

Thought Questions:
1. What marked contrasts or key words did you find in Genesis 1–3?
2. How is one remade in the image of God? What does it mean to reflect God’s image?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Reading about, thinking through, and contemplating who God is elicits gratitude and praise for our Creator. The Creation story speaks to the entrance of sin into the experience of humanity; yet, there is the great promise of hope that, through Jesus Christ, God’s image may be restored within us, and our relationship may be renewed with the Creator God. This promise in and of itself is cause for praise and thanksgiving as the attention is directed to the God of grace and love, who is also our Creator God.

Please allow enough time for the following activity (about 15 minutes for creating and 10 minutes or more for expressing and sharing with the group members).

Activity: Divide your class members into groups of three and have each group write a psalm or poem that gives praise to the Creator God and also praises Him for His gift of grace and the hope of becoming re-created in and by Jesus Christ.

Regroup into your large group and have each small group share their psalm or poem with the other members of the class.
Lesson 4

October 20–26

Salvation: The Only Solution

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: John 2:25; Jer. 17:9; Titus 1:1, 2; Rom. 3:19–24; Acts 2:36–38; Luke 7:47; Eph. 2:1–5.

Memory Text: “‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’” (John 3:16, NKJV).

Key Thought: The sin problem is very big; how thankful we should be that the solution was big enough to solve it.

The “sin problem” refers to the crisis caused by the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which brought to the earth the great controversy between good and evil. God’s part in the controversy has been to stop, and ultimately eliminate, the deleterious effects of sin, not just on the earth but on the creation as a whole. God’s action to rescue the creation from the destructive results of sin constitutes the doctrine of salvation. And though that battle, at least in terms of salvation, does play out here on earth, the great-controversy motif has shown us that the issues are, literally, universal.

The doctrine of salvation primarily concerns God and His work to save us, of course. But humanity has an important role too. Yes, God has made an incredible provision for the salvation of the human race. Our crucial part comes in the answering of the question, What will be our response to that provision? On that answer, the eternal destiny of souls truly hinges.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 27.*
The Scope of the Problem

Because salvation is God’s solution to the problem created by sin, the extent of sin’s damage determines the scope of the solution. After all, it wouldn’t be a solution if it was unable to solve the problem, no matter what the size of the problem.

What do the following texts reveal about the scope of the sin problem? How have you experienced it yourself or seen around you the reality of these texts?

John 2:25________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Ps. 59:2__________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Jer. 17:9__________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Rom. 5:12________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

James 5:1–7_______________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Isa. 5:23_________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

2 Thess. 2:10_____________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Who among us hasn’t known deeply, personally, and painfully just how bad the sin problem is? We live every moment of our lives with the reality of sin and its effects. Every aspect of human existence on this planet is, to some degree (a great one, in fact), dominated by the reality of sin. From politics to the innermost recesses of the human heart, sin has infected humanity. It is so bad that, without a divine solution, there would be no solution. How grateful we should be that the solution has been given. It’s called “the plan of salvation,” and its purpose is to solve the problem of sin.
God’s Provision: Part 1

The effects of sin did not wait for a “grace period.” The results of sin were immediate and needed immediate attention. It was necessary, therefore, for some kind of provision to be in place when sin manifested itself. Ellen G. White expresses it so clearly: “As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1084.

What do the following texts tell us about the plan of salvation and when it was established? What great hope and promise can we take from the texts ourselves?

Titus 1:1, 2

Eph. 1:3–5

2 Thess. 2:13, 14

Rev. 13:8

Dwell on the implications of these texts. What are they saying? Basically, from eternity, provisions had been made by God for the problem of sin. Though God did not foreordain that sin would occur (if He had, He would be responsible for it—a horrific and blasphemous idea), He knew that it would; so, back in eternity He made the provision to meet it.

This is biblical predestination, which is radically different from “predestination” as is commonly understood. It was God’s plan, from eternity, that all human beings would have salvation in Jesus. The fact that some reject this salvation doesn’t annul the force or the breadth of the provision. It only adds to the tragedy of what it means to be lost in the face of what has been done for us.

Dwell on the amazing truth that, from eternity, God’s plan was for you, personally, to have salvation. Think about what that means. In what way should a truth like this impact your life?
God’s Provision: Part 2

Throughout salvation history—from the first gospel promise (Gen. 3:15) through the early sacrificial system (Gen. 4:4), the covenant with Abram (Gen. 12:1–3), and the Israelite sanctuary service (Exod. 25:8)—everything was to point to, and climax in, the life, death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate provision to solve the sin problem.

The seriousness of the sin problem can, perhaps, be best understood only when we grasp just what it took—the Cross—in order for it to be solved. The Cross alone proves the utter futility of humanity to solve the sin problem by itself. An extreme situation called for an extreme solution, and the death of Christ, God bearing in Himself our sins, is about as extreme a measure as could possibly be imagined.

Christ’s sacrificial death is presented in Scripture as an atonement for sin (the means by which the sin problem in all its manifestations is ultimately dealt with). How does the death of Christ provide for humanity’s need of salvation? Explore this question from the following perspectives:


2. Sanctification/Regeneration (living right before God): See 1 Cor. 6:8–11, Rom. 6:1–8.


Dwell more on the fact that sin is so bad that it took the Cross to save us from the ultimate result, eternal death. How should keeping the Cross before us at all times be a deterrent to sin?
The Experience of Salvation: Part 1

The sinner is justified and reconciled on the objective basis of Christ’s atoning sacrifice for all (Rom. 5:6–10). However, the provision that God has made for the justification and reconciliation of humankind to Himself through the death of Christ needs to be brought into the experience of the believer. It is not enough to just have a theoretical knowledge about justification. We need to experience what it means for ourselves.

Acts 2:36–38 and Acts 3:19 bring up repentance as the beginning of the sinner’s experience of salvation. How does the nature of repentance as a feeling of remorse help us to connect the experience of justification with the death of Christ?

Ponder the following comment: “Nothing so touches the depths of the soul as a sense of Christ’s pardoning love. When sinners contemplate this unfathomable divine love, displayed on the cross, they receive the most powerful motivation possible to repent. This is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).”—Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists Believe (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), pp. 135, 136.

Read Romans 3:23–25 and Ephesians 2:8. What is the role of faith in the experience of justification?

We are told in the Bible that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We have also seen that contemplating the love of Christ motivates a person to repentance. Repentance, then, is not the special prerogative of a privileged few. In view of these facts, the importance of the study and the contemplation of God’s Word in the experience of justification cannot be overemphasized.

It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance and justification. Thus, if I should repent of sin and experience justification, God is the one to receive the credit. Salvation, then, is truly a gracious gift from God, for, indeed, it is by grace through faith that we are saved (Eph. 2:8).

What are some tangible and practical ways in which you may flood your heart and mind with the goodness of God, especially as you think of what He has done for you and what He has spared you from?
The Experience of Salvation: Part 2

The experience of justification places within the life of the believer spiritual realities that initiate change in the person’s life. In justification, the sinner is forgiven (Luke 7:47, Eph. 1:7, Rom. 4:7), acquitted of the charges of sin and reckoned righteous (Rom. 5:16, 18; Rom. 8:1), and given the gift of a new life (Eph. 2:1–5, 2 Cor. 5:17).

The foundation of this new experience is the reality that, no matter our past, no matter our sins, no matter how faulty and wrong we have been, we can stand pardoned, forgiven, and cleansed before God.

Think through what this means. Christ’s death covers all sin, even the worst; no matter how much your own heart might condemn you (1 John 3:20), when you surrender yourself to Christ, in faith, and accept His perfect life instead of your own “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6), then you are at that moment covered in Christ’s righteousness. His perfect life is credited to you as if it were yours. Talk about a gift, especially to a sinner!

The question is, How can something like this happen to a person and that person not be radically changed? That change, often called the “new birth,” is part and parcel of the experience of salvation.

Read the texts in the above paragraphs and summarize their teachings about justification and the ways in which we experience it in our own lives.

The experience of forgiveness ends the sinner’s vulnerability to God’s wrath and clears away any barriers to reconciliation and fellowship between God and humans. A new life opens up for the sinner, who then has the privilege of living in fellowship with Christ under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is the prerequisite for entering into the experience of forgiveness and justification, and it comes accompanied by confession and baptism (Acts 2:38, 1 John 1:9). This helps to explain the fact that although forgiveness is available to all, not all will be forgiven.

Where would you be if you couldn’t lean on the promise, every moment of your life, that your acceptance with God is based on what Jesus has done for you and not on yourself or your own performance and law-keeping?

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal’ (Rom. 16:25, R.V.). It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. . . . God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 22.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about how bad sin must be that it took the death of the Creator Himself to solve it. What does the Cross reveal to us about the utter inability of humanity to save itself? What do we think we could add to what has already been done for us?

2. Some believe in what is called the “subjective atonement,” the idea that nothing about the Cross changed our standing with God. They claim that the whole point of the Cross was to change our attitude about God, nothing more. What’s terribly deficient about such a theology? What does it say about the problem of sin if all it would take is an “attitude adjustment” on our part to solve it?

3. How possible is it to have a good deal of knowledge about salvation and yet not the experience of it? What do you make of Ellen G. White’s comment that “consecration to God must be a living, practical matter; not a theory to be talked about, but a principle interwoven with all our experience”?—Our High Calling, p. 243. How do we, on a daily and practical level, live out the experience of salvation?

4. Dwell on the role of salvation in the context of the great controversy. Why does Satan want to keep as many people as possible from having salvation in Jesus? What are the means he uses against us, and how can we defend ourselves against them?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 3:16

The Student Will:

Know: Outline both the devastating results of sin and the solution that God has provided.
Feel: Sense the goodness and magnitude of Christ’s pardoning love and the forgiveness, justification, and restoration that He makes possible.
Do: Repent and experience the new life that comes with acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Large Problem, Large Fix

A How has sin changed human nature and life in this world as well as in the universe?
B What was God’s solution to sin? When in the course of eternal history was this solution provided, and what power does it have to fix the problem?

II. Feel: Overwhelming Goodness

A Why is it important for each follower of Christ to consider, on a daily basis, his or her great need as a sinner?
B Why is it also important to ponder, on a daily basis, what Christ has done on the sinner’s behalf by His death on the cross?
C How does responding to God’s loving sacrifice and accepting the forgiveness, justification, and restoration that He makes possible, change the human heart?

III. Do: Repent and Believe

A What does God ask the sinner to do in response to Christ’s sacrifice?
B How can the sinner be assured of salvation?

Summary: Without a Savior, we would face eternal destruction because of sin. However, God has provided a perfect, all-encompassing solution through the sacrifice of Christ, which, if accepted, provides forgiveness, justification, and restoration.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Through Christ’s death on the cross, God provided the ultimate and only solution to the problem of sin. Without God’s way, there is no way out of sin.

Just for Teachers: Of the many questions that confront human existence, one of the most perplexing is “ ‘Who am I?’ ” (2 Sam. 7:18, NKJV). The world in all its confusions either tempts us to exalt ourselves or to plunge ourselves into the depths of despair. What is the problem with either of the world’s responses, and what is the answer? Our lesson this week will focus on this issue.

Opening Activity: Who am I? Many answers are possible, but consider these four. First, the philosopher says, “The unexamined life is not worth living. Knowledge is power, and it is power that makes or breaks me.” Second, the “primitive” person answers in terms of tribal identification. “I find my security in my group; no one else matters.” However, the trouble with such primitiveness is that it never gets beyond the cave of self-interest. Third, consider the “mundane.” In the world of the mundane, my identity—be it in business, politics, or profession—is in myself. Power becomes my focus. In the sentence of life, the subject is “I,” the verb is “am,” and the object is “me.” I am me. Nothing else matters.

None of these answers will suffice. Thus, we turn to the Cross. There we see our status: a sinner sought by God. At the cross, the sinner sees one person: “ ‘the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ ” (Gal. 2:20, NIV). With that perspective, I can affirm that I am not a cosmic accident in this universe. I am not the climax of an evolutionary process. I am not a cog in a giant machine, moving in a meaningless cycle. I am a child of God gone astray.

Discuss: Why is it that the most satisfactory answer to the human predicament can be arrived at only when it is studied in light of going astray from, and coming back to, the foot of the cross?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The Bible describes the act of “going astray” as sin—leaving the will of God, rebelling against His law, rejecting His
rightful claims, and asserting self. With heaven as the point of departure and being with sin the downward plummet away from this ideal, this descent has a vertical dimension. However, “going astray” also brings a horizontal relational break—across family and community, expressed in terms of pride, jealousy, unkindness, and other such acts. Lead the class in a general discussion about both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of sin.

Overview: Approaches to dealing with sin are varied. Some would deny sin. Others would equate sin to a biological mishap, a sociological accident, or a psychological underdevelopment. Still others would argue for a moral deficiency or economic deprivation. But what does the Bible say? This week’s lesson points to the nature of sin, to what God has done about it, and to what we need to do.

I. Sin: Its Nature and Essence (Read Romans 7:23–25 with your class.)

Sin is an intrusion. The Bible begins with the portrait of sin as an intrusion into God’s perfect creation, which was brought about by the choice of our first parents to cast their lot on the side of Satan as opposed to the side of God (Genesis 3). The Bible ends with the judgment of God destroying sin and Satan and creating a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 20:11–15, 21:1–5). In between the opening and the closing, the Bible narrates sin’s history as it is played out in the lives of individuals and nations.

Sin is a rebellion against God. In heaven sin began with Lucifer’s rebellion against God (Isa. 14:12–15, John 8:44). On earth, it began with the disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3, Rom. 5:12). “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Thus, sin is not simply a wrongful act—as in driving through a red light—but an actual revolt against God (Ps. 51:4, Isa. 1:2). Moreover, it is both a refusal to be subject to Him (Rom. 8:7) and a choice to live in enmity with Him (Rom. 5:10, Col. 1:21).

Sin is universal and leads to death. “All have sinned,” and all are subject to death (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). Isaiah gives a grim prognosis of human depravity: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it” (Isa. 1:5–7, NKJV). The meaning is clear: the whole person—physical, mental, spiritual, emotional—is sin-polluted (Rom. 1:23–25; 7:23–25; 5:8, 12), and with us the entire creation groans under the weight of evil (Rom. 8:22). Thus, a depraved humanity, an estranged fellowship, and a groaning nature are witness to a universe in battle with the forces of sin.
Consider This: Sin is not simply a revolt; it is a refusal and a choice. What are we refusing when we choose sin? To what extent has sin polluted the human race, and what is the only cure?

II. Sin: What Has God Done? *(Read John 3:16 with your class.)*

In one mighty text, the Bible summarizes what God has done in order to deal with the problem of sin: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” *(John 3:16, NKJV)*. God’s giving of His Son to die on the cross was neither accidental nor an afterthought; it was conceived in His mind “even before the foundation of the world” *(Eph. 1:4–7)*.

God’s provision for the sin problem is both redemptive and surgical. It is redemptive in that God has provided for the redemption of humanity from sin through the Cross of Christ, which reconciles God with humanity *(2 Cor. 5:19)*. It is surgical in that it looks forward to an end time when sin and its results will be completely wiped away from earth, giving way for the creation of “new heavens and a new earth” *(Isa. 65:17)*.

Consider This: How does the Cross reveal to the universe both the true curse of sin and the true meaning of life?

III. Sin: What We Need to Do *(Read Ephesians 2:8 with your class.)*

We can do nothing on our own to save ourselves. The doctrine that we can save ourselves by our good works or rituals is as old as sin itself. The Cross, not the fig leaf, is the solution to the problem. “The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion. . . . Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 35, 36.

Christ alone is our Redeemer. To speak this truth is not a result of spiritual arrogance or doctrinal pride but is an acknowledgment of the uniqueness of what happened on the Cross. God’s chosen way of dealing with sin, through the manifestation of His grace, cost the life of His Son. “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With his stripes we are healed.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

Thus, it must be noted that God’s love and grace have made possible our salvation through the Cross *(John 3:16, Rom. 1:16, Eph. 2:8, Titus 2:11)*. Our
part is to believe and accept what God has done through Christ. As sinners all we need to do is to come in faith to the Cross. There we must see in Him our Substitute. We must repent of our sins and acknowledge that He died for us (Mark 1:15, Acts 3:19, 16:31, Rom. 5:8, 14:15). Through faith in Him, we have forgiveness of sin and redemption (Eph. 1:7, 8), justification (Gal. 2:16), and “righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30, NKJV). Nothing essential to a new life is spared, and we become the children of God (Rom. 8:14). We receive the gift of eternal life (Rom. 5:21, 6:23, 1 John 2:25).

Consider This: Why is the doctrine of salvation by works so dangerous? How does it seek to undermine the theology of the Cross—that we can be saved only through Christ?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Every religion requires its followers to do good either as a means to gain salvation or to escape a cycle or two in the process of reincarnation. But in Christianity, salvation cannot be earned by works. Ellen G. White writes that the robe of righteousness, “woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising.”—Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 311. In Christ, God accepts us as we are, forgives our sins, empowers us to do good, and adopts us as His children. We sing, therefore, “In the Cross of Christ I glory.”

Application Questions:

1. How can you make the Cross central to your life?

2. What is the responsibility of the children of God to His other children, both within and outside the saving fold?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The redemptive experience makes it possible for us to have a transformed mind that can look at life and its environment from a perspective of holistic conformity with God’s original plan.

Activity: In view of such a redeemed experience, how will you relate to those around you—to your neighbor who has a different faith, to your co-worker who often seems disagreeable, and to those who differ from you in culture, politics, or race?
Lesson 5  *October 27–November 2
(page 38 of Standard Edition)

Growing in Christ

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Isa. 35:10, Mark 10:45, Rom. 6:12–23, Eph. 6:12, Col. 1:16, Gal. 4:1–11, Col. 2:15.

Memory Text: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15, NKJV).

Key Thought: Christ’s victory on the cross defines the scope of the victory into which the Christian may grow.

The amendment to the church’s fundamental beliefs, voted at the fifty-eighth General Conference Session (in 2005), was titled “Growing in Christ.” When the statement is analyzed, the following significant points become evident: Jesus has defeated satanic powers and evil forces; through Christ, victory over these powers, including their past manifestations in a person’s life, is possible; and, finally, there are conditions in order for these victories to be realized in a person’s experience.

These points will occupy our attention for the next three studies. This week we will be looking at the nature of the victory that Christ won on the cross. By His victory—not only over sin but over every other force that works against humanity and God’s creation—Christ has achieved salvation for us.

As we seek to understand what Christ has accomplished in our behalf, we will be better prepared to understand what we can have in our lives now. His victory can be our victory if we claim it for ourselves, because, no matter what Jesus has done for us, we must choose to accept it. Victory is not automatically given to anyone.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 3.*
The Redemption

Christianity is “a religion of redemption,” in which people are saved from the devastation of sin through what someone else—in this case, Jesus—has done for them. Thus, the Christian religion may be distinguished from “a religion of law,” where one may rectify his or her doom by one’s own efforts at “doing good works.” We need this redemption because, according to the Bible, people without Christ are enslaved to sin (John 8:34) and under a death sentence (Rom. 6:23). They cannot free themselves from these two conditions. The sinner’s plight requires outside intervention, and this intervention comes at a price. As the New Testament so clearly teaches, that price was the death of Jesus on the cross.

What do the following passages reveal about the concept of redemption? Isa. 35:10; Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4, 5; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.

From the New Testament’s point of view, Christ’s redemptive death is sacrificial and substitutionary. He took our place, sacrificing Himself in our behalf, suffering our fate for us so that we don’t have to suffer it ourselves. Though some reject this idea because they don’t like the notion of someone suffering in place of another (especially in the place of someone who is guilty), that’s the heart and soul of the gospel message.

“When the New Testament speaks of redemption, then, unless our linguistics are at fault, it means that Christ has paid the price of our redemption. To the extent that the price paid must be adequate for the purchase in question this indicates an equivalence, a substitution.” —Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1965), p. 61.

Think of some things in your own life that you find are impossible to change, things that you are absolutely helpless to do anything about. In the same way, we are absolutely helpless to save ourselves. How does this realization help us to better understand what Christ did for us on the cross? More important, how should this amazing truth of redemption impact our lives?
Slaves Set Free

When we understand redemption as freedom from a form of enslavement that required external assistance, we may conclude that sinful humanity is bound by a power or influence stronger than itself. The question that needs to be answered is, By what power or agency has sinful humanity been so bound?

**Study** Romans 6:12–23. Notice that in verses 18, 20, and 22, Paul speaks about freedom. What is the context of this freedom? What is Paul talking about here?

Think about what Paul says in the above verses along with what he says in Romans 6:1–11. Paul talks about what happens in Christian baptism. Here he sets forth some things that were to have died with Christ in baptism. Having spelled these out, Paul challenges the Christian, who has been united with Christ, to manifest the lordship of Christ, who has “freed” him/her from the power of sin.

The bottom line here is that, according to Paul, no matter how corrupted our nature has been by sin, through Christ we can be free from its enslaving power. Who hasn’t seen just how devastating this kind of slavery can be? Who hasn’t seen lives ruined by sin? Who hasn’t struggled with the power of sin in their own lives? It is, by far, the greatest foe that we as human beings will ever face.

What makes it so bad is that it’s a slavery not imposed solely from without; rather, it’s one that comes from within us. How are we freed from a slavery, a bondage, that originates in us, even in our very nature?

The answer, as we’ve seen in the above verses, comes only from the power of Jesus, who won the victory for us and who offers us the power to overcome. Through Christ, we are not only forgiven our sins, we are to be dead to them, and we are freed from them. They no longer have to dominate us. These are amazing promises, powerful promises, promises that all who profess the name of Christ must claim for themselves.

What has your own experience been with the enslaving and brutal power of sin? How can you learn to better grasp hold of the wonderful promises of freedom that have been offered to us in Jesus?
Principalities and Powers: Part 1

The Bible pictures our world as being under the dominion of evil forces that seek to control and to ultimately destroy us. The great controversy is, of course, the result of the Lord’s work against these powers. The great news is that, after the Cross, victory against them is assured, even though the battle continues to rage. The conflict is dramatic, cosmic, and fierce; but the victory belongs to God, a victory in which we can share by faith.

Study the following texts: 1 John 3:8; 5:19; John 12:31; 16:11; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15; and Rom. 8:38, 39. What do these reveal to us about the reality of this battle? What great hope and promises are found in them for us?

Many people of the twenty-first century world function on the basis of a scientific worldview alone. This means that things are examined mainly from a naturalistic perspective, the only perspective that many believe to be valid. For these people, a world populated with evil forces and dominated by demonic hostile powers is predominantly viewed as a holdover from an age of superstition and ignorance. In contrast, the Bible presents, as part of the reality of our world, an array of hostile forces comprising demonic principalities and powers. Though the biblical worldview incorporates naturalistic and scientific concepts, it certainly doesn’t base all understanding of reality on them. The Bible’s view of the world is large enough to encompass both natural and supernatural worldviews.

In Romans 8:38, for instance, the word translated as “principalities” is the Greek word archai, which could refer to civil rulers as well as to supernatural powers that attempt to exercise evil dominion over men. In Ephesians 6:12, the literal phrase “the rulers of the darkness of this age” could also be translated as “world rulers of this darkness.” “Clearly Paul is referring to personal evil spirits, who exercise a degree of authority over the world. Compare the phrase ‘prince of this world,’ describing Satan, in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. The personality of the devil was also clear to the revelator (Rev. 2:10; 12:10).”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1044.

How does the reality of the great controversy reveal itself in your own life? In what ways do you sense the struggle? What’s the only way to be defeated in this struggle when you have the promise of Christ’s victory in your behalf?
Principalities and Powers: Part 2

As we saw, the word translated as “principalities” could refer to world rulers or supernatural powers that attempt to exercise control over human life. Another Greek word that is used in conjunction with the word principalities (archai) is the word stoicheia, which literally means “elements,” or “elementary substances or principles.” The contexts in which stoicheia is used reveal other aspects of this fallen world from which we have been redeemed by Christ’s victory on the cross.

**Given** the context of what we are talking about, from what other things have we been delivered through Jesus, other than literal evil powers? See Col. 2:8, 14, 20; Gal. 4:1–11, especially verses 3 and 9.

The New Testament, especially Paul’s concept of the “powers,” seems to connect spiritual beings to forces or powers that rule over human life outside of Christ. These could be political, social, traditional, even religious. The word stoicheia, as used in Galatians 4:3, 9, talks of the system of heathenism from which the Christians in Galatia had been delivered. It is used also in reference to aspects of the ancient Jewish legal system. In Colossians 2:8, 20, it refers metaphorically to worldly philosophical principles.

“In Isa. 24:21 the phrase ‘the kings of the earth upon the earth’ implies that ‘the high ones that are on high’ refers to Satan and the evil angels. Paul refers to Satan as ‘the prince of the power of the air’ (Eph. 2:2), and to the unseen leaders of evil as ‘the rulers of the darkness of this world’ that abide ‘in high places’ (Eph. 6:12). In 1 Cor. 15:24, 25 Paul refers to their subjugation by Christ. Isaiah foresees the time when evil angels and evil men will all suffer punishment (see Matt. 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4, 9; Rev. 20:10–15).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 198, 199.

In short, the Bible teaches us that life is ruled by a series of powers, both personal and impersonal. Without Christ, man is at the mercy of these powers, in whatever form they come. The pressures of the present moment, not to mention the fear of the future, as well as the demands of life, society, tradition, and ideology, all can exert influences that can separate a person from the Lord. But through Christ we have been acquitted not only of our sins but also from our bondage to these “powers.” We need to understand the nature of that victory and claim it as our own.

**Besides the supernatural realities that exist in our world, with what other forces and influences do you struggle, forces and powers that work against you and your faith?** First, identify what they are and then claim the promises you have in Jesus in order to gain victory over them.
A Murderer Revealed

Christ came into the world for the purpose of destroying the works of the devil (Heb. 2:14). He did this at the Cross. But if Christ has been victorious over the devil and principalities and powers, why are we still wrestling with principalities and powers? Why is the devil still able to roam about like a lion looking for prey to devour?

Study Colossians 2:15 carefully. Look at the three different verbs that Paul uses in order to describe what happened at the Cross. How do we understand what this means?

First, Christ “spoiled” (KJV) or “disarmed” (NASB, NKJV) the “powers.” The Greek word is apedduomai, which literally means “to strip off one’s clothes.” Here it may mean that the powers were stripped of their weapons.

What weapons? “Christ’s life of victory, culminating in Calvary, spelled the doom of the devil. Satan’s disguise was torn away. His methods of operation were laid open before the angels and the entire heavenly universe. He had exposed his true colors. . . . By His cross Jesus Christ stripped from the principalities and powers of darkness both their robe of office and authority as princes of this world, and their armor of strength in their warfare against right.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 205.

Christ “made a shew . . . openly” (KJV) or “made a public display” (NASB) of the “powers.” How were the powers exposed publicly at the Cross? What image of them became evident? See John 8:44.

After Christ’s death, “Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ’s brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan’s existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 761.

“A battle unseen by human eyes is being waged. The army of the Lord is on the ground, seeking to save souls. Satan and his host are also at work, trying in every possible way to deceive and destroy. . . . Day by day the battle goes on. If our eyes could be opened to see the good and evil agencies at work, there would be no trifling, no vanity, no jesting or joking. If all would put on the whole armor of God and fight manfully the battles of the Lord, victories would be gained that would cause the kingdom of darkness to tremble.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 41.

“As men seek to come into harmony with God, they will find that the offense of the cross has not ceased. Principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places are arrayed against all who yield obedience to the law of heaven. Therefore, so far from causing grief, persecution should bring joy to the disciples of Christ, for it is an evidence that they are following in the steps of their Master.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 29, 30.

Discussion Questions:

1. Look at Hebrews 2:14, 15 a little more closely. Death as an agent of enslavement is clearly depicted here. Notice, too, the emphasis on our fear of death. Why do we fear death so much? How does the fear hold us, as the text says, in a kind of slavery? How should the Christian, free in Christ, view death?

2. For some people, the whole idea of demonic forces is silly superstition; for others, this fear dominates their entire life. How, as Christians, can we strike the right balance in our understanding of the reality of these powers, and yet at the same time understand what Christ has done for us in the fight against them?

3. What are some examples of how evil forces control or influence various worldly powers?

4. How does the great-controversy worldview help us to understand the continued existence of evil, even after Christ’s victory at the cross?
The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** Colossians 2:15

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe the completeness of the victory of Christ at the cross over not only sin but over every other power and tradition that hold humanity in bondage.

**Feel:** Take joy in the triumph of Christ over all the powers of evil in the world and in his or her personal life.

**Do:** Unite with Christ, put on His armor, and, in partnership with Him, fight for the salvation of souls.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Complete Victory**

A What sophistries of Satan did Christ unmask at the cross?

B What deceptive philosophies, traditions, and social and political powers are still enslaving earth’s inhabitants, and how does Christ’s victory offer the power needed to overcome these forces?

**II. Feel: Joy in Victory**

A What assurance is possible for the believer who trusts in Christ’s triumph at the cross?

B Though there are still battles to be won over evil, on what grounds can we be joyfully confident and praise God for the outcome of this cosmic war?

**III. Do: The Battles of the Lord**

A How do Christians unite with Christ in the final struggles with evil forces?

B Why is it important for Christ to use His friends and disciples as personal ambassadors and soldiers in the conflict here on this earth?

▶ **Summary:** At the cross, Christ proved victorious over evil and demonstrated that Satan’s challenges to God’s government were based on lies.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: In the great controversy between good and evil, the cross is a symbol of victory over sin. Though the battle wages on toward its ultimate climax, the believer experiences growth within the context of the conflict, claiming victory in Christ.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson expounds the different aspects of what Christ accomplished on the cross. While His victory over sin was complete, the Christian, through a daily struggle with sin in its many, all-encompassing effects, yet occupies the field of battle. In this opening section it is important to begin to examine the dynamics of this battle and to look at how it is possible to have victory in living the Christian life despite the warfare involved with sin.

Opening Discussion: There are many different types of challenges and battles. Some are applicable only to the individual experience. Many people view addictive habits in terms of fighting a battle, and they communicate this with the expression “fighting a battle,” for example, against smoking. Other battles involve a corporate effort, as in the reality of warfare in defense of country and home.

Whether a battle is of an individual or corporate nature, the common goal of both is to obtain victory and win the challenge over whatever might be considered the enemy.

Looking into the general dynamics of battle, we note that there are always two opposing forces that are striving for mastery in order to win “the prize.” Included also is a battle plan or strategy, as well as the participants involved in war with each other.

A significant part of putting together a battle plan is taking inventory in order to assess what is needed in terms of tools to win the fight. These tools, along with a plan of execution, are crucial for victory.

While strategy, the right warfare equipment, and the desire for victory are important, there are also other significant components that cannot be ignored. Interviews of victorious veterans of war indicate that the roles of faith, endurance, and partnership with one another are essential to the success of winning the battle.

Scripture portrays the spiritual battle between God and evil as having begun in heaven between Lucifer and Michael. A few weeks ago, one of the lessons stated that the first created humans yielded to the power of evil, and sin entered this earth’s history. Even so, God’s Word also reveals
that a plan of battle against sin went into effect.

Today, we live on the other side of the Cross and Christ’s victory over evil, sin, and death. It is at this point that we must consider the importance of spiritual tools in the battle for our salvation in this great controversy between good and evil. Victory is possible with the spiritual warfare equipment of faith, endurance, and partnership with Jesus Christ, the Victor.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is one Bible verse in this week’s lesson that gives encouragement to the believer in relationship to the battle against evil?

2. What is the significance of Christ’s victory on the cross, and what implications does this have for our daily life?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The historical context of the letter of Paul to the Romans reveals Paul’s pastoral heart and also his teaching skill when striving to address and instruct the new church converts in their spiritual understanding of what it meant to live a new life in Christ. This instruction is specifically the theme of Romans 6. For Step 2, please read each section of this chapter, discussing the different illustrations that Paul uses when addressing how to grow and live the Christian life in view of Christ’s victory on the cross.

I. Baptism, Death, and Life (Read Romans 6:1–11 with your class.)

Romans 6 begins with Paul’s strong reaction to the wrong idea that it seems had been suggested by some in the early Roman congregation. The implication was that if grace was extended all the more each time one sinned, then one should sin in order to have this grace abounding more. Paul uses the demonstration of baptism to refute this wrong conclusion and also to illustrate what a new life in Christ should look like.

In the early church, baptism was evidence of a personal confession of faith and also of the leaving behind of one’s former life that he or she had been living without Christ.

Paul uses the spiritual experience in the life of the new convert as a means to discuss more deeply how to think through the before- and after-conversion
lifestyle and the implications that this reflection has for the new believer in Christ.

Paul explains that baptism is a burying of everything that had to do with a former life. The action of baptism joins a believer with Christ. Just as Christ was resurrected from the dead “to the glory of the Father,” so now in baptism a burial of the old has taken place, and there is, as in resurrection, a newness of life.

Verse 11 puts forward the new attitude and way in which one needs to think about a new lifestyle: “In the same way look upon yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin but alive and sensitive to the call of God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Phillips).

**Consider This:** What is wrong with the skewed idea that we should sin more in order to receive more grace? What does it mean to be dead to sin and alive in Christ? How do we enact this truth through baptism?

**II. Weapons, Tools, and Instruments** *(Read Romans 6:12–14 with your class.)*

Have different members of your class read Romans 6:12–14 from different Bible translations (if available). Notice the different words that are used in verse 13 for “weapon of wickedness” and “weapon of righteousness.” The Living Bible translation presents a good reading of this passage: “Do not let sin control your puny body any longer; do not give in to its sinful desires. Do not let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God—every part of you—for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes. Sin need never again be your master, for now you are no longer tied to the law where sin enslaves you, but you are free under God’s favor and mercy” (vss. 12–14).

**Discussion Question:** How does the difference in wording between instrument, tool, weapon, or member contribute a new insight into how much of our life we are to give to God and how it should be lived?

**III. Slaves of God** *(Read Romans 6:15–23 with your class.)*

Paul uses a strong and graphic illustration in his teaching of what it means to live a new life in Christ. In its historical context, the illustration shows that in Paul’s time and location, as in many other parts of the world, to be a slave meant that one did not own any part of one’s life. All attention was directed to the master in terms of service and time. A slave also did not have any rights; rather, he or she was viewed as a possession in service to the master.

Of interest in this text is verse 16, “You belong to the power which you choose to obey, whether you choose sin, whose reward is death, or God, obedience to whom means the reward of righteousness” (Phillips). In other words, referring
back to baptism, those who choose to follow Jesus do so freely, choosing a new Master and new relationship of slavery and service to the Master.

Notice the vast difference in pay scale between serving sin and becoming slaves of righteousness. The Living Bible version expresses well this consideration: “In those days when you were slaves of sin you didn’t bother much with goodness. And what was the result? Evidently not good, since you are ashamed now even to think about those things you used to do, for all of them end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and are slaves of God, and his benefits to you include holiness and everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (vss. 21–23).

Discussion: Ask class members to define in their own words the difference between the wages of service to sin and the “free gift” from the Master.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Divide your class members into small groups (ideally of 3–5 participants each).

Activity: Have your small groups design for a target group a battle plan for living a new, vibrant, and growing life in Christ; for example, the target group could be young adults, new church members, grandparents, et cetera.

Make sure in light of this week’s lesson that you consider the enemy also in terms of principalities and powers, and highlight the means of obtaining victory in Christ.

Regroup once this first part of the activity is accomplished and then ask one member of each small group to share his or her group’s battle plan with the group at large.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Writing supplies needed: paper or note cards and writing utensils. Is there a Sabbath School member missing from your group? Have your class members all write words of encouragement on a card or paper and either give or mail their notes to that member immediately. (Alternately, to perform this exercise without supplies, and in instances where it is more preferable or convenient to do so, visit, e-mail, or phone him or her.) Practice being an “instrument” of righteousness today.
Victory Over Evil Forces

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37, NKJV).

Key Thought: In Christ, we have victory over all forces that would oppress us.

In some parts of the world, religion is basically a source of power that may be seen as nothing but a way to help one meet the challenges of daily living. The Christian notion of salvation from sin, for example, is foreign to many traditional religions. In these places, Christianity risks being seen mainly as a means to help solve the problems of everyday life.

Though there are, of course, many practical advantages to a Christian’s lifestyle, we must always remember that Christianity has an “otherworldly” outlook. In other words, Christianity sees another dimension of reality beyond the material world. Both realms are important, and both host forces that are at cross purposes with each other. How thankful we can be that we are promised victory.

Again, we stress that the overarching narrative of the great controversy between Christ and Satan needs to form the background template for our understanding of the world and our place within it as Christians. In the midst of this conflict, Christianity does not abandon its adherents to the mercy of the opposing forces. On the contrary, in Christ we have the promise of victory over those forces.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 10.
A Stage Set for Our Victory

The Christian would have no hope of victory over the forces of evil unless the stage was set for it. In last week’s study it became clear that Christ, through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, gained victory over all sorts of evil and antigodly “powers.” In a very real sense, the unmasking and disarming of these “powers” have placed a limit on them. The fact that the “powers” have been brought under subjection sets the stage for the victory of the Christian.

Study Ephesians 1:18–22. Paul prays for the enlightening of the eyes of the Christians in Ephesus. According to Paul, what did Christ accomplish for us? How do we understand these words in the context of the great controversy? What is promised to us here? How do we make these promises real in our own experience?

Paul is praying that a new and deep illumination will accompany the Christian. When this has happened, their lives will be filled with Christian hope. They will know their privileges as God’s heirs, and they will know by experience the power of God in their lives, a power that is of the same magnitude as that which raised Jesus from the dead.

Notice Ephesians 1:20–22 in particular. What can we claim from these promises for ourselves and our struggles with forces stronger than we are?

As a consequence of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, all things, including principalities and powers, function in subjection to Him. The stage is truly set for the possibility of our individual victories over all that would spiritually oppress us.

Read the verses for today. What can you take from them that you can apply to whatever struggles you are facing at the moment? Think about what is being said in them and what is promised to us in Christ. How, in your own experience, can this message go from being mere theology to reality?
Hope of Victory

Not only is the stage set for the possibility of the Christian’s victory over evil forces, but the Bible explicitly gives us the hope of victory over them.

**Study** Romans 8:26–39. What point is Paul trying to make here? What reasons does Paul give for the Christian to look confidently to the future? Look at all the wonderful promises and words of encouragement found in these verses. Again, how can we take them beyond theology, beyond something that sounds nice, and live according to the clear teachings of the Word of God that are presented here?

Romans 8:29, 30 has been a battleground for discussions on predestination. But the passage really occurs in the context of a great promise. Paul gives at least two solid reasons for the Christian to be confident in the Lord. First, the Spirit helps us in our trials and “groanings.” Second, according to God’s eternal purpose, all things, including trials, contribute to the Christian’s ultimate welfare (no matter how hard that might be to see at this present time). Trusting God in difficulties is, indeed, a crucial component of what it means to live by faith and not by sight.

Verses 29 and 30 are Paul’s way of justifying the confidence expressed in verse 28. In these verses he shows how God’s purpose for those who love Him is developed, a purpose that includes all the processes of salvation.

**How** does Paul’s argument for boosting the confidence of the Christian reach a pinnacle in verses 31–34? Look especially at verse 31. In the context of the great controversy, what can we take from this verse for ourselves?

Romans 8:35–39 gives an array of entities over which the Christian can be victorious. Notice that “principalities and powers” are included in the list. The sheer inclusiveness of Paul’s list points out that there is nothing in the universe over which the Christian cannot be victorious, thanks to Jesus.
Christians Versus the Devil

Read James 4:7. What clear promise is given to the one who stands against the devil? How do we stand against a force so much more powerful than we are, in and of ourselves? See also Deut. 4:4.

The Christian is not a helpless victim, at the mercy of the devil. (Can you see here, too, why it’s so important to understand the literal reality of Satan and the fallen angels?) But the Christian is not so much called upon to rise in opposition to the devil as to take a stand against him. The word translated as “resist” is the Greek *anthistemi*, which means “taking a stand against something.” It is an attitude the Christian takes that causes the devil to flee. That attitude has to be one of complete surrender to Jesus, who alone has the power to cause the devil to flee from us.

Study 1 Peter 5:6–10. What promise is given to the Christian in the face of an enemy who is described as a “roaring lion” seeking someone to devour? How do these verses help us to understand what James wrote? See also Eph. 4:27 and 6:11.

Peter wrote these words to admonish Christians who were suffering persecution. Obviously he knew that lurking behind the persecution his readers were suffering was the archenemy, Satan. The apostle admonished his readers to resist the devil. Here Peter uses the word *anthistemi*, as James did, but he adds the modifier *stereoi* (”hard” or “firm”). Thus, he suggests that the devil may flee from those who present a solid, rock-like front against his attacks. A cowardly attitude will not suffice. Still, Peter knows that in spite of a strong stand, suffering may endure for a while yet; but God Himself will perfect (mend), establish, strengthen, and settle the Christian (1 Pet. 5:10).

Even with all the promises given here, we are not promised freedom from suffering, are we? What Christian doesn’t know the reality of suffering? As humans, we seem destined in this world to suffer. What crucial difference should our faith make for us amid sorrows and pain?
Examples of Victory

So far we have been shown by the Bible the hope and promises of victory that the Christian may have. Actually beyond these, we have real examples of Christian victories over evil forces recorded in the Bible. We begin with the example of the ministry of the early disciples whom Jesus sent out.

Read Matthew 10:1–8; Mark 6:7, 12, 13; Luke 9:1, 2; Luke 10:1–20. Look at what these people were commissioned to do. How are these texts to be understood in the context of the great controversy? Also, what do these texts say today to us, the ones who are called to preach to the world about Jesus?

It is quite interesting that as Jesus sent the Twelve out to proclaim the gospel of the coming of God’s kingdom, He deemed it important to give them power over demons and unclean spirits. This is not surprising, because proper preaching of the gospel necessarily entails the unmasking of such powers. The manifestation of the “powers” was to be expected as the gospel would be proclaimed; hence, the need to give the Twelve power over them. Surely, the evil forces manifested themselves as the Twelve went about preaching, and, just as surely, many demons and evil forces were cast out.

As far as can be seen from the records, Jesus did not, in specific terms, commission the Seventy to cast out demons (Luke 10:9). Yet, this is the aspect of the mission that seems to have excited the Seventy the most (Luke 10:17). With joy the Seventy reported that as they went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom, demons were brought into subjection to them. Of course, they understood that it was the power of Jesus working through them that made this possible.

Though much can be discussed and debated about these texts and the way in which they should be understood today, the important point is that, as Christians who have been called to proclaim the gospel to the world, we have, through Christ, the power to do it.

Read Luke 10:20. What important point should we take for ourselves from Jesus’ words here? How does His response show us what should be important in our lives? How can we make sure that we keep this correct emphasis?
Examples of Victory (Book of Acts)

The examples of victories over demonic forces that we looked at in yesterday’s lesson happened in the days of our Lord on the earth. But the victories were by no means restricted to that period. In the book of Acts we find the continuing victories of Jesus’ followers over demonic forces.

Of course, this shouldn’t be surprising, not with all the promises that Jesus left to His followers about the Holy Spirit being with them when He Himself left (see, for example, John 14:16).

At the same time, too, as we so well know, the great controversy between Christ and Satan, though settled finally at the cross, is to rage until the end of time. Thus, Christ’s followers, even after He left, were to be engaged in the conflict, especially as they sought to fulfill the gospel commission.

Read the following examples of some of these victories over evil forces. What lesson can we learn from them in our present context of outreach and witness?

Acts 5:12–16_______________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Acts 3:1–11_______________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Acts 16:16–18_____________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Acts 16:16–18 presents an unusual case. When the slave girl mentioned “the Most High God,” her words expressed a great truth. Paul, though, would have none of it. He could see what was really going on. The supernatural powers that she had manifested, which were making money for her masters, were not of the Lord, and Paul knew it. When she cried out about these men being “servants of the Most High God” (NKJV), she was not talking about the true God but, most likely, about a Canaanite god who was also called Elyon (Most High). Notice how easily, merely through the use of certain common terms, error could have greatly compromised the truth.

Look again at Acts 5:12–16 and the amazing part about the people hoping that “at least the shadow of Peter” (NKJV) might touch them. What warnings should that have for any Christian who is working for the Lord, especially when his or her work is deemed “successful”?

“Jesus gained the victory through submission and faith in God, and by the apostle He says to us, ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.’ James 4:7, 8. We cannot save ourselves from the tempter’s power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but ‘the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.’ Prov. 18:10. Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 130, 131.

“The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper.

“There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast out the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 490, 493.

Discussion Questions:

1. Take some of the examples from this week that show the victories revealed in the Bible. In what ways do we see similar things happening today? What can we do, if anything, to see more of them?

2. What does it mean to “draw nigh unto God,” as Ellen G. White quoted above? How do we do that? Discuss in class what it means, how we do it, and what happens when we do.

3. Imagine that you are Peter, and people want to merely be touched by your shadow. Think about what that could do to you spiritually. What’s your only safety in a situation like that?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 8:37

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe the basis on which the followers of Christ may experience victory over the evil one.

**Feel:** Acknowledge the power of Christ available to the weakest soul who, through repentance and faith, claims His protection and strength.

**Do:** Submit to God, draw near to Him, and stand in His strength, resisting Satan’s wiles.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know:** Assurance of Victory
   - What biblical examples demonstrate how followers of Christ have been victorious over the devil?
   - How may Christians draw on the promises of God for power and victory in times of temptation?

II. **Feel:** Perfect Hope
   - How was Christ victorious over Satan? In like manner, how may Christ’s followers utilize the same means in order to attain victory?
   - How may the children of God be confident in Christ’s ability to offer every power they need to resist the evil one? What hope and joy does this assurance provide?

III. **Do:** Stand Like a Rock
   - What must Christians do in order to meet the devil’s attacks?
   - Who should be the main focus of attention when trouble surrounds the child of God?
   - What promises for power and victory may be claimed daily?

**Summary:** Through submission to God and faith in the Father, Christ gained victory over Satan. In the same way, as His followers seek God’s power to overcome temptation through submission to God’s will and faith in His Word, even the weakest soul will be victorious.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Christ’s death on the cross offers the hope of a life reconciled to God while also extending victory to the believer over the forces of evil.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s study reflects on the principalities and powers of evil in relationship to the promises and biblical examples of victory. The latter are testimony to the fact that, with the power of Jesus Christ, victory over the forces of evil is possible.

Your goal in Step 1 is to encourage class members to think more deeply about the spiritual victories that have already been won in their lives. This is a time to gather hope and encouragement in recalling God’s work and His fulfilled promises on their behalf.

You will need a chalkboard or writing board for this section that will be visible to all your class members. (Alternately, if a chalkboard is not available, record the opening activity on a piece of paper or simply discuss it with the class.)

**Opening Activity:** Draw a line down the middle of your chalkboard or writing board. At the top of the left column write the words “Principalities and Powers” and on the right column write the word “Victories.”

Now have your class members think back to their pre-conversion or pre-baptism lives. What were they spiritually struggling against? Make a list of these struggles under the column “Principalities and Powers.”

At this point, ask your class members to recall the power of God in their lives and the ways this power was evidenced in victory. Write their responses under the column “Victories.”

**Thought Question:** How do my responses influence my hope for victory over evil forces today?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** No one suffered more than Jesus. Suffering, as part of living the Christian life, is best understood in the context of the lives of biblical characters, such as Christ and Paul, who suffered persecution, hardship, and adversity while living out their faith.
Scripture makes known from Genesis to Revelation the consequence of sin and the open attack upon God’s people by instruments of wickedness. Even so, many times we forget and question our difficult circumstances; therefore, we are in constant need of being reminded through the promises in Scripture that living victoriously amid suffering is possible in Christ.

The goal of this section is to reflect more deeply on the topics of suffering and hardship in the life of the believing follower of Christ, as well as to reflect on the hope and victory that are made possible through faith.

Please read through all of the Scripture passages and encourage your class members to read from different versions of the Bible for added insight and meaning into the text.

I. Living and Suffering for Christ (Read 1 Peter 4:12–19, 5:6–11 with your class.)

In the first text, 1 Peter 4:12–19, the apostle Peter remarks in verses 12 and 13, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (NIV).

Writing in apostolic times, Peter the disciple knew firsthand that to identify with Jesus would naturally result in persecution and suffering. For those brothers and sisters in Christ living currently in geographic locations and conditions where very little persecution and trial occur as a result of being a follower of Christ, it is a surprise when unexpected adversity and hardship occur in their lives.

Notice carefully Peter’s clarification and commentary (1 Pet. 5:8–11) on the topic of suffering, as paraphrased in The Living Bible: “Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart. Stand firm when he attacks. Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world are going through these sufferings too” (vss. 8, 9).

Suffering, therefore, is to be an expected occurrence in the life of Christians, given their common enemy. However, equally important is the promise of victory that Peter shares with the followers of Christ in verses 10 and 11: “After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you his eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever. To him be all power over all things, forever and ever. Amen” (TLB).

Please turn your attention now to 1 Peter 5:6, 7. Note Peter’s words that offer great comfort and guidance during times of trial and affliction: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due
time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” *(NIV)*.

**Consider This:** Have your class members paraphrase 1 Peter 5:6, 7. What does this verse tell us about God?

### II. Keeping Eternity in View *(Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–17 with your class.)*

The apostle Paul is an exceptional example of suffering for Christ, and is someone who endures many forms of hardship; as such, he is an authoritative voice on the subjects of suffering, faith, and victory in Christ.

Notice carefully the contrasts he draws forth in verses 8 and 9. He speaks of being afflicted in every way, but not crushed; intensely perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not feeling forsaken by God; struck down, but not destroyed.

Note the word *always* in verse 10. Reflecting on this word gives evidence that Paul endured this kind of suffering as a daily, usual experience in the course of his life and ministry. Observe in verses 10 and 11 how the apostle Paul keeps in view the life and death of Jesus in relationship to his own spiritual experience.

How is Paul able to endure and live through such intense, constant suffering? Read again verses 13 and 14. “But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” *(NRSV).*

Paul had eyes of faith that viewed life from a broad eternal perspective and not from a short-term momentary outlook. This spiritual lens gave Paul an attitude of generosity, as expressed in verse 15, “Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” *(NRSV).*

It is in verses 16–18 that Paul displays faith in abundant measure and places suffering in its rightful place. “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” *(NRSV).*

Therefore, Paul bears witness to the importance of focusing our attention on eternal realities. Consequently, he shows us how to place actual-present circumstances, suffering, and afflictions within their proper context in view of “the eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”

**Consider This:** How did Paul keep from losing heart in the face of his continuous daily struggles? How can keeping in mind the life and death of Jesus help us to endure affliction on our spiritual journey?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This exercise will provide opportunity to work with the themes of opposing power, God’s power, suffering, and victory. Please allow enough time to read through the Scripture narrative and work through the responses.

You will need paper and writing utensils for each class member. You will also need a chalkboard or writing board that may be viewed by your class members. Make four columns and write the following headings in each column:

WHO (list the persons in the story)
WHAT they did
HOW they responded verbally
WHAT implications do you find for your life in view of suffering and victory?

(Alternately, if you do not have the supplies available, simply divide the class into groups and discuss their responses to the questions listed above.)

Activity: Divide your class members into groups of 3–5 persons (ideally). Have the small group members take turns reading through Acts 5:12–42. Then have them write down their responses to the questions listed on your writing board.

When the groups have finished working through this passage, have them come together again to share their responses.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: It is important to review and evaluate what we have learned by creatively expressing the spiritual insights that have touched our hearts and lives. It is worthwhile to acknowledge how far-reaching the examples and words of the individuals portrayed in Scripture are—how they continue to inspire, encourage, and contribute to our spiritual growth and faith. This understanding is necessary in order to live a life of victory in Christ.

Activity: Team up your class members into pairs and have them create and write down (if supplies are available) an imaginary conversation with Peter and the apostles. Have them begin this conversation with the words: “Peter and apostles, today you have strengthened my faith by . . .”
Lesson 7
*November 10–16
(page 56 of Standard Edition)

“Arming” for Victory

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Eph. 6:14–17, 2 Cor. 6:7, Eph. 5:9, Rom. 10:15, 1 Thess. 5:8, Mark 14:38.

Memory Text: “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13, NKJV).

Key Thought: Every believer must be personally and individually armed as we each find ourselves immersed in the great controversy.

Satan’s ultimate goal is to wrest for himself the allegiance that all true believers give to Christ. Before conversion, people belonged to the devil’s realm; he ruled over them. Although conversion to Christ takes the believer away from the devil’s dominion, it does not completely shatter the devil’s power. If anything, Satan increases his efforts to destroy our faith and win us back to himself. He has a vast array of deceptive ploys; Scripture calls them “the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). In the end, though, no matter the enemy’s deceptions, ploys, and wiles, he can take no one from Christ who is determined to stay faithful to the Lord (Satan might make our lives miserable, but that’s another matter entirely).

This week’s lesson focuses on the Christian’s armor in this warfare. Putting on all of God’s armor is our only protection. Therefore, we need to understand the nature of that armor because, without it, we would surely fall prey to the enemy; with it, our victory is assured.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.
The Need for Arming Personally

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul describes the Christian life as a struggle, saying, “we ... wrestle.” Notice, he uses the plural. The passage reads, literally, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (NKJV). Every Christian is brought into the picture. In verse 13 Paul urges his readers to put on the whole armor of God. It is with God’s armor that we are to equip ourselves, and it has been made available for our use. Paul begins the verse with the word wherefore/therefore, implying that, in view of the nature of the conflict, such arming is necessary. Paul then describes the way in which the Christian ought to be armed and does so using the imagery of how a Roman soldier would have been armed for battle.

Consider the imagery of Ephesians 6:14–17 carefully. What in the picture impresses you with the fact that here is a struggle that not only involves every Christian but calls, fundamentally, for personal engagement? What does that mean to you that you, yourself, have a fight in which to engage?

The word translated as “wrestling” originally referred to hand-to-hand combat but was later applied to other types of fighting. As used here, although a real hand-to-hand contest with demons may not be in view, the word clearly points to an individualizing of the struggle.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1–13, though in a different context than what’s being considered here, nevertheless speaks to the issue of personal engagement in spiritual matters. Ellen G. White applies the spiritual conditions of the five virgins to Paul’s description of a class of end-time people who have a form of godliness but lack its power (2 Tim. 3:1–5). “This is the class that in time of peril are found crying, Peace and safety. They lull their hearts into security, and dream not of danger. When startled from their lethargy, they discern their destitution, and entreat others to supply their lack; but in spiritual things no man can make up another’s deficiency.” —Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 411, 412.

What are some things that only you can do for yourself—things that no one else can? (For instance, no one can eat for you.) How do you then apply that same principle to the arming of self for the spiritual conflict in which we are each individually engaged?
Girdle of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14, NKJV).

Though it’s a little difficult to know the exact nature of the girdle, it seems that in Ephesians 6:14, Paul may have been referring to a leather apron that offered some protection to the lower abdomen but also made freedom of movement and readiness for action possible. In this sense, the girdle was a piece of basic armor. And that armor, said Paul, was “truth.”

Along with the girdle of truth was the breastplate of righteousness. Thus, in this one verse Paul links the concepts of truth and righteousness.

Look up the following texts. How can they help us to understand the link between truth and righteousness, and why are they so crucial for our spiritual protection in the great controversy? 1 Kings 3:6, Ps. 15:2, 96:13, Prov. 12:17, Isa. 48:1, 2 Cor. 6:7, Eph. 5:9.

When the apostle Paul speaks of righteousness as a breastplate in the context of spiritual warfare, he has moral issues in mind. Doing right and practicing righteousness (or, in other words, living out the “truth”) are as vital to Christians in the battle with the powers of evil as is the breastplate to the soldier on the battlefield. When we neglect to do what is right, when we turn our backs on what we know to be the truth, we are easy prey for Satan’s attacks, because we are leaving a wide-open hole in our armor.

At the same time, though this “righteousness” includes living a righteous life, we must always remember the other aspect of righteousness, and that is the righteousness of Christ, which covers the believer and remains the believer’s only hope of salvation. As long as we cling to this truth—that our salvation rests in Jesus—we can be protected from one of Satan’s most efficient spiritual assaults against us: discouragement.

Have you ever been tempted to give up your walk with Jesus because you’ve been discouraged over your life, your character, and/or your actions? If so, why is understanding the truth about Christ’s righteousness so crucial to a strong defense against Satan’s assaults?
Preparation and the Shield of Faith

The Roman soldier armed himself to ensure that his steps would not be impeded on rough terrain. To facilitate movement over all kinds of roads, Roman soldiers often wore shoes studded with sharp nails. Such shoes ensured a good grip, and Paul likens the shoes to the “readiness,” or “preparation,” of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15).

Read Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15, and Ephesians 6:15. Paul’s idea seems to be steadfastness in the Christian life of warfare. In what sense does the gospel of peace provide the Christian with a “good grip” in spiritual warfare?

Ephesians 6:15 may be translated in various ways: “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” “having feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace,” or “having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace.” The key is a Greek word that can mean “preparedness,” as in a prepared foundation or base. Hence, the gospel of peace as a “prepared foundation” is the peace a Christian experiences as a result of having been reconciled with God through the blood of Christ. This reconciliation gives the Christian a firm foothold from which to engage in the spiritual battle that we all face.

The next piece of armor that Paul speaks about is the shield, which he likens to faith (Eph. 6:16). In introducing this armor, the apostle prefaces his point with a phrase that may be translated as “above all,” or “besides,” or “in addition to all.” What do you think the apostle means by this opening phrase?

The word translated as “shield” comes from the word for “door.” The shield, measuring about four feet by two-and-a-half feet and consisting of two layers of wood glued together, was shaped like a door. Because arrows in those days were dipped in pitch and then set on fire, the wooden shield was covered with leather in order to extinguish the glowing arrows and blunt their tips. This was a prominent weapon among all the weapons of defense.

The spiritual analogy isn’t hard to see: among the “fiery arrows” of Satan are lust, doubt, greed, vanity, and so forth. “But faith in God, held aloft like a shield, catches them, snuffs out the flame, and makes them fall harmless to the ground.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1045. This kind of faith is primarily faith in action, a faith that, while including doctrinal truth, goes beyond mere belief. It is a faith that manifests itself in an active defense against the assaults of the enemy. Of course, we can’t save ourselves, and we can’t fight the devil ourselves; our battle is to daily choose the Lord and His ways over anything the devil will throw before us.
Helmet and Sword

The helmet of salvation in Ephesians 6:17 is most likely taken from Isaiah 59:17, although Paul applies it differently. In Isaiah 59, it is God who wears the helmet of salvation; here, in Ephesians, the Christian is called upon to receive it. Whereas the previous items may have been laid out for the soldier to pick up, the helmet is handed to him. Perhaps this is to emphasize the total “giftedness” of salvation.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul speaks of the helmet as the hope of salvation. In Ephesians 6:17, the helmet is depicted simply as salvation. How may this shift in emphasis help to explain how salvation can be a weapon of defense?

Salvation in the New Testament is a present experience that will climax in eternity by way of deliverance from every kind of evil. The victorious helmet that God (Isa. 59:17) wears is given to the believer as protection. Because the ultimate goal of the devil’s attack is to deprive Christians of their salvation, the present assurance of salvation that is “given” to them apart from their own works becomes a powerful weapon for surviving the conflict. Truly can the believer in any spiritual conflict proclaim with the psalmist, “O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle” (Ps. 140:7, NKJV).

After mentioning the helmet of salvation, Paul speaks next about “the sword of the spirit,” which is the Word of God. Compare that text with Hebrews 4:12. What important truth is being conveyed by these verses, especially in the context of our battle with Satan?

The temptation of Christ as recorded in Matthew 4:1–10 is a beautiful illustration of how the Word of God can be an effective weapon. The passage should also provide an incentive to Christians to buttress themselves with the truths that are revealed in the Word of God.

So many forces are at play in attempts to weaken our trust in the Bible. What are some of those forces in your own society, church, or culture? More important, how can you defend yourself against any and every attempt (which at times can be very subtle) to weaken your trust in the Word of God?
Praying Always

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase “praying always,” which suggests that praying is connected with the previous verses. The idea is that the putting on, taking up, and receiving of heaven’s armor, all necessitate reliance on God. Hence, “prayer is not another weapon; rather, it is the spirit, the manner, in which the whole armor is to be worn and the battle fought. Paul is here urging it as a perpetual state of mind, a continuous attitude of communion with God.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1046.

Study carefully Ephesians 6:18. What words and phrases associated with Paul’s admonition to the Christian regarding prayer suggest alertness and discipline?

The Bible frequently calls on people not to cease from prayer (Luke 18:1, Rom. 12:12, Phil. 4:6, Col. 4:2, 1 Thess. 5:17). But in the context of the combat with evil forces that Paul is addressing in Ephesians 6, he stresses the fact that every occasion in life is to be wrapped in prayer. Such an attitude about prayer is no small demand of Christians, especially because our first instinct in moments of difficulty is to consult friends and colleagues, which is fine and has its place. Prayer, though, should always be the first line of defense, and it is something that we should be doing always.

Ephesians 6:18 begins with the phrase “praying always” and continues with another about being “watchful.” About what are we to be watchful, and why?

When Jesus was in Gethsemane, He told Peter and the other disciples whom He found sleeping to watch and pray (Mark 14:38). Before this happened, Jesus had spent some time warning the disciples to watch (Mark 13:33–37). From the perspective of Luke, watching is linked with prayer as a constant affair that brings spiritual strength to the Christian. In Ephesians 6:18, the emphasis is on praying for others. No doubt, as we pray for others, we ourselves are spiritually strengthened and are better armed for the ensuing conflict, no matter what form it takes.

Why is praying for ourselves more important for us spiritually than having others pray for us (however important that is)? What does personal prayer do for you that the prayers of others just can’t?

“In every soul two powers are struggling earnestly for the victory. Unbelief marshals its forces, led by Satan, to cut us off from the Source of our strength. Faith marshals its forces, led by Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Hour by hour, in the sight of the heavenly universe, the conflict goes forward. This is a hand-to-hand fight, and the great question is, Which shall obtain the mastery? This question each must decide for himself. In this warfare all must take a part, fighting on one side or the other. From the conflict there is no release. . . . We are urged to prepare for this conflict. ‘Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’ The warning is repeated, ‘Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’”
—Ellen G. White, The Youth’s Instructor, January 10, 1901.

“We must put on every piece of the armor, and then stand firm. The Lord has honored us by choosing us as His soldiers. Let us fight bravely for Him, maintaining the right in every transaction. Rectitude in all things is essential to the welfare of the soul. As you strive for the victory over your own inclinations, He will help you by His Holy Spirit to be circumspect in every action, that you may give no occasion for the enemy to speak evil of the truth. Put on as your breastplate that divinely protected righteousness which it is the privilege of all to wear. This will protect your spiritual life.”—Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1119.

Discussion Questions:

1. However much this week’s lesson emphasized the personal aspect of the struggle in which we’re all engaged, as Christians we are part of a larger community. How can the community as a whole help one another in their individual conflicts? What are the practical things that the community can do to help those who are in spiritual need, in whatever form that need may come?

2. How does the military imagery that Paul uses reinforce the reality of the great-controversy motif that is so central to the Bible? Why is it always important to keep the reality of this conflict before us? Who could imagine a soldier on the battlefield, forgetting that he was in a war? How much more important is it for us not to forget either?
The Lesson in Brief

▶ Key Text: Ephesians 6:13

▶ The Student Will:

**Know:** Describe how each piece of the armor that God provides is essential for life as a soldier in His army.

**Feel:** Sense the honor that the Lord confers on His soldiers by choosing them to fight for His cause.

**Do:** Put on the armor of God, relying wholly on His protection and power through prayer.

▶ Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Whole Armor

A How are the girdle of faith, breastplate of righteousness, footgear of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit each critical pieces of the armor God provides?

B What kinds of attacks from dark forces are thwarted by each piece of armor?

II. Feel: Honored to Fight on God’s Side

A How did Christ utilize the same armor that He provided to His “soldiers”?

B Why is it an honor to participate with the Son of God Himself in the battle over evil?

III. Do: Suiting Up

A Though the armor is God’s and provides His protection, what is the soldier’s duty in standing firm against the evil one?

B What important part does prayer play in the suitig up and wearing of God’s armor? Why is the role of prayer so important?

▶ Summary: Through His armor of truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and His Word, God provides protection and both offensive and defensive strategies in the battle against Satan. His soldiers are called to put on this armor and stand firm against Satan, relying through prayer on God’s strength.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The armor of God is something we put on when we first accept Christ. It is vital to protect ourselves by putting on the spiritual armor daily as part of a dynamic and ongoing relationship with Christ.

**Just for Teachers:** This lesson should be used to develop a full understanding of each part of the spiritual armor that Paul introduces in Ephesians. Once the class understands the different parts and functions of that armor, it is important for them to learn how to use it most effectively. Studying Jesus’ example can help the class to learn this and can also prepare it to anticipate the types of attacks that Satan is likely to wage.

**Opening Bible Reading—Putting on the Whole Armor of God:**
Ask your class to turn to Ephesians 6:11–18, the basis of this week’s lesson, which talks about the armor of God. Invite a member to read the passage, keeping in mind that Paul wants to encourage the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. In verses 11–13, Paul transitions into giving practical advice on exactly how to do that. As a veteran of spiritual warfare, Paul’s counsel to his fellow soldiers was to put on the armor of God. Yet, this was not a new idea. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul refers to the breastplate of faith and love, and to the hope of salvation as a helmet. And in Romans 13:12, we read that the day is at hand for putting on the “armor of light” (NIV). However, Ephesians fully develops this concept.

It is helpful to remember that as he wrote this epistle, Paul was chained beside, or directly to, a Roman soldier. Day in and day out, he no doubt looked at his captor’s breastplate, helmet, leather shoes, shield, sword belt, and sword. It is easy to imagine that under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul’s mind compared what he saw his jailors wearing to what Christians needed to wear in order to successfully engage in warfare against the devil.

**Discuss:** Based on the passage above, why is it important to have our spiritual armor on all the time? Why is it vital to understand that “wearing the armor of God” is an active and dynamic state of living and being in Christ? In what way is putting on the armor a daily choice instead of a one-time thing?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The three primary goals for this section are to (1) understand and put on all the aspects of God’s armor, (2) identify how Satan specially targets the converted, and (3) develop skills and habits that allow us to successfully fight against him.

First, encourage your class to explore the nature of the armor of God. As the Bible notes, we know that a spiritual battle cannot be fought in the flesh in order to gain the victory. We must use spiritual weapons. Reading further in Ephesians, we see what these weapons are:

- A belt, which is the girdle of truth,
- A breastplate, which is righteousness,
- The helmet of salvation, a gift of God,
- The gospel of peace, which are the shoes covering our feet,
- The shield of faith, our key defense,
- And the sword, which is the Word of God.

The Whole Armor of God (Review Ephesians 6:11–18 with your class.)

Once we are clad in the armor of Christ, we must stand ready to do battle. But what can we expect in the war we will fight with the devil? There are two important sources we can look to in order to understand the conditions we should expect. The first source is the Bible, and the second is what we know about war from the human experience. Both sources provide information about the circumstances, facts, and conditions that we should not only expect but prepare and be ready for when they occur.

Let us first explore what we can learn from human experience. Although we know that Satan will be the losing general in the struggle of good versus evil, we also know that he is cunning and smart and should never be underestimated. Similarly, we can see from looking at human examples that some of the best generals have been on the losing side of war. If you look up General Erwin Rommel, nicknamed the “Desert Fox,” you will read of a general who outsmarted a better-supplied, larger British army many times in the North African campaign of World War II. One of his tactics he used was the positioning of a small number of tanks with propellers to swirl up dust several miles on the horizon away from the British so that they were convinced the attack was coming from that direction. The British then positioned their anti-tank guns in such a way as to repel an advance from Rommel from that
direction. Suddenly, however, the real tanks and army struck a blow from the rear, and the battle was over before it began. What this example reveals to us are the kinds of tactics that we should expect. Satan is a master of misdirection, stealth, and subterfuge. Any good general will try to outmaneuver and outsmart his opponent, and Satan is an expert at pointing people in the wrong direction.

The second, and most important, source to consult when seeking to understand the type of challenges we will face is the Bible. Here we see stories unfold that reveal to us what a spiritual battle is and what the devil’s tactics are. The adversary always wants to wage the battle in conditions that are optimal for his success and our failure. And there is one central strategy that Satan uses time and again that is always successful—he strives to divert our awareness away from his methods and to assign the blame for the evil that he causes to other people. In Genesis 3:1–5, we see this begin in the Garden of Eden with the serpent. In tempting Eve to fall, Satan convinces her that God’s motives are those in question and suspect, not his, and that it is God who wishes to withhold divinity, knowledge, and immortality from Adam and Eve.

**Consider This:** How does Satan make use of diversion, misdirection, and stealth in his attacks against us? According to the Bible, what sources of protection does God give to us? List the different pieces of the spiritual armor of God and their functions. How does each one protect us from the arrows of fear, doubt, impurity, wrath, impatience, greed, et cetera?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Encourage your class to look in more detail at other scriptures in order to see the spiritual battle unfolding in the Bible. Look especially at the example of the life of Jesus, specifically, at the parts where the devil unleashes the full potential of his attack. Most of these attacks came through people. The list is impressive and includes the following:

a. Jesus’ family—some of whom thought He was crazy *(Mark 3:21)*; even His own brothers did not believe in Him *(John 7:3–5)*.

b. The Jewish nation—“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” *(John 1:11, NIV)*.


Imagine the insidious nature of being doubted and undermined by those closest to you on a regular basis. For example, the lesson mentions the temptation of Christ, as recorded in Matthew 4:10. In all these examples, we observe how Jesus used the Word of God as a weapon against the tempter.
We can be certain that Satan will use those same tactics against us that he used against Jesus; he will attack, oppose, ridicule, and cause us to be forsaken by those closest to us whenever we want to execute and do God’s will.

Inductive Questions:

Consider the tactic of temptation and false counsel. Have you ever received counsel that presented an easier way to do something? It sounded good and was the result of true human affection. Yet, it had only one flaw: it opposed God’s will. How do we defend against this type of attack? What roles do prayer and study play in this defense? How do those two things help to perfect our ability to wield the sword of truth?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: Lastly, ask your class to turn to Luke 22:31–62 where we find Peter’s denial of Jesus. What can we learn from the example of Peter about losing focus and getting chinks in the armor that we wear? In this chapter we find Peter to be distracted by things of the world, issues of self-interest, and a desire for recognition and position.

Note: The example of Peter perhaps shows the greatest weapon in Satan’s arsenal of weapons. The person he uses to distract us from Jesus and to shed the protective armor of God is none other than self.

1. Ask the class, of all the battles that Satan has waged, which has been the hardest for them?

2. What can we learn from the lesson about how to let Jesus take full control because doing so is the key to securing a victory over Satan?

3. What battle tactics did our own Savior use in order to win the battle of the ages?
Lesson 8  *November 17–23
(page 64 of Standard Edition)

The Church: In Service to Humanity

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:21, 22; Acts 15:1–29.

Memory Text: “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14, 15, NKJV).

Key Thought: “We should remember that the church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 2, p. 396.

For many, church isn’t what it used to be (whatever that was). Some people even talk about “a churchless Christianity,” a concept that is self-contradictory. Others rail against “organized religion” (what is better, “disorganized religion”?). The Bible teaches, clearly, about the importance of the church. It’s not an option; it’s a crucial component in the plan of salvation. No wonder, then, that as the great controversy unfolds, Satan works so hard against it, especially because the church is one important means by which sinners are brought into contact with God’s offer of salvation. The church, wrote Paul, was “the house of God,” even “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15, NKJV). The church is not a human invention; it was created by God for the purposes of bringing erring sinners into a saving relationship with Him.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 24.
Nature of the Church: Part 1

When we speak about the nature of something, we are usually interested in its origins, function, and purpose. Besides providing several images to depict the church, the Bible uses a particular word in reference to it, *ecclesia*, which means “called out” or “called forth.” In secular Greek life the word was used primarily to describe a group of citizens who had been called out from their homes into a public place for an assembly or gathering. The New Testament uses the word in this general sense.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), the “congregation” of Israel, especially when gathered before the Lord for religious purposes, is referred to as *ecclesia*.

The Jews were “called out” to be God’s special people, but the early Christians may have used the word to identify those Jews and Gentiles who, as recipients of God’s grace, had been called out to be Christ’s witnesses. In the New Testament, the church describes the company of the faithful the world over. It’s important to note that the word *ecclesia* is never used with reference to a building in which public worship is conducted. Equally significant is that whereas the word *synagogue* originally denoted an assembly of people gathered for a specific purpose, the Christians preferred to use the word *ecclesia*. Nevertheless, both words indicate that the New Testament church was in historical continuity with the Old Testament church, the “congregation” of Israel (*Acts 7:38)*.

The word *ecclesia* indicates, in general terms, a group of people called out through God’s initiative. How does this explain Paul’s use of the word at three different levels: (i) the church in individual homes (*Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19*); (ii) the church in specific cities (*1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2*); and (iii) the church in larger geographical areas (*Acts 9:31*)?

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*Ecclesia* is the depiction of any group of people gathered together who share in a saving relationship with Christ. This means that individual congregations are not just a part of the whole church; each unit represents the whole. Furthermore, the church is one throughout the whole world, but at the same time it is present in each assembly.

Think about your local church, which functions as a representative of God’s whole church. What kind of responsibilities does that place on you as part of the church body and on the local church itself?
Monday

November 19

Nature of the Church: Part 2

Besides the word *ecclesia* itself, the New Testament describes the church with several images that further explain its nature and function. Today we will look at just two crucial concepts regarding the church: the church as the people of God and the church as the body of Christ.

1. The “people of God” as a concept is applied in the Bible to the children of Israel (Deut. 14:2). Read 1 Peter 2:9, where the concept is clearly applied to Christians. How are we to understand what this means for us today?

Notice that even as the concept is applied to Christians, it is still used to describe the nation of Israel (Luke 1:68; Rom. 11:1, 2). Evidently the New Testament applies the concept to the church in a way that suggests continuity and consummation. (See Gal. 3:29.)

2. “Body of Christ”—Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:27, and Ephesians 1:22, 23 depict the church as the body of Christ. How do these texts help us to understand better its nature and function?

Numerous ideas can be found within these texts, perhaps the most obvious one being the unity (see Wednesday’s lesson) that should be seen in the church. This is an idea expressed elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul writes: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” (1 Cor. 12:12–17).

Some people suffer from what are known as auto-immune diseases: their own immune system, which is supposed to protect the body, attacks it instead. Think about the implications of this analogy for the church as “the body of Christ.”
The Mission of the Church

The church as “the body of Christ” means that the church is to do what Christ would do if He were still on the earth “bodily.” It is for this reason that the church as an “assembly” has been called out. The church does not simply have a mission; the church is mission.

Read Matthew 28:19, 20. How does this text address the issue of the church’s mission?

Mission involves sending people out to speak for God. It is what God Himself did with the prophets of Israel (Jer. 7:25) and with the apostles (Luke 9:1, 2; 10:1, 9). Jesus also sent out His disciples just as the Father had sent Him (John 20:21). The church today can do no less and still remain faithful to its calling.

What do the following texts also teach us about the church’s mission?

Clearly, evangelism is central to the mission of the church. The church exists also for the edification of believers, for the promotion of true worship, and for engagement in matters of social concern.

Though the church faces many challenges, one of the most difficult is to keep a proper balance in its understanding of mission. On one hand, it would be so easy to get caught up in social reform and in working for the betterment of society and its ills. While that work is important, in and of itself, it must never be allowed to swallow up the ultimate mission of the church, which is to reach the lost for Jesus and to prepare people for His return. At the same time, too, we need to avoid the extreme of living as if every headline signaled the end of the world and thus neglect the basic tasks of daily life. We need divine wisdom in order to know how to strike the right balance.

How involved are you in the mission of the church? In what way could you do more than you are doing? Why is it important for your own spiritual growth to be involved in the church’s calling?
Unity of the Church

The church—depicted as the “called out” of God, the “people of God,” the “body of Christ,” and the “temple of the Holy Spirit”—is fitted for service or mission. Unity is essential to the church because without it the church cannot successfully accomplish its mission. It is no wonder that the issue of unity was on Christ’s mind toward the close of His earthly life (John 17:21, 22).

Jesus prayed for the unity of the church (John 17:21, 22); Paul exhorted the believers about it (Rom. 15:5, 6). How are we to understand unity as it is expressed in these texts? What does this unity mean?

The unity that Christ prayed for and that Paul exhorted the believers to attain clearly involved a union of feeling, thought, action, and much more. It is not a harmony that is achieved through social engineering, diplomatic management, or political subterfuge. It is a gift bestowed upon believers by the indwelling Christ (John 17:22, 23) and kept by the power of God the Father (John 17:11).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 2 Corinthians 13:11. How are we to achieve what Paul calls for in these texts?

There is no question that we are all different people and that we have different views regarding many things, views that can at times make unity difficult. Though stresses and strains are inevitable at every level of the church, we all need to keep an attitude of humility, self-denial, and a desire for a good that is greater than ourselves. So many of the divisions that arise do so because of selfishness, pride, and a desire to exalt oneself and one’s views over others. None of us has it all right; none of us understands all things perfectly. Whatever the inevitable differences that will arise, were we all to daily take up our crosses, daily die to self, daily seek not only our own good but the good of others and the good of the church as a whole, so many of the problems with which we struggle and which hinder the work would vanish.

In short, unity begins with each one of us, individually, as followers of Christ—not just in name but in a life of true self-sacrifice, a life dedicated to a cause and a good greater than ourselves.
Governance means getting things done. This is true of general social life, and it is also true of church life. Governance also involves organization, which means the organizing of things into a functioning, coherent whole with rules, regulations, and structures designed to facilitate a task at hand. Authority is also critical to governance. At the practical level of church life, who has authority to authorize things and who can be authorized to do things? Different answers to these questions have led to different forms of church governance.

Seventh-day Adventists have a representative system of church governance. Ideally, leadership acts only as representatives, receiving delegated authority and responsibilities from the membership. It is not simply enough to show that a system of church governance is based on Scripture; the exercise of authority within the system must demonstrate sensitivity to biblical values.

Look at Acts 15:1–29. What can we learn from these verses about some key principles that are involved in church organization and governance?

Whatever we can learn from these verses about church governance, one point should be clear: church organization needs to be centered around advancing the spread of the gospel. Biblically, church governance is only as good as its promotion of mission and evangelism.

We need to remember, too, that though Christ exercises His authority through His church and its appointed officials, He has never handed over His power to them. He retains the headship of the church (Eph. 1:22). The early church was conscious of the fact that it could not exercise any authority independently of Christ and His word. In Acts 15:28 it was important to the assembly that what it decided “seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (NKJV), the true representative of Christ. Holders of offices in the church today cannot act differently.

Consider Matthew 20:24–28 and 23:8. What implication is there for the exercise of authority in the church at all levels?

How willing are you to serve others? Think deeply about your own motives and what they are in regard to what you do in the church, regardless of whatever position you might hold. What are these motives, and how can they be more in harmony with the principles revealed in the Word?

“If a man is sanguine of his own powers and seeks to exercise dominion over his brethren, feeling that he is invested with authority to make his will the ruling power, the best and only safe course is to remove him, lest great harm be done, and he lose his own soul, and imperil the souls of others. . . . This disposition to lord it over God’s heritage will cause a reaction unless these men change their course. . . . A man’s position does not make him one jot or tittle greater in the sight of God; it is character alone that God values.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 362.

“The mission of the church of Christ is to save perishing sinners. It is to make known the love of God to men and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love. The truth for this time must be carried into the dark corners of the earth, and this work may begin at home.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 381.

Discussion Questions:

1. There is no question that the church, our church, has problems. Jesus explained it as such: “ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away’ ” (Matt. 13:24, 25, NIV). Read the rest of the parable. How do we apply what Jesus said to our church about the way in which we deal with those who cause problems? Does this mean that there are no circumstances under which someone could be disfellowshiped? See, for instance, Titus 3:10, 11 and Rom. 16:17.

2. What do you say to someone who, believing the church is corrupt, decides to pull away from the body as a whole and go it alone?

3. Our church affirms the notion of what has been called the “priesthood of all believers.” What does this idea include? What responsibilities does the idea carry for us?

4. Discuss in class some of the potential threats to our unity as a church. What issues have caused division in the church in the past? What can we learn from the past that can help to prevent similar things from happening in the future?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 1 Timothy 3:14, 15

**The Student Will:**

*Know:* Recognize the purpose and function for which the church was designed, understanding that Christ is its Foundation and Head.

*Feel:* Cherish unity of mind and heart, as well as the diversity that brings strength to the church family.

*Do:* Practice servant leadership.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Called to Mission**

   A. Who is the head of the church? How does this make a difference when considering criticism of the church body and governance?

   B. How has Christ modeled the mission and leadership style that He is calling the church to provide?

   C. What functions is the church to perform, and how does church governance support these functions?

II. **Feel: Called to Unity**

   A. Christ constantly stressed the unity between the Father and Himself. Why is unity with God and with one another so important for His church to promote and experience?

   B. How do the many parts of the church support and strengthen one another?

III. **Do: Called to Service**

   A. How should church members emulate Christ’s example of servant leadership?

   B. What daily acts of servanthood may followers of Christ perform?

**Summary:** Christ is the Head of the church and serves as the best example of mission, unity, and service through His self-sacrificing life on this earth. His life was one of perfect unity with the Father, culminating in His atoning death on the cross. What He has done offers salvation to the lost and victorious living to His disciples.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Becoming a member of the church implies both individual and corporate belonging. Therefore, the mission of the church to seek the lost and make disciples remains and applies equally in commission to the individual member as it does to the worldwide church.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson examines the church from the aspects of its nature, mission, unity, and governance, thereby giving us a very good framework for disciple making.

In this first section we want to connect the overall concept of church to the actual church experience of the church member. First, we will review the unique status of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its challenges. Then we will probe a little deeper into the actual dynamics of actively belonging to it.

**Opening Discussion:** The Seventh-day Adventist Church movement is an exciting place to be today. We are experiencing an influx of multiple new members in many countries. We are witnessing many last-day events taking place before our very eyes, giving us evidence that we are now coming close to the awaited time of Jesus’ second coming. The advent is upon us, and many of us are recalling scriptural prophecy as well as the Spirit of Prophecy writings.

The global nature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church creates a beautiful mosaic of diversity as well. While the denomination is well over a century old, its new members bring in fresh life and keep the sense of mission active.

Church membership is composed of individuals with free will who live out their spiritual choices and lives individually and corporately. Complicating this diversity, certain geographic locations and circumstances evince that perhaps the influence of current culture and the cares and busyness of life have resulted in lower-than-might-be-expected, regular study of the Bible.

Another challenge for the church is that of membership retention, both in rapidly growing areas and with the youth and young adult members in the more established venues.

How then do we continue to grow spiritually from the standpoint of both the individual and the corporate church?

It is time to reflect more deeply on the relationships that we share with one another within the local church structure. These relationships are key to the role of the church and its mission.
Activity Questions:

1. Share, in a sentence or two, how you became a follower of Christ and a church member.

2. Who has played a key role in your continued, active participation in church life? How has he or she influenced your spiritual growth and walk with Christ?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Equipping the Church *(Read Ephesians 4:1–16 with your class.)*

Historical context tells us that the book of Ephesians is what we call a “prison epistle”; it is thought to have been written by Paul while he was incarcerated. Ephesians shows that Paul gave much serious thought to this new entity, the church, coming into being. We find that in this epistle he refers to the church as the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the bride of Christ. Our Scripture passage, in chapter 4, speaks to the unity and purpose of the church.

Notice the gifts given to the church as described in verse 11: “Some of us have been given special ability as apostles; to others he has given the gift of being able to preach well; some have special ability in winning people to Christ, helping them to trust him as their Savior; still others have a gift for caring for God’s people as a shepherd does his” *(TLB).*

It is very significant to consider why Jesus Christ gives these gifts to individual members who make up the church. Paul sets forth three reasons: first, *(read vss. 12, 13)*, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” *(NRSV).*

Second, Paul addresses the very real process of spiritual growth. Note verses 14–16: “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” *(NRSV).*

Lastly, Paul places focus on how the church membership should function together. Observe verse 16: “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working
properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (NRSV).

This passage sets forth Paul’s framework for both the individual member and the corporate church structure. It entails both the process of individual spiritual growth and corporate mission.

Let us review, then, the three purposes for the gifts that Jesus gives to the church. The first purpose, “to equip,” means to prepare people for service. The second purpose, to nurture spiritual growth and knowledge, means to prevent being spiritually misled. Finally, the third purpose is for the edification of the church.

These three purposes entail one threefold goal, found in verse 13: unity of faith, knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity in Christ.

Paul’s concluding metaphor of the body so brilliantly encompasses his vision for the church: unity, maturity, and harmony. As the body is joined together with ligaments, so is the church well built with each part working rightly, promoting growth nurtured by love.

**Consider This:** What metaphors does Paul use to describe the church? What spiritual qualities do those images suggest about the church and the intimate relationship that Christ wishes to have with us?

■ For what purpose are the spiritual gifts given to the church? What metaphor or word-picture does Paul use to explain how the church should work together as a whole? How does this illustration encompass Paul’s vision for the church?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** This section is designed to connect the goals of the church framework as described in the previous section with practical application in the spiritual-life experience of the church member. As an overview to the following reflection on discipleship, read Matthew 28:19, 20 with the class.

**Reflections on Biblical Discipleship:** There is no doubt that many of us are asking, how do we relate with one another and with the overall church structure in order to have the individual and corporate church experience that the apostle Paul defines and describes in Ephesians? This question is at the heart of discipleship and disciple making.

Turning to Matthew 28:19, we review the beginning words, “‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations’” (NIV). How are disciples made? The Gospels portray both the model and method of discipleship by showing how Jesus discipled the 12 men He had chosen to continue His ministry when He returned to the Father.

The discipleship model and method that Jesus utilized was not a curriculum
or a program; rather, it was a life-to-life investment of time and relationship within a lived experience in the process of discipleship.

Experience was also key to how Jesus instructed His disciples and empowered them for future ministry. As He shared His everyday life of teaching, preaching, and healing, these settings became like a classroom session with His disciples. As Jesus shared relationship and ministry experience with His disciples, they were at once becoming like their Master while being confronted with the cost and commitment necessary to follow Jesus.

Discipleship at its core is fundamentally a relational process. Leroy Eims observes, “Disciples cannot be mass produced. We cannot drop people into a ‘program’ and see disciples emerge at the end of the production line. It takes time to make disciples. It takes individual personal attention.”—The Lost Art of Disciple Making (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 45, 46.

Jesus’ method of discipleship reveals that it is a smaller group that provides the setting where there might be honest and open interchange. This context makes it possible to have individual response and observation that elicits correction, inspiration, and a desire to become like the Role Model.

It is by proximity, or life-to-life contact, that change begins to take place in the life experience and spiritual understanding of a disciple. This process of spiritual growth is called transformation.

Inductive Questions:

1. Based on the passage from Matthew, how did Jesus encourage, equip, and challenge His disciples?

2. What can we take from His methods of discipleship in our own disciple-making endeavors?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Please provide paper and a writing utensil, if available, to each student for this exercise. Alternately, to do this activity without supplies, have each of the students select someone to pray for and then have them break away into smaller prayer bands of two or three to pray for this person, as well as for the individuals chosen by the others in their prayer group.

Activity: Ask your class members to write down the name of one individual in their local church for whom they would like to pray and to follow this by investing their time and life with them. They might want to take this one step further by inviting this person into a discipleship friendship.
The Church: Rites and Rituals

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Matt. 28:19, 20; Rom. 6:3–8; John 13:1–17; Matt. 26:26–28; 1 Cor. 11:24–26.

Memory Text: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38, NKJV).

Key Thought: God has instituted ordinances that, properly understood, help to reinforce our faith.

Many societies have initiation rituals, sometimes called “rites of passage.” In some cultures, rites of passage are designed in order to help persons to transition from one stage of life into another. For example, rites of adulthood are performed around the onset of puberty. These rites vary from place to place; yet, all have the goal of ensuring that younger members are shaped to be productive and responsible, community-oriented individuals. In the process, boys or girls are taught the ways of adulthood; that is, they are shown what is expected of them as adult members of the society.

In the Christian community there are specific rites as well, acts that formalize the commitment of individuals to the faith that they profess. These sacred acts not only confirm a person’s participation and fellowship in the community but, ideally, help to prepare each individual to become a faithful and productive member of that community. These acts also are the means of helping members to understand what their commitment to Christ must entail. This week we’ll look at three rites that express our faith: baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 1.
Naming the Sacred Rites

During the early stages of the Christian church, believers in the eastern part of the church, where Greek was the common language, used the word *mysterion*, or “mystery,” to describe Christian sacred rites. In the west, where Latin predominated, the term employed was *sacrament* (Latin, *sacramentum*). A *sacramentum* was an oath that a Roman soldier swore, declaring his obedience to the commander’s order. Those who employed this word felt that it described accurately the nature of the sacred rites. With time, however, the idea came to represent an act with an inward invisible power. The church of the Middle Ages identified seven such acts, called “sacraments,” which were seen as means of infusing grace into a person’s soul.

During the Reformation, the sacraments came under scrutiny and criticism. In the minds of many, the term *sacrament* appeared tainted. A different term was felt to be in order, and that was *ordinance*. The word *ordinance* comes from the verb “to ordain,” which makes an ordinance a special act that Christ Himself instituted or ordained. To prefer the term *ordinance* to *sacrament* is to say that one participates in the acts because they are the divinely ordained means for us to show our obedience and loyalty to Jesus as Lord. Seventh-day Adventists see baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord’s Supper as ordinances—acts that reveal our loyalty to Christ. They are symbolic ways of expressing our faith.


To what extent do these passages support the idea that the sacred acts should be described as “ordinances”?

However much importance we place on the “ordinances,” we must always remember that these are not conduits of grace or acts by which we earn salvation or gain merit before God. Sin and its effects are matters far too serious for rituals, even those instituted by Christ Himself, to be able to redeem us. Only the death of Jesus on the cross was sufficient to accomplish the salvation of beings as deeply fallen as we are. As we understand them, the ordinances are outward symbols of our acknowledgment of what Christ has done for us and of our union with Him (and all that this union entails), and they serve their purpose well. They are a means to an end, not an end in and of themselves.
Baptism

The New Testament uses several images to describe what baptism means. First, baptism symbolizes a spiritual union with Christ (Rom. 6:3–8), involving participation in His suffering, death, and resurrection, as well as the renunciation of one’s former lifestyle. In this way, baptism is linked with repentance and the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38), the new birth and reception of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), and, consequently, entrance into the church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Baptism symbolizes a covenantal and spiritual relationship with God through Christ (Col. 2:11, 12). Baptism represents what circumcision represented in the Old Testament. And, too, baptism symbolizes a transfer of loyalties, one that places a person into a community that is consecrated to the service of Christ. The reception of the Spirit in baptism enables believers to serve the church and work for the salvation of those who are not yet of the faith (Acts 1:5, 8).

Many years ago the Joint Committee of the Church of England on Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion made an impressive admission. The statement said that “the recipients of Baptism were normally adults and not infants; and it must be admitted that there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament for the Baptism of infants.”—Baptism and Confirmation Today (London: SCM, 1955), p. 34, quoted by Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 1102. The meaning of baptism precludes infants as legitimate candidates, because biblical baptism requires faith and repentance on the part of the participants. Also, the idea of the role of the Word of God in the development of faith (Rom. 10:17) indicates that repentance must be coupled with biblical and spiritual instruction. These elements are necessary in order for candidates to bring forth “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8) as evidence of their relationship with Christ.

The nature of baptism helps us to understand the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament. Baptism, according to those who see it as a sacrament, is the means that brings about the transformation in a person from spiritual death to life. In this understanding, the age of the person doesn’t matter, because it’s all a supernatural event anyway. On the other hand, baptism as an ordinance is an indication or symbol of an internal change (a supernatural event) that has already occurred in the life of the believer by way of his or her experience with Jesus. In this view, candidates for baptism ought to have already experienced faith in Christ; therefore, the question of who is baptized, and when, becomes very important.

If you have been baptized, think back upon the experience. When you understand what it means, why (in a sense) do we need to be “baptized” every day? How can this be accomplished?
The Ordinance of Humility

It’s hard to imagine the pain that must have been going on in the heart of Jesus as He—about to face the Cross, the greatest humiliation possible—saw the jealousy and infighting among His own disciples over who would be the greatest in His kingdom.

**Read** Luke 22:24–27 (see also Matt. 18:1, 20:21). What crucial truth had the disciples still not learned?

Our world is so twisted and perverted by sin that it has it all backward, however “rational” and “sensible” backward may seem. Who in his or her right mind would rather be the one serving than the one served? Is not the whole point of life to get ahead, to become wealthy, and to be someone who is waited on and attended to by others rather than being one who serves? It’s no wonder, then, that at the Last Supper, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. No words He could have said would have conveyed the truth of what real greatness is in the eyes of God more forcefully than His washing the feet of those who should have been kissing His feet.

**What** does John 13:1–17 teach us about footwashing as a part of the Communion service?

So much amazing truth rings out through these verses. In verse 3 it says that Jesus knew that the Father had given “all things into His hands.” What happens next? Yes, Jesus, knowing full well that “He had come from God and was going to God” (NKJV), rose from the meal and started washing the disciples’ feet (vs. 5). Even without fully knowing who Jesus really was, the disciples must have been astonished. How could they have failed to see the lesson there?

Before claiming for ourselves all that Christ has done for us, remember how important it is to come to the Lord’s Supper with a sense of our own humbleness and lowliness and need of divine grace.

Whose feet might it do you some immense spiritual good to wash?
The Lord’s Supper

**Read** Matthew 26:26–28. What meaning is evident in what Jesus is telling us to do here? Why is it important to see this in terms of symbols?

The Lord’s Supper replaces the Passover festival of the old covenant era. The Passover met its fulfillment when Christ, the Paschal Lamb, gave His life. Before His death, Christ Himself had instituted the replacement, the great festival of the New Testament church under the new covenant. Just as the Passover festival commemorated Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the Lord’s Supper commemorates the deliverance from spiritual Egypt, the bondage of sin.

The Passover lambs’ blood applied to the lintel and doorposts of each house protected the inhabitants from death; the nourishment that its flesh provided gave the children of Israel the strength to escape from Egypt (Exod. 12:3–8). So, Christ’s sacrifice brings liberation from death; believers are saved through the partaking of both His body and blood (John 6:54). The Lord’s Supper proclaims that Christ’s death on the cross provides our salvation, provides our forgiveness, and promises us victory over sin.

**Read** 1 Corinthians 11:24–26. What important doctrinal truth about the Cross is revealed here?

Here we see, clearly, the substitutionary aspect of Christ’s death. His body was broken and His blood shed for us; at the cross He took upon Himself what rightly belonged to us. Each time we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we should always remember what Christ accomplished in our behalf.

When you add to the Lord’s Supper the footwashing, which helps to prepare our hearts before we partake of the Communion service, we should also get a sense of the communal nature of this ordinance. With the Cross so vividly symbolized through the partaking of the bread and wine, we are reminded that, whatever earthly things divide us, we are all sinners in constant need of grace. The Communion service should help us all to realize our obligations, not just to the Lord but to one another, as well.
Anticipation of the Second Advent

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). What great hope is presented here?

With these words we see how closely entwined the Second Coming and the Communion service are. That makes so much sense too, because the Second Coming is, really, the culmination of what happened at the Cross. One could argue that the biggest reason for the First Coming—which included Christ’s body being broken and His blood shed for us—was the Second Coming. The First Coming is what paved the way for the Second.

What good would the First Coming of Christ be without the Second?

The Communion service, in a sense, spans the interim between Calvary and the Second Coming. Each time we partake of communion, we dwell on the Cross and what it accomplished for us. Yet, what it accomplished for us cannot be separated from the Second Coming. In fact, what Jesus did on the cross for us doesn’t reach its ultimate culmination until the Second Coming.

Read Matthew 26:29. What is Jesus saying in this one verse?

Look at the promise, the assurance, and the hope that the Lord gives us here. These words imply a closeness, an intimacy, between the redeemed and the Redeemer that will extend into eternity. Jesus is promising us that He will not drink of this fruit of the vine until He drinks it new with us in the eternal kingdom. When we remember who He is, the Creator of the universe (Col. 1:16), this promise is even more astonishing. Thus, besides everything the Communion service points to, it should also point us to the great hope that awaits us at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Discouraged? Downtrodden? Welcome to a fallen world. Why, amid all that you may be going through, is it so important to look at the Cross, what it means for you now, and what it means for your ultimate future?

“Baptism is a most sacred and important ordinance, and there should be a thorough understanding as to its meaning. It means repentance for sin, and the entrance upon a new life in Christ Jesus. There should be no undue haste to receive the ordinance. Let both parents and children count the cost.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 93.

“The Passover pointed backward to the deliverance of the children of Israel, and was also typical, pointing forward to Christ, the Lamb of God, slain for the redemption of fallen man. The blood sprinkled upon the door-posts prefigured the atoning blood of Christ, and also the continual dependence of sinful man upon the merits of that blood for safety from the power of Satan, and for final redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 201.

Discussion Questions:

1. When was the last time that you washed someone’s feet in the foot-washing service? Why is this such an important practice?

2. Read 1 Peter 3:20, 21. What analogy does Peter use in order to help to explain the meaning of baptism?

3. Early Christians were accused of many things of which they were not guilty, including cannibalism. One of the reasons were the following verses: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him’ ” (John 6:53–56, NKJV). What is Jesus teaching us with these words? Why is it so important that we understand the spiritual meaning of texts such as these?

4. In class, discuss in more detail the communal aspect of the Communion service. In what ways can it help your church to better understand what our obligations are to each other and to the outside community as a whole?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Acts 2:38

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe the spiritual transformations and truths symbolized by baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper.

**Feel:** Sense the sacred nature of these Christ-ordained services through personal experience.

**Do:** Participate wholeheartedly in the communal expressions of faith provided for in the services of baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Ordained by Christ**
   - A Why are the services of baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper defined as ordinances rather than sacraments?
   - B These ordinances serve as symbols of what internal transformations?
   - C What truths of Christ’s work in behalf of His people do these ordinances illustrate?

II. **Feel: Sacred Experience**
   - A How does personally experiencing baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper differ from mentally accepting the doctrine regarding these services?
   - B As we look forward to His second coming, what is the value of submitting to Christ’s request that these sacred rites be observed in remembrance of His sacrifice?

III. **Do: Communal Expressions of Faith**
   - A How do these sacred, communal rites build up church bonds and shared worship experiences? Why must we not neglect these opportunities to share in these expressions of faith?
   - B What can Christ’s followers do in order to more fully experience the benefits of these ordinances?

**Summary:** Baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper are ordinances outlined by Christ as symbols of sharing in His suffering, accepting His death on our behalf, and sharing in a new life of service and commitment.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The ordinances of baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper are symbolic acts that commemorate important spiritual events central to the life of the believer.

**Just for Teachers:** Ask your class to comment on the role of rituals in their lives. At an individual level, family level, community level, and national level, what rituals do the students engage in? What is the purpose of those rituals?

**Opening Activity:** Whether or not we are conscious of it, we all have quotidian rituals that define our daily lives—waking up at a certain time every morning and taking the dog for a jog before heading off to work, reading the newspaper, et cetera. This week’s lesson deals with a different type of ritual—spiritual ones that are given to us in order to help us to feel connected to God. Consider with your class the way in which the ritual of footwashing is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. Explore some of the following examples with your class and ask members to draw upon Scripture for other examples:

- The first mention of footwashing in the Bible is one of hospitality in which Abraham says to traveling strangers, “‘Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree’” (*Gen. 18:4*, NKJV).
- In the story of Lot, we also read of footwashing. Lot offers travelers (angels) entering Sodom to “‘turn in to your servant’s house, and spend the night, and wash your feet’” (*Gen. 19:2*, NKJV).
- God commanded the priests to wash their hands and feet with water prior to entering the Holy or Most Holy Place or before offering sacrifices on the altar (*Exod. 40:30–32*).

**Discuss:** What functions did the act of footwashing serve in the Old Testament examples? Encourage your class to reflect on this act as one of hospitality, welcome, cleanliness, and service, among other things. As a practice that extended back throughout the great stories of Scripture, a practice of which the disciples were well aware, there was a deep cultural understanding and tradition of footwashing. How did Jesus’ act of washing His disciples’ feet both confirm and draw on those meanings and, at the same time, broaden them (for example, through enacting servant leadership)?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: Encourage your class to observe how the three spiritual ordinances studied this week—baptism, footwashing, and the observance of the Lord’s Supper—are interconnected rites, which, when practiced, reaffirm the core elements of living a sanctified life. Together, these three symbols constitute a virtuous cycle of salvation, acceptance of that salvation, receipt of forgiveness, and renewed acts of discipleship.

I. Baptism: The Entrance to Discipleship (Read John 3:5 with your class.)

The dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 deals with the indispensable need to receive the eschatological gift of the Spirit, or, as John says, to be born out of the Spirit. This indwelling takes place concretely through the ordinance of baptism. The recipient of the new birth needs to be born of “water and the Spirit” (3:5, NKJV). In Christ’s dialogue with Nicodemus, the question is answered of how a person receives a part or share in Christ’s inheritance. It is conditioned on “being born again” from “above” at baptism. Baptism is the next logical step of faith after accepting Christ, for “he who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16, NASB).

Jesus points to baptism as the entrance to discipleship. This emphasis is in harmony with His command to baptize those who accept Him as Lord and Savior (Matt. 28:16–20). Baptism teaches the necessity of repentance, of forgiveness, and of making the important decision of accepting Jesus as the Redeemer-King.

In John, baptism is symbolic as an essential requirement in the cleansing from sin. In the water of baptism, the believer is cleansed from sin. By connecting the water and the Spirit, Jesus expresses two great principles experienced by the believer—water stands for the cleansing that wipes out the sins of the past while the Spirit stands for the strengthening power of Christ that gives the believer victory.

Consider This: How is baptism a symbol of the soul cleansed from sin and in receipt of the Spirit of God?

II. Footwashing (Read John 13:1–17 with your class.)

Footwashing is a means of reconciliation with God and humanity. It is a constant reminder that humankind is in great need of continued cleansing
from post-baptismal sins, and that it stands in constant need of God’s love and grace, which issue forth in forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. At the same time, the ordinance of footwashing is a reminder to treat our fellow believers in the way that Jesus treats us; to forgive them and be reconciled with them so that we will create and maintain a community of love, unity, and fellowship that reflects the love of God. Thus, footwashing, correctly understood and practiced, will be the means to accomplish, or at least greatly contribute to bring about, that kind of community.

During the Last Supper (John 13:2–4), Jesus waited, presumably, to give an opportunity for one of the disciples to wash the feet of the group. When this didn’t happen, Jesus rose and proceeded to engage in an act of utter humility and love. In taking the role of a slave, He foreshadowed the role that He would play in His death on the cross and, in so doing, enacted the entire plan of redemption. Also, by washing His disciples’ feet, Jesus taught an eternal principle that His kingdom is based on self-sacrificing love and service and that the way to glory is the path of humility, service, and even death for others and to self.

Consider This: Why is footwashing a constant reminder that each disciple needs daily forgiveness and purification? How does it also show that the soul needs the regenerative power of the Spirit in order to lead a sanctified life?

III. The Lord’s Supper (Read John 6:53, 54 with your class.)

Observing the Lord’s Supper is central to our understanding of the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice for our salvation. John, in chapter 6, verses 53 and 54, notes that Jesus said to His disciples, “ ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day’ ” (NASB). In the ordinances of baptism, footwashing, and communion, we see the complementary aspects of water and blood—both of which are symbols of how we are saved and cleansed from sin. Ellen G. White, in Early Writings, comments that the blood and water represent forgiveness and the gift of life.—Page 209.

Consider This: How is the observance of the Lord’s Supper a symbol of Christ’s ultimate act of sacrifice for our salvation?

**STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Spend some time discussing with your class other ways that the Lord’s Supper is symbolic, not only of Jesus’ death and...
sacrifice on the cross but also of His ongoing attempts to feed and nourish us. Consider the following points and then answer the questions that follow:

1. Through the eating of a meal, we are “partaking” of food that becomes part of us. In the act of Communion, Jesus symbolically becomes part of us, and we become part of Jesus. As Jesus says, “‘Abide in Me and I in you’” (John 15:4, NKJV). Jesus is the heavenly Manna that we need to eat spiritually and partake of by faith on a daily basis so that we become one with Him.

2. Food and drink are necessary to sustain life, and, as such, the bread and wine of the Last Supper (the body and blood of Jesus) are necessary for our spiritual life. Jesus is both the “bread of life” and the “water of life.”

3. Eating provides enjoyment and pleasure. As the Bible says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8, NKJV).

4. Food provides us with the strength to carry out the duties and responsibilities of our daily life. Similarly, when we partake of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, we are given spiritual strength and insight to carry out our Christian privileges and duties.

**Thoughts/Applications/Inductive Questions:**

Reflect on the layered dimensions of the Lord’s Supper. Why does God use a meal (the Last Supper) as an ordinance? What is He trying to teach us?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Now is a good opportunity to review what has been covered in this week’s lesson. Everyone should understand the meaning and important aspects of each of the ordinances.

However, as with so many other rituals that are oriented around hugely meaningful events and have deep significance, these three ordinances risk losing meaning when we take them for granted.

**Brainstorm:** How can churches and pastors and the larger community celebrate these events so that they don’t feel so rote and ritualistic? How can individuals prepare to engage in them so that their hearts and minds are open to experiencing these rites in the meaningful way in which God intended us to experience them?
The Law and the Gospel

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study: Ps. 19:7, 8; Exod. 23:1–9; 1 John 5:3; Rom. 3:19, 20; Exod. 20:11, 12; Deut. 5:15.

Memory Text: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3, 4, NKJV).

Key Thought: God’s entire moral law is what reveals our sin and, thus, our need for a Savior. The law and the gospel are, therefore, inseparable.

The law and character of God are central to the great controversy, and when the controversy is finally over, God’s law and character will be vindicated before the onlooking universe. Until then, the controversy rages on. As human beings we wind up on one side or another, and the side we choose decides which master we follow. In the words of Bob Dylan, “You’re gonna have to serve somebody, / Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord / But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

Those who choose to serve the Lord do so out of love and appreciation for what has been done for them through Christ. Having been buried with Christ by baptism into His death, they know that the body of sin was destroyed so that they no longer need to serve their former master, sin; but now have been given the freedom to obey God and His law.

In this week’s lesson we will look at the nature of the law, its purpose, and its relation to the good news of God’s saving grace. For, rightly understood, God’s law helps to reveal just what God’s grace has offered us in Christ.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 8.*
God’s Laws and Regulations

The word *torah* is a commonly used Hebrew word in the Old Testament and is often translated as “law.” The New Testament uses the Greek *nomos* (law) to translate *torah*. *Torah* means “direction” or “guidance.” Because the Bible is a record of God’s relationship with humans, *law* in the Bible generally refers to all of God’s instructions to His people. And because God Himself is good and righteous, and guides and instructs His people in goodness and righteousness, we rightly assume that His law reveals His goodness and righteousness. Or, as we like to say, the law is a reflection of God’s character.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the law and, ultimately, about God? *Ps. 19:7, 8; Rom. 7:12; Ps. 119:151, 152, 172.*

It is by way of the Bible that God has explicitly revealed Himself to humankind. As one reads through the sacred texts, one comes across an abundance of materials that are, basically, directions or instructions that cover many aspects of human life: morality, ethics, health, sexuality, diet, work, et cetera. Some of these instructions are clearly universal; others appear to be more limited in time and scope. But because all of them are God’s instructions (*torah*), the greatest care is needed in the development of principles that help us to understand what is universal and what is limited. Seventh-day Adventists and many other Christian groups generally make a distinction between “ceremonial” laws (regulations that teach the plan of salvation by symbols and ritual practices), “civil” laws (instructions regarding the community life of the nation of ancient Israel), and “moral” laws (instructions of God’s pattern of conduct for humanity).

The book of Leviticus contains many ceremonial laws, especially with regard to the sanctuary service and its ritual system. The nature of civil laws and the principle of justice underlying them can be seen, for example, in Exodus 23:1–9. Then there is the moral law, the Ten Commandments, which most Christians (in theory, at least) believe are still God’s law for all humanity.

**Look through Exodus 23:1–9. What universal moral principles can we take from what was given specifically to ancient Israel?**
The Moral Law Today

Most Christians claim that the Ten Commandments are God’s universal moral code. This view is seen, for instance, in various legal battles in the United States in which Christians have sought to have the Ten Commandments posted in various public places, especially public schools. Years ago, Alabama was involved in a legal battle involving a state judge who refused to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from a courtroom, despite orders from a higher court to do so. In the minds of many, the Ten Commandments, far from being invalidated, remain God’s legal standard for morality.

And with good reason too. To begin with, although the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) was codified at Sinai, the book of Genesis suggests that most of the commandments were known before then.

What do the following texts reveal about the existence of the law prior to Mount Sinai? Gen. 35:1–4, 2:3, 4:8–11, 39:7–9, 44:8, 12:18.

On logical grounds alone, it makes no sense for the Ten Commandments to have been purely a Jewish institution, something intended only for a particular people in a particular time and place. Doesn’t it make sense that moral issues such as stealing, killing, adultery, and idolatry are universally wrong, regardless of culture? Also, when the Bible is so clear that sin is defined through the law (Rom. 7:7), the notion of the law being abrogated or superceded is, on the face of it, an illogical position for any Bible-believing Christian.

How does James 2:11 help us to understand the perpetuity of God’s law?

First John 5:3 says that obedience to God’s commandments is an expression of our love for Him. What does that mean? Why is obedience to the commandments an expression of this love?
The Law and the Gospel

Though many understand that the Ten Commandments remain binding in the lives of Christians, the role that they play in the plan of salvation can be confusing. If we’re not saved by the keeping of the law, then what is its purpose?

How do the following texts help us to understand the role that the law plays in the lives of those who are saved by grace?

Rom. 3:19, 20______________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Ps. 119:5, 6_______________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Rom. 7:7_________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

The law was never designed to be a means of salvation. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the law creates in the sinner a need for the grace (gospel) of Christ. By pointing out what is right, what is good, and what is true, those who fall short of that standard (which is all of us) realize our need of salvation. In this sense the law points us to the need for the gospel, the need of grace. This grace comes to us through Jesus. The function of the law, even in the Old Testament, was to show us our need of salvation; it was never a means of providing that salvation.

“To ask whether the law can bring salvation is to ask the wrong question as far as Scripture is concerned—in both the Old and New Testaments! Never does either Testament affirm, imply, or even hint that this might ever have been the case. . . .

“It is a further error to argue that the writer of Hebrews (10:1–4) corrected the law, as if it had taught that ‘the blood of bulls and goats [could] take away sins.’ . . . The sacrifices were pictures, types, and models of the one perfect sacrifice that was to come.”—Walter C. Kaiser, Five Views on Law and Gospel (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 394, 395.

Look around at what violation of God’s law has done to humanity. How has your own life been impacted by the violation of God’s law? What does your answer tell you about just how relevant the law remains?
The Sabbath and the Law

As we saw in Monday’s lesson, many Christians still believe in the binding nature of God’s law. Again, as long as one accepts the reality of sin, it’s hard to see how anyone could believe anything else.

Yet, as we know so well, the whole issue of the Christian obligation to the law suddenly gets very murky when the question of obedience to the fourth commandment arises, particularly in regard to the seventh day itself. In fact, the irony is that the Alabama judge who got himself in trouble for his insistence on placing the Ten Commandments monument in the courtroom was himself living in violation of that law because, however strict a Sunday keeper he might have been, he wasn’t keeping the biblical commandment to rest on the seventh day. If we take the Bible for what it says, then, according to James—“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10)—the judge was guilty of violating every precept of the law that he had insisted upon leaving in the courthouse!

Exodus 20:9, 10 explains the Sabbath commandment. The text is careful to point out when the Sabbath occurs (the seventh day), and how it is to be kept (cessation of regular work by all under one’s shelter) in order for its holiness to be guarded. “The Sabbath is not portrayed as a day of recuperation from those too weak to keep working day after day without rest. It is portrayed rather as a stoppage good for everyone, for the purpose of refocusing on holiness (all concerns that stem from belonging to God, which is what holiness is) in order to enjoy God’s blessings of that day and its potential.”—Douglas K. Stuart, The New American Commentary, Exodus, vol. 2 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), p. 460.

The spiritual potential of the Sabbath is embodied in what it symbolizes. What do the following texts tell us about the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath? How has your own experience with the Sabbath helped you to better appreciate what these texts teach us? Exod. 20:11, 12; Deut. 5:15; Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:20; Heb. 4:3–9.

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The Sabbath and the Gospel

In the final question of yesterday’s lesson, we looked at both Exodus 20:11, 12 and Deuteronomy 5:15. What we see here is the Sabbath pointing us toward two ideas: creation and redemption, two concepts that are very powerfully linked in the Bible. God is not only our Creator, He is also our Redeemer; and both these important spiritual truths are brought home to us every week, every seventh day, as we rest on the Sabbath, “according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56, NKJV), just as the women who “c[a]me with Him [Jesus] from Galilee” (Luke 23:55) did.

Read Colossians 1:14–16 and John 1:1–14. How do these texts link Jesus as both our Creator and Redeemer?

“Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 63. Only as Creator, only as One equal with God, only as the One who had made “all . . . that was made” (John 1:3), could Jesus be the One to redeem fallen humanity.

By pointing us to Christ as our Creator and Redeemer, the Sabbath is a powerful symbol of the gospel of grace. In fact, our resting on the Sabbath reveals that we, indeed, are not saved by the works of the law but by what Christ has done for us. Thus, Sabbath rest becomes a symbol of the rest we have in Jesus (see Heb. 4:3–9).

Salvation, too, is restoration; it is re-creation, a process that not only starts now when we have accepted Jesus (see 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15) but that culminates and climaxes with the re-creation of the heavens and the earth (see Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:5). These verses show even more clearly how Creation and Redemption are linked, and both of these crucial truths are embodied in the Sabbath commandment, one of the Ten Commandments.

It’s one thing to say that you are a Sabbath keeper, and to even rest on the Sabbath. The scribes and Pharisees did that. But it’s another to experience the fullness and richness of the Sabbath. What about your own Sabbath keeping? What might you do in order to better reap the spiritual and physical blessings that God provides for us on the Sabbath day?

“God would have us realize that He has a right to mind, soul, body, and spirit—to all that we possess. We are His by creation and by redemption. As our Creator, He claims our entire service. As our Redeemer, He has a claim of love as well as of right—of love without a parallel. . . . Our bodies, our souls, our lives, are His, not only because they are His free gift, but because He constantly supplies us with His benefits, and gives us strength to use our faculties.” —Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 24, 1896.

“And the Lord says, ‘If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; . . . then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.’ Isa. 58:13, 14. To all who receive the Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s creative and redeeming power, it will be a delight. Seeing Christ in it, they delight themselves in Him. The Sabbath points them to the works of creation as an evidence of His mighty power in redemption. While it calls to mind the lost peace of Eden, it tells of peace restored through the Saviour. And every object in nature repeats His invitation, ‘Come unto [M]e, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matt. 11:28.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 289.

Discussion Questions:

1. Jeremiah 31:33 reads, “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Some try to use this text to show that the law (or, really, the seventh-day Sabbath) has been abrogated under the new covenant. What’s wrong with this line of reasoning? In fact, in what ways does this text reinforce the Seventh-day Adventist position regarding the law, including the Sabbath?

2. Because we do believe that the law, including the Sabbath, should be kept, why must we be careful of falling into the trap of legalism? In class, talk about what legalism is and how we can avoid it.

3. Think through the role of the law in the great controversy. Why, in his attack on God’s law, has Satan singled out the Sabbath commandment for special attention? Why was that such a “brilliant” move on his part?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 John 2:3, 4

The Student Will:

Know: Compare and contrast the roles of the law and the gospel in the great controversy.

Feel: Revere the overwhelming gift of the life of the Creator on the sinner’s behalf in answer to the righteous claims of the law.

Do: Rest from labor on the Sabbath in recognition of the Creator’s work in both the making and the redeeming of humanity.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Lawgiver and Savior

A What important role does the law play in salvation?

B What does the gospel provide that the law cannot?

C Why did it take the Creator to meet the requirements of a just and righteous law?

II. Feel: Gift of Life

A How does it feel to realize the impossibility of meeting the requirements of a law that is as righteous as God Himself?

B How does it feel to know that the requirement was met by the Creator Himself as He laid down His life to take the death penalty that sinners deserve?

III. Do: Sabbath Rest

A How does keeping the Sabbath honor Creation, redemption, and the new earth?

B How does the act of keeping the Sabbath (and other laws) honor the Law Maker?

Summary: The law teaches the need of a Savior because it is impossible for us to meet the demands of the law’s exacting requirements for salvation.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Typically one does not relate the words law and obedience with love and belonging. However, the word heart brings them all together as the location where God and child meet in full expression of all these words.

Just for Teachers: In this section we want to introduce the concepts of law and obedience, and discuss practical ideas about how the law relates to personal life. We also want to make sure that we reflect on the God who gave the law.

Opening Discussion: This week’s lesson examines the topic “The Law and the Gospel,” setting forth not only the necessity of the entire moral law but also stressing its relationship to God’s grace, as extended through Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe a law-abiding citizen?
2. Is there someone you know who reflects God’s law? If so, what characteristics does he or she display?
3. What does God’s law reveal about God?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The goal of this section is to delve more deeply into the concepts of law, love, and obedience.

I. Law, Heart, and Belonging (Read Jeremiah 31:31–34 with your class.)

A talented writer with a brilliant poetic gift, Jeremiah’s deep emotion and insights are communicated in a manner that express God’s heart of mercy, ever calling His people to turn away from idolatry and the outright forsaking of His law.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 is one of the most profound passages in Scripture,
It is important to read Jeremiah’s words in order to experience their full impact: “The days are surely coming, say the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (NRSV).

Notice the deeply relational phrases in this passage; “I took them by the hand,” “I was their husband,” “I will write it on their hearts,” and “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” All these phrases communicate both love in action and a law of love that expresses the belonging of all that we are to the God who gives all that He is to us.

**Consider This:** Notice also the intimacy of knowing and generosity of grace contained in the concluding words of this passage. Which words in particular describe the intimacy that God wishes to have with us? Which portray His generosity toward us? What do these words, when taken together, reveal about God’s character?

**II. Obedience and Conquest** *(Read 1 John 5:3–5 with your class.)*

How do we actualize commandment keeping in our everyday lives? Notice what 1 John 5:3–5 states:

“For loving God means obeying his commands, and these commands of his are not burdensome. . . . In fact, this faith of ours is the only way in which the world has been conquered. For who could ever be said to conquer the world . . . except the man who really believes that Jesus is God’s Son?” *(Phillips).*

Observe the connection between obedience, love, and belief. Jeremiah establishes the fact that love is at the center of the new covenant. In this passage, John is asserting that loving God is expressed by obeying His commands. Note his commentary on this process: “and these commands of his are not burdensome.” Why does John make this statement and how does he clarify this view?

Note the following reasons that he sets forth: because the child of God
loves and obeys God, his or her faith and belief in Jesus Christ enables him or her to overcome the world. Therefore, the significant component of conquering faith is belief that Jesus is God’s only Son.

In this context that presupposes love for God the Father and love for God the Son, obedience to God’s commands is not burdensome or obligatory. Rather, the child of God will live the reality of Jesus’ words, “‘For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’” (Matt. 11:30, NRSV).

In summary, there is no doubt that what we believe about God influences and shapes our understanding of love. This understanding, in turn, impacts our response to God’s law.

**Consider This:** What is the relation between law and love in the writings of John? How does this compare with the teachings of Jeremiah, studied in the previous section?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Activity:** “Tested Obedience”: a retelling of Daniel 3:1–30.

The great and mighty King Nebuchadnezzar builds and erects a towering gold statue, placing it on the plain of Dura. He invites all of the elite leaders and governors to the dedication ceremony.

At the sound of many instruments, all who are gathered for this great display are instructed to fall down and worship the image of gold. Those who do not will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

A group of young men named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuses to bow. They know that the king’s display is nothing more than an idol, and they also know that by bowing down and worshiping it, they would be going against God’s command in Exodus 20:4, 5, “‘You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them’” (NIV).

The king-pleasing astrologers cannot scurry to the king fast enough. They inform him of the violation of the king’s command, declaring, “‘Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up’” (NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar’s anger blazes up like the heat of his furnace. He summons the three young men before him and asks why they refuse to comply with his commands to worship the statue, adding, “‘But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?’” (NIV).

Standing before the king, they respond, “‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the
blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up’” (NIV).

How could one ever forget what happens next? The king throws them into the fiery furnace; however, their faithfulness is rewarded, and God meets them there.

Nebuchadnezzar is impressed, declaring, “‘Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God’” (vs. 28, NIV). And then he promotes them!

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego actualize the truth of the words of Jeremiah, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33, NRSV).

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you find the concepts of law, obedience, and love connected in this story?

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2. What implications might this story hold for you in your spiritual journey?

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STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Please provide paper and writing utensils for this exercise, if possible. Alternately, discuss and share the traditions below.

Activity: This week’s lesson also highlighted Sabbath and the law. Write down three Sabbath traditions that you practice that result in your enjoyment of the keeping of the Sabbath law. Share these with your class members. In turn, ask them to add to the list by sharing the traditions of Sabbath keeping that have been meaningful in their own experience. How have these traditions expanded their understanding of their love for God and God’s love for them?
Lesson 11  
December 8–14  
(Sabbath Afternoon)

The Christian Life

**SABBATH AFTERNOON**

**Read for This Week’s Study:** Deut. 8:11–17; Phil. 2:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Rev. 22:1–5; Matt. 22:39; Gen. 2:21–25.

**Memory Text:** “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16, NKJV).

**Key Thought:** Anyone can call himself or herself a Christian. What, though, does that mean in practical terms?

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?” (James 2:14, NLT).

The Bible emphasizes “sound doctrine,” but this emphasis is in the context of holy living (1 Tim. 1:10, Titus 2:1–5) in order to point out that the true goal of biblical teaching is an ethical life, one that is manifested in obligations to others. In fact, if you look carefully at those texts in Timothy and Titus, they link sound doctrine with correct living as if correct living itself is sound doctrine!

The Christian is saved in order to be God’s agent for the salvation and good of others amid the great controversy between good and evil. To be “so heavenly minded that you’re no earthly good,” however much a cliché, does represent a reality that Christians need to avoid. Certainly, heaven is our ultimate home, but for now we’re still on earth, and we need to know how to live while here.

This week we’ll look at how some practical, “hands-on” Christianity should be manifest in our lives.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 15.*
Stewardship

When we think about salvation translating into service to others, we cannot avoid the Christian concept of stewardship. *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* defines stewardship as “the responsibility of God’s people for, and use of, everything entrusted to them by God—life, physical being, time, talents and abilities, material possessions, opportunities to be of service to others, and their knowledge of truth.”

Look at the following passages. With each one ask yourself, given my particular circumstances, how can I manifest in my own life the wonderful principles taught in these texts? How should these truths impact the way I live and how I relate to others, to God, and to the gifts that He has given to me?

*Deut. 8:11–17*

*Ps. 24:1*

*Phil. 2:3, 4*

*1 John 3:16*

The Bible teaches that the fundamental purpose for all of God’s creation is to glorify Him. Sin derailed this reality in a very big way, but God directed His saving action toward us in order to bring us back to participate with all creation in glorifying Him. Christ purchased us for the sake of God’s glory (Eph. 1:11–14). We bring glory to God when we acknowledge in both word and deed the complete lordship of Christ over our lives. The complete expression of Christ’s lordship over our lives will involve our service to others through the use of our time, talents, abilities, and material possessions.

Read again the texts for today. Which ones touch you the most, and why? What motivates you to try to live a life that involves seeking the good of others, as well as your own good? Why is it so important for you, spiritually, to live for others?
Tithe: A Mere Pittance

“And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. For the children of Israel and the children” (Neh. 10:38, 39).

Think about your life; think about the brevity of it; think about the utter inevitability of your death (unless Christ returns in your lifetime). Think what it would mean if, as many believe, the grave is the ultimate end. You’re here, a spasm of cellular metabolism that does its thing (often in pain, hardship, fear), and then ends; one way or another, when all those cells die, nothing’s left but a carcass on which bugs and bacteria feed until they also expire.

Such would be the fate of all of us in a universe so large that our planet, much less our individual lives, could appear to be so meaningless as to be nothing but a cruel joke that most of us don’t find funny.

In contrast to that scenario, look at what we have been given in Christ. Look at what has been offered to us through Jesus. Look at what the plan of salvation tells us about our worth and about what was done for us so that we don’t have to meet the fate pictured above.

What have we been given in Christ? 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Rev. 21:4; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:6, 7; Rev. 22:1–5. What should these things mean to us?

How should these promises impact every aspect of our existence?

“I speak of the tithing system, yet how meager it looks to my mind! How small the estimate! How vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love against a love and sacrifice that is measureless and incomputable! Tithes for Christ! Oh, meager pittance, shameful recompense for that which cost so much! From the cross of Calvary, Christ calls for an unconditional surrender.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 119, 120.

After all that Christ has done for you, can you not exercise enough faith and give back to Him a mere pittance of what you’ve been given?
The Responsibility to One’s Self

Jesus tells us very clearly that “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:39). This is a very interesting text in light of the idea that we often look at love for self as the height of all that is opposed both to Christianity and to the idea of disinterested selflessness. What did Jesus mean by this text? How do we interpret and apply it in a way that reflects what true Christianity should be about?

Love of self, in the Christian sense, isn’t selfishness; it isn’t putting yourself first before everyone and anything else. On the contrary, love for self means that, upon realizing your own worth before God, you seek to live the best possible life, knowing that the results of such a life will be a benefit not just to yourself (which is fine) but also, and even more important, to those with whom you come into contact.

How would you relate Jesus’ admonition above to the following texts?

Phil. 2:5, 8
2 Cor. 5:14, 15
1 Cor. 10:31–33
1 Pet. 1:13–16

The redemption that the sinner obtains in Christ brings about such unity with Him (Gal. 2:20) that the Christian desires to live a life that is ordered after Christ’s impulses. The sinner desires to have Christ’s mind, to live no longer for one’s self but for Him, and to heed the call to holiness (separation from such things as our passions, the sinful trends in culture, and moral impurity). If you love yourself, you want what’s best for you; and what’s best for you is a life that is committed to God, a life that reflects the character and love of God, a life that is lived not for self but for the good of others. The surest way to guarantee yourself a miserable existence is to live only for self, never thinking of the good of others.

Dwell more on what it means to love yourself in the Christian sense. How easy is it for this kind of love to degenerate into a self-destructive self-centeredness? What’s the only way to protect yourself from this trap?
Christian Marriage

Humans are social beings. At home and work and in public and civic places, people are involved in all kinds of relationships. Responsible Christian behavior ought to be evident at all these levels, and the Bible has relevant principles by which to guide these relationships.

**Study** the following Bible passages in order to come up with a biblical definition of marriage: Gen. 2:21–25, Mal. 2:14, Eph. 5:28.

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To define something is to provide its meaning. Today it is said that marriage is difficult to define because the meaning of marriage differs for different people, times, and cultures. The Bible, however, has no such flexible idea of marriage. According to the Bible, marriage is an institution put in place by God, in which two adults of different gender covenant to share an intimate and lasting personal relationship. Biblical marriage is marked by an appreciation of the equality of the male and female, a deep bond of unity where goals are blended, and there is a sense of permanence and faithfulness and trust. As with a relationship with God, the relationship between a husband and a wife should be sacrosanct.

Of course, as we know all too well, marriage, even within the church, has become something that’s often treated lightly. People enter into a union that they believe God has created, and then, when things get rough, they stand before a human judge who, through man-made laws and rules, separates what God has united. We all know that something is terribly wrong with this picture; yet, as a church, we struggle with what to do in these situations.

Together with issues of polygamy, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and the practice of homosexuality, what challenges of human sexuality can you identify in today’s society? What biblically based counsel can you bring to bear on these issues?

Adultery, fornication, and pornography abound in society today, and these are hardly the worst of things that are out there. Nevertheless, God continues to look on human failings with compassion and tender mercy. Yet, these practices remain failings that can be overcome through the grace of Christ. Therefore, redemptive efforts must aim high in order to attain God’s ideals—as opposed to seeking to justify and excuse sin through a host of excuses and cultural qualifications.
Christian Behavior

Beyond the family, the Christian has other social and professional involvements—a clear recognition of the biblical view that Christians are in the world but not of the world (John 17:14–18).

Consider the following three areas of daily life and discuss the Christian’s responsibilities in regard to lifestyle and behavior:

1. Employer/Employee Relations (James 5:4–6, Eph. 6:5–9). Apart from regarding employees as equals in Christ, the Christian employer must be guided by the principle that adequate work requires adequate compensation. On the other hand, Christian workers ought to resist the temptation to be slothful at work.

   “Parents cannot commit a greater sin than to allow their children to have nothing to do. The children soon learn to love idleness, and they grow up shiftless, useless men and women. When they are old enough to earn their living, and find employment, they work in a lazy, droning way, yet expect to be paid as much as if they were faithful.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 345.

2. Civic Duties (Rom. 13:1–7). The Christian places God first in all things and evaluates all actions and responsibilities from this perspective. For this reason the Christian will, for example, oppose discrimination in any form, even if it is officially sanctioned. At the same time, “loyalty to God first does not entitle anyone to become autonomous and create social disharmony or chaos. Christians pay taxes, participate in civic duties, respect traffic laws and property regulations, and cooperate with civil authorities in curbing or controlling crime and violence.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 701.


In your work and social interactions, are people able to detect your Christian values? Be honest with yourself (no matter how painful that might be!). Which aspects of your life, if any, draw people to your faith? What does your answer tell you about the way in which you live?

“Acts of generosity and benevolence were designed by God to keep the hearts of the children of men tender and sympathetic, and to encourage in them an interest and affection for one another in imitation of the Master, who for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. The law of tithing was founded upon an enduring principle and was designed to be a blessing to man.

“The system of benevolence was arranged to prevent that great evil, covetousness. Christ saw that in the prosecution of business the love of riches would be the greatest cause of rooting true godliness out of the heart. He saw that the love of money would freeze deep and hard into men’s souls, stopping the flow of generous impulses and closing their senses to the wants of the suffering and the afflicted.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 547.

“If one has health and strength, that is his capital, and he must make a right use of it. If he spends hours in idleness and needless visiting and talking, he is slothful in business, which God’s word forbids. Such have a work to do to provide for their own families, and then lay by them in store for charitable purposes as God has prospered them.

“We are not placed in this world merely to care for ourselves, but we are required to aid in the great work of salvation, thus imitating the self-denying, self-sacrificing, useful life of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

1 The issue of marriage and divorce is of great concern, as it ought to be, in view of the fact that divorce is so rampant in certain countries. How do we apply the clear teaching of the Bible when addressing this topic? If we applied the teachings of Jesus more strictly, would people be less inclined to divorce? Discuss this difficult issue.

2 Dwell more on the whole question of tithing. Some argue that they should be able to give tithe to whom they choose, instead of through the channels of the organized church body of which they are members. What’s the great danger of that attitude?

3 As a church, we cannot ignore all the biblical admonitions regarding the caretaking of the poor and the needy among us. No one who calls himself or herself Christian can ignore this mandate. At the same time, what are the pitfalls of our calling if caretaking becomes our primary focus or the end point as opposed to the means to a greater end? Discuss.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: 1 John 3:16

The Student Will:

Know: Outline the Christian’s responsibilities regarding time, talents, and other personal and material resources, as well as his or her responsibilities toward family and community.

Feel: Sense the generosity and benevolence that Christ’s example of self-sacrifice calls forth.

Do: Give to others as generously as God has given to him or her.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Interested, Sympathetic, and Supportive

A What riches has God given to Christians, and how are they owed back to Him?

B What principles of stewardship guide the Christian’s responsibility regarding gifts of possessions and relationships?

II. Feel: Source of Every Good Thing

A What examples has Christ provided of self-sacrificing generosity?

B What response does Christ’s benevolence call from His followers, and how can these emotions and resulting actions guard against selfishness and covetousness?

III. Do: Giving

A How do Christians give back to God, family, community, and the world at large in ways that complete the circle of benevolence?

B How does the cultivation of the beauty and sanctity of marriage reflect a Christian’s relationship with God?

C What are the civil responsibilities of Christians in their neighborhoods, nation, and in the global community?

Summary: God has given gifts to His children and has demonstrated in the life of Christ the unselfishness that characterizes His nature. His children are called to reflect His benevolence in their use of His gifts of personal and material resources, family, and society.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Practical Christianity encompasses living and managing our everyday lives in a manner that reflects our love for God and those around us.

**Just for Teachers:** In this first section, our goal is to assist the class members in reflecting on what encompasses practical Christian living.

**Opening Discussion:** What does the term *practical Christianity* convey to you? This week’s lesson highlights topics ranging from employer/employee relations, civic duties, and Christian marriage, to self-worth, tithing, and stewardship, and relates them to practical Christianity. Reflecting on the various topics taken together, the lesson poses the question, How do we practice our Christian and spiritual experience in our everyday life and dealings?

**Discussion Question:** How would you define a Christian lifestyle and what makes it Christian?

STEP 2—Explore

**Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** It is essential to delve more deeply into the relationship between God and our possessions and the implications that this relationship poses for our faith and giving within the context of our daily experience.

I. Don’t Forget! *(Read Deuteronomy 8:11–20 with your class.)*

Scholar J. A. Thompson states, “Deuteronomy is one of the greatest books of the Old Testament. Its influence on the domestic and personal religion of all ages has not been surpassed by any other book in the Bible. It is quoted over eighty times in the New Testament and thus it belongs to a small group of four Old Testament books to which the early Christians made frequent reference.”—*Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 11. In Deuteronomy, the speeches of Moses encompass the background history of Israel, followed by attention to the ceremonial law in regard to matters of worship, clean and unclean foods, and
tithes. Furthermore, civil ordinances, as well as various laws on marriage, parents, and disobedient children, are addressed.

It is also in Deuteronomy 8 that Moses reminds the children of Israel of God’s past mercies toward them: “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, . . . a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees . . . , a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing. . . . You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you” (vss. 7–10, NRSV).

Note carefully the strong admonition that follows: “Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. . . . Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today” (vss. 11–18, NRSV).

The value of these words is not only a reminder to the children of Israel of their indebtedness to God for everything, but the far-reaching import of the words is significant to our historical time and life experiences as well.

Jesus echoes Moses’ words about possessions. In fact, He talks about wealth, money, and possessions more than any other topic. He does so in connection to everyday life, addressing the money spent in the marketplace and by the family.

Why? It seems that Moses’ admonition had been forgotten. This same danger is posed when, today, in our forgetfulness of God as Provider, we instead attribute to money a godlike power that makes us think that we are in control and autonomous.

**Consider This:** Money exists in the realm of things that can be worshiped. But according to Moses, why did God give His people the power to acquire wealth? What is the connection between a failure to keep the commandments and a worship of money? How is obedience to the law a safeguard against the worship of mammon?

**II. Faith and Trust**

Today in many countries, cultural myths abound in regard to wealth and possessions. These myths communicate that things bring happiness and that having a little more money is the answer. However, biblical truth states that the goodness of life is not reflected in the abundance of one’s
possessions, and the one who loves money will never have enough.

This truth takes us to the core of practical Christian living in regard to faith and trust. In what do people typically have faith when making decisions about how they will earn, give, and spend their money? The cultural response to this question is that they have faith in their own ability, job, home, insurance, investments, pensions, children, education, and possessions.

In whom does the Bible say to place our trust? The reply is GOD.

Therefore, a Christian lifestyle will be one lived with values other than consumerism. It will be faith-based and also generous in giving.

**Consider This:** What are the biblical principles that should shape our attitudes and practices toward our use of money? What does the Bible say is the true source of happiness? Why can’t the source of true joy be found in material things?

### III. Tithes and Offerings

Returning tithe and giving offerings is a powerful antidote to the danger of forgetting God and succumbing to the pull of culture and its myths about possessions and money. When we faithfully and regularly tithe, we participate in the act of worship that positions God in His rightful place, which is first in our lives and in all of our everyday dealings.

**Consider This:** How does tithing provide us with a tool to worship God? In what way does it help us to place Him first in our lives in every way? How is tithing a tangible recognition of our incredible relationship with Him?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Please divide your class members into small groups (of three to five each, if possible) and have them discuss the following questions. Then reassemble and invite them to share their answers.

**Activity:** As Creator of all things, God has never transferred the ownership of His creation to people. When we acknowledge this truth, then every spending decision also becomes a spiritual decision. The pertinent question then becomes not, “Lord, what do You want me to do with my money?” but rather, “Lord, what do you want me to do with Your money?”

**Discuss:**
1. How can we consistently remember and become aware of God’s ownership?
2. How can we move beyond intellectual recognition of God’s ownership and transfer this information to our hearts and everyday actions?

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3. In addition to returning tithes and giving offerings, where else and what else, in terms of God’s gifts to you, might you be able to give?

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

▶ **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Provide paper or 3 x 5 cards and writing utensils, if supplies are available. Alternately, this exercise can be performed without the supplies by simply discussing the answer to the activity question. Divide your class into small groups (of three to five each, if possible). Have the group members work together on this activity and, when finished, invite each small group to share with the class at large.

**Activity:** Within your small group, create and write out the epitaph of a faithful steward. How might it read?

Epitaphs often are guilty of praising too much or saying too little. Part of the problem with epitaphs is their brevity—they are short by necessity. After all, a headstone has limited real estate on which to inscribe much more than the name and birth and death dates of the deceased. The other problem is the tendency to sentimentalize the qualities of the dead—to gild the worst sinner with saintly qualities never legitimately possessed, perhaps, in an effort to erase painful memories or disappointments that he or she caused when alive.

Whatever the case, an epitaph doesn’t always provide the most accurate insight into the deceased’s character. In light of these thoughts, consider the epitaph you have written. How can you endeavor to ensure that it is neither exaggeration nor understatement? Or, put another way, how can the principles that you’ve learned this week help this truth to be lived out in your life now—and not to be mere bloated inscription on granite when you are six feet under?
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Heb. 8:1–5; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:24, 25; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:23; Acts 3:19–21.

Memory Text: “‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began’” (Acts 3:19–21, NKJV).

Key Thought: The Bible’s teaching on Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, His second coming, and the resurrection of the dead stand together as a message of hope for those who have placed their trust in Him.

The history of the great controversy between good and evil has had many pivotal moments; the climax, though, was at the cross, where Satan’s ultimate defeat and destruction were ensured. At the same time, biblical prophecy points to a “time of the end” (Dan. 12:4, 9), a period in salvation history with its own significance in terms of the relationship between the Lord and His people. Events within this “time of the end” period are described as “eschatological,” meaning “last things.”

In this week’s lesson we will look at three special events within this general period of the “last things” that have immense spiritual implications: Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of those who died in true faith.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 22.*
The Heavenly Sanctuary: Part 1

Fundamental Belief no. 24 opens with the following words: “There is a sanctuary in heaven—the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man” (see Heb. 8:2). One of the matter-of-fact assumptions of the Bible is the existence of a heavenly sanctuary (Ps. 11:4).

Read Hebrews 8:1–5. What is the main point taught in these verses?

The earthly sanctuary is portrayed as a type, or pattern, of the heavenly one; this means that, at a minimum, the former has some functional correspondence with the latter. The earthly sanctuary, then, teaches us a lot about the heavenly; despite that whatever the earthly sanctuary meant to the people of Israel, its true significance was found in the heavenly and what was to happen there. Through the efficacy of sacrifices and priestly ministry, the earthly model taught us about the realities of the heavenly sanctuary. The ministrations of the earthly sanctuary were God’s means of teaching the principles of salvation to His people, a foreshadowing of the “real thing”—which is Christ’s ministry (Heb. 9:9–15), both through His death and then His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary.

Ministry in the earthly sanctuary taught that while the shedding of blood was necessary (Heb. 9:22) to atone for sin, there was still the need for a priestly mediator between sinners and a Holy God as a result of that shed blood. The ministry of the priest in the Most Holy Place cleansed the sanctuary of sin and required affliction and repentance on the part of the people. Thus, judgment also was highlighted as an integral part of the total ministry of salvation.

What is fascinating, too, is what Hebrews 8:1, 2 says, which is that the goal of all the previous seven chapters in the book is to point the reader to the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and the position of Christ as our High Priest in that heavenly sanctuary. It’s hard to understand how anyone could not see the great significance that Hebrews gives to Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as part of the entire plan of salvation. Nothing in the verses indicates that the sanctuary in heaven, much less Christ’s ministry there, should be seen as metaphorical or symbolic. In fact, verse 5 makes it clear that the earthly sanctuary—a real structure with real priests and real sacrifices—was only a “shadow” of the reality of what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary.
The Heavenly Sanctuary: Part 2

The earthly sanctuary service revealed three phases of salvation: substitutionary sacrifice, priestly mediation, and judgment. The Bible teaches that all three phases of salvation are embodied in the ministry of Christ on behalf of sinners.

Read Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:24, 25; and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How does Christ’s death on the cross satisfy the substitutionary aspect of salvation?

What do these texts say about both Christ and mediation on behalf of sinners? 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 7:25.

Just as animal sacrifices pointed to the death of Christ, the priestly ministry foreshadowed the true ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In particular, the continual, or daily, ministry of priests in the Holy Place symbolized the access that the sinner has to God through Christ’s ministry as Intercessor and Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:14–16).

Study Hebrews 9:23. How does the cleansing of things in the heavens relate to the priestly work in the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement?

With the earthly sanctuary services in the background, Hebrews 9:23 points clearly to a cleansing ministry of Christ in heaven. This is a text that has baffled scholars for centuries, because it clearly teaches that something in heaven has been defiled and needs to be purified. For Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of the two phases of Christ’s heavenly work in our behalf, this cleansing is the antitype—that corresponds to the yearly cleansing of the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

Think about atonement—what it means, how it is accomplished, and who alone can make atonement for us. Why, then, should the news that we are living in the “Day of Atonement” be something positive and hopeful?
The Second Coming of Christ

**Study** Acts 3:19–21. How does the blotting out of sins that is mentioned here relate to the cleansing of the sanctuary that we studied yesterday?

While Peter may not have known the “times or seasons” (Acts 1:7), his reference to Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:14–21 points to his appreciation of the fulfillment of prophecy in his time. In his prophetic frame of mind, it seems evident that “Peter, speaking by inspiration, and thus beyond his own finite understanding, is referring, tersely, to two great events of earth’s last days—(1) the mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit and (2) the final blotting out of the sins of the righteous—which are tied to a third climactic event, the second advent of Christ.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 160.

The early church was certain of both the second coming of Christ and the promise of a new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:13). Christ’s first coming provided a theological rationale for the second. As far as we are concerned, without the Second Coming, the First Coming would have been futile. The process of dealing with the sin problem, a process that He began with His sacrifice on the cross, reaches its consummation when, after the “cleansing of the sanctuary,” He appears the “second time . . . for salvation” (Heb. 9:26–28, NKJV). In fact, without the Second Coming, and the resurrection it brings, what would the promise of salvation mean to us? (See 1 Thess. 4:16–18.) Nothing!

The second coming of Christ will mark the conclusion of the great controversy as far as the destiny of mortals is concerned. Satan, knowing that the end of the controversy is in sight, seeks through deception to lead as many astray as possible. We are told that, “as the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ draws near, satanic agencies are moved from beneath. Satan will not only appear as a human being, but he will personate Jesus Christ, and the world that has rejected the truth will receive him as the Lord of lords and King of kings.”—Ellen G. White, The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, April 14, 1896. Against this deception we have been warned that Christ’s coming will be a literal, personal, and visible event that will impact the entire world, ending it as we know it—a place of sin, suffering, misery, disappointment, and death.

Look at our world. How well have we, as humans, done in making it a better place? While we must try to improve the lot of those less fortunate than we are, and of those who are suffering and in need—why must we always keep before us that which is the only solution?
Awaiting the Advent

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. What is the message here, and why is it so relevant to us today, living when we do? How can we take these words and apply them in the practical moments of day-to-day living?

So much exists in those verses, but one point should stand out so clearly, and that is the hope that those Christians awaiting the return of Christ should have. Certainly, we need to be watchful and sober so that the day doesn’t overtake us like a thief in the night. But we should also be full of faith and love and hope; because whether we “wake or sleep” (that is, whether we die before He returns or are alive when He returns), we have the promise of eternal life with Him.

In this day and age, when we see signs all around us, we must be careful of the way in which we interpret them and of how we understand their significance. Too often we can get caught up in events that cause all kinds of excitement and drama and anticipation, only to have them fade into nothing. These kinds of things, once finished, can leave members disgruntled, disappointed, and even full of doubt. We need to be vigilant, but we also need to be cautious, wise, and humble as we seek to read and discern the signs of the times (see Matt. 16:1–4).

What is the purpose of the “signs of the times,” according to John 13:19, 14:29?

The predictions about the end times were not given to satisfy the curiosity of believers but to encourage them to keep watching (Matt. 24:32–44). As we await the Second Advent, we need to keep our eyes open, and we need to know what the Word of God teaches about last-day events; this is especially important because there are so many false views within Christendom itself regarding the signs of the times.

How do we strike the right balance in living in anticipation of the Second Coming while refraining from seeing every headline as a sign of the end?
Death and Resurrection

In the New Testament, one of the events connected with the second coming of Christ is the resurrection of those who died believing in Him. In fact, as far as most believers are concerned, that is the most important part of the Second Coming, because most of Christ’s followers will be dead when He returns.

What do the following texts teach us about the resurrection of the dead at the time of Christ’s return?

1 Thess. 4:13–16

1 Cor. 15:13–25

Rom. 8:11

Phil. 3:20, 21

The Bible teaches that in the resurrection, the “body” is restored to life. In other words, biblical resurrection is a bodily resurrection. This truth becomes even more clear when we keep in mind the fact that after Christ’s resurrection, His tomb was empty. The dead body no longer remained in the grave. So, in the certainty of His resurrection, we have the certainty of ours.

If resurrection amounts to the breaking of the power of death, how does that explain why one can attain to it only by being “in Christ”?

2 Tim. 1:8–10.

The key to immortality is not greater scientific research. The power of death has already been broken through Christ’s own death and resurrection (Rom. 6:9); based on that accomplishment, He is able to bestow immortality upon those who identify with His death and resurrection through baptism (Rom. 6:23). Also, the Bible makes it clear that the gift of immortality is not given to believers at death but when Jesus comes the second time, at the “last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:51–54).

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies” (John 11:25, NASB). How can you learn to better grasp the hope that is contained in these words? Where would you be without them?
Further Study: “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, ‘whither the forerunner is for us entered.’ Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will. He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 786, 787.

Discussion Questions:

1. John Calvin called Christ’s work of intercession the “continual application of His death for our salvation,” and it is said that “the existence of a heavenly sanctuary was standard theology among Puritan divines.” It’s not hard to see why Christ’s work of intercession should be seen as such an important teaching. After all, look at how much of the Old Testament centered around the sanctuary and the temple. Look at how much the New Testament does, as well! What should this tell us about the importance of this doctrine?

2. Dwell more on Hebrews 9:23, a text that for centuries has baffled biblical scholars who can’t understand how something in heaven itself could actually need cleansing. As Seventh-day Adventists, we still have a lot to learn about what this text means. How does our understanding, for instance, of Daniel 8:14 help to clarify this important concept?

3. The resurrection of Christ is utterly essential to the Christian faith. Without it we have nothing. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. Look at how Paul is seeking to persuade his readers of the evidence for Christ’s resurrection. Notice especially verse 6. What is he saying here? Why is he emphasizing the fact that many of the people to whom Christ appeared are still alive? It’s almost as if he’s saying, “Don’t take my word for it. Ask some of these hundreds who saw Him themselves.” These are not the words you would expect from someone who wasn’t sure of what he was teaching. What other evidence from the Bible can help to reaffirm our certainty of Christ’s resurrection?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Acts 3:19–21

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe the ongoing work of Christ that builds on the Cross and culminates in the judgment and Second Coming.

**Feel:** Cultivate the alert watchfulness and faithfulness of those who expect to see their Master at any time.

**Do:** Follow Christ behind the veil of the sanctuary as He mediates on our behalf before the throne of mercy.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Christ in the Sanctuary**

   - **A** How does Christ’s work as High Priest build on what He did at the Cross for us? How does this work culminate in judgment and the Second Coming?
   - **B** How have the earthly sanctuary activities helped to explain current last-day events in the heavenly sanctuary?

II. **Feel: The King Is Coming**

   - **A** What is the proper attitude that Christ’s followers should have regarding the signs of the last days?
   - **B** What deceptions must be guarded against?

III. **Do: Following the High Priest**

   - **A** What part do Christ’s followers play as their High Priest intercedes with the Father on their behalf?
   - **B** After the cleansing of the heavenly temple, what comes next in the great controversy, and what are the followers of Christ to do?

**Summary:** After ransoming His beloved on the cross, Christ intercedes on their behalf as their heavenly High Priest. He cleanses the heavenly sanctuary and then returns to take His people to live with Him.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The second coming of Christ is not a fairy tale but a reality. Without it, our faith in Christ is vain.

**Just for Teachers:** To motivate faith in the second coming of Christ and other related last-day events of redemptive history, have a senior class member read the following imagined narrative. Then discuss the implications of the story.

**Story to Read:** “As an early teen, I became a charter member of the church at Thessalonica. When Paul came to our town, the gospel message challenged every philosophical and belief system we had ever known. Plato was out, Jesus was in. Idols were gone, the God incarnate in Jesus became our Sovereign. We received the Word heartily (1 Thess. 1:6). Our faith was known everywhere (vs. 8), even as we turned to serve a living and true God and to wait for Jesus’ imminent return to establish His kingdom (vss. 9, 10). But as things turned out, everything was not rosy in our church. Satan was stirring up trouble. He caused some saints to doubt and question. One of the great truths that the apostle Paul brought us is that Jesus, who came and died for our sins, is in heaven and will soon return to take us home. We lived in that awesome hope. But Satan was busy, sowing seeds of doubt. Some elderly believers were beginning to die, and members began to ask: Is the second coming of Christ real? What will happen to those who are dying, one by one, without seeing the Son from heaven? Doubt attacked faith. We all were in a state of worry. Against such doubts and worry, Paul wrote us a beautiful epistle. In the climax of the epistle, he assured us: ‘For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air’ (1 Thess. 4:16–18). I live and am ready to die with that hope in my heart.”

**Questions to Ask:**

1. Have you ever doubted the Second Coming? If so, why? If not, why not?

2. It has been almost two thousand years since Paul wrote those words. On what basis can we say that those words are still trustworthy?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: Of the many assurances Jesus gives to His disciples, John 14:1–3 is one of the finest. Despite the grief that the shadow of the Cross brings to the disciples, Jesus does not leave them without comfort. Two reasons for His comforting assurance may be cited: first, Jesus will turn the instrument of death into a means of triumph and rise victorious over sin; second, Jesus will go to the Father and return to take the disciples home. The lesson today deals with the second part; it is important to lead the class in a faith-renewing discussion and study of this topic.

No other founder of any philosophy or religion has left to his followers a promise as significant and meaningful as the one Jesus left. “I go” to my Father, Jesus said to His disciples, and immediately assured them, “I will come again” (John 14:1–3). The time between His going and returning is known as the last days. Among the last-day events, three are for our study this week: the ministry of Jesus in heaven, the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the saints.

I. Last-Day Events: The Heavenly Sanctuary (Read Hebrews 7:22–28 with your class.)

The Cross is the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. For the death that Jesus “died, He died to sin once for all” (Rom. 6:10, NKJV). There is no further sacrifice needed. Having offered Himself as the “once for all” sacrifice, Christ has entered the heavenly sanctuary to perform His mediatorial ministry (Heb. 7:22–28). The book of Hebrews teaches that the earthly sanctuary is a model of the heavenly (Heb. 8:5, 9:23–26). The earthly sanctuary taught the procedures—the daily sacrifices, the priestly duties, the annual services of judgment—to be followed in dealing with sin, thus showing God’s people the seriousness of sin and the cost of salvation. All these were an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality (Heb. 8:5). The heavenly reality is what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:9–15) “after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever” on the cross (Heb. 10:12, NKJV). When the ministry in heaven—including the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:23) typified by the annual Day of Atonement—is over, Christ will return to the earth for “the second time” to take His children home (vs. 28).

Consider This: What is the relation between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary? How does the earthly sanctuary show the seriousness of sin? How did the earthly service typify the heavenly?
II. Last-Day Events: The Second Coming (Read Matthew 24:5–7, 25:37–39 with your class.)

Christ’s promise “I will come again” (John 14:3) resolutely affirms a second coming as distinct from a first. Hebrews underscores this distinction clearly: “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28, NRSV). Thus, the mission of the Second Coming is not to atone for sin but to gather into His eternal kingdom those who “are eagerly waiting for him.”

The Olivet discourse of our Lord (Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) specifically speaks of the Second Coming in terms of a universal gathering of His disciples “from the ends of the earth” (Mark 13:27, NIV) into the kingdom of God. It is the harvest time (Mark 4:29, Rev. 14:15). His coming will be preceded by various signs, including false Christs (Matt. 24:5), wars and rumors of wars (vss. 6, 7), famines and earthquakes (vs. 7), and worldwide proclamation of the gospel (vs. 14). Just prior to His coming will be a great tribulation (vs. 21) and a spiritual apathy and deterioration (Matt. 25:37–39, Luke 17:28–30). These and other signs are given not to work out a chronological timeline as to when Jesus will come but to keep God’s people in a state of preparedness. Watchfulness and readiness are the Christian’s perpetual response to the promise of the Parousia.

Consider This: What is the mission and purpose of the Second Coming? How does it differ from the first? What are the signs of Christ’s second coming within the church and in the world? In what ways are they meant to prepare us for His soon return?

III. Last-Day Events: The Resurrection of the Saints (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 with your class.)

In the trauma of death, Christians must not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). A Platonist may see in death a release from the pain and corruption of life and a doorway to a new life. A follower of Seneca may issue a call to self-discipline in the face of death. A Hindu may see in death the endless possibility of reincarnation. But not the Christian. To him or her, grief must be placed within the perspective of Christian hope, and that hope is anchored in the certainty that the “dead in Christ will rise first” (vs. 16, NKJV). There lies the Christian’s answer and comfort to the problem of death.

But when will the dead in Christ rise? Paul’s answer is clear: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (vss. 16, 17, NKJV). The Greek word for “meet,” apantesin, is packed
with power and significance; it connotes the return of a conquering hero. The Hero of all ages, the King of kings, the Sovereign of the universe is returning, and His subjects will meet Him in the air. Jesus, the Sovereign of the cosmos, the Lord of heaven and earth, is arriving to take His own. That is our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

Consider This: Based on the authority of Scripture, what is the biblical understanding of when the dead in Christ will rise? How does a knowledge of the Greek word for “meet,” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, enhance our appreciation of what will transpire at the Second Coming?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Today’s lesson brings out many areas of truth peculiar to Seventh-day Adventists. As you lead the lesson, make sure you emphasize these unique areas of last-day events.

Application Questions:

1. Why is our faith in vain if the Second Coming is not real?

2. What does the Second Coming mean to you personally? Can you recall an experience during which you found this doctrine a blessing to you?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Make sure that your class understands that without the second coming of Christ, the first coming has no meaning so far as final victory over evil and death is concerned. The Cross assures the decisiveness of the victory over the evil one. It was through the Cross and the Resurrection that the decisive battle was won.

Activity: Ask various class members to read aloud the following passages and share what the text means to them: Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 11:26; 15:54, 55; Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 1 Peter 1:3, 5; 4:7; 2 Peter 3:12.
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(page 104 of Standard Edition)

When All Things Become New

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: 1 Thess. 4:16–18, Revelation 20, 1 Cor. 4:5, Rom. 8:20–22, Rev. 21:11–22:5, Rev. 21:3.

Memory Text: “‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’” (Revelation 21:4, NKJV).

Key Thought: What is the millennium, when does it happen, and to what does it lead?

Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) was an English author who coined the word *utopia* in order to depict an imaginary island with a seemingly perfect social and legal system. Since then the word has been often used pejoratively to denote the impossibility of the idea of a perfect society. After all, look at how many times that humans have tried to create “utopias.” They have always failed, and miserably too.

The Bible, however, teaches about the true utopia. In a sense it has been the goal toward which the Godhead has been working ever since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden. God wants to bring humanity back to the utopia He originally created for us.

In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ will conclude His work for the salvation of humanity. After that, He will come to earth a second time, but with a glory never before seen. He will resurrect the dead saints and translate those who are living; and all of them will reign with the Lord Jesus in heaven for 1,000 years.

This is the time that we call the “millennium” (for the word *thou-sand*). The beginning of the millennium marks the onset of the only utopia humans will have known since Eden before the Fall.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.*
Events Inaugurating the Millennium

If the millennium marks the beginning of God’s “utopia” for His people, it is only natural for us to try to know when the millennium will begin and what it will be like. The millennium, as a concept, appears in Revelation 20, where it is mentioned six times between verses 2–7. In order to know the time of the millennium, the place of Revelation 20 in the overall flow of the book of Revelation needs to be determined. Although the book does not follow a straight time line, in this case it is not too difficult to determine when the millennium begins.

**Compare** 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and Revelation 20. How does the nature of the resurrection as mentioned in these two passages help to determine when the millennium begins? What connected events can you find in these passages?

Sometime before Jesus’ second advent, Revelation predicts that three powers (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet) will gather the nations to oppose the work of Christ and His people (Rev. 16:13). At the time of Christ’s coming (Rev. 19:11), the nations will gather to make war against Christ, but in the process the beast and the false prophet will be destroyed (Rev. 19:19, 20). Revelation 20, then, takes up the fate of the third power, the dragon. While the dead in Christ are being resurrected, during what is here called the first resurrection (vs. 5), the dragon (Satan) will be captured and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (vss. 1–3).

Some of these amazing events are depicted also in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9. These passages together help to explain what happens before the millennium begins.

That beginning, of course, coincides with the second advent of Christ. The dead in Christ will be resurrected to join the faithful living, and both groups will be taken to heaven. The wicked living at the time of Christ’s advent will be slain by His “brightness” (2 Thess. 2:8). And the desolated earth will become the prison house of Satan, who will be “bound” for 1,000 years by, as it were, a chain of circumstances. The reason given for Satan’s imprisonment is “so he might not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev. 20:3). Many see a symbolic link between the “banishment” of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:22) and the circumstances of Satan during the millennium.

Go back over the events revealed in these verses. They talk about supernatural happenings that reveal the greatness and power of God in contrast to the weakness and impotence of humankind. How can we always keep this important contrast before us? Why would that be a good remedy for pride and self-sufficiency?
In the Midst of the Millennium

Read Revelation 20:4–6 again. What evidence there shows us that the millennium unfolds in heaven (at least for the saved)?

A specific segment of the group who will participate in the millennium are described as “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands” (NKJV). As Seventh-day Adventists, we understand that the Bible doesn’t teach the existence of separate, immortal, conscious souls. This text, instead, is portraying those who went through the experience of persecution as portrayed in Revelation 12:17–13:18. At the Second Advent (at which time occurs the first resurrection), these persecuted souls come back to life and, after the resurrection, reign in heaven with Christ (compare with 1 Thess. 4:15–17).

Revelation 20:4 draws our attention to another event during the millennium, when it says that judgment will be given specifically to the redeemed. Knowing that the faithful are reigning with their Lord and that the wicked were slain by the brightness of Christ’s coming, what is the nature and purpose of this judgment?

One of the three things that we focused on last week (Monday) was the judgment connected with Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary before the Second Advent. That judgment is different from the judgment in Revelation 20:4, which is really a fulfillment of Christ’s promise in Matthew 19:28, and which corresponds to Paul’s statement that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2, 3).

The concept of judgment in the Bible is rich and multifaceted. The final judgment has three phases, the first of which is the one associated with Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Seventh-day Adventists call this the investigative phase of the final judgment. Next, there is the millennial review phase of the judgment, which is referred to in Revelation 20:4 and 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3. In this phase, the redeemed will have an opportunity to examine God’s ways and judgment with regard to the agents of rebellion. The third phase of the final judgment is the executive phase, which is part of the events that will occur at the end of the millennium.

Keeping what you’ve read today in mind, read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What important hope is found here in view of the fact that we have so many unanswered questions?
Events at the End of the Millennium

**Read** Revelation 20:7–9. What event marks the close of the millennium, and what opportunity does it provide Satan?

Reversal of the circumstances of Satan marks his being “released.” This event is linked with the resurrection of the rest of the dead who “did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (vs. 5, NKJV). The phrase “Gog and Magog” is used figuratively, as in Ezekiel 38:2, to describe those whom Satan will succeed in deceiving—the wicked from all ages. It is this universal multitude that Satan will inspire to try to overthrow the city of God. Revelation 20:9 suggests that the city, the New Jerusalem, at this time will already have descended from heaven to earth (presumably with Christ), and Satan and his hosts will march against it. A detailed description of the city is given in Revelation 21.

**As** said earlier, Revelation does not move in a distinctly chronological order. Look at Revelation 20:11–15. How is the idea of judgment expressed here? What is the significance of the fact that final punishment occurs after the saints are involved in judgment?

Rev. 20:4.

“During the millennium the saints participate in a deliberative judgment that reviews the cases of the lost of this earth and the fallen angels. This judgment is evidently necessary in view of the cosmic nature of the sin problem. The course of the rebellion of sin has been the object of concern and interest on the part of other worlds (Job 1; 2; Eph. 3:10). The whole interlude of sin must be handled in such a way that hearts and minds throughout God’s universe are satisfied with its treatment and conclusion, with particular reference to God’s character. It is especially important for the redeemed from earth to understand God’s dealings with those who called for the rocks to fall on them and deliver them from the ‘face of him who is seated on the throne’ (Rev. 6:16). They must be totally satisfied that God was just in His decision regarding the lost.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 2000), p. 932.

**What does it say about the character of God that we, ourselves, can be involved in the judgment of the lost? How does this concept fit in with the whole idea of the great controversy?**
The New Earth

Revelation 20 ends with the elimination of Satan and his hosts. Revelation 21 opens with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

Revelation 21:1–5 carries the promise that God is making all things new. In what ways does this reflect the Genesis creation account? (Genesis 1–2). What are the differences?

The word translated as “new” in Revelation 21:1 emphasizes something that is new in form or quality rather than a “new” event in time. God’s purpose in the Genesis Creation remains unrealized until the promise to make all things new is fulfilled on the new earth. Hence the whole creation groans and longs for liberation (Rom. 8:20–22). God’s new creation, then, will consist of the liberation of the cosmos and the earth from their present states of incompleteness, and the bringing of them into conformity with His design. Consequently, while the new creation will definitely be different from the old, there will be some continuity between the two. Like the old, the new earth will be a real, tangible place inhabited with real, physical beings. The new earth will be a renewed earth, purified as it were, by fire (2 Pet. 3:10–13).

Read Revelation 21:11–22:5 in order to capture the physical aspects of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth. In what way does John’s description portray the reality of the city?

One thing is clear: we are talking about a literal, physical place. The pagan heresy of the physical being bad and the spiritual being good is, again, debunked by Scripture. Although words are limited in what they can convey, even inspired words, they can teach us to know that a real inheritance awaits us. How important it is to remember that this world, with all its imperfections, is not the way it was supposed to be; it is an aberration, one that Christ came to fix. In contrast, the depiction that we see in Revelation, no matter how hard it is for us to grasp (knowing only a fallen world), is the eternal reality that awaits us. What a hope we have, especially compared to those who believe that death is the end of everything.
Life in the New Earth

Read Revelation 21:3. In what way will this stupendous fact alter the life experiences of the inhabitants of the new earth?

Perhaps there isn’t another awe-inspiring vision throughout the Bible comparable to the one that John the Revelator describes here; the new earth will not only be home to human creatures but also to God. The holy, transcendent Creator of the universe will grace the community of the redeemed with His presence. Of course, God will forever remain distinct from His creatures, but in the new earth, the separation between God and humanity that was brought about by sin will be removed.

Also, true fellowship will be restored—not only between God and humans but between humans and nature and within nature itself. John describes there being no more curse (Rev. 22:3), and the prophetic anticipation of the cessation of animosity within the animal world is also described as coming to pass (Isa. 65:25).

Beyond the restoration of complete fellowship, the elimination of the “groaning of the creation” will mean that all that is harmful—decay, disease, death, and suffering—will be things of the past (Rom. 8:21, Rev. 21:4).

Read Psalm 8. What is the message for us here, especially in light of what we have studied this quarter?

The implications of God’s presence on the new earth, and the implications for life there, are immense—especially as science has revealed to us, as never before, the size and scope of God’s creation. The estimated size of the “visible” universe is many billions of light-years wide; however, scientists now speculate that this immense and vast cosmos represents only about 7 percent of what’s actually out there!

And to think: the God who created all that not only died for us but will dwell with us for eternity! At some point, because of the limits of our fallen minds, we have to stop trying to think about this rationally and, instead, fall to our knees and worship and praise the One who not only created us but redeemed us and now promises to live with us for all eternity.
Further Study: “In the typical service the high priest, having made the atonement for Israel, came forth and blessed the congregation. So Christ, at the close of His work as mediator, will appear, ‘without sin unto salvation’ (Hebrews 9:28), to bless His waiting people with eternal life. As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so Christ will place all these sins upon Satan, the originator and instigator of sin. The scapegoat, bearing the sins of Israel, was sent away ‘unto a land not inhabited’ (Leviticus 16:22); so Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God’s people to commit, will be for a thousand years confined to the earth, which will then be desolate, without inhabitant, and he will at last suffer the full penalty of sin in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 485, 486.

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. . . . Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”—Pages 674, 675.

Discussion Questions:

1. There are three basic positions (with some variations) within the Christian church regarding the millennium: (i) that it represents the era between the first and second advents of Christ; (ii) that it is a long period of peace and righteousness on earth before Christ appears, brought about in part because of the preaching of the gospel and social reforms; and (iii) that the millennium, a period of 1,000 years, will take place after Christ’s return and it will happen in heaven. Seventh-day Adventists, as we have seen, take the third position, with the millennium unfolding in heaven, not on earth (as some erroneously believe). What problems do the other options present?

2. Read Revelation 21:27. What do you understand about this exclusion from the New Jerusalem? What other exclusions are there, and why?

3. Dwell on the idea of human attempts to create “utopias.” What examples can you think of? What were the results? Why have they always failed, and why do these failures reveal to us our utter dependency upon God’s supernatural intervention in our world?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Revelation 21:4

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Describe the judgment that precedes the millennium, the millennium itself, and those events that culminate in the creation of the new earth.
- **Feel:** Sense the sweeping drama of earth’s closing events and God’s power that ushers in eternal peace and joy.
- **Do:** Rejoice in the liberation of the cosmos and the promise that God will dwell with His people.

**Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Judgment and Settlement**

- A What are the three types of judgment that precede the creation of the new earth?
- B What will the saints be doing during the millennium? Why is this activity an important part of the closing events of the great controversy?

**II. Feel: Shock and Awe**

- A How do the dramatic scenes of the closing of earth’s history affect the wicked?
- B How are the righteous affected by the display of God’s power that reveals His holiness to the nations and saves them?

**III. Do: Every Knee Shall Bow**

- A How does God cause every knee to bow in the final scenes of earth’s judgment? Why is this event significant?
- B What comfort and joy can Christ’s followers take in the promises of the new earth?

**Summary:** In the end, God will save the righteous, allow the saints to review His judgments, and execute the final sentence on all evil. Then He will bring about a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people in peace and joy forever.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Through the hope presented by the biblical teaching of the millennium and new world, we gain fresh insight into God’s commitment to remove sin, vindicate His name, and make all things new in our individual lives.

**Just for Teachers:** Spark discussion about the millennium by asking class members the following questions. But first, as a prelude to discussion, remind class members that if God can change an entire world of decay and sin into a beautiful paradise, then surely He can do the same in our individual lives.

**Opening Questions for Discussion:** What kind of discussions would most likely take place during the millennium in regard to the tragedies that have darkened human history?

1. In what sense do these tragedies encourage us to hope beyond this world?

2. What kind of surprises do you think will take place during the millennium?

3. If God can change this world with all of its history of evil, in what further ways can He change our lives, the products of shameful history and evil?
STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: This section provides opportunities to explore examples of the connection between the condition of the earth and the condition of humankind. Thus, establishing the encouraging truth of God’s ability to change and renew an entire world will serve as an illustration of His regenerative power and desire to change and renew our own hearts.

I. Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust (Review Genesis 2:7, 3:19, and Ecclesiastes 3:18–20, 12:7 with your class.)

The connection between humanity and the earth begins with creation itself: The Bible tells us that God formed man from the dust of the ground. Humanity is dust or earth, plus breath or life from God. In fact, the very name Adam carries the idea of red or ruddiness in reference to clay. While the English in Genesis 2:18 and 19 transitions from the words “the man” to “Adam,” the Hebrew words remain the same. It is after the animals are referenced as being formed from the dust that the word Adam becomes not just a description of the origin of humanity but also the proper name of the father of our race. We see that after the fall of man, God declares that Adam will return to the ground, or adamah in Hebrew, for out of it he was taken.

II. Disobedience’s Effect Upon Dominion (Review Genesis 1:26–28 and 3:17, 18 with your class.)

The Bible tells us that when God created humankind in His image, it was His intention to allow man to have dominion over everything that God had created in the previous six days. This intention is clear from the topographical references used in Genesis 1:26–28, “of the sea,” “of the air,” and “over all the earth.” When man is overcome by temptation in the Garden of Eden and God describes sin’s consequences, He states to man that “cursed is the ground for your sake” (3:17, NKJV; emphasis added). The ground, referring to the earth, was under Adam’s dominion and, in fact, was not cursed because of itself but because of the disobedience of its lord, Adam. Adam’s choice did not simply affect his relationship with God but with the earth as well.
Consider This: Why did God curse the earth as a consequence of sin? The phrase “for your sake” implies something done for someone as opposed to against them; this suggests that even as the earth was cursed, God designed a blessing to come forth from it. What was the nature of the curse, as a consequence of sin, and how was that curse ultimately meant to lead to a blessing for the fallen race?

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_____________________________________________________________

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III. The Whole Creation Groans (Review Romans 8:18–23 with your class.)

The apostle Paul composes some of the clearest and most compelling statements regarding the connection between the condition of humankind and Creation. By reminding us of the incomparable glory that shall be revealed in us, Paul poetically suggests that the Creation groans for deliverance.

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The Bible’s clear teaching on the connection between Creation and humanity encourages us to look upon God’s interaction with nature as an illustration of what He is able and willing to do in our individual lives. Use the following questions to help the class learn in practical terms to let God make all things new in their individual lives.

Application Questions:

1. How can we become better acquainted with the things that need to become new in our lives?

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________
What lessons can we learn from Jesus’ references to nature in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) that will help us to cooperate with God as He seeks to make things new in our lives?

Just as Solomon was, surely many of us are puzzled about many things in the world. How can we practically live meaningful lives even as these questions go yet unanswered?

What promises in Scripture can we memorize and rest upon in prayer so as to aid us in our journey to “all things new”? How can parents, Sabbath School teachers, and pastors make this hope more central to their teachings?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers**: These activities are intended to help class members to accept the millennium and heaven as realities and to speak of them as such.

**Group or team activities**: Encourage the class members to imagine and discuss what their first seven days might be like in heaven. Have them speak of the first Sabbath worship service, what it will be like to speak with their guardian angel, whom they will want to meet from the Bible and why, and the experience of sitting on a throne and judging with Jesus, et cetera.