CQ is written by Seventh-day Adventist young adults and their friends around the world.

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There are times when life is more than the update on Facebook, the tweets, the IMs, and texts. Sometimes, the important times, it's about looking beyond the abridged, the instants, the clichés. It's about discovering what God is really trying to say to you.
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By George R. Knight

One of the brightest pearls in the writings of Paul, Galatians focuses on justification by faith as the basis of Christian liberty and ends with a discussion of Christian ethics. Since we’ve been justified, how shall we then live? Invite the Holy Spirit to renew your life as you study God’s transforming grace this quarter.

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Jose Eden Martinez Torres created the illustrations for this quarter’s lessons. His hometown is in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. Jose studied Visual Communication at the University of Montemorelos, from 2006 to 2010. He said it was a pleasure to do the illustrations for CQ.
FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ’s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

About four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflect the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

POINTERs FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit’s guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week’s lesson are based appear in bold type in the “Logos” portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the “Logos” pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
   - **Introduction** is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week’s theme.
   - **Logos** is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
   - **Testimony** presents Ellen White’s perspective on the lesson theme.
   - **Evidence** approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
   - **How-to** discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
   - **Opinion** is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
   - **Exploration** provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week’s lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.
Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles

“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18, NKJV).
James really wanted to be an astronaut. He read about space voyages and spaceships. He bought a costume that looked like a space suit. He watched documentaries on space exploration. James was able to interview a NASA worker for one of his classes. He even visited the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral.

A focus on externals makes for a dead religion.

James knew a lot about spaceships, astronauts, and physics. When he wore his space suit, he looked like an astronaut. But he was not. Likewise, we can dress like Christians, talk like Christians, and read all sorts of books about Christianity. We can attend Sabbath School and church services every Sabbath, and associate only with Christians. However, if Christ is not the center of our lives, we will end up just like James—having the appearance of being someone we are not.

A focus on externals makes for a dead religion. We don’t behave like Christians in order to be Christians. We behave like Christians because we are Christians, new creations in Christ, through faith in Jesus.

The Lord appeared to Saul when he was on his way from Damascus to Jerusalem to eradicate Christians. Saul was a devout Jew who believed in the importance of keeping the law as well as the importance of preparing his people to meet their Messiah who was to come to restore Israel. However, his encounter with the Lord helped Paul to see three things. First, the Messiah had come and was alive. Second, he was being called to be an ambassador of Christ rather than a persecutor of Christians. Third, literal Israel did not have exclusive rights to the gospel message.

In reaching out to the Gentiles in Galatia, Paul understood that the issue was not about Jewish Christians insisting that Gentile Christians keep the Mosaic law. He understood that good works did not lead to salvation, but were a result of salvation, and that the only way to be saved was to have faith in Christ and His righteousness.

We need to have a conversion experience similar to Paul’s. We need to encounter the living Christ. And then, we need to become ambassadors for Him.

REACT

1. What is the difference between looking like Christians and being Christians?
2. How can we be ambassadors for Christ?

Many Jews and their religious leaders were threatened by the gospel of Jesus Christ because they believed it jeopardized their traditions and way of life. In Acts 6:9–15, we read how members of certain synagogues were against Stephen for having spoken what to them was blasphemy. They even went so far as to arrange for false witnesses to testify that Stephen had said that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs given to them by Moses.

For three sightless days, Paul suffered in quiet darkness.

Acts 15:1–5 indicates that many of the early Christian Jews insisted that both Jews and Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the laws of Moses in order for them to be saved. Paul and Barnabas challenged that belief. The question of whether a new believer must be circumcised went all the way up to Peter and the apostles residing in Jerusalem (verses 6–11).

Paul's mission to the Gentiles involved contextualization (1 Cor. 9:19–23). He was interested in presenting Christ and Christ alone. The Jewish sacrificial system pointed to Christ and was fulfilled in His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. Type had met antitype. The symbols were not the means of salvation. Salvation can be obtained only through Christ. Many of the early believers were, in fact, converted Jews (Acts 6:7), and maintaining the traditions of the Mosaic law seemed to them to be as important as accepting Christ. Paul, however, boldly proclaimed that only through faith in Jesus are people saved, not through the legalism that seemed so prevalent in the Judaism of the day (Gal. 5:5, 6). The book of Galatians is a stirring letter, exhorting righteousness by faith and challenging a perverted gospel that focuses on works instead of on Christ.

Called to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1–9; 11:19–21)

Paul’s passion for righteousness by faith was no doubt partly founded on his own conversion experience. Having been a devout Jew and Pharisee, and a zealous persecutor of the early Christian church, he knew too well the dangers of legalism and of trusting in one’s own righteousness (Phil. 3:2–6).

In Acts 9:1–9, we see Paul on his way to Damascus to eradicate the Christian movement there. However, his journey is interrupted by Jesus. As a Pharisee, Paul believed that a person is saved by keeping the law.
It is during this dramatic encounter that he begins to learn about the true nature of salvation.

For three sightless days, Paul suffered in quiet darkness, searching his soul and repenting. He “was able to recall the Messianic prophecies, to apply them to Jesus of Nazareth, and to judge his own past in the light of his new convictions. How great must have been his anguish, how fervent his prayers for pardon, how sweet the gift of Christ’s own forgiveness!”

By the time he recovers his sight and has become filled with the Holy Spirit, his defense of Judaism has been turned on its head, and he becomes one of the greatest evangelists for Christ. His own encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus would define his ministry. Out of his past mistakes and wounds, God used Paul to bring healing to the Gentiles and now to us (Rom. 11:13; Eph. 3:8).

**Do Not Judge Lest You Be Judged (1 Sam. 16:7; Matt. 7:1)**

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God tells Samuel that people look at outward appearances, but God looks at the heart. Ultimately, God wants a heart religion. Our behaviors are only symptoms of the condition of our hearts. Focusing on external behaviors leads only to hypocrisy; the same hypocrisy that Jesus warned the Pharisees about. “‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness’” (Matt. 23:27, 28, NRSV).

In Matthew 7:1, Christ admonishes us to “‘judge not, that you be not judged’” (NKJV). We judge one another when we compare our own behavior to someone else’s behavior. This becomes so easy to do when we fail to focus on Jesus. Instead of focusing on ourselves and the mistakes of those around us, we are to direct our attention fully to our Savior. Real change can take place only as we turn our gaze upon Him (2 Cor. 3:18). It is through our faith in Him that we become changed.

Paul admonishes the Galatians to focus on Jesus. It is a powerful, life-changing faith that produces His righteousness in our lives. It is not until we have our own encounter, our own Damascus-road experience with the risen Lord that we, too, can fully comprehend the extent of our own hypocrisy and the magnitude of Christ’s amazing provision for our nearly hopeless condition. It is this experience that Paul proclaims and offers in Christ through the book of Galatians.

**REACT**

1. How would you describe your faith journey?
2. How can God use your faith journey to minister to others?
3. In what ways do you tend to judge others or fail to focus on Christ?

* The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, 1st ed., p. 231.

Jill Manoukian, Avon, Indiana, U.S.A.
Paul was once like the stray sheep in Christ’s parable. If we have accepted Christ’s redemption, then we were also once like that stray, trembling lamb. Having been redeemed, how do we view those who are still lost?

“As the shepherd loves his sheep, and cannot rest if even one be missing, so, in an infinitely higher degree, does God love every outcast soul. Men may deny the claim of His love, they may wander from Him, they may choose another master; yet they are God’s, and He longs to recover His own.”

Notice how our Shepherd treats the rescued lamb: “With what relief he hears in the distance its first faint cry. Following the sound, he climbs the steepest heights, he goes to the very edge of the precipice. . . . In his joy he takes the trembling creature upon his shoulders; if it is bruised and wounded, he gathers it in his arms, pressing it close to his bosom, that the warmth of his own heart may give it life. With gratitude that his search has not been in vain, he bears it back to the fold. . . .

“The parable does not speak of failure but of success and joy in the recovery. . . . Every one that will submit to be ransomed, Christ will rescue from the pit of corruption and from the briers of sin.

“Desponding soul, take courage. . . . Do not think that perhaps God will pardon your transgressions and permit you to come into His presence. God has made the first advance. While you were in rebellion against Him, He went forth to seek you. With the tender heart of the shepherd He left the ninety and nine and went out into the wilderness to find that which was lost. The soul, bruised and wounded and ready to perish, He encircles in His arms of love and joyfully bears it to the fold of safety.”

**REACT**

1. How did Ananias first react when the Lord told him to go to that vile lost lamb, Saul? (See Acts 9:13–15.) In this passage, how was Christ reiterating to Ananias the same teaching that is drawn from the parable of the lost sheep?

2. What is your part in the rescue of God’s lost sheep?

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2. Ibid., pp. 188, 189.

_Sandra Prevost, Avon, Indiana, U.S.A._
After Jesus called Paul to witness to the Gentiles, he often found himself confronting people who were prejudiced against the Gentiles and people who considered traditions and ceremonial laws equal to the gospel (Gal. 2:11–16). In his letter to the Galatians, he set forth his distinctive qualifications to deal with these problems. He also readily distanced himself from any self-appointment to apostleship by declaring that he became an apostle by “Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal. 1:1, NIV).

Before giving them correction, Paul hastened to encourage the Galatian Christians by applying the balm of grace and peace borne of the gospel (Gal. 1:3). Perhaps the mercy Christ showed Paul on the Damascus road helped him to be merciful toward those whom he desired to reach for God’s kingdom. Paul attributes the people’s misunderstanding of the law to a perversion of the gospel that brings grace and peace at the same time it pronounces a curse on any person who preaches a perverted form of the gospel. Paul was so unabashedly strong in addressing the purveyors of a perverted gospel because he could attest to the transformative nature of the unperverted gospel in his own life. Of all people, he knew all too well the dangers of a pharisaical approach to the gospel (Acts 6:9–15). Thus, with loving authority, he preached the truth about salvation.

Both Paul and John declared that their message concerning the pure and everlasting gospel came from the same Source—the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12; Rev. 1:1). The book of Galatians is a clear argument for salvation through faith rather than through works. It is a call for an unpolluted gospel, powerful, life-giving, and life-changing in nature. Walking with Paul through the book of Galatians and adhering to the principles therein can give us an Enoch experience, whose walk led him to the destination to which we all aspire (Gen. 5:22, 24).

**REACT**

1. Is the “marvel” in Galatians 1:6 evident in Adventism today? If so, list some examples of our losing our way, of a “turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel” (NKJV).

2. In Galatians 1:7, Paul mentions a perverted gospel that is being preached. What is this perverted gospel and how is it being preached today? How might the “prosperity gospel” and a “revisionary” view of Divine creation be a part of this perverted gospel?
Paul had to step outside the walls of Judaism and the Mosaic laws to learn the true meaning of salvation and to share it with others. Likewise, I was so entrenched inside the walls of the church that I didn’t know any “Gentiles” or have any opportunities to meet any. At the age of 11, I began my life in the Adventist educational system. (I would have started earlier, but our church didn’t have a school when I was younger.) I stayed within this system until I graduated from college. I followed that with 17 years of working as a pastor and chaplain. On the rare occasion when I did meet a “Gentile,” I had no idea what to do or say.

After 27 years of church school and church employment, I began working in the world. Since then, I’ve learned a great deal about how one should work with people, and how to network with others you don’t know in order to grow your business. I believe the following principles I’ve discovered also apply to our mission of winning people for God:

It’s all about relationship. It’s difficult to have an impact on someone’s life if you don’t have a positive relationship with that person. I have a hard time selling to someone who will not give me the time of day. Likewise, I know I will never reach someone for God if that person does not respect me. I have to be a friend first, which means I have to get to know that person.

Be genuine. In order for a relationship to grow, we have to be genuine. We need to be real and let that reality reflect the God who is living in our lives.

Put the needs of others first. Nothing relays our message better than asking someone what we can do for them. We have to be willing to put self aside and allow God to help us reach out; and by reaching out, we can become the hand of God to someone who has never seen Him, or hasn’t seen Him in a positive light.

**REACT**

1. Think of five people you believe do not have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. Brainstorm ways you could begin to develop closer relationships with them.
3. Begin touching those lives today in such a way that they will want to know the Source of your joy, your happiness, and your hope!

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Neil Richmund, Avon, Indiana, U.S.A.
As Saul traveled to Damascus, he probably thought about all the people he would take back to Jerusalem to try them for their crimes against the laws of Moses and the God of Israel. Having just witnessed the stoning death of Stephen, he probably had a little smile on his face and a slight spring in his step because he was so sure of his position regarding the law.

“Thomas” has been going to Sabbath School for as long as he can remember. He’s a pillar in his church. He’s served on every board and committee ever dreamed up, taught every level of Sabbath School, and has held every church office short of pastor. He believes it is his duty to counsel church members who are acting in ways considered unacceptable in God’s true church. Those members who are unwilling to change?

Those members who are unwilling to change?
Well, they don’t belong.

Well, they don’t belong. He does all this with a smile on his face and a song in his heart, because like Saul, he, too, thinks that he is absolutely right and just in his mission.

Even before Christ’s birth, there were followers of God who used His law as a weapon against those who didn’t follow its interpretation or believe the same way they did. Jesus’ greatest earthly enemies were often His own people who were more interested in following the letter of the law and condemning those who did not do so.

Throughout the history of the Christian church, debate over the place of God’s law in one’s Christian experience has been the source of controversy and division among Christians and the greatest hindrance to spreading the true gospel to unbelievers. To a new believer there is nothing more confusing and discouraging than to witness or get caught in the age-old debate regarding the law and its relationship to righteousness by faith.

**REACT**

1. What do you think your mission is regarding God’s church? Is it right and just according to church tradition or according to the command of Christ?

2. Think about a time in your life when you had an experience like Saul’s—an experience that completely changed your relationship with God for the better. How could you articulate that experience to another person? How are you living that experience so that others can see the fruit of Christ in you?
CONCLUDE
Like Paul, we are called to be ambassadors for Christ. Paul’s effectiveness came from a life-changing encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. The same is true today. Transformation comes through a relationship with our Redeemer, not by emphasizing laws or correct behavior. Our mission, like Paul’s, is to lift up Christ and proclaim salvation for all through faith in His sacrifice made on our behalf.

CONSIDER
• Listening to “I Will Never Be the Same Again” (Darlene Zschech, Hillsongs Australia). Think about the words in the context of Paul’s experience. Ask yourself, How does this song speak for my own heart?
• Creating a skit or monologue that tells the experience of Paul (or Ananias) in first person. Offer to perform it for your Sabbath School class or small group.
• Interviewing three or four Christians of other faiths (Lutheran, Baptist, non-denominational Christian, and so on). Ask them to complete each of these sentences: “Here is what God’s grace means to me . . . ” and “The most encouraging thing about my walk with God is . . . ”
• Researching several modern “apostles” who have had a wide sphere of influence for Christ (for example, D. L. Moody; H. M. S. Richards Sr.; Steven Curtis Chapman). Find out what their “Damascus road” experience might have been.
• Using washable or dry-erase markers to write a key phrase from this week’s lesson on your bathroom mirror so you’ll see it every morning. Decorate it in a creative and colorful manner.
• Making a poster of Edwin Markham’s poem “Outwitted” (available by doing a Web search). Think about how it relates to this week’s lesson.

CONNECT
William G. Johnsson, Glimpses of Grace; Gerald May, Addiction and Grace; Philip Yancey, What’s So Amazing About Grace?
Paul’s Authority and Gospel

“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10, NKJV).
In the cartoon, a man is watching a ballgame on television. His wife is on her knees, looking up an item in the encyclopedia. Without moving, he says to her, “Now, my dear, no mere proof will convince me.” It’s easy to close our minds to something new. We want comfort and convenience, not change. Solomon made a useful observation when he wrote, “There is a way that seems right to a man, / But its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12, NKJV).

It is much harder to reorganize how we live than to change our thinking.

It is generally true that people believe what they want to believe. Very few are open to new ideas or fresh light on any subject. Anything that involves change is difficult for people to accept. It is easier to stay in our comfort zones than to engage in the hard thinking required to test new ideas or to respond to ideas we hold dear.

There are two types of change in life: (1) to change one’s mind, and (2) to change one’s behavior. It is not terribly difficult for reasonable people to change their minds. To believe death is an unconscious sleep requires that we change our thinking. Such a change in thinking does not necessarily alter how we live. However, to accept the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount as truth will require changes in our behaviors. It is much harder to reorganize how we live than to change our thinking.

Paul made the change from persecutor to preacher of salvation in Jesus alone. He defended the change he made and the gospel he preached against all who would undermine it or in any way attack it. He was confronted by some people in the Galatian church who had a closed-minded approach to the gospel. They believed God had given circumcision to Abraham as a sign of the covenant between him and God and that this practice was therefore unchangeable. They made the practice of circumcision more important for salvation than faith in Jesus and His sacrifice. Their closed minds were a hindrance to their growth in Christ. In this week’s lesson, we will examine how Paul responded to this issue.

**REACT**

1. What significant life change have you made? Was it easy or difficult?
2. How do you feel about the change you made?
3. Do you have a mind-set open to consider change? If not, why not?
History and the Bible tell us that Paul was a Roman citizen, a Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, and a trained scholar in both Jewish law and traditions (Phil. 3:1–5). He first came into the picture as one of the leaders in the persecution of Jews, and then accepted Christ and the Christian church. To make it even more interesting, on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, he was temporarily blinded by a bright light and heard a divine voice tell him that he would be proclaiming Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:12–18).

This tumultuous background makes him the perfect candidate for questioning when it comes to his authority. He is one of the most well-known Christian leaders in history, yet there are many scholars who give him credit for only half of his 13 epistles.*

Galatians is the most undisputed letter of Paul’s from the biblical scholars’ point of view. However, the Galatians themselves seem to think otherwise. In chapter 1 especially, we see Paul trying to explain and prove the authority of his work. Indeed, he was not a part of the 12 disciples Jesus Himself chose. Nonetheless, Paul received his call directly from God. This is confirmed by Ananias, who received God’s instructions to go to Paul, then named Saul, and speak to him about his experience (Acts 9). Ananias and Saul’s companions could validate the experience as having come from God. Biblical scholars do not look at the divine authority aspect as much as they look at its authenticity. This authenticity is analyzed through historical setting, language, style, content and theology, and internal and external evidence. After undergoing extensive analysis, Paul’s authority passes the test, but the Jewish teachers became determined to stop his ministry.

What happens when God is in control of something? It comes to pass. What happened with Paul once God spoke to him? He turned around his life and the lives of many others as he traveled through Asia Minor and Greece. What authority a changed heart can carry!

**REACT**

What would God need to do to grab your attention and turn your life around?


Diana Ionita, Bucharest, Romania
Only One Gospel (Gal. 1:3–5)

Paul is implacable in repudiating the activities of those who created confusion among the Galatian Christians. There is only one gospel—the gospel of Jesus “who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4, NIV). This gospel is complete and does not therefore require additions such as circumcision. Paul is fierce in his condemnation of those who pervert the gospel by attempting to add to it. He denounces them by saying that he wishes those who insist on circumcision would “emasculate themselves” (Gal. 5:12, NIV). He is so certain that the gospel he preaches is the only true one, that nothing can modify it in any way.

The Peril of Ignorance (1 Pet. 3:15, 16)

Peter, who knew of Paul's writings, recognized that Paul wrote some things that require serious study. Those who are ignorant and unstable misrepresent not only Paul's writings but also other parts of Scripture. The counsel in 1 Peter 3:15, 16 is that if Christians wish to have a correct understanding of Jesus' atonement, it is essential that they be well balanced. It is notable that Peter links ignorance and instability as reasons why people misunderstand God's Word. If we would experience the joys of salvation, we would know what the gospel is and securely embrace it.

The Nature of the Gospel (Exodus 14; 20; Leviticus 1)

Israel's history was dominated by three major events that illustrate that salvation is God's act rather than human achievement: (1) the Exodus from Egypt; (2) the giving of His holy law on Mount Sinai; and (3) the establishment of the sanctuary service. Each of these explain the relationship between salvation by God's grace and obedience made possible by that same grace. The Jews who opposed the gospel Paul preached should have known these truths.

During the Exodus, God did for His people what they could not do for themselves—He defeated the demonic power of Pharaoh, which held them captive, and led them into the Promised Land. This deliverance is celebrated in psalm after psalm. For example, read Psalm 106:10.

When He gave His holy law, God declared, “‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery’ ” (Exod. 20:1, NIV). It is only the person redeemed by grace who can obey God's law and who is inclined to do so. The unredeemed soul is at war with the law. Paul expressed this clearly.
in Romans. “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Rom. 8:7, NIV). The history of the Hebrew people continually demonstrates this truth.

In the sanctuary service, God made plain the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death. The altar of burnt offering taught the sinner two truths: (1) The wages of sin is death, so the lamb was killed and sacrificed. (2) The death was the death of the substitute rather than the death of the sinner. Here is salvation full and free, done by Christ on behalf of sinners who could neither add to nor subtract from it. Their only options are to accept or reject it.

The Judaizers who opposed Paul in Galatia misunderstood these great truths. They made the forms the end and not the means to truth. Before Christ’s substitutionary death, to be circumcised and to offer sacrifices were meant to be acts of faith in the Christ to come who would in reality provide salvation. They were never meant to be the source of salvation. Because Paul understood this clearly, he resisted any attempt to corrupt the truth.

Today, it is easy to imagine that we are worthy of salvation because we observe the Ten Commandments, return tithe, and don’t eat meat or dairy products. Paul’s response to those who opposed him clearly teaches us otherwise.

**The Faces of Authority (Gal. 1:1, 2, 20)**

There are two kinds of authority: (1) authority that is conferred by virtue of holding an office, and (2) authority that is earned by the service given while holding the office. It is generally understood that the more important authority is that which is earned by the one holding the office. When the Judaizers challenged Paul’s authority, he responded by claiming that his authority came from Christ and God the Father (Gal. 1:1). He stated that the gospel he proclaimed was not of human origin, but a revelation from Christ (Gal. 1:12). God ordained Paul to reveal Christ to others. This was confirmed by God Himself (Gal. 1:1).

**Paul’s Authority Authenticated in His Ministry (Gal. 1:10, 18–24)**

The Galatians knew that Paul was a changed man by becoming a slave to Jesus (Gal. 1:10). They knew also that he had not received his ministry from the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:17). It was three years after his conversion that he went to Jerusalem and only for a brief visit. While there, he met only Peter and James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:18, 19).

Instead, Paul’s ministry was recognized and authenticated by its results in the Galatian and Judean churches (Gal. 1:18–24). His credentials and authority were beyond doubt and enabled him to show how false the teachings of the Judaizers really were.

**REACT**

1. How can we know if our obedience to God’s law is the result of salvation rather than the basis of it?
2. Explain why our good works cannot produce merit.
3. In view of today’s lesson, what would be the likely outcome of adding conditions to salvation by faith?

Patrick Boyle, Watford, Hertfordshire, England
Paul urged the Galatians to leave the false guides by whom they had been misled, and to return to the faith that had been accompanied by unmistakable evidences of divine approval. The men who had attempted to lead them from their belief in the gospel were hypocrites, unholy in heart and corrupt in life. Their religion was made up of a round of ceremonies, through the performance of which they expected to gain the favor of God. They had no desire for a gospel that called for obedience to the Word, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). They felt that a religion based on such a doctrine required too great a sacrifice, and they clung to their errors, deceiving themselves and others.

“The traditions of men, like floating germs, attach themselves to the truth of God.”

“To substitute external forms of religion for holiness of heart and life is still as pleasing to the unrenewed nature as it was in the days of these Jewish teachers. Today, as then, there are false spiritual guides, to whose doctrines many listen eagerly. It is Satan’s studied effort to divert minds from the hope of salvation through faith in Christ and obedience to the law of God. In every age the archenemy adapts his temptations to the prejudices or inclinations of those whom he is seeking to deceive. In apostolic times he led the Jews to exalt the ceremonial law and reject Christ; at the present time he induces many professing Christians, under pretense of honoring Christ, to cast contempt on the moral law and to teach that its precepts may be transgressed with impunity. It is the duty of every servant of God to withstand firmly and decidedly these perverters of the faith and by the word of truth fearlessly to expose their errors.”

“The traditions of men, like floating germs, attach themselves to the truth of God, and men regard them as a part of the truth. Through false doctrines, Satan gains a foothold, and captivates the minds of men, causing them to hold theories that have no foundation in truth. Men boldly teach for doctrines the commandments of men; and as traditions pass on, from age to age, they acquire a power over the human mind.”

**REACT**

In order to survive, error has to contain some truth. What safeguards should we have in place to be able to discern error?

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*Lars Eric Andersson, Lindesberg, Sweden*
“I am William Wallace. And I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny! You have come to fight as free men. And free men you are! What will you do with that freedom? Will you fight?”

“Fight? Against that? No! We will run—and live!” Wallace shouted back, “Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you will live, at least awhile. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that, for one chance . . . to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives but they will never take our freedom?”

Hundreds of years earlier, Paul also wrote a stirring speech on behalf of freedom: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1, NIV). The religious leaders were preaching that everyone must be circumcised in order to be saved. They wanted the people to be slaves to the rules and regulations of the time. So God sent Paul to give a message of freedom, to remind the Galatians and us what salvation is all about. Below are three ways to live in the freedom God has given us.

Learn more about it (John 8:36). God gave us freedom because He loves us, and He wants us to know why we have freedom (John 3:16).

Use self-control (1 Pet. 2:16). We have been given freedom, but we are expected to use our freedom for God. Such freedom is not an excuse to do whatever we want. It should be used in ways that show thankfulness and love for the Giver of our freedom (Gal. 5:13).

Share your story (Isa. 52:7; 1 Pet. 3:15). If there was a better way of life out there, wouldn’t you want to know about it? It is our mission to tell others about salvation in Christ.

**REACT**

1. How does the fact that you have freedom affect how you live your life?
2. How can you fight for your freedom?

* Mel Gibson, Braveheart (Paramount Pictures, 2005).
A church leader was heard to comment, “It just confirms my suspicions about him,” and then continued with an effective character assassination. Maybe this was how the problem started in the Galatian churches. Someone just happened to point out that Paul didn’t quite fit the mold, and soon the gossip mill was in full production and working overtime. For gossip to have a semblance of validity, it must have a large dose of truth mixed in with innuendo and insinuation. Paul met the problem head on. In his opening statement, he confirms his credentials: “Paul, an apostle” and then proceeds to meet the criticisms of him as a person and his teachings one by one.

Honesty framed by kindness and firmness avoids many problems.

Two thousand years later, the church still suffers from gossip and disension. Few consciously set out to gossip, but there are times when it is difficult to distinguish between appropriate sharing of that “special insight” or confidential information and gossip.

Gossip has no place inside or outside the church. Solomon recognized the problem and how it destroys relationships. Read Proverbs 16:28 and 18:8. James also points out the dangers of thinking with our mouths rather than with our brains. Read James 3. Read, too, what Solomon says about gossip in Proverbs 20:19.

Closely allied to gossip is criticism. Some criticism is essential, however. As Frank A. Clark said, “Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man’s growth without destroying his roots.”* No one is perfect, and sometimes we all need to hear uncomfortable truths about ourselves and how others perceive our actions. The question is how we deliver and receive these “truths.” Honesty framed by kindness and firmness avoids many problems. Generally, situations that are not confronted openly and fairly are never resolved. Honesty and openness, combined with kindness, are character qualities Christians should embrace.

**REACT**

1. How do you react when people criticize you? What does your answer teach you about confronting others when they do something wrong?

2. Think of strategies that can be used when someone begins to gossip or when you are tempted to share something inappropriate with others.

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Audrey Andersson, Lindesberg, Sweden
CONCLUDE

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God tells us that we look “at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (NIV). Paul confronted some members in the Galatian church who questioned if he served God, and from whom he received his authority to preach. Some Christians in Paul’s day showed more interest in the forms or rituals of salvation, such as circumcision, instead of in Christ, the means to salvation. We can be guilty of the same offenses by focusing on each other rather than on Jesus. What in our Christian walks may hinder the beautiful simplicity of the salvation Jesus offers?

CONSIDER

- Photographing someone in the community who is showing Christian behavior to his or her fellow community members. Then interview him or her. Put both the photo and the interview on your church’s bulletin board. Be sure to do so with the person’s consent.
- Watching birds at a park or a birdfeeder and think about whether they are worried about what you are going to say or think about them. How are they honoring their Creator?
- Surfing the Internet to find where your pastor fits in the hierarchical chain of authority within our denomination. Where do you fit?
- Using a telescope or your bare eyes on a dark night to find the nearest planet or galaxy. How is the power of the Gospels evident in what you see?
- Helping out with a church building project or work bee. Contemplate how different it would be if everyone stood idly by, chatting instead of working hard.
- Performing on your own or with a group a dramatic scene about Paul’s conversion experience. Discuss what it would have been like to be in Paul’s life, as Ananias was, when Jesus called Paul to work for Him.

CONNECT

Education, chap. 2; The Acts of the Apostles, chap. 36.
The Unity of the Gospel

“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Phil. 2:2, ESV).
In Paul’s day, a number of Jewish Christians falsely believed that Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to become true followers of Christ. This was a serious threat to the unity of the early church. Even today, threats of unity come from false beliefs regarding salvation.

What it all boils down to is that all of us have to make the final decision for ourselves.

So whom should we believe? Whom should we listen to? Do some of your friends and some of your fellow church members have their own ideas and opinions about the nature of salvation? Every day we face issues regarding right and wrong. Every day we struggle with the decisions we must make regarding these issues. At times, people share with us the course they think we should take. They do so out of love, and it is right for us to listen to them and weigh the options we have. However, we must always ask if they gave us the course they like or the direction they think is right for us. What information did they use to make their decisions? Was it from inside themselves, from other friends, or from the Bible, the true source? From the beginning of time, people have had to choose between two different lifestyles—the lifestyle our Creator planned for us from the beginning of Creation and the lifestyle Satan would prefer we choose.

None of us knows for sure what is in another person’s heart. What it all boils down to is that all of us have to make the final decision for ourselves. It makes no difference whom we listen to or who advises us. We must each answer to Jesus for our own decisions and actions. We must be sure of the race we run (1 Cor. 9:24). We won’t be able to blame anyone else or Satan for the decisions we’ve made or for what we’ve done. We must choose for ourselves whom we will serve. Read Joshua 24:15.

There is effort involved in trusting God, because sinful human nature gravitates to the lies and half-truths of the devil. However, as you study the lesson this week, may your heart be open to the Holy Spirit, and like Paul, may you be inspired to never compromise the gospel.
Have you ever taken a lie-detector test? What do they say happens when you do? If you are telling the truth, you are calm and responsive in your answers, and the machine shows a straight-line mark on the paper. With a lie comes sweating and nervousness. The machine picks up on that, and you end up with quite a wavy line on the paper.

How many times were Jesus and the disciples told that if they renounced what they were saying, they would not be punished and/or killed? The devil, when tempting Jesus in the wilderness said, “If you will, I will . . .” We know how the rest of that story went.

Only as Christ lives in our hearts, transforming us by His grace, can we live together in harmony.

God’s Covenant (Gen. 17:1–21)

God made a covenant with Abraham, when Abraham was 99 years old. God promised to be his God and to multiply his descendants like the sand on the seashore. In return, every male descendant of Abraham was to be circumcised when he was eight days old. Also, every male bought with money was to be circumcised. God said that circumcision was a token of the covenant between Himself and His people. Abraham and his seed were to possess Canaan. Sarah was 90 years old when Isaac was born. Isaac was God’s gift and proof of God’s ability to keep His promises.

God’s True Children (John 8:31–38)

Through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, the truths of the gospel were made known. But many of these truths had been buried under unnecessary laws and traditions created by the religious leaders, making the religious life a burden for the common people. How like Satan to try to get us to forget the simplicity of the gospel. If we confess our sins to God, He is willing to forgive us, and with forgiveness comes freedom from legalism. What a wonderful thing such freedom is! By telling God the truth about our sins, we dispense with worries and doubts. Paul recognized the danger of traditions when in people’s eyes they become necessary for salvation. That is why he preached Jesus and Him crucified wherever he went. That is why he taught about unity in the churches he raised up. He knew a house divided cannot stand. He believed rightly that there is one body—the body of Christ—made of many members, each with gifts so that the work of Christ can march onward to its fulfillment.
Prescription for Harmony (Gal. 2:11–21)

Paul went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. James, Peter, and John decided to preach to the circumcised while Paul would preach to the uncircumcised. At Antioch, Peter showed favoritism toward the Jews to the point of actually shunning the Gentiles. Knowing that such behavior could cause division within the church, Paul confronted him about this and helped him to see how divisive his behavior could have been. “Apparently Peter realized his own error and made no attempt to justify or excuse himself. Such a reaction is in keeping with what might be expected of Peter after his great confession (see John 21:15–17). It marked him as a man of noble spiritual stature.”*

From this incident, we can learn how essential it is to refrain from behavior that would bring disharmony to the church. This is possible as long as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. We cannot win the battle alone. Only as Christ lives in our hearts, transforming us by His grace, can we live together in harmony.

Disunity started in heaven with Lucifer. Eventually, God had no choice but to cast him out, along with the angels who sided with him. Lucifer always has wanted to be more than what he is. If he can turn against his Creator, you can imagine how he will turn against us, making us believe that we are always right in our way of thinking. That is why we need to put God first in our lives. As we do so, we will learn that we are all equal in God’s eyes, and that He is our Example. That being the case, let us allow Him to teach us how to treat one another as equals. Paul teaches us that it doesn’t matter who or what we are. It doesn’t matter what country we were born in, or whether we were born into an Adventist family or not. Christ is in everyone who believes in Him. We should never sacrifice such unity in favor of the traditions of a few.

REACT

1. If you realized there was disunity in the church over an issue, what would you do? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Should unity ever be preserved at the cost of truth? What might have happened if Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, had in the name of unity instead of truth, renounced his views on salvation by faith alone when he was brought to trial at the Diet of Worms?

3. What traditions in your local church might ever so slowly be causing members to forget the simplicity of the gospel?

4. Are there any traditions in the Adventist Church in general that might be overriding the gospel?

“In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. To these converts the Jewish teachers found ready access, and through them gained a foothold in the churches. It was impossible, by scriptural arguments, to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul; hence they resorted to the most unscrupulous measures to counteract his influence and weaken his authority. They declared that he had not been a disciple of Jesus, and had received no commission from Him; yet he had presumed to teach doctrines directly opposed to those held by Peter, James, and the other apostles. Thus the emissaries of Judaism succeeded in alienating many of the Christian converts from their teacher in the gospel. Having gained this point, they induced them to return to the observance of the ceremonial law as essential to salvation. Faith in Christ, and obedience to the law of ten commandments, were regarded as of minor importance. . . .

“Paul’s soul was stirred as he saw the evils that threatened speedily to destroy these churches.”

“Paul’s soul was stirred as he saw the evils that threatened speedily to destroy these churches. He immediately wrote to the Galatians, exposing their false theories, and with great severity rebuking those who had departed from the faith.

“Paul . . . describes the visit which he made to Jerusalem to secure a settlement of the very questions which are now agitating the churches of Galatia, as to whether the Gentiles should submit to circumcision and keep the ceremonial law. This was the only instance in which he had deferred to the judgment of the other apostles as superior to his own. He had first sought a private interview, in which he set the matter in all its bearings before the leading apostles, Peter, James, and John. With far-seeing wisdom, he concluded that if these men could be led to take a right position, everything would be gained. Had he first presented the question before the whole council, there would have been a division of sentiment. The strong prejudice already excited because he had not enforced circumcision on the Gentiles, would have led many to take a stand against him. Thus the object of his visit would have been defeated, and his usefulness greatly hindered. But the three leading apostles, against whom no such prejudice existed, having themselves been won to the true position, brought the matter before the council, and won from all a concurrence in the decision to leave the Gentiles free from the obligations of the ceremonial law.”


Lewis Siffles, Duncan, Oklahoma, U.S.A.
The sun, the planets, the moons around the planets, the stars—all have their own functions. The earth orbits the sun, and in its rotation we get our days and nights. The earth’s turning on its axis gives us seasons. The moon’s rotation controls the tides. God created everything to be in sync. If you take one thing out of its course, even by one degree, it all falls apart. So, it is with God’s Word. God has given us a way to have a relationship with Him and to have freedom from sin. Scripture gives us our only safeguard from sin. The gospel was written by many different men. Like the stars, the moon, and the sun, each author had his own function in how the gospel was written. Together, however, they all stand in unity and purpose (2 Tim. 3:16).

In a world of uncertainty, Scripture does not change (Ps. 119:89). To disregard one point of Scripture would be like taking the earth out of its orbit by one degree. In Genesis 3:1–5, Satan twisted the truth just a bit when he talked to Eve. What a disaster this twist caused. Scripture cannot be broken or proved untrue, John wrote in John 10:35.

Thus, Paul had to confront Peter publicly when Peter ignored the Gentile Christians once the Jewish Christians arrived. Soon others started acting in the same hypocritical way. It even started affecting Barnabas (Gal. 2:1–14).

There’s not a situation or purpose in life that a biblical principle cannot cover. If there is a disagreement, we can always go to Scripture to settle it in unity. To change something, or even rearrange it because it doesn’t seem right to us, could greatly affect someone else’s idea of God. That is why it is necessary to study and to be unified on these principles. Jesus paid much too high a price for us to do it any other way.

1. Why is it worth the risk to say something to a fellow church member who is teaching or speaking in error?
2. When was the last time you had to admit you were wrong about something? Or did you?
3. In Paul’s day, some people believed that salvation depended on circumcision rather than on God’s grace. What “works” do some people point to today as a means of salvation?
On the Day of Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit on the 120 in the upper room. They were all of one mind and one accord, praying in unity, as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4). We may not all agree on some matters, but we should all agree on the foundational truths of our faith. Paul names seven spiritual realities that unite all true Christians.

One body. Every true believer is a member of the body of Christ, placed within that body at conversion by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 12:12–31). Even though individuals are members of the great body of Christians, they should join themselves to a local body of like-minded believers. It is there that we exercise our individual spiritual gifts and help others to grow.

One Spirit. The same Holy Spirit dwells in each believer, so that we all belong to each other in the Lord.

One hope of your calling. This refers to the Lord’s return when He comes to take His church to heaven. Every believer who walks in the Spirit and looks for the Lord’s return strives to be a peacemaker.

One Lord. This is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, and who will one day return for us. It is difficult to believe that two believers can claim to obey the same Lord, yet not be able to walk together in unity.

One faith. Basic doctrines were taught, guarded, and committed to others by the early Christians (2 Tim. 2:2). To depart from these doctrines or to insist that they mean something that they do not is to cause disunity within the body of Christ.

One baptism. This refers to baptism by water, which symbolizes death to sin and our new lives in Christ. When we are baptized, we are publicly announcing that we are uniting with the church—the body of Christ.

One God and one Father. To believers in God’s family, God is over all, working through all, and in all. He wants us to walk together in unity.

God is asking for our undivided devotion so we can allow the Holy Spirit to bring unity into each life and into our church. When this occurs, we will see souls brought into the kingdom and lives changed.*

**REACT**

How can you effectively bring unity into the local church?

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Marian Cheree Headley, Duncan, Oklahoma, U.S.A.
Disunity was not unfamiliar to the early church, nor is it unfamiliar to the church today. Over 2,000 years ago, Paul urged “that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10, NKJV). He told them to follow Christ, not Apollos or Cephas or himself. We are all under Christ, no matter who we have for a pastor or Sabbath School teacher. It isn’t about the person who delivers the message. Rather it’s about the Person around whom the message centers. There are many eloquent pastors and teachers, yet they have no ability to save. We follow “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV).

People today are just like those in Paul’s time.

People today are just like those in Paul’s time. We cannot go forward if we are always being pulled apart by issues of little or no importance. If there is an issue between us, it is wise to search for answers through prayerful Bible study. Christ Himself spent much time in prayer. Why would we do anything less?

We have “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5, NKJV). Yet so many churches split apart over many different types of issues. Satan is constantly trying to pull us apart (1 Pet. 5:8). He is the one that comes between us and fellow believers, between us and Christ. If he can keep us quarreling, then he has accomplished what he has set out to do.

Christ, however, would not have us bickering with one another. When the disciples received the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended to heaven, “it is evident that unity existed among” the disciples (Acts 2:1).* Together we must stand, or there can be no body of believers.

Jesus came to give us peace. There are many forms of peace that He will impart to us if we only ask. In addition to the peace that comes from knowing we are saved by His blood, is the peace of being united. When we are saved by His grace and obey His commandments as a result, we are able to experience such peace.

**REACT**

1. What difference do you see between your church and the one at Corinth?
2. What are some of the things that cause division in our churches today, and why?
3. How is it possible for us all to get along, even though we have differences?

*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, 1st ed., p. 135.*

Austin McCarty, Duncan, Oklahoma, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

Although we, as Christians, will have differing opinions on some issues, it is important—nay, vital!—that we remain united in Christ! Satan would like nothing more than to divide us. It is his utmost desire to let petty, silly things cause us to forget the gospel and its beautiful message about Jesus. Satan will use any way to do so—legalism, differing opinions, or outright lies—as long as, in the end, he gets us to take our eyes off Jesus. And how easy it is to become distracted! We must hold fast to our Lord and work to avoid derision among our Christian family.

CONSIDER

- Establishing a weekly Bible study with people in your church. Use this time to dive into the Word, seeking to create unity among you through the gospel and to draw everyone involved closer to Jesus.
- Writing a prayer, asking the Lord to help you maintain unity with fellow Christians through the gospel. Place the prayer in your Bible so it will be ready for you review any time you feel as though Satan is tempting you to cause derision.
- Comparing examples in the Bible of churches that were united versus churches that were not. What were the united churches' greatest strengths? How did this help them to share Jesus’ love with others? Create a list or a diagram to organize your thoughts.
- Journaling about your own weaknesses and areas in which Satan tempts you to separate from other Christians. Jot down ways to cope with those times of weakness.
- Writing, e-mailing, or calling a friend with whom you have had a falling out. Express your concerns, but do so in kindness. Express your deep desire to reconcile with that person through the love of Jesus. Perhaps you could arrange to eat together or to go on a walk to talk further.
- Drawing a picture or creating a collage depicting a church united. Share it with your Sabbath School class or display it on a church bulletin board so others can reflect upon your ideas.

CONNECT

Our Father Cares, January 27, p. 36.
Herbert E. Douglass, Messenger of the Lord, chap. 17.

Allison Saucedo, Centerville, Ohio, U.S.A.
Justification by Faith

Alone

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, ESV).
The idea of justification by faith is a foreign concept to many. Although it is straightforward in nature, it has confounded the minds of even the most intelligent. Throughout the centuries, humans have operated on the principle of earning your reward. For example, in the workplace, we are paid based on the job we do. What you put in is what you get out. God’s gift of salvation stands in sharp contrast to this “vending machine” mentality.

Many believe that we have to earn our way into heaven, but this belief is in direct conflict with God’s Word. First, we have no right to heaven. When we say that our good deeds can save us, we are saying that we are not sinners, that we do not deserve to die, and, ultimately, that Jesus’ sacrifice has no relevance in our lives. When we argue that keeping the law will make us righteous, we are insulting His perfection. When we behold the goodness of God and His law, we see our own sins and recognize our need for a Savior. Romans 3:20 states that “no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (NIV).

It is when we are convicted of our own sinfulness that we become dependent on a Savior who can justify the lives that we ourselves cannot save.

Justification, by definition, is making something just. To make means “to produce”; “cause to exist or happen”; and “to bring about.” Dictionaries define just as “truth,” “reason,” “justice,” and “fairness based on what is right or lawful.” In other words, when we are “justified” God produces a method for us to be right, or to be in accordance with the law. He tells us in Romans 3, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (verse 23, NKJV; emphasis added); and in Psalm 14:3 we read that “there is no one who does good, not even one” (NIV). Throughout the Bible God repeats that no one is deserving of the title righteous. “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’ ” (Rom. 1:17, NIV). It is written that righteousness is revealed in a life lived in faith. We receive justification by faith in the power of our God to bestow it.
In the book of Galatians, we find that certain Jewish Christians, known as Judaizers, were teaching Gentile Christians that they must follow the laws of Moses in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). Paul fervently argued against this belief in his letter to the Galatian Christians. It was through the study of this book that Martin Luther became convinced of the true nature of salvation. He reasoned that theological justification is never merit-based, that Christians could not depend on their participation in Communion, confession, and indulgences to earn their way into heaven.

Indeed, our sinful natures make attaining righteousness on our own an absurdity. Fortunately, God offers an alternative—faith in His Son who died to save us. Such faith is powerful. Even a small amount of it can remove great obstacles from our lives (Matt. 17:20). Faith equalizes all social standing as it draws people from all walks of life to the foot of the cross, where Jesus died that we might be justified through faith in Him.

But wait! There’s more! Because even “the demons believe” (James 2:19), faith can never be just an intellectual assent to a set of doctrines. True faith in God is also a lifestyle. James continues by explaining that “Abraham’s works provided the genuineness of that faith which God had declared righteous. Like Paul . . ., James places faith at the core of justification and illustrates its vitality by citing the worthy deeds of justified men.”

“It is only through deeds that faith can prove and demonstrate itself; and it is only through faith that deeds will be attempted and done. Faith is bound to overflow into action; and action begins only when a man has faith in some great cause or principle which God has presented to him.”

That faith, which combines intellectual belief with “worthy deeds,” is the faith that connects us to our Life Source and keeps us grounded and growing. Such faith is our anchor in a tumultuous world. With it, we can cling to the Word of God and be assured that we will grow and prosper in the grace of Christ.

**REACT**

What are some of the deeds, rules, or works that we as Adventists sometimes think will get us into heaven?

Paul felt so strongly about the truth of the gospel he preached that he felt it was necessary to confront Peter regarding his behavior, which others may have thought of as being politically expedient. In today's lesson, we'll internalize Paul's sentiments by studying an event crucial to Israelite history and other examples from his writings.

**Exhortation From Spiritual History (Gen. 15:5, 6)**

Read all of Genesis 15. Abram, the father of both the Jewish nation and the spiritually faithful of all nations, had an experience recorded in this chapter that is so significant Paul appeals to it in Romans 4:1–5. The state of righteousness (right being and doing) is granted to Abram by God independent of any being and doing on Abram's part. Two key foundations form the basis of this justification by faith: (1) the failure of the human in accomplishing the being and doing (in this case, being a father by having a child), and (2) the obvious impossibility of the human ever doing so.

**Justification is something that happens only through faith in God’s promise.**

Abram’s walk by faith was to be an example for all true believers until the end of time. All true believers come to the point where they realize that they cannot obtain righteousness through their own accomplishments. They cannot obtain God’s grace by being good. Instead, grace comes to them by His promise.

**Paul’s Own Writings (Rom. 3:8, 10–20; Gal. 2:15–21)**

Read all of Romans 3. While there is so much to digest in this incredible chapter, let’s deal only with Paul’s obvious agreement with the foundation for justification by faith we saw in Genesis 15. First, there is the impossibility of people saving themselves from their sinful conditions. Just as Abram and Sarai reached a point where being parents by having a child was humanly impossible, so Paul agrees that there is no one who can obtain justification by their own being and doing. Justification is simply not a human accomplishment. Second, justification is something that happens only through faith in God’s promise.

Now read all of Galatians 2. There is a temptation often encountered among religious groups to indulge in the belief that spiritual superiority is attained by being and doing. Peter struggled with this when he lapsed into thinking that those who were circumcised held a higher spiritual status than those who were not.
In comparison to the broad scope of humanity addressed in Romans 3, Paul narrows the argument in Galatians 2:15–21. He asserts in these verses that even Jews—who are so well acquainted with the law of God, who, of all people, have a higher understanding of truth and practice—must still find their justification in Christ. He repeats his conviction that no one can be justified by obeying the law. The Jews had significant spiritual advantages over the Gentiles that should have been considered great blessings (Rom. 3:1, 2). Those advantages, however, had nothing to do with actually obtaining justification. There was no such thing as collective salvation just for being a Jew. Paul repeats here the truth that justification is unattainable even by the most advantaged of believers.

Now read all of Philippians 3. If religious groups have the tendency to justify themselves by their being and doing, even more so is the tendency of individuals to assert themselves as right and justified. Paul combats this temptation by narrowing the issue of righteousness by faith to his own testimony. He had achieved a level of religious accomplishment that few had even the remotest possibility of obtaining. But in all of that being and doing, Paul states that he came to the point where he realized that his craving for righteousness could only be satisfied by accepting it as a gift from Jesus Christ. In the face of such a promise, his human accomplishments gained him no justification with God or genuine superiority among humans.

**Making It Personal (Phil. 3:7–9)**

Peter’s political expediency undermines the very core of the gospel God has presented to humanity since the beginning of sin (Gen. 3:21). We should thoughtfully consider how we justify ourselves based on our social standing, religious affiliation, and the good works we do. In most cases, our goodness in these arenas is based solely on human accomplishment.

However, like Abram and Paul, God will bring each of us through circumstances that convince us that accomplishing on our own what we really desire is impossible. Our hearts will grow weary with labor that remains ineffective in granting us peace (Ps. 107:12, 13; Isa. 57:12, 13). God’s hope for us at that point is not that we will try harder, but rather that we will turn our hope toward the fulfillment of His promises in our lives.

**REACT**

1. List some temptations to spiritual superiority that your church or fellowship may be subject to.
2. If you could really believe that God's love and approval of you was not based on whether you are a vegan, don’t wear jewelry, or volunteer in your community’s soup kitchen, how much of your life would change? Why?

Glenn G. Poole II, Elbert, Colorado, U.S.A.
“Before his conversion Paul had regarded himself as blameless ‘touching the righteousness which is in the law.’ Philippians 3:6. But since his change of heart he had gained a clear conception of the mission of the Saviour as the Redeemer of the entire race, Gentile as well as Jew, and had learned the difference between a living faith and a dead formalism.”

“Let the believing soul stand beside the cross of Calvary, and with a heart swelling with grateful love, cry, ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!’ Behold Him! Say it with heart and soul and voice. Induce the sinner to look. When his gaze is arrested, amazed at such wonderful condescension, he steps nearer, and learns of the Saviour the lesson all must learn,—the lesson of meekness and lowliness. The believing soul sees Jesus as He is, and beholding, is changed into His image. The experience of those who are truly converted testifies that God is the author of eternal salvation, and that the grace of Christ is wisdom and power.”

“Those who were waiting to make themselves more worthy of divine favor before they venture to claim the promises of God, were making a fatal mistake. Jesus alone cleanses from sin; He only can forgive our transgressions. He has pledged Himself to listen to the petition and grant the prayer of those who come to Him in faith. Many have a vague idea that they must make some wonderful effort in order to gain the favor of God. But all self-dependence is vain. It is only by connecting with Jesus through faith that the sinner becomes a hopeful, believing child of God.”

“The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ.”

2. The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, January 7, 1902.
It’s easy for us to get into the habit of thinking that we’re better than someone who smokes, wears jewelry, and doesn’t “keep” the Sabbath. This I’m-better-than-you-are thinking is what Peter engaged in when he refused to eat with the uncircumcised Christian Gentiles; and because of this thinking, he lived a hypocritical lifestyle. Following are ways we can prevent ourselves from doing the same:

Stop! Then thank Jesus. Stop yourself from thinking any of the following: (1) “Look at the tattoos on her arms! She must be a tough character!” (2) “Well, Jennifer finally decided to come to church.” (3) “I can’t believe Kevin went swimming last Sabbath!” Instead, thank Jesus for the people you tend to criticize, and thank Him for dying on the cross for everyone. Throughout the day, as you thank Him for the salvation of others around you, notice how your attitude toward these people changes.

Act/Care. The next time you see someone who doesn’t fit your profile of a “good Christian,” befriend them and determine how you can best help them. It could make a big difference not only to that person, but to you as well. It may not be the “coolest” thing to do, and you may get criticized for doing it, but it’s what Jesus would do, and what He thinks is more important than anything else.

Unite. Ephesians 2:11–17 teaches us that we are all one in Christ and that the walls of prejudice were broken down when He died on the cross. Whether we are prejudiced against others because of their skin color, physical appearance, how “well” they keep the Sabbath, or how they spend their free time, we need to remember God died for all of us. We are all unrighteous and all unworthy, but He chose to give us salvation anyway. Think and pray, care and act to unite those around you as one body in Christ.

REACT
1. Are you like Paul or Peter? How do those around you know which one you are?
2. How might you have replaced the legalism of Jesus’ day with your own type of legalism?
3. What are some areas in your life that you can work on to improve how you react toward others?

Amanda Corea, Hagerstown, Maryland, U.S.A.
After Abraham’s victory over the four kings that captured Lot, he worried that his reward already had been given to him on earth, and that if there were future rewards, to whom would they be given, for he had no offspring. So God alleviated his worries, promising him abundant descendants and future reward. Abraham believed without needing subsequent proof. God credited this faith to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

Abraham wasn’t the only person to experience anxiety or encounter uncertain situations. People of all ages have grappled with this. In Thunder From Jerusalem, a book about the founding of the state of Israel, one of the characters describes faith: “Though we cannot always see the Almighty’s hand of protection with our eyes, we must look with our hearts. . . . That is called faith. Even when the battle we face seems so great that we will be defeated, we must still trust in the Lord.”* No matter how bleak the battle looks to our eyes (as the battle for the renewed state of Israel most certainly looked to its new inhabitants in 1948), we must have faith that God’s plan for us will succeed.

Today, believers and nonbelievers face difficult times. The economic recession has affected millions of lives and, as of this writing, shows little sign of improvement. Still, people anticipate the day the economy will bounce back. Believers in Christ also await the day the universal battle between God and Satan ends and we are in heaven with our Savior. Signs that this battle is intensifying are becoming ever more abundant.

Regardless of which trial, battle, or worry we are grappling with—whether it concerns financial pitfalls, an upcoming exam, or family unrest—Abraham has set us an excellent example. Genesis 15 gives us a clear picture of what we must do—have faith in God. In return, He credits that faith to us as righteousness. Whether our reward comes while we are still on earth, or we receive it in heaven, we must have faith in God and believe He has a plan for each and every one of us. Paul beautifully describes our walk of faith: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12).


Aleksandra Kozlova-Harris, El Jebel, Colorado, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

One of the major effects of sin in our world has been the need for us to work hard throughout our lives in order to be “successful.” Sin has shaped our thinking so that “it’s all about us” and what we strive to do for ourselves. We believe that the only way we can improve our condition is through our own efforts. So when Jesus offers us the indescribable gift of salvation in exchange for a tiny grain of our faith, it seems too good to be true. Surely we need to do more than that? But we don’t!

CONSIDER

- Making a list of different man-made “systems” that require a high degree of your trust, such as airplanes, medical interventions, and satellite navigation systems. Compare your trust in these man-made technologies with your trust in Jesus’ ability to save you.
- Filming a short movie on the theme of justification by faith. Show the movie during a church service, or upload it to your church’s Web site or YouTube.
- Reflecting on what you like best about the concept of justification by faith, and then reflecting on the most important aspect of justification by faith for you. Respond to your reflections by creating a personal response to Jesus for His amazing gift. This response could be in the form of a poem, song, collage, PowerPoint presentation, Thank-you card, letter, and so on.
- Drawing a diagram or picture to illustrate the process of salvation by faith in Jesus to someone who doesn’t speak your language.
- Inviting your friends to create whatever they like to illustrate the concept of justification by faith, then holding a mini-exhibition of your creations. Let each person introduce his or her creation and describe what it means.
- Writing an imaginary script of God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit working together to design the incredible process of justification by faith.
- Filling an attractive bowl with ten tiny objects that can do important things, such as the key to your car; a pencil that could write a world changing book; a match; and so on. Reflect on the insights each one of these gives you into the powerful effect on your life of a tiny grain of faith in Jesus.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, Faith and Works.
Philip W. Dunham, Sure Salvation; Morris Venden, 95 Theses on Righteousness by Faith.

Karen Holford, Auchtermuchty, Scotland
Old Testament

Faith

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’ ” (Gal. 3:13, NIV).
Jamilla was a quiet girl. She secluded herself from the rest of the students in our Christian school because most of them teased her. One day during lunch, I gathered up the courage to sit with her. Soon we became friends, and she felt free to tell me the following story.

A few years earlier, while Jamilla was attending another Christian boarding school, she had given her life to Jesus Christ. When the school closed for the December holidays, her non-Christian parents took her to their gods’ temple. Little did she know that they had been asked to sacrifice a child to appease the false gods whom they worshiped, and because she was her parents’ only child, she was to be that sacrifice. After certain rituals were performed, they hung Jamilla upside down over a raging fire. At first she panicked, but then she remembered Jesus and called upon Him. As she did, she recalled how God had instructed Abraham to offer his only son as a sacrifice. She remembered how Abraham obeyed God, and how in the end, God had provided a lamb, who represented the Savior, to be sacrificed in Isaac’s place. Jamilla then told me, “I knew that what was being done to me was not God’s will. So I prayed for Him to please provide a ‘lamb’ to take my place.”

Even after three hours of hanging above the fire, Jamilla miraculously remained alive. This caused the members of the temple to grow increasingly nervous. Finally, when they couldn’t take it any longer, they released her and threw her on the doorstep of a hospital where a doctor found her. There she remained until she became well. The doctor who found her adopted her and raised her as one of his own children. He then brought her to the school I was attending so she could continue her education.

I admire Jamilla’s faith in God. She believes that He had engraved her name on the palm of His hand, that He knew her even before she was born, and that He has plans to give her a prosperous future (Isa. 49:16; Jer. 1:5). Her faith, as does Abraham’s, teaches us that the basis of our salvation is faith in Christ alone. It was because of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises that he was counted as righteous. That same gift of righteousness is available for anyone today who shares Abraham’s faith. The only reason we are not condemned for our mistakes is that Jesus paid the price for our sins by dying in our place. As we study this topic this week, may we also believe that our names, too, are written on the palms of our Savior’s hands.

Judy Muthungu, Nairobi, Kenya
The Nature of Faith (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 22:1–18)

We are ultimately measured not by where we stand in moments of comfort but where we stand during times of turmoil. Whether we exhibit spiritual ecstasy during times of trouble or not is inconclusive evidence that we are Christians. Holiness is not rapture, but complete surrender of the will to God. It is living by every word that proceeds from His mouth. Holiness also is trusting God in darkness as well as in light. It is walking by faith and not by sight; and finally, holiness is relying on Him with unquestioning confidence and resting in His love.

If we can’t stand for something, then we will definitely fall for anything. The Bible clearly teaches that without faith it is impossible to please God and that the just will live by faith.

Abraham, the father of faith and God’s friend, was a man of noble character who diligently sought the Lord with a childlike trust. He knew that without faith it was impossible to please God.

Let’s take a closer look at who Abraham was.

This must be one of the greatest tests God has asked of any human.

1. He came from the city of Ur. While he lived there, “the city possessed an exceptionally high culture. Houses were well constructed, and usually two stories high. Rooms on the ground floor were grouped around a central courtyard, and a staircase led up to the second story. The city had an efficient sewage system, which is more than some cities in that country can boast even today. In the schools of Ur reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography were taught, as the many school exercises that have been recovered make evident.”

2. Abraham was a wealthy man. The Bible describes him as rich in livestock, silver, and gold (Gen. 13:2). The word translated as “rich” “literally means ‘heavy’ or ‘weighty,’ used in the sense of being ‘loaded’ with possessions.”

3. Abraham was a great teacher. God said of him, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him” (Gen. 18:19). “Abraham not only prayed with and before his family, but interceded for them as priest. . . . As a prophet he instructed his family in both the theory and the practice of religion, with emphasis on the practical virtues. He taught his family not only to know these things but to do them as well.”
That which gave power to Abraham’s teaching was the influence of his own life.

4. Abraham’s influence extended beyond his own family and household. Wherever he pitched his tents, he built an altar to God for sacrifice and worship. When Abraham moved on, the altar remained as a witness so that many a roving Canaanite whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham tarried at the altar to offer a sacrifice to Jehovah.4

5. Abraham was a man of great faith. When God instructed him to sacrifice his promised son as a burnt offering, Abraham did just that. This must be one of the greatest tests God has asked of any human.

That Was Then. But What About Now? (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:1–14; Heb. 11:6)

When Christ was crucified, His closest disciples did not believe He would rise again. Even though He Himself had stated plainly that He was to rise on the third day, they were perplexed by what He meant. This lack of comprehension left them in utter despair at the time of His death. Their faith was unable to penetrate beyond the shadow Satan had cast over their hearts and minds. All seemed hopeless to them. If they only had believed the Savior’s words, how much sorrow they might have been spared! The same power that sustained Abraham, that gave Caleb and Joshua faith and courage, could have empowered them to remain faithful during their time of grief. Fortunately, at Pentecost, they received an increased measure of faith and Holy Spirit power that made their work effective. Such faith and power have upheld God’s faithful children in every succeeding age, and ours can be no different.

Today, like Abraham, we must have faith in the promises of God. We must be prepared to do whatever He asks of us. Let us pray for strength to walk by faith as well as by sight, for that which is visible is only temporal but that which is invisible is eternal.

REACT

1. In what ways can we improve our faith as we wait for the soon coming of Christ?
2. Why should our faith not depend on any circumstance, time, season, or place?

2. Ibid., p. 300.
3. Ibid., p. 329.
“Abraham’s unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible. To him, faith was ‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ [Heb. 11:1]. Relying upon the divine promise, without the least outward assurance of its fulfillment, he abandoned home and kindred and native land, and went forth, he knew not whither, to follow where God should lead.

“It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. There were strong ties to bind him to his country, his kindred, and his home. But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise—whether the soil was fertile and the climate healthful; whether the country afforded agreeable surroundings and would afford opportunities for amassing wealth. God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be.”

“The Lord in His providence had brought this trial upon Abraham to teach him lessons of submission, patience, and faith—lessons that were to be placed on record for the benefit of all who should afterward be called to endure affliction. God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. . . . God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. ‘I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil.’ Jeremiah 29:11. The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange.”

**REACT**

1. How can my faith in God help me to find “the happiest place on earth”—the place where God wants me to be?
2. The part of Abraham’s story that I most identify with at this moment is . . .

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1. Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 126.
2. Ibid., p. 129.

*Sue Welch, Hemel Hempstead, England*
As we go through the Old Testament, we come across many people who had the faith of Abraham, the type of faith that no matter what position a person occupies in life, no matter what situation a person is in, that person remains faithful to God.

“‘I know that my Redeemer lives, / and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.’”

By faith, Moses refused to be called Pharaoh’s heir. He chose instead to suffer with God and His people. Enoch walked with God by faith until his translation. He did not seek the comforts of life, nor did he attempt to gain wealth and happiness for himself. Also consider Manoah and his wife. When “the angel of the Lord” (Judg. 13:3) told Manoah’s wife, who was sterile, that she would have a child who would deliver Israel from the Canaanites, both she and her husband had faith and the desire to do what was right. Of Manoah’s faith we read that he “fully accepted and believed the Angel’s word. He took for granted that in due time this promised child would be given to them. His faith is in sharp contrast to that of the priest Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who asked for a sign when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and promised him a child (Luke 1:8).”* Manoah and his wife showed their faith by trusting the “angel of the Lord” and by obeying God’s instructions to them regarding their child.

Then there is Job, the person who has suffered like no other. In response to Bildad, one of his friends who believed Job was suffering because of the sins he had committed, Job replied, “‘I know that my Redeemer lives, / and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. / And after my skin has been destroyed, / yet in my flesh I will see God; / I myself will see him / with my own eyes—I, and not another. / How my heart yearns within me!’” (Job 19:25–27, NIV).

When we consider the faith of these people and so many others in the Old Testament, let us also consider how often we are willing to leave our comfort zones to trust God.

When God told Abraham to sacrifice his only legitimate heir, Abraham did not argue or complain. Instead, he made preparations to carry out God’s instructions and then set out to carry them through. Matthew 17:20 says that if we have faith even as small as a mustard seed we would be able to do impossible things. Indeed, with God by our side, we can do anything He asks us to do. Listed below are four ways we can acquire such faith.

Pray. Doing so strengthens us to face temptations and to do God’s bidding in difficult situations. When Daniel prayed only to God despite a decree that everyone in Babylon should pray to the king or be thrown into the lions’ den, God delivered him. As a result, the king issued a decree that everyone in his kingdom should “‘fear and reverence the God of Daniel’” (Dan. 6:26, NIV).

Stop complaining. When we complain about our problems, we are not focusing on God and His power. So rather than grumble about your circumstance, look to Him in faith. When you do, He will give you the strength and the answers you need to move forward. He knows what you need and when you need it. All you need to do is ask, and it shall be given!

Don’t be discouraged. Because the devil is not happy when your relationship with God is good, he will try to discourage you from having a close relationship with Him. Satan will remind you of just how horrible a sinner you really are, and these reminders will make you feel unworthy of God’s love and righteousness. Hold fast to God’s promises, and all will be well.

Obey. Obedience is essential. When James wrote about Abraham’s faith, he said, “You see that his [Abraham’s] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (James 2:22, NIV). Then in verse 26, James states that “faith without deeds is dead” (NIV). Faith and obedience go together. We can’t have one without the other.

**REACT**

1. Think of a time when you were losing your faith. What was causing you to lose it, and what helped you to regain it?

2. What else would you lose if you lost your faith in God? What will you gain as your faith increases?
God is faithful to people like Abraham, Manoah and his wife, Job, and Daniel because they are faithful to Him. And when He is faithful to us, nothing He asks of us is impossible to accomplish. For example, Manoah and his wife could not have children. But because of their faith in God’s faithfulness, they had a child who God promised would begin to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Together as husband and wife, they showed their faith by obeying the conditions God set for them concerning their child.

Today, we also know that God has laws we should follow if we say we have faith in Him. We cannot truly be faithful if we do not have it in our hearts to obey God. His promises are not empty. But neither can His promises be fulfilled if we do not have the type of faith we see in much of the Old Testament.

In Habakkuk, chapter 1, the prophet asks God the following two questions: (1) how long will He allow evil to triumph? (Hab. 1:2, 3), and (2) why does He remain silent “while the wicked [Babylon] swallow up those more righteous than themselves [Judah]?” (Hab. 1:13, NIV).

God answers Habakkuk in chapter 2, and the answer is simply that Habakkuk must wait in faith upon the Lord (verse 4), and that “ ‘the Lord is in his holy temple / let all the earth be silent before him’ ” (NIV). In other words, do “not presume to question the wisdom of God in guiding the destiny of nations, as Habakkuk has done (chs. 1:13; 2:1).”*

How often do we presume to question God’s guidance in our lives? Such presumption is a sign that we do not have a saving faith, the type of faith displayed by Abraham and recommended by Paul and by Christ Himself as a saving faith. Let us not be quick to question God’s wisdom. Rather, let us be quick to have faith in Him, the kind of faith the results in good works for Him (Isaiah 58; Mic. 6:8).

**REACT**

1. In your own life, how can you show that you have experienced Old Testament faith?
2. Was there ever a time when you questioned God’s wisdom regarding how He was guiding your life? How did things turn out for you in the end?


Damaris K. Masika, Nairobi, Kenya
CONCLUDE
In the Christian life, from its beginning to its end, the basis of our salvation is faith in Christ alone. Because of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises, he was counted as righteous. Today, that same gift of righteousness is available for any one of us who shares Abraham’s faith. The only reason we are not condemned for our sins is that Jesus paid the price for them by dying in our place.

CONSIDER
• Reading Genesis 22:1–18 three times. The first time, ask yourself what you hear (the birds, the surprise in Isaac’s voice, etc.). The second time, ask yourself what you see (the look on Abraham’s face, etc.). The third time, ask yourself what you feel (alarm, shock, etc.). How does each reading expand your knowledge of and desire for Old Testament faith?
• Reviewing Judges 13:2–24 by making a five-column chart. Label the columns Why? How? What? Where? and When? As you read the story, write in each column how the story answers each column’s question. Then write a one- or two-sentence summary about how this story has enlarged your understanding of Old Testament faith.
• Reviewing the stories of Old Testament faith that were discussed in this lesson, then drawing a picture of one of them. In your drawing, consider carefully how you will highlight or symbolize the meaning of such faith.
• Dramatizing one of the Old Testament stories presented in this week’s lesson with your friends. Make arrangements to present it to the adult Sabbath School division of your church.
• Singing “A Mighty Fortress” by Martin Luther (no. 506 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal). How do the lyrics help you to understand Old Testament faith? How does the melody help to emphasize that meaning?
• Asking a grandparent or an aunt or uncle to share with you a time when God asked him or her to do something that was seemingly impossible. How did this help them to develop a saving faith?
• Meditating on Psalms 23 and 91. How do these passages help you to understand the nature of Old Testament faith?

CONNECT
Psalms 40:1–4; 121.

E. R. Woerkom, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.
The Priority of the Promise

“For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise” (Gal. 3:18, NIV).
How many promises have you broken? If you are like me, you’ve probably broken too many promises to remember. I came face to face with one of my broken promises when I recently read the diary of my deceased sister. She wrote about a boy she liked and how I had broken my promise that I wouldn’t try to stop her from seeing him. So why did I break that promise? I guess I thought I knew better than she did. Maybe I did. Maybe I didn’t. She died before I could find out. My other sister said it was a promise I never should have made. So who was right?

When He makes a promise, we don’t have to worry that He will break it.

Being human, I can never fully know how things would have worked out if I had just left them alone, and that frightens me. Now, however, comes the good part. Jesus knows how things will work out. There’s no “maybe” in His mind. He knows when to make a promise and when not to. So it stands to reason that when He does make a promise, the promise must be something really important. Throughout the Bible, we read about God making promises to His people. One of the major promises was that of a coming Savior. Reread the key passages listed at the beginning of this lesson. Abraham received a promise, and, as a part of his spiritual family, we can claim that promise too. So how do we know that the promise is true? We can know by looking at the One who promised it.

How many times has God broken His promises like you and I have? Never. Throughout the Bible He has proven Himself time and time again. When He makes a promise, we don’t have to worry that He will break it. He always keeps His word. “What I have said, that will I bring about; / what I have planned, that will I do” (Isa. 46:11, NIV).

This week, we will learn about the priority God places on His promise of salvation as it relates to His law and to our faith.
What Paul was basically saying to the Galatians was, “OK, evil people are trying to pervert the gospel of Jesus, but why are you letting them get into your heads?” He was disturbed by the wishy-washy way the Galatians were thinking about God’s covenant. God promised Adam, Noah, Abram, and the Israelites that He would send Jesus to be the Sacrifice for sin. In 4 B.C., He totally came through with that promise, and the Galatians were living in the time after that. So, Paul wondered, what could be so confusing about the gospel the Galatians had learned, that they would start listening to the people who wanted them to get circumcised as a sign of their being inheritors of the promise?

“The promise was Jesus, and the promise was kept.”

“Let’s go over this again,” Paul said. In human business, a legal agreement like a car loan document is an example of a promise that must be kept. Anyone who has tried to avoid keeping a legal promise knows the consequences: financial loss, lawsuit, public relations nightmare, and so on. Likewise, God had set up agreements He would not violate. No floods had again come to destroy the whole earth. The nation of Israel had come from Isaac, the promised son. And finally, Jesus died to fulfill the promise that all people would have the opportunity to escape from sin and live forever.

The law came to make people aware of sin. The law is not the fulfillment of the promise to save people from sin and death. However, the Judaizers wrongly believed that the law was given as the promise and that keeping the law was the way to receive pardon from sin. God had said a thousand times to the nation of Israel, “Love and obey Me, and you will prosper.” But God never once said, “Loving and obeying Me will pardon you from your sin.” The Judaizers had actually put their own terms into an agreement that did not even exist (Gal. 3:18).

The promise was Jesus, and the promise was kept. Receiving the promise by faith is the only possible human act in response.

**REACT**

1. Paul points out in Galatians that even church leaders, as well as many members, were swayed by the Judaizers’ influence. What false ideas are swaying the church today?

2. In your own thinking, which ideas are holding too much sway? Which ideas do you hold above the promise of eternal life through Jesus? What will change in your thinking?
Historical Covenants (Gen. 3:15; 9:11–17; 15:1–6, 18)

Nahbi, Geuel, Sethur, Gaddiel: four men from the same passage of Scripture. Do you know who they are and what they have in common? Think about that while we ponder some of the covenants in the Old Testament.

God made a covenant with Adam and Eve when He created them: Do not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Obey and live, or choose death by choosing disobedience. We know the story. Our first parents did not believe God's promises. They broke the covenant, which destined them to die. However, as soon as there was sin, there was a Savior; and our heavenly Father stepped in with another covenant in which He would actually give us His power to be obedient.

In Genesis 9, we read of God's promise displayed in the rainbow. His covenant with Noah is still binding in our time. Indeed, it will continue for as long as there is time. Plus, we know about God's conversation with Abraham during which He promises Abraham that his children would be as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:1–6). Then on that same day, He made covenants to care for Abraham's descendants and to give them the land of Canaan (verse 18).

However, there was more to these promises than physical care for earthly life. In the very first covenant, God promised that one day a Savior would be born to the human race, and in order to fulfill this promise, He chose a special people through whom He would work. Enter Abraham. God's covenant was so much more than just a promise of descendants to a childless man. It was the ultimate reward for faithfulness—someone from Abraham's line of children would be the Messiah!

The Sin of Unbelief (Gen. 11:4; Numbers 13)

Unfortunately, not everyone had faith like Noah. So not long after the rainbow promise, some people convinced themselves that they knew better than God. They did not believe the pledge He had made with Noah whereby He would not send another worldwide deluge. Tragically, the sin of unbelief did not end with these designers of Babel.

Now, back to the four men mentioned earlier. They appear in the Bible
only once. Yet if I were to mention their contemporaries, you probably would be able to place the story instantly. The narrative is found in Numbers 13, and their two famous contemporaries are Caleb and Joshua. Yes, Nahbi, Geuel, Sethur, and Gaddiel were four of the 12 spies Moses sent to look over the land of Canaan. These men and the other spies had one thing in common—they chose not to take God’s promises to heart, and thus they were unable to enter into God’s covenant. Their sin wasn’t in seeing, or even in reporting, the giants that occupied Canaan. Their sin, and the sin of many of us as well, was the sin of not believing that God was bigger than the giants. They believed that God was not powerful enough to keep His word.

When we try in our own strength, and by our own methods, to earn salvation, we are effectively telling God the same thing: “God, I really don’t believe 100 percent in what You say or promise.”

**God Means What He Says (Exod. 16:22–26; Mal. 3:6; Matt. 5:17–20; Titus 1:2)**

Even a perfunctory reading of Holy Writ leads us to the fundamental truth that God means what He says. His promises are sure (2 Cor. 1:20) because He is powerful enough to fulfill them. These promises are a beautiful chain throughout His Word, binding it all together. We can trust Him because we have seen how He proved Himself faithful to His people in the past. Not even the law (the Ten Commandments) can change His covenant, because in truth, they are two sides to the same coin. “From the God-ward side the Sinaitic covenant (also called the first covenant) was a renewal of the Abrahamic covenant of grace (Heb. 9:1). . . . Later scriptural passages speak of ‘a new or better covenant.’ But they do so, not because the everlasting covenant was changed but because (1) through Israel’s unfaithfulness God’s everlasting covenant had been perverted into a system of works; (2) it was associated with a new revelation of God’s love in Jesus Christ’s incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and mediation; and (3) it was not until the cross that it was ratified by the blood of Christ.”

We are not saved because God is changeless. It is through faith in Him that we become His children and Abraham’s spiritual children. Any contract by its very definition must have two parties. We must uphold our end of the bargain for it to be of any importance. God asks us to enter into this wonderful covenant with Him through faith in Christ. Only then can we become heirs according to the promise.

**REACT**

1. What does disbelieving God say about your witness?
2. What is the most important thing you personally can do to build a faith relationship with God?

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Rachel Atwood, Stanford, Kentucky, U.S.A.
We all know the story of Noah and God’s promise to him and man, signified through a rainbow placed in the sky. This promise is one of many found in the Bible. As we explore the writings of Ellen White, we gain a greater understanding and appreciation of God’s promises.

“God’s ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.”

“What we want is a living, striving, growing faith in the promises of God.”

“Would it not be better to take the blessed promises of God and apply them to yourself, bearing your whole weight upon them? This is faith. It is by faith that we are to come into sacred nearness to Christ, not depending upon feeling; we are to say, ‘I believe thy promise, Lord, because thou hast said it. Thy word is pledged; we know that we are the children of God because we comply with the conditions, because he has pledged his word.’

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” [Matthew 7:7, 8]. Will you believe the assurances? Will you say, Yes, Lord, I take Thee at Thy Word; I will begin where I am, to talk an increase of faith; I will take hold of the promises; they are for me! O brethren and sisters, what we want is a living, striving, growing faith in the promises of God, which are indeed for you and for me.”

REACT

Because humans make and break promises quite easily, it is almost incomprehensible that God’s promises always stand true. How can we reassure ourselves that He does indeed keep His promises?

1. The Desire of Ages, p. 311.
2. The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, July 29, 1890.
3. Pacific Union Recorder, December 26, 1912.

Jodie Morgan, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, British West Indies
The Galatian Christians struggled with the supposed tension between God's law, His grace and promise of salvation, and their faith. Christians today also can become overwhelmed with this perceived tension. The truth of the matter is this: God's law given at Sinai shows us the extent of our sinfulness and helps us to recognize our need of the promise of salvation God offers to all people through Abraham and his descendants. We claim this promise through faith. How, then, can we cultivate this faith?

We must depend on God in every aspect of our lives. In impressing upon us the importance of faith, the Bible teaches complete dependence on God. When a centurion begged Jesus to heal his paralyzed, suffering servant merely by saying the word, Jesus highlighted the extraordinary nature of the man’s faith (Matt. 8:5–10). We, too, must have complete trust in God and in His ability to work for us and through us.

Believe that God’s Word accomplishes what it promises. The very word of God is creative, for “by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, / their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Ps. 33:6, NIV). God’s self-fulfilling word must be our only guide and source of inspiration, because it alone can accomplish His will in our lives.*

Study, pray, and work for God. The cultivation of our faith becomes increasingly practical as we study, pray, and meditate on Scripture. As we engage in these disciplines, we are allowing Him to speak to us and to guide us into His will. As we get to know Him through study and prayer, we then will be inspired to go work for Him by helping others fulfill both their physical and spiritual needs (Isa. 58:6–11).

REACT

1. Why is knowledge of and faith in God’s promises so important to our spiritual development?
2. How does serving others on behalf of God help us to cultivate even more faith?

Trumpets blare. People scatter everywhere. Men, women, and children stop in their tracks and turn their heads to the direction of the sound. The sky is awash with the colors of a rainbow. On the other side of the world, people are awakened from their sleep. They spring from their beds to face beaming sunlight. Again trumpet blasts echo through the air, deafening, yet triumphant. Clouds part to reveal an array of angels winging toward earth. In the midst of this host sits Jesus in His majestic glory—our Lord, Savior, and King of kings.

Jesus knows what we are feeling. . . . There isn’t anything about our lives that we can’t share with Him.

Yes. Jesus has promised to come again, and the Bible is filled with reminders of His salvation and the chance we have of eternal life with Him. Second Timothy 2:11, 12 says, “Here is a trustworthy saying: / If we died with him, / we will also live with him; if we endure, / we will also reign with him” (NIV). What a wonderful promise.

Many people look for alternatives to God’s promise of eternal life. One such watered-down myth is the fountain of youth. This legend has been around for thousands of years. Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, mentioned a fountain in Ethiopia that contained special water that helped Ethiopians to live for a long time.*

But to find the real fountain of youth we need look no further than the Bible. There we read God’s promises of everlasting life. Faith in His promises of salvation through Jesus, our High Priest, is the cup from which we can drink from this fountain again and again. Jesus knows what we are feeling. He knows our temptations. There isn’t anything about our lives that we can’t share with Him. On that glorious day when He returns, how will you feel? Will you be jubilant? Or will your heart melt with fear and a sense of regret because you did not commit your life to Him?

Are you ready? Are you drinking from the eternal waters in preparation for His eternal kingdom? Ask God to help you prepare for His return.

CONCLUDE
Perhaps nothing delights Satan more than to sow discord among believers on issues pertaining to their salvation. He often pushes us to discount God’s free gift as worthless. If that doesn’t work, he urges us to work hard to earn our salvation so we can assure our standing with God. This latter deception was at the core of the “drama” to be played out among the Galatian converts. The apostle Paul went to great lengths—sometimes exasperation—to point out that our righteousness is obtainable only through Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:15–21). Observing Jewish customs and keeping the law could never replace righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. This truth remains essential today!

CONSIDER
- Conducting a video interview with a close family member. Ask this person to share one of the most sacred promises he or she has made and why. Then ask the person to share a cherished promise from the Bible.
- Finding three conditional promises in the Bible. Analyze the conditions God sets forth for honoring His promises. How are these conditions alike in each promise? How are they different?
- Surfing YouTube for Rachael Lampa’s powerful ballad about Jesus’ sacrifice titled “No Greater Love Than This.” After you’ve listened to it, think about why so many people struggle to simply accept Jesus’ awesome sacrifice.
- Brainstorming two ways to explain to a friend the relationship of the law to sin and salvation.
- Doing a dramatic reading of Galatians 2:15 to Galatians 3:7. Notice how strongly Paul words this portion of his appeal.
- Writing a short journal entry based on the meaning of Galatians 6:9.
- Writing a one-paragraph prayer thanking God for adopting you as His child, a joint heir with Christ.

CONNECT
John 1:11, 12; Romans 3–6; Hebrews 10:1–22.  
The Road to Faith

“Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal. 3:22, ESV).
It’s the final game of the World Cup. The whistle blows. The game begins. However, you notice something is wrong. A player on one team keeps stopping to read something. He’s actually reading the rules! Then you notice another player from the same team always running to the referee to see if each play he makes is lawful. You also see the goalie whip out a tape measure to see how far he is from the net! This is going to be a long game!

In our Christian walk, if we’re always looking up the rules and measuring ourselves against the law (the Ten Commandments), we’ll never move forward. Instead, our focus should be on Christ. Paul discussed this when he wrote, “The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24, NKJV).

Does this mean that we discard the law? No. The Ten Commandments are a framework for the “game” of life. Now let’s picture a different scenario for the World Cup game. There are two minutes left, and it’s a draw. You are a player and your coach has directed your team to set up a pass that doesn’t make sense. You’ve never made this play before, so you’re not sure if it will work. Still, you decide to do it. As you run down the field, the ball rolls to your feet. You look up to find the defending goalie staring at you.

You kick. You score! As you’re carried off the field in victory, you look back at your smiling coach.

You see, you played the game, not the rules. The rules help us, but they are not the game itself. Paul states that “after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:25, NKJV). Faith is the key; but how does that tie in with the law? As you journey through this week’s study, you will discover the answer to these and other questions. As you explore this topic, may you receive understanding and be blessed by what you discover.
Decrees, Laws, and Freedom (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 8:1–4; Gal. 3:21–25)

Leviticus 18:5 states that God has a mandate for His people to follow. Predominately, this mandate involves the boundaries God would like them to follow regarding sexuality. For example, “‘No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord’” (verse 6, NIV). Why did God so clearly state what He wanted His people to adhere to? Because obeying His laws leads to living better lives. “You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live” (Lev. 18:5, NRSV).

Isaac recognized obedience in his father Abraham and enjoyed the benefits of this obedience. God said to Isaac, “‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.’” Why is this? “‘Because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, . . . my laws’” (Gen. 26:4, 5, NIV).

Paul tells us that “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24, NIV). What an incredible shift—from being found guilty by the law and condemned to death to being set free through faith in Christ.

You may wonder, then, if we really need to obey the law. Paul says, “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12, NIV). Furthermore, Jesus tells the disciples “‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them’” (John 14:23, NRSV). We can’t run away from these texts. God’s law is who He is. His law describes His character; and He is asking us to respond out of love. The disciples had the opportunity to respond to Jesus face to face, like Peter on the beach when Jesus asked him three times, “Peter, do you love Me?” Jesus is now asking us the same question (see John 21:15–17).

Don’t think for a second, however, that the price paid is trivial. The price, we are told, is God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The price was indeed the greatest ever paid and that ever will be paid. As sinners, we deserve to die deaths that are eternal. In fact, we must die. Jesus, however, took our sins upon Himself. And “to paraphrase an ancient theological truth: Jesus became what we are so that we might become what he is.”
Jewish Advantage? (Rom. 3:1, 2, 9–19)

Paul talks about the Jews having an advantage over others. What is this advantage? In Romans 3:2, he says of the Jews that “they have been entrusted with the very words of God” (NIV). Later, he finishes the list of advantages with the following: adoption, divine glory, covenants, the law, temple worship, promises concerning the Messiah and His kingdom (Rom. 9:4, 5). For all of these reasons, the Jews had an advantage. Notice, though, that all of these advantages are concerned with salvation history and not with salvation itself.²

Salvation history is indeed an honor to have lived through, but salvation itself does not come from such great experiences and honor. Paul reminds his readers that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. He gives a very expressive outline of why that is the case. Every single person is silenced by this outline, and everyone is truly accountable to God. “ ‘There is no one righteous, not even one’ ” (Rom. 3:10, NIV).

Across All Divides (1 Cor. 9:19, 20)

First Corinthians 9:20 emphasizes the dedication Paul has to his own people. Remember that Paul was once a bold legalistic Jew who persecuted new Christians. Here, however, he states his dedication to save the Jews and those “under law.” Some examples of Paul’s dedication include the time he circumcised Timothy because the local Jews knew that Timothy’s father was a Greek. This was essential if they were going to build bridges to the Jewish hearts in that community (Acts 16:3).

Another time Paul paid the expenses of four men to have their hair cut off as he joined them in purification rites. “The only way he could win Jewish approval . . . would be to show that he was faithful to it [the law].”³

Last of all, Paul, who was also an apostle to the Gentiles, declares that he would like to see the Jews envious of the Gentiles so that they, too, would desire the salvation the Gentiles were experiencing (Rom. 11:14).

REACT

1. What is the difference between the law supervising you and Christ supervising you?
2. What does Paul’s method of sharing the gospel teach us? How might you apply his methods in the part of the world where you live?

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2. Ibid., p. 75.

Tim Shelton, Sydney, Australia
“‘The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith’ (Gal. 3:24). In this scripture, the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law. The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Adam and Eve dared to transgress the Lord’s requirements, and the terrible result of their sin should be a warning to us not to follow their example of disobedience. . . . There is no genuine sanctification except through obedience to the truth. Those who love God with all the heart will love all His commandments also. The sanctified heart is in harmony with the precepts of God’s law.”

“The followers of Christ must be partakers of His experience.”

“The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness, seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression.”

“The life of Daniel is an inspired illustration of what constitutes a sanctified character. It presents a lesson for all, and especially for the young. A strict compliance with the requirements of God is beneficial to the health of body and mind.”

“It is not enough even that we believe on Christ for the forgiveness of sin; we must by faith be constantly receiving spiritual strength and nourishment from Him through His word. . . . The followers of Christ must be partakers of His experience. They must receive and assimilate the Word of God so that it shall become the motive power of life and action. By the power of Christ they must be changed into His likeness, and reflect the divine attributes.”

**REACT**

If the law is a reflection of God’s character, how can we effectively keep it?

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5. Ibid., p. 275.

*Bruce McCourt, Perth, Western Australia*
When Paul set out to explain to the Galatian Christians what the function of God’s law was, he used an illustration based on something they observed every day—the role of a guardian for a child or teenager in their family. Greek and Roman parents provided for the personal development of their children by assigning guardians to them. These guardians were usually trustworthy older male slaves. A guardian would literally accompany the boy everywhere he went. If you were a Greek boy, your guardian would make sure you were dressed properly and your hair combed nicely. He would walk you to school and carry your box of school equipment, which included writing equipment, scrolls, and possibly your harp, if you were having music lessons. Along the way, he would drill you on the Greek grammar that you were supposed to have memorized for classes that day.¹

Of course, the constant presence of your guardian could be a little annoying. A Greek writer called Aristides documented some of the nagging reminders guardians use to give to the boys in their charge: “It is not proper to stuff yourself full!” “Do not be noisy!” “Walk on the street in a decent way!” Does any of this sound vaguely familiar?

The guardians also were to morally guide the boys and protect them. When a boy moved into his teen years, his guardian also protected him from undesirable lovers who could try to seduce him.

No matter how trustworthy a guardian was, there came a time when a young boy needed to mature into a fully independent adult. The ultimate aim of parents was a mature young man who no longer needed to be directed by his guardian. Paul used this example to illustrate how God wants us to transition from being morally guarded by the law to real spiritual maturity and freedom through faith in Jesus Christ and through living self-controlled lives by His Spirit.²

No one can just jump into a car and drive away without a driver’s license. To be a good driver, there are steps you need to take. These steps illustrate what it is like for us to grow in our relationship with Christ.

**His law will guide you safely through life.**

_Step 1: Obtain a learner’s permit._ When I got my permit, I didn’t really want to learn how to drive. It took me five years to actually take a driving lesson. I kept renewing my permit, giving excuse after excuse, until the authorities told me I couldn’t renew it anymore. Similarly, getting to know God requires that you develop the desire to do so. You may be surrounded by opportunities to do so, but you just don’t want to. However, don’t make up excuses, and don’t delay (Rev. 3:20).

_Step 2: Take the driving lessons._ Your instructor will teach you everything you need to know about driving. Most important, you need to know the different road signs and rules, because these will keep you safe. The Christian’s highway also has signs and rules—God’s commandments. His law will guide you safely through life so that you will not have an accident that will cost you a lot of money, your reputation, or even your life (Gal. 3:24).

_Step 3: Choose your route wisely._ Congratulations! You passed the test and have a driver’s license. You know the rules of the road and what all the road signs mean. They will lead you to where you are going. Obeying them will safely get you to your destination.

Likewise, God’s commandments have the important task of leading you to Jesus so that you can be justified and saved through His sacrifice. When you have faith in that sacrifice, you will be saved (Rom. 3:21–24; 10:9; Gal. 3:24), and the Holy Spirit will help you to grow in Him as He leads you through life. When you enter God’s kingdom by professing Christ as your Savior, you will want to travel according to His commandments and His plan for your life. Your journey from then on is focused on where He is leading you.

**REACT**

1. Explain the roles that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have in your salvation. Why is each of Their roles equally important?

2. Sometimes when we drive, we become distracted by our cell phones or the music we are playing. Such distractions might cause us to have accidents. What distractions could cause us to stop focusing on Christ?

Ana Lotawa Turaganitabua, Burerua, Tailevu, Fiji
Laws can be seen in various ways. A juvenile delinquent might view the law as an arbitrary set of rules designed specifically to interfere with fun. An ordinary citizen probably views the law as something that deters unsavory characters from abducting children or robbing a bank. For the police, the law is something that stands behind them so they can keep the peace. For convicted criminals, however, the law is something that condemns.

If one peels back the layers of the law, one can see it as something entirely other than just a lot of dos and don’ts enforced by fines, jail, and perhaps even death. Laws reflect the society from which they stem. They reflect the values of any given society and how the majority of citizens within that society believe people should act. Most civilized societies believe that people shouldn’t lie, cheat, steal, kill others, or sleep with another person’s spouse.

God does not leave us to follow His law by ourselves.

God’s definition of a decent human being is similar to ours. C. S. Lewis theorizes that this is because He is the “Somebody of Something behind the Moral Law,”* which is responsible for any innate sense of right and wrong we might have. In addition, God’s law shows us what He thinks a Christian should be. Because we are His representatives on earth, He did not leave us to puzzle out what to do all by ourselves. Instead, He gave us His law to use as a road map. We can also compare His law to a mirror in which to check our reflections. If we follow His law, the mirror we look into will reflect Him, rather than us. In addition, others will see Him when they look at us.

God does not leave us to follow His law by ourselves, because He knows it’s impossible for us to do so. When we invite Him into our lives, He teaches us that “ ‘For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible’ ” (Matt. 19:26, NRSV).

We would do well to call on that promise.

**REACT**

1. Most people in the secular world do not react to the laws of their country in a legalistic way. So why do we often react this way with God’s law?

2. How can we truly see the Someone behind the law in the Bible, either without slipping into an obsession with the law itself or abandoning the law entirely?

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CONCLUDE
Do you identify yourself as a Christian by the distinctive religious observances you keep? Or do you find your identity in Christ? That’s what Paul was talking about to the Galatians. Their entrance into the church was not to be through keeping Jewish rituals. Yet Jewish believers wanted them to demonstrate their church affiliation by taking on rites like circumcision. And the Galatians were buying it! Outrageous, right? Well, maybe not! Don’t we all at times become captive to the law because our faith begins to get a little shaky? We begin to doubt that Christ’s grace and righteousness is enough, so do we think we should help Him out? Yet the gospel of the Cross is such that our entrance into God’s family is through Christ’s sacrifice alone. The power to live free from the fear and guilt associated with trying to keep the law is in His blood and in His Spirit alive in us, helping us to overcome sin through His victory on the cross. That’s our sole claim and stake! Now that’s what’s so outrageous to the legalistic mind! And that is the battle of every Christian!

CONSIDER
• Listing the lifestyle choices you make as an Adventist Christian. Do that on one side of your paper. Then in a column across from that, list what Christ has done for you. Which list is longer? Which column represents what gives you personal security in your standing with God?
• Writing about your experience in coming to Christ. Include your feelings when you first came to Christ and unloaded your sins at His feet. Then write about the conflicting way in which you have dealt with balancing obeying God’s law with your faith.
• Sharing what you wrote in the exercise just above with your Sabbath School class or with a friend. Or ask your pastor if you can share it in church as your testimony of faith.
• Finding songs in the hymnal about faith and victory. What do the lyrics of each song have in common? Sing your favorite one of these songs. If you are particularly musical, try creating your own tune to the words of your favorite of these songs as a way of striking a personal chord of praise for what God accomplished in you.

CONNECT
Fritz Ridenour, How to Be a Christian Without Being Religious.

Liane Edlund, Ekebyholm, Sweden
From Slaves to Heirs

“You are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Gal. 4:7, NRSV).
Imagine yourself as president of a prosperous corporation that you created. The fruits of your labor allow you to reside in a mansion decorated in your favorite colors and styles. The land surrounding your home features clear streams, botanical gardens, and gazebos. Servants cater to your every need and desire, while your children play on the manicured grounds and enjoy an abundance of other amenities.

Think of yourselves . . . as heirs to the highest throne in the universe.

With all of these luxuries, however, there will come a time when you won’t be able to run the corporation anymore. Then you will have to decide who will follow in your footsteps, who will get to enjoy the luxuries you have attained. Hopefully, you will favor the children God has blessed you with to become your heirs.

When God entrusts parents to raise children, no matter what the circumstances, they have a responsibility to train those children and teach them important life lessons. Parents should raise their children to be respectful, helpful, and loving. It doesn’t matter if the children have servants to do everything for them. Parents should still teach them to obey certain rules and guidelines. On the other hand, the children should not obey only to be favored with their parents’ inheritance, but out of the love they have for their parents.

One might say, “Well, if the children have chores and responsibilities, what makes them different from the servants?” They both have to answer to the parents or the owner of the estate, but the difference is that the children are the ones the parents have worked so hard to build a life for. The children will become heirs to their parents’ estate when the parents decide that the time is right.

It is the same with Jesus. He came to the earth as a baby and eventually died for us. He favors us, His children, and has gone to build us a place in heaven that will be far more beautiful than anything our earthly minds can imagine. When the time is right, He will return for us, His heirs. While He is preparing for us, we prepare to become His heirs by accepting His grace and then allowing His Spirit to help us obey His commandments.

As you study this week’s lesson, think of yourselves as royalty, as heirs to the highest throne in the universe (Rev. 12:3). Have faith that God will guide you through the transition from being a slave to sin to being an heir to His throne.
While God created us to enjoy a relationship with Him, He also created us with freedom of choice. Unfortunately Adam and Eve chose the slavery of sin. Being a loving Father, however, God made provision to redeem His children from sin even before He created them (1 Pet. 1:18–20). Then, in the fullness of time, Jesus came to live as a human so that we, through faith, could inherit the kingdom God has for us. If we are slaves to sin in any form, we cannot receive the inheritance God wants to give us. Anything that separates us from God will keep us from receiving our inheritance—salvation and eternal life.

“Throughout OT times the Jews were subject to the ‘the law’ . . . as a slave is subject to his master. God required them to comply with its precepts as a minor is expected to obey his guardians. How strange that the ‘foolish’ Galatians aspired to return to that state of bondage (chs. 3:1; 4:9; 5:1). They could never find freedom from condemnation, which was all the law had to offer (ch. 3:13). Any today who trust to their own efforts for salvation are in the same state of bondage as the Jews of OT times and as the Galatians while subject to the Judaizers. . . . Any self-imposed duty, or one demanded by ecclesiastical authority, results in spiritual bondage if it takes the place of faith in God and submission to His will.”*

God is willing to help us accept all that He has to offer. As a parent provides daily for the care of a newborn, God provides daily for our needs. Jesus’ life has shown that salvation is possible. God promised to make a way of escape for every temptation. He has given His angels charge over us to keep and protect us.

Freedom can sometimes mean to be redeemed from a situation. Sometimes with freedom there is a price or an obligation. We were created equal in the sense that we all have the same opportunity to inherit eternal life. Jesus paid the price for our freedom by shedding His blood on the cross. Our Father is the King of kings. Why should we settle for slavery?

**REACT**
1. How much are you worth?
2. To what might you currently be a slave?

For the past several years, my work has involved a lot of air travel. Usually, I sit near the back of the plane. However, sometimes I have received free upgrades to first class, where soft leather lounge chairs welcome you. A relaxed quiet fills the air while flight attendants offer glasses of juice. The food is hot, delicious, and free. When given the chance, I never turn down the offer of a free upgrade. In this lesson, we’re looking at the ultimate upgrade—from slaves to sons and daughters, and heirs to wealth that is out of this world. Galatians 4:7 says, “You are no longer a slave, but a son [or daughter]; and since you are a son [or daughter], God has made you also an heir” (NIV). This raises questions that deserve closer examination: To whom, or what, were we slaves? How is transformation possible? How should we live as children of God?

“
You are a slave to whatever controls you.
"

Living in Slavery (Rom. 6:1–11)

Romans 6:1–11 states that we are slaves to sin. In verse 17, Paul again identifies us as “slaves to sin.” Notice some of the sins and fears that hold us in bondage: impurity (Rom. 6:19, NIV); lawlessness (Rom. 6:19, NASB); appetite (Rom. 16:18, NIV); “elemental spirits of the world”* (Gal. 4:3, NRSV); “gods that are not real” (Gal. 4:8, CEV); and fear of death (Heb. 2:15, NASB). The apostle Peter adds that we are “slaves to corruption,” and states, “You are a slave to whatever controls you” (2 Pet. 2:19, NLT).

However, the Bible also speaks about being set free from sin and becoming “slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18, NASB). Paul explains what this means: “Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy” (verse 19, NLT). He also states that we have a choice—“You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living” (verse 16, NLT).

Transformation (Gal. 4:7)

The transformation that takes us from slaves of sin to sons and daughters of righteousness begins by first accepting God’s love for us (1 John 3:1). We see His love most clearly on the cross where Jesus poured out His life for us. “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His
Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. . . . Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal. 4:4–7, NASB).

Jesus became like us in every way (Heb. 2:14–18), so that by His sinless life He might deliver us from Satan’s power. He came to lift us up out of the chains of slavery to sin and into the joy of being His child. Justification not only frees us from condemnation, it also rescues us from sin’s power: “He who has died has been freed [literally, “justified”] from sin” (Rom. 6:7, NASB). Then we are no longer “under the law” but “under grace,” because the law has been written in our hearts (2 Cor. 3:3).

It is only in response to God’s great love that we can become obedient “from the heart.” “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart” (Rom. 6:17, ESV). Through faith in Christ, we become God’s sons and daughters (Gal. 3:26). As we unite to Christ, dying to our old selfish ways, the chains of slavery are broken, and we become His heirs (Gal. 4:7).

From Slave to Son (Luke 15:11–32)

Jesus illustrated the difference between a slave and a son in Luke 15:11–32. Here we read about two sons of a wealthy father—but both behaving as slaves. The elder son served his father for what he could get. The younger one decided he no longer wanted to live under the rules of his home. Desiring his “freedom,” he left home and became a slave to self—to impurity, lawlessness, appetite, the “elemental things of this earth” (NASB), and “gods that are not real” (CEV).

In the meantime, his elder brother stayed home—a slave to rules, obeying only for what he could get out of it, and becoming bitter because of it.

Finally, the younger son was ready to give up slavery to self. He dared to hope that his father might allow him to return home as a servant. Of course we know how the story ends. The father welcomes this son home as a true son who will serve his father forever—not from fear or greed, but out of a grateful heart.

**REACT**

1. To what or whom are you a slave?
2. What does it mean to “die” to self?
3. If you are child and heir of God, what is your inheritance?

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* This phrase comes from the Greek word *stoicheia*, referring to “any created thing which assumes divine authority over human beings.” Howard Clark Kee, ed., *Cambridge Annotated Study Bible* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
“Of Christ’s relation to His people, there is a beautiful illustration in the laws given to Israel. When through poverty a Hebrew had been forced to part with his patrimony, and to sell himself as a bondservant, the duty of redeeming him and his inheritance fell to the one who was nearest of kin. See Leviticus 25:25, 47–49; Ruth 2:20. So the work of redeeming us and our inheritance, lost through sin, fell upon Him who is ‘near of kin’ unto us. It was to redeem us that He became our kinsman. Closer than father, mother, brother, friend, or lover is the Lord our Saviour. ‘Fear not,’ He says, ‘for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.’ ‘Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.’ Isa. 43:1, 4.

“Christ loves the heavenly beings that surround His throne; but what shall account for the great love wherewith He has loved us? We cannot understand it, but we know it true in our own experience. And if we do hold the relation of kinship to Him, with what tenderness should we regard those who are brethren and sisters of our Lord! Should we not be quick to recognize the claims of our divine relationship? Adopted into the family of God, should we not honor our Father and our kindred?”

“Heaven is worth everything to us.”

“Heaven is worth everything to us. We must not run any risk in this matter. We must take no venture here. We must know that our steps are ordered by the Lord. May God help us in the great work of overcoming. He has crowns for those that overcome. He has white robes for the righteous. He has an eternal world of glory for those who seek for glory, honor, and immortality. Everyone who enters the City of God will enter it as a conqueror. He will not enter it as a condemned criminal, but as a son of God. And the welcome given to everyone who enters there will be, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ Matthew 25:34.”

**REACT**

1. What areas of your life can you change so you can feel a true kinship to Christ?
2. How much is heaven worth to you?

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Johnny was captivated by money and success. He read motivational books in pursuit of owning his own business. Within a five-year span, he became quite successful. As an entrepreneur, he received a plethora of accolades, and he enjoyed his own business. This young man was on his way to becoming one of America's richest CEOs. Yet he still attended church on a regular basis. However, his lifestyle was not what it should have been. Johnny subscribed to the ideas of “party hard” and “play hard.” His life was really a form of slavery, a life that Satan urges millions of young adults to live. Any success that omits God’s true presence is ultimately doomed for failure. How did Johnny break free from the bondage of Satan?

He accepted Jesus into his heart. When Johnny accepted Jesus, his whole life changed. Accepting Jesus into your life with a sincere heart is the only way to let go of the pleasures and fulfillment of this world and experience growth and transformation in Christ.

He formed new friendships. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Johnny became friends with true Christians. He surrounds himself with people who are aiming for heaven. They encourage each other daily as they journey upward. This doesn’t mean that they must turn their backs on all former associates. No. You are to share with them the life changes you have made and why you made them.

Johnny didn’t fake it by living a lie. He began attending Bible studies and spending quality time with Christian friends. As Christ grew inside of him, he realized that he was becoming dead to sin and living for Christ. “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:11, NKJV). Because God is all knowing, we can't fool Him. He knows our hearts. Pretending to be a Christian will not get you to heaven. Attending church once a week isn’t enough. We must live a Christlike life instead of the lies that Satan portrays.

**REACT**

1. Are you currently riding on Satan’s slave ship? If so, why?
2. How can God use you to lead someone to inherit the promise intended for him or her?

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Because God is all knowing, we can’t fool Him.
Reflect on that pivotal moment when you realized you were not in control of your life and that it was time to truly turn everything over to Jesus Christ. What were you doing? How did you feel? Accepting Him as your personal Savior and deciding that very moment that you were going to live for Him transformed you in more ways than one. Not only did you become a Christian, you became a child of God, an heir instead of a slave. You also accepted the promise of eternal life.

As a child of God, all pride must be set aside. We must be faithful to Him. This is not to say that we will never be tempted again. In fact, often people who accept Christ feel as if they are being tested more. It is in those moments that we must stand firm and pray to God for strength, courage, and wisdom to overcome the battle. Jesus never promised that the road to salvation would be easy; but He did promise to keep us, love us, lead us, and forgive us of all our sins.

**God will keep His promise, for He cannot tell a lie.**

Prior to becoming a child of God, one could be viewed as a slave to the sins of the world and living without purpose. However, once a person accepts Jesus Christ and decides to live for Him, that person becomes His heir. There is no reason for anyone to return to slavery once he or she experiences the goodness of the Lord. Regardless of any earthly riches a Christian might have, that Christian’s goal is to remain faithful to Christ, knowing that only what we do for Him will be of any lasting value. God will keep His promise, for He cannot tell a lie. He promises us eternal life, so as His heirs, let us remain faithful and claim our inheritance provided for us through His Son’s sacrifice.

**REACT**

1. What, if anything, can we do to ensure we are living a righteous life?
2. How can pride interfere with one’s salvation?
3. In addition to eternal life, what are some of the other promises Jesus has given us? Which of these promises would you like to claim today?
CONCLUDE
The Bible often refers to our role in relationship to God as “heirs.” Whether taking over a business or a political empire, an heir has both rights and responsibilities. Chief among these responsibilities is the responsibility that comes with freedom—the responsibility to avoid entangling alliances and debts. We can enjoy life as heirs of God’s kingdom if we accept the freedom from sin that Christ has made possible when He paid our debts on the cross.

CONSIDER
- Writing an imaginary letter from God to yourself, explaining the meaning of the inheritance He has provided for you.
- Comparing/contrasting the inheritance you might expect to receive from your earthly parents with the one your heavenly Father has prepared.
- Listening to “I Am Free” by the Newsboys, and/or “Live Out Loud” by Steven Curtis Chapman. Then make a list of things you are free to do, since Jesus has set you free (John 8:36).
- Reading the first few chapters of The Prince and the Pauper, by Mark Twain. What are some of the things in your life that seem ridiculous or inconsequential if you think of yourself as a prince or princess rather than a pauper?
- Researching some famous heirs—including some who abdicated or squandered their position. (For example, Ivanka Trump, Huntington Hartford, Paris Hilton, England’s Edward VIII, etc.) What can you apply to your spiritual life from their experiences?
- Designing a coronation outfit for an “heir of the kingdom”—à la “the armor of God” (Eph. 6:10–18).
- Interviewing three or four elderly people. Ask them what they might have inherited from their parents—or left to their children—and how that affected their lives.

CONNECT
Sons and Daughters of God, chap. 1.
The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 594, “Heir of the Kingdom”; no. 468, “A Child of the King”; no. 464, “When I Can Read My Title Clear.”
Scott Bessenecker, How to Inherit the Earth: Submitting Ourselves to a Servant Savior.
Paul’s Pastoral

Appeal

“Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are” (Gal. 4:12, NRSV).
Introduction
Within the Love of a Leader

Change. It can be asked of us, brought upon us, and even desired by us. We perceive that there are many positive and negative connotations toward changes in our lives. However, without accountability, positive change may be difficult to achieve. Have you ever become frustrated by a friend or family member who called you out for doing something wrong—maybe for a distasteful habit, or perhaps for following the crowd when they were headed in the wrong direction? Do you have friends who have left the church because they were asked in a nonloving way to change?

Do you have friends who have left the church because they were asked in a nonloving way to change?

You can probably sympathize with the churches Paul reproves in Galatians, but the difference is how he talks to them. He feels his responsibility as their spiritual parent and realizes it is important to show them that they need to pay attention to how they are conducting themselves spiritually, who is persuading them, and for what cause. At one point, he even asks them, “What has happened to all your joy? . . . Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Gal. 4:15, 16, NIV).

Finding the humility to listen to someone who is pointing out our errors becomes a bit easier when that person comes to us with love and patience. However, the changes we are faced with are often hard to put into practice. It is easy to do what feels natural or most comfortable when it comes to our spirituality. However, it is important to remember that as Christians we are called to work against the natural flow of this world and against the way Satan has tried to lead us. What made it so important for Paul to talk with the churches in Galatia in such a blunt manner concerning their acceptance of a perverted gospel? His love for them as their spiritual parent is clearly revealed in Galatians 4:12–20, and his dedication to pure words and the example of Christ is plain.

Like Paul, God calls us to be His sons and daughters. Like Paul, we can oppose those who preach another gospel. Like Paul, we can follow the pattern of Jesus, and thereby show love and patience with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Do not be ashamed of setting the example by placing within your heart the pure words of Christ. Begin today.

Aimee S. Burchard, Lookout Mountain, Georgia, U.S.A.
Being a Witness to All People (1 Cor. 9:19–23)

In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Paul presents his strategy for leading people to Christ. When he was with the Jews, he lived as a Jew. Likewise, when he was with the Gentiles, he lived as a Gentile. Naturally, for Christians, some questions arise here. Aren’t we supposed to be a light on a hill that shines in the darkness? Doesn’t God call us to be a peculiar people? Some people may think that Paul is saying that we should compromise Christian standards in order to befriend unbelievers. They might think that it is all right for us to bring our standards down to those we are associating with so that we can relate to them. Is that what Paul is really saying here?

When Paul says he lives like the Jews or the Gentiles in an effort to show Christ, he does not mean that we should compromise Christ’s standards. What he does mean is that he looks for beliefs, ideas, or values that he shares with both Jews and Gentiles. Then from these, he builds a relationship with them and leads them to Christ. He is saying that he does not come to strangers and immediately start telling them that everything they are doing is wrong and proving to them that he is right. Rather, he finds common ground, builds trust and friendship, and then leads them to the Savior.

The Christian Struggle (2 Cor. 4:7–12)

In 2 Corinthians 4:7–12, Paul presents the Christian life as a struggle, a constant battle between good and evil. In verse 7, he states that our mortal bodies reflect the glory of God, showing that our accomplishments and victories belong to Christ and are not products of our own efforts. In this world of sin we will be tempted. We will fall, but Christ will be there to pick us up. This set of verses also implies that there will be more than a spiritual struggle. There will be people who hate and persecute us because of our belief in Christ. We will be slighted and mocked because of our values and standards, which are so different from the world’s values and standards. This is how we share in the death of Christ. This is so that the love of Jesus can be seen in our lives; and, in the end, we will receive eternal life.

Paul’s Concern for the Galatians (Gal. 4:12–20)

Paul has just shared some strong words and ideas with the Galatians.
False teachers with strange ideas were trying to lead them away from Christ. He tells the Galatians that he cares about them and doesn’t want them to be led astray. Then, out of desperation, he tells them the truth in a plain and open manner.

Sometimes as Christians we find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of explaining to someone that he or she is doing or believing something wrong. In Paul’s case, he wrote a letter to them because he couldn’t be with them at the time. Parts of his letter were strong and appeared to be unfeeling. In Galatians 4:12–20, he begs them to remember that they were once close friends and that he cares about them a great deal. He apologizes for being so forward, but says that the situation calls for substantial action. The most important thing here is that Paul already had a relationship with these believers. He was their friend and leader. The Galatians weren’t a random group of people he heard about, and he decided to write to them to straighten them out. When we find it necessary to confront people, we should first establish a relationship with them. We should be a person whom they love and respect. And we should tell them the truth with love and genuine concern for their salvation. We are not to spend time finger pointing and exposing the faults of others. However, there are times when the truth must be spoken to place the straying feet of a fellow believer back on the right path. These corrections should always be spoken with tact and love.

A Christian Example (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17)

In the two verses for this section, it might seem as if Paul is a little conceited. However, what he is really saying is that he follows God so closely that Christ’s image is being reflected in him. Many people are looking for someone to follow, someone after whom they can pattern their lives. Many people look to emulate politicians, movie stars, singers, or business men and women. They are searching for a good example to follow. Some people look to Christians to see what Christ is like. If they see no difference between those who profess Christ and those who don’t, then why should they become Christians? We should strive to reflect the image of God so when people look at us they are also seeing Christ.

REACT

1. What boundaries should you have when befriending people to lead them to Christ?
2. If someone you are befriending doesn’t accept Christ, should you stop seeing them? Explain your answer.
3. Are you suffering for Christ in your everyday life? What does your answer say about your relationship with Jesus?
4. What can you do to reach people you know who aren’t coming to church anymore?

Sarah White, Ooltewah, Tennessee, U.S.A.
“In his letter to the Galatian believers Paul briefly reviewed the leading incidents connected with his own conversion and early Christian experience. By this means he sought to show that it was through a special manifestation of divine power that he had been led to see and grasp the great truths of the gospel. It was through instruction received from God Himself that Paul was led to warn and admonish the Galatians in so solemn and positive a manner.”¹ “Those who heard him knew that he had been with Jesus. Endued with power from on high, he was able to compare spiritual things with spiritual and to tear down the strongholds of Satan.”²

“The apostle urged the Galatians to leave the false guides by whom they had been misled, and to return to the faith that had been accompanied by unmistakable evidences of divine approval. The men who had attempted to lead them from their belief in the gospel were hypocrites, unholy in heart and corrupt in life. Their religion was made up of a round of ceremonies, through the performance of which they expected to gain the favor of God. They had no desire for a gospel that called for obedience to the word.”³

“How different from Paul’s manner of writing to the Corinthian church was the course he pursued toward the Galatians! The former he rebuked with caution and tenderness, the latter with words of unsparing reproof.”⁴ “The situation was critical. The evils that had been introduced threatened speedily to destroy the Galatian churches.”⁵ “He wrote, not in hesitancy and doubt, but with the assurance of settled conviction and absolute knowledge. He clearly outlined the difference between being taught by man and receiving instruction direct from Christ.”⁶

“An important lesson for every minister of Christ to learn is that of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. . . . To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God.”⁷

2. Ibid., p. 208.
3. Ibid., p. 386.
4. Ibid., p. 385.
5. Ibid., p. 383.
6. Ibid., p. 386.
7. Ibid., pp. 385, 386.
The book of Galatians is an impassioned appeal. Paul sees the people he loves and of whom he has said, “That, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me” (Gal. 4:15, NKJV) falling into the deadly trap of righteousness by works.

The Galatians gladly received the good news from Paul in the beginning, but soon turned aside from what they had learned. Paul immediately sent a loving rebuke by saying that if he “or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8, NKJV).

He appeals to them in a way that he knows they will understand. He explains that Abraham worked in order to have Ishmael, and thus God told him to send Ishmael away. The promise was for Isaac. Isaac was a gift, and Abraham had no more chance of producing him on his own than we have of producing righteousness on our own.

Paul urges the Galatians to understand that it isn’t about their works; it’s about Christ’s righteousness. He clearly balances faith and works in one verse: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

In this verse Paul answers the burning question in the heart of the Galatians: how can they please God? Christ would live in them, because their works meant nothing since “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6, NIV). Righteousness is literally “an attribute of God” and is “exhibited in the death of Christ.”* Given this definition, it is easy to understand that good works can never produce righteousness. Good works can be produced only by Christ living in us. Paul’s words were not just to the Galatians. They were given to us too. We know this because “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NRSV).

**REACT**

1. Think of a practical application of having Christ live in us.
2. Is there still a danger of satanic angels appearing like heavenly angels leading us the wrong way? If so, what should our defense be?

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Dot-to-dot puzzles and color-by-number pictures were favorites of mine as a child. If I followed the pattern, an image appeared. Paul urged new Christians to “live according to the pattern we gave you” (Phil. 3:17, NIV). To the young church, Paul was the pattern of a Christian, because he had patterned himself after Christ. Paul’s advice wasn’t just for Bible-time churches alone. We, too, are to “live according to the pattern.” Here’s how we can do so:

**God has an unfailing eraser called grace.**

*See the puzzle.* To complete a jigsaw puzzle, you have to first see a complete picture of it. For Christians, we must first recognize that there are truths we have yet to uncover, lessons we have yet to learn, and so much that God longs to show us. If we ignore this fact, toss the paper away as it were, the puzzle goes uncompleted. We must be willing to let God help us to see new truths, no matter how difficult or confusing they may seem at first glance.

*Check the key.* Without a key to a color-by-number picture, it would be difficult to paint the picture. Likewise, God has given us a “key”—the Bible. In it, He gives us everything we need to know.

*Ask for help.* As a child, I didn’t always know what the letters g-r-e-e-n spelled, or what number came after 53, but I never hesitated to turn to my mother and ask. Christians, too, should be childlike in this manner. Never hesitate to ask God what you need to know. Sometimes His pattern may seem unclear or may be muddled by other believers. But when, with a childlike trust, we ask God for help, He will never let us down.

*Link the dots.* Just as you linked the dots as a child, now follow the biblical directions for your life. Yes, we all make mistakes—sometimes dot two might get connected to dot four—but God has an unfailing eraser called grace. He will always forgive, and with His help, the result will be a beautiful life that clearly portrays Him.

**REACT**

1. What are some of the “puzzles” in your life that can be solved by studying God’s Word?
2. What role do spiritual mentors and fellow Christians play in helping you re-create Christ’s pattern?
3. Is our “picture” ever complete? Where does witnessing to others come into play?

_Amanda Ernst, Charlotte, North Carolina, U.S.A._
Paul could speak as he did to the Galatians, because of the personal relationship he had with Christ. In order to be able to share Christ with others, we must personally know who it is we want to share. It takes an intimate knowledge of God for Him to become real to us. Spend uninterrupted time at the beginning and end of your day to pray, study, and invite His presence into your life. Kaye Johns wrote, “I did not understand that I could have a personal relationship with the Lord, until I was 46 years old. I would not have experienced it then, if I had not finally begun to have a regular quiet time that included prayer and devotional Bible reading. Without consistent time spent with the Lord, it is impossible to have a relationship of any depth with Him. And without an in-depth relationship, we cannot have the powerful, effective prayer life that most of us would like to experience.”

As you spend time praying and studying the Bible, you will be able to settle in your mind what you believe. You might study such topics as, When Jesus comes again, where will I be? How will He come? How can I know an antichrist? Why does it matter on which day I worship? What is Jesus really like?

Look for answers in the Bible to life’s questions. Do you know what the Bible teaches about death? Does God care when you are discouraged?

Take notes on what you learn, and share with others what you learn. The more you study, the easier it will be to share these ideas.

As you draw closer to Jesus, you will feel in your heart a stirring to share Him with others. Do so at every opportunity you get! Speak of Jesus. Live like Jesus. Pray with others. The more you share, the easier and more natural it will become.

**REACT**

1. What topic(s) can you study that will help you to know God intimately?
2. What can you do to make prayer more interesting?
3. If people ask what your church believes, what would you tell them?
4. What does how you live and treat people show others about your relationship with Christ?

* Kaye Johns, “Can We Have a Personal Relationship With the Lord?” http://www.learntopray.org/print_materials/messages/d2/d2-1.htm (accessed August 5, 2010).
CONCLUDE

Sometimes a loving pastor or friend calls on us to make a difficult change in the way we act. At other times, God calls us to alert a friend to a dangerous path. Paul begs us in Ephesians 4:2 to “be patient, bearing with one another in love” (NIV). When confronting someone we love about God’s truth, a personal relationship with Jesus ranks as our strongest aid. New truths often reveal our mistakes, but Paul states in Ephesians 4:7 that “to each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” Remember, you have God’s gift of grace.

CONSIDER

- Listing and discussing with a friend three ways you can be more patient in your job or schooling this week, thereby reflecting God’s character to your coworkers, classmates, and friends. Then act on them!
- Going to a nature trail or park to find an object lesson in nature that demonstrates gentleness and humility. Share what you found with someone you know.
- Thinking of someone in the Bible who exemplified the character of change, then write and perform a short skit about a time in that person’s life when his or her character shone through.
- Baking something for your neighbors and include a Bible verse about God’s desire to change our hearts. If they ask you why you’re doing this, strike up a conversation about how God has changed you.
- Picking one thing this week to change in your routine, for example, limiting Internet and TV time. Share with someone how this change influenced your relationship with God.
- Demonstrating with an equation or experiment how the slightest change can make a drastic effect on the summation of your calculations. Discuss with a group, such as your Sabbath School class, the implications of changing the figures or elements of your process.

CONNECT

Ephesians 4:1–16; 2 Timothy 1:8–4:8; Titus 3.
The Two
Covenants

“The Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother”

(Gal. 4:26, NIV).
Zach’s head goes under water, then emerges again. He gulps for air before the next wave hits him. He struggles and gasps. No matter how hard he swims, he can’t make it to shore. It takes all his energy and determination to keep from drowning, but he is fast running out of both. He can barely keep his head above water long enough to yell for help before he is once more engulfed by the waves.

Is Zach’s situation helpless? Can he save himself? How long can he fight against the waves that continually hit him before they overcome him? Zach is swimming and flailing his arms and yelling for help, but none of that will help him.

The great part of this story is that not only is help on its way, but a life preserver has already been tossed into the raging sea right beside him! The bottom line, however, is that Zach has to believe that the life preserver can save him! Only then will he take hold of it and stop fighting against the waves.

This is not a lifeguard lesson. It is a lesson on grace! If I do not believe that grace will save me, then I will drown in sin, either in my own self-righteousness or, after I grow tired of trying to live a godly life, in the ways of the world. Either way, I will not have peace, and I will not have a saving relationship with Jesus.

The point of grace is that it saves us because we cannot save ourselves. As a Christian swimmer, I can take lessons from all the right teachers and can perfect all the right strokes; but none of that will save me. It is only when I let Jesus take me out of the water and place me in a new covenant, a new way of living my life based on His promises, that I will be able to fully breathe His life-giving air, bathe in His light, and know God, the God of love.

It is this God who has provided a way when there was no way, who sent the One next to His heart to take my place on death row so that I can take Christ’s place, enthroned with Him on God’s holy mountain.

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Cheryl Woolsey Des Jarlais, Ronan, Montana, U.S.A.
In the Old Testament, the word *covenant* comes from the Hebrew *berith*, which implies the cutting of flesh. In Genesis 15:9–18, God instructs Abram to take various animals, cut them in half, and place the halves opposite each other. When darkness came, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between the pieces. The furnace and lamp represented God’s presence, and by passing between the divided carcasses, God signified that He was making a covenant with Abram.* God was following the custom that when a covenant was made, the individuals involved would cut animals in two and pass between the pieces. By doing so, they were stating that if they broke their promise, they, too, should be cut in half. Thus God spoke Abram’s language to assure him that His promises were everlasting.

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**The law they had promised to keep lay shattered in the sands of the desert.**

The covenant God made with Abram was to be passed on to his descendants. However, after 400 years in slavery, God’s promises, His character, and the plan of salvation glimpsed by Abraham, was all but lost to the Israelites. After years of bending to the will of pharaohs, the Israelites’ understanding of God’s law was so narrow that they thought they could keep it (see Exodus 19:5–7). But it wasn’t long before they created a golden calf to worship instead of the Lord, and the law they had promised to keep lay shattered in the sands of the desert.

Galatians 4 is key to understanding the two covenants. When Abraham tried to help God keep His promise, Ishmael was born to a slave; but when God provided the promised heir in His own way, Isaac was born in freedom. God’s new covenant means His law is written on our hearts. We can accept His promise of a saving relationship by faith, believing that He will do as He has promised, and then live in the freedom as a true son or daughter of God. Or we can remain shackled with our own human inability to make God’s promises come true, as did the Israelites in the desert. They could have been free, yet they still thought and lived as slaves.

**REACT**

1. What kind of promises do we often make to God?
2. When we do make these promises, what is our only hope of keeping them?

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Heather Holloway, Ronan, Montana, U.S.A.
The Old Covenant (Gen. 3:15; Exod. 19:3–6; 24:3–8)

The old covenant was based on the law. God gave the Israelites the law and promised to be their God and make them His “special treasure” and “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5, 6, NKJV). The Israelites agreed to do all that God commanded when they were first told of the covenant, and again later when the covenant was confirmed. But even though this covenant was based on law, it was grounded in grace. Along with the law, God gave Israel the sanctuary and the sacrificial system, which pointed toward the time when His promise about the woman’s Seed crushing the serpent’s head would be fulfilled (Gen. 3:15).

We rest in a promise.

Humanity Weakened (Exod. 19:3–6; Rom. 5:12–20)

Every person born since Adam and Eve sinned has been a sinner and faces a sinner’s death. God’s law demonstrates just how much sin reigns in our hearts. Yet there is hope, for “where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Rom. 5:20, NIV).

Some people believe that God’s laws were not known until Sinai. However, God’s ways were nothing new. God introduced the Sabbath immediately after He created the world. Cain was afraid for his own life after killing his brother. Ham’s descendants were cursed because he did not honor his father; and Joseph fled from the temptation to commit adultery. Before the Israelites were ever brought to Mount Sinai, a distinction had been made between sin and righteousness. But the Israelites had been slaves in a pagan land and had forgotten the ways of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God needed to impress on them the weakness of humanity and their need of a Savior.

Law and Earthly Sacrifice Unable to Cleanse From Sin (Heb. 10:8, 9)

If we could be saved through our works, there would have been no need for the law or the sacrificial system, which pointed to Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The law is a “shadow of the good things that are coming” (Heb. 10:1, NIV), but it could not save in Moses’ time, and it cannot save now. It’s the same with the sacrifices made in the earthly sanctuary. If an animal sacrifice could really make the people perfect, then there would have been no need for Jesus’ sacrifice. But “‘sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings [God] did not desire’” (Heb. 10:8, NIV). So Jesus came
to earth to do His Father’s will (Heb. 10:9). Jesus was sent to do what the law and sacrifices were too weak to do.

**The Difference Between Old and New (Isa. 53:12; Jer. 31:33; Rom. 5:16; Heb. 8:7–13)**

A new covenant was needed in the Old Testament. This covenant was mentioned in Jeremiah, and repeated again in Hebrews. The Israelites did not follow all that God had commanded them, so God promised, “‘I will put my law in their minds / and write it on their hearts. / I will be their God, / and they will be my people’ ” (Jer. 31:33, NIV). Throughout both the New and Old Testaments, however, Jesus’ sacrifice remained constant. The Old Testament pointed toward Jesus’ work on our behalf. In the New Testament, He fulfilled the promise made from the time of Adam’s fall to deliver us from our sins (see Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb whose blood atones for sins. Paul declares in Romans 5:16, “The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification” (NIV). The new covenant is an elaboration on the theme of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. We come to understand that because of Jesus’ death on the cross, “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, NKJV).

**Children of the Old and New Covenants (2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 4:21–31; Heb. 7:17–22)**

God has always been a God of promise. When He made a covenant with Abraham that he would have descendants like the stars, He promised something that was impossible for Abraham and his wife to accomplish on their own, something that was possible only through godly intervention. God did not need Abraham to take Hagar as a wife to fulfill this promise. But because Abraham did have a child apart from God’s promise, we have an illustration of the problems that arise when we attempt to save ourselves through our own means.

Ishmael was the son of a slave; and although he became great, he was not heir to the promise. Isaac was the promised child, so he was heir to the promise. He represented the promise of salvation that could not be gained by anything a person could do. Jesus was also a promised child, born apart from human will and power. He was promised to Israel to redeem them and bring them into a new kingdom. He was born to become the Priest of the new covenant. When we trust Him, we will experience the fulfillment of all of God’s promises (Heb. 7:17, 21, 22).

Through faith in God’s promise, we can each be children of Abraham and Sarah—children of the promise, free children. But this does not mean that we are free to do whatever we please. It does mean that we are free to follow God without guilt haunting us. We are free from the sin that entwines and entraps us. We are set free from trying to save ourselves. We rest in a promise. We are empowered to live a Christlike life. God says, “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ ” (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).
“As the Bible presents two laws, one changeless and eternal, the other provisional and temporary, so there are two covenants. The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden, when after the Fall there was given a divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. To all men this covenant offered pardon and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ. It also promised them eternal life on condition of fidelity to God’s law. Thus the patriarchs received the hope of salvation.

“**The patriarchs received the hope of salvation.**”

“This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ Genesis 22:18.”

“Though this covenant was made with Adam and renewed to Abraham, it could not be ratified until the death of Christ. It had existed by the promise of God since the first intimation of redemption had been given; it had been accepted by faith; yet when ratified by Christ, it is called a new covenant. The law of God was the basis of this covenant, which was simply an arrangement for bringing men again into harmony with the divine will, placing them where they could obey God’s law.

“Another compact—called in Scripture the ‘old’ covenant—was formed between God and Israel at Sinai, and was then ratified by the blood of a sacrifice. The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, and it is called the ‘second,’ or ‘new,’ covenant, because the blood by which it was sealed was shed after the blood of the first covenant. That the new covenant was valid in the days of Abraham is evident from the fact that it was then confirmed both by the promise and by the oath of God—the ‘two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie.’ Hebrews 6:18.”

**REACT**

1. If God’s “new” covenant of grace was first established with Adam and Eve after they sinned, why was it necessary for God to establish the “old” covenant?
2. Revelation 12:17 says that in the last days, God’s people will “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (NKJV). What does this verse mean for people living under God’s “new” covenant of grace?

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2. Ibid., pp. 370, 371.

Twyla Geraci, Belgrade, Montana, U.S.A.
When you purchase land in a neighborhood that has a covenant, you must agree to terms that limit what the land is used for, the size of your home, and so on. The covenant is beneficial to all parties because it keeps the neighborhood desirable, thereby protecting property values. It takes at least two people, each holding up their end, for a covenant to fulfill its purpose. When God created a covenant with the Hebrews, He promised forgiveness of sins, grace, blessings, salvation, and eternal life. We also have a part to play in this covenant. However, there is a difference between what the Hebrews believed they needed to do regarding the covenant and what we who currently keep the “new” covenant must do.

**The old covenant deals with the old you.**

*We must accept God’s grace.* As sinners, it is impossible for us to keep the covenant law. If our salvation depends upon our ability to never mess up, we would be lost (Rom. 3:21–24). Not only does the grace of God cleanse us from past sins, it also assists us in avoiding future sins. God’s grace is a gift we must accept. This acceptance is the work involved in keeping the new covenant.

*We must be faithful to God.* Martin Luther defined faith as “God’s work in us that changes us and gives new birth from God (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers.”* * The old covenant deals with the old you. The new covenant is a contract with a reborn you, who has God’s law written on your heart. Faith in God is more than just believing in Him. Faith also creates righteousness within us. Abraham had faith in God, and God credited it to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). And like grace, faith is also a gift from God (Eph. 2:8).

**REACT**

1. Why is it so important to understand that salvation is by faith and not by works?
2. How does faith work in us to change us and mold us into the image of Christ?

A professor walked into his classroom, opened a desk drawer, and pulled out a pencil. Sticking the pencil behind his ear, he walked to a stool in front of the classroom and sat down. The students whispered to each other. However, because their instructor did nothing more than sit there, they gradually grew silent. Then he asked them to write down what had just happened. As the students handed in their papers, the professor began to read each one. One student mentioned the professor’s clothes; another focused on the noises each of his actions made; a third’s observation seemed so different that the professor wondered if the individual really even saw what had happened! After reading all 50 papers, he realized he had 50 different viewpoints.

Why the college students wrote such different accounts about what happened could be due to a number of things: an argument they had just had, their personalities, learning styles, or where they were sitting in the room. In a similar fashion, how we view salvation and God’s covenant depends on a number of things: our personalities, past circumstances, worldviews that drill into our heads that nothing is free and that anything too good to be true, like salvation, probably is. Some of us, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, may view God’s gift of eternal life as something to be earned. Others, like King David and the apostle Paul, may understand that it is a gift and needs only to be accepted. However, our tunnel vision does not change what salvation really is!

The eternal covenant was established even before Creation (Eph. 1:4). It is first mentioned in Genesis, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned. God did not have to deliberate over a solution. He was ready to empty heaven of its greatest Treasure on our behalf. Even before Adam and Eve found out how their lives would change, the promise was given to them in Genesis 3:15. This is what we call the new covenant. We may have a tarnished understanding of what the covenant is, as did the Israelites just coming out of slavery. However, while our understanding of and relationship to the covenant may need a makeover, the “new covenant” is really quite old. Yet it is eternally fresh and just what we’ve always needed.

**REACT**

1. What makes it difficult for you to accept God’s gift of salvation?
2. What can you do to help yourself accept God’s gift of salvation?

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Kristi Rich, Bozeman, Montana, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

As sinners, we are condemned to death (Rom. 6:23, first half). However, God made a plan to save us. This plan is called the covenant. The old covenant was based on the law. By following the law, one could live in alignment with what God required. However, when Christ came and died, He transformed the old covenant into a new one that was based on grace and forgiveness. This new covenant is one that not only changes your present and future life on this earth, it gives you eternal life as well (Rom. 6:23, second half).

CONSIDER

- Writing a poem about how the covenant changed through the Bible. Use different references about the covenant, and end with the beautiful promise that the new covenant gives to us.
- Journaling about the impact of the new covenant on your Christian walk. When you learned to understand the new covenant, how did this change your view of Jesus?
- Creating a chart or diagram comparing the old covenant and the new covenant.
- Creating a play or role-playing activity to explain how the new covenant changes you into a new you. Consider sharing this with your Sabbath School class or Bible study group.
- Praying for the Lord to show you areas in your life that are not in accordance with His law. Pray that after those areas have been revealed, God will give you the strength to make any necessary changes, and that you can claim the promise of grace that the new covenant brings.
- Contacting someone who has a clear understanding of the covenants. Find a time to sit down with him or her and discuss how the new covenant has changed your life. Jot down some notes of ways that you can see the new covenant changing your life.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 8.
Freedom in Christ

“You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another” (Gal. 5:13, NRSV).
The scene is Egypt, around 1500 B.C. Pharaoh is at the zenith of his power; plus he has a multitude of Hebrew slaves who are making bricks to build two cities, where Egypt’s wealth will be stored in temples under the watchful eyes of the Egyptian gods.* Just imagine God’s chosen people groaning and crying out under their oppression (Exod. 2:23). Imagine the weight of their suffering as they yearn for freedom. When Moses urges Pharaoh to let God’s people go, Pharaoh drives the slaves even harder (Exod. 5:6–17), causing an Israelite foreman to criticize Moses. Immediately, Moses calls upon God to intervene. Thus, after a series of plagues showered upon the Egyptians, God miraculously leads His people to a new life of freedom.

The Israelites’ story is not unlike our story.

The Israelites’ story is not unlike our story. We are slaves to sin. As our taskmaster, the devil drives us hard. He works day and night to keep us enslaved. However, when we cry out to Christ for help, He gives us freedom. Through the Cross, He has become our Advocate who stands by our side. With His Holy Spirit living within us, we are able to break free from the enemy and win the battle between good and evil.

This week, we will study about the freedom we have in Christ. As we study each day’s lesson, we will discover what such freedom includes and if it has any limits. We will also learn how freedom in Christ is connected to God’s law. By Friday, we shall ideally have made several steps forward in our liberating relationship with our beloved Savior.


Mary Awuor, Mbita Point, Kenya
Liberty in Christ, Part 1 (Rom. 8:1–4)

The American patriot Patrick Henry once said, “Give me liberty or give me death!” Soldiers often fight to the death in order to protect their country’s freedom or to restore freedom if it has been lost. It is an unusual person who does not highly value freedom.

As Christians, however, there is a freedom we cannot obtain through our own efforts. This is the freedom from sin and its consequences, freedom from the despair, hopelessness, and eternal death that sin causes. In Romans 8:1–4, Paul tells the people and us today that such freedom is possible only through Christ Jesus. He writes to people who are chained to self-righteousness, who are trying at all times to please God through their own acts. As they cling to the letter of the law, they lose sight of the saving act God has done for them through Christ. Because of this blindness, they fail to use a gospel-centered approach when teaching others about Christ. They miss the true essence of Christianity, the essence of who God is and what He has done for us through Christ.

Do our lives exhibit the compassion Christ had for people?

“The good news of the gospel is that Christ came to condemn sin, not sinners (John 13:7; Rom. 8:3). To those who believe and accept the generous provisions of the gospel and who in faith commit themselves to lives of loving obedience, Christ offers justification and freedom [from condemnation].”

Liberty in Christ, Part 2 (1 Cor. 6:20)

Paul knew the dangers of misunderstanding the essence of freedom in Christ. He noticed that many Christians professed obedience to the law, but behaved toward their fellow humans in immoral, unloving ways. In 1 Corinthians 6:20, he reminds them that they have been bought with a special price—the blood of Jesus Christ. It is belief in Him that gives Christians freedom in the Spirit, freedom that allows us to be re-created anew into God’s image (Gen. 1:26). “Unless a person is experiencing this transforming union with Christ, he cannot claim freedom from condemnation.”

The Holy Spirit transforms us as we walk by faith. This process is called sanctification, and it frees us from the bondage of keeping the letter of
the law. It is for this reason that Paul affirms the importance of the new covenant—“not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6, NIV).

Instead of condemning the Jewish leaders in Christ’s day for their legalism, we should examine our own hearts to see if we are like them. Do we go to church each Sabbath, pay our tithe, and eat healthfully hoping that these behaviors will get us into heaven? Do our lives exhibit the compassion Christ had for people? Do we remember that love for Christ motivates us to obey Him?

**Liberty in Christ, Part 3 (Gal. 5:1–15)**

In Galatians 5:1–15, Paul addresses the danger of depending on the ceremonies of Judaism for salvation. He knew that most of the people who were criticizing him were Judaizers—men who taught that the newly converted Christians had to observe certain portions of the Mosaic law in order to be saved.

Paul was not against these laws. After all, they pointed to Christ. What the Galatian Christians needed to understand was that in keeping these laws in order to be saved “they were denying the very thing Christ had come to do for them and had deprived themselves of His merits. If they could, indeed, earn salvation, what need had they of Christ at all? His work on their behalf would become superfluous, for they had found a way to get right with God on their own behalf. If they could find justification outside of Christ, then they did not need Him. But Jesus had declared that no man could come unto the Father except by Him (John 14:6).” Obeying any law, even one of the Ten Commandments, in order to be saved, does not free a person. Rather, that person becomes a slave to the very law obeyed.

Paul’s instructions to the Galatians are, of course, for us as well. In order to escape the prison shackles of righteousness by works, we must stand guard over the freedom of Christ, or else our freedom in Him will be eroded, and we will become slaves to legalism. Always remember that only Christ can save.

**REACT**

1. Read Romans 13:8. Explain how the type of love spoken of in this verse relates to salvation and our freedom in Christ.

2. What philosophies blind people to the nature of God’s salvation and freedom in Christ?

3. In what ways does the spirit of the Judaizers exist in the church today?


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 976.
Freedom in Christ is only possible if we allow Him to transform us from within. None of us can claim to be free in Him if we have not accepted Him as our personal Savior. “Remissions of sins can be obtained only through the merits of Christ. To no man, to no body of men, is given power to free the soul from guilt.”

“‘The truth shall make you free;’ and Christ is the truth.”

“Among [Jesus’] hearers many were drawn to Him in faith, and to them He said, ‘If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’

“These words offended the Pharisees. The nation’s long subjection to a foreign yoke, they disregarded, and angrily exclaimed, ‘We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free?’ ” In this conversation, we see how the Pharisees thought they already had been liberated by virtue of being Abraham’s descendants.

“Jesus looked upon these men, the slaves of malice, whose thoughts were bent upon revenge, and sadly answered, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.’ They were in the worst kind of bondage,—ruled by the spirit of evil.”

That was then. How is it with us today? Can we say that we have been liberated? On what conditions do we receive complete liberty?

Ellen White observed, “In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. . . .

“The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. ‘The truth shall make you free,’ and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one’s self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is ‘the law of liberty.’ James 2:12.”

REACT

1. What must you do as an individual to protect your freedom in Christ?
2. How does spiritual liberty differ from civil liberty?
3. Do you think it is right for Christians to brag about their salvation and always say, “I’m saved! I’m saved!”?

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1. The Desire of Ages, p. 806.
2. Ibid., 466.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

Augenia M. Ndunge, Machakos, Kenya
The following quotes are what some famous people had to say about freedom. How does each quote define freedom? Why do you agree or disagree with each quote?

**Epictetus**—“Freedom is the right to live as we wish.”

**Alan Keyes**—“Freedom is first of all a responsibility before the God from whom we come.”

**Abraham Lincoln**—“Freedom is the last, best hope of earth.”

In 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul wrote that “the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (NIV).

As Christians, we are to seek opportunities which will help us understand what freedom in Christ is all about. Because we are sinful by nature, we are prone to sin itself. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the only remedy for our condition. We need to embrace God’s Word to the point where we experience total freedom in Christ. At times, we are all like the Galatian Christians, who were easily led astray by people who believed that in order to be saved one must keep the Mosaic law.

However, when “you allow the Lord to have complete control of your life, you suddenly discover a new-found liberty. Paul tells us where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. We are promised a freedom—freedom from worry, from anxiety, from fear, from doubt. Jesus is the one that gives us that liberty. But we must first allow him to be the Lord of our life. What happens is we keep on wanting to take back our old bondages. Instead of freedom in the Spirit, we look to our own weak and foolish nature for help. The results are predictable—we fall back in the same tracks as before. Instead of freedom, we find chains. Instead of deliverance, we find problems. Instead of joy, we discover fear. Instead of liberty, we return to captivity. Christ came to set us free. But we must first allow the Spirit to minister to us.”

**REACT**

1. What is the difference between freedom in Christ and legalism?
2. How can individual Christians avoid the trap of legalism, which enslaved the Galatians?
3. How can the church escape legalism? Explain your answer.

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Sin dominates our world. Immorality, addictions, anger, and strife infect much of society. That is why it is good to examine our lives and to invite the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts so we can experience freedom in Christ. Here are steps we can take for doing just that:

**F—Focus on Christ.** When we focus on His love for us rather than on our trials and hardships, it is much easier to experience freedom from anxiety, fear, and doubt.

**R—Remove the veil.** We cannot experience freedom in Christ as long as we are covered by the veil of legalism. True freedom comes only as we cast off this veil and accept Christ’s righteousness as our own. One commentator observes, “Whenever a person turns to Christ and finds in Him the end or fulfillment of the law, the Lord completely removes a veil from his heart. No longer is his spiritual perception impaired. He recognizes that the dispensation of grace has superseded the dispensation of the law. He is a new creation in Christ.”*

**E—Expel sin.** If Christ lives in our hearts, we are no longer slaves to sin. Instead, we are bold to share our faith, and Christ’s grace can transform us inwardly and outwardly.

**E—Enact a difference.** As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, we become new beings in Christ. The more we become like Him, the bigger the difference we can make in our part of the world.

**D—Develop in Spirit.** Freedom in Christ leads to spiritual growth and development. As such growth occurs, our relationships with God and with others improve.

**O—Overcome iniquity.** After becoming new creations in Christ, we have the necessary agencies to fight sin. Christ is a Winner. He is the Truth—and the truth sets us free.

**M—March forward.** When Christ reigns in our hearts, our motto becomes “Forward ever, backward never.”

**REACT**
How can you personally strengthen your faith so that you don’t lose hope before you can experience complete freedom in Christ?

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James Omondi, Nairobi, Kenya
I haven’t always been a Seventh-day Adventist. The few people I knew who were Adventists were regarded as “those people who couldn’t work on Saturday or even light a fire on that day.” They were also considered proud, and many of them drank and smoked. Basically, there was no difference between them and the Galatian Christians in Paul’s day. The Adventists I knew before I became one thought that “keeping” the Ten Commandments was enough. Likewise, the Galatian Christians thought that keeping the law of Moses would grant them salvation.

“Where does the difference come in? The answer is found in the death of Christ. He died for us the death of eternal separation from God. When we accept His death on our behalf and invite His Holy Spirit to live in our hearts, we become liberated Christians. Then it is our delight to tell others that He is the only One who is capable of and willing to liberate all who put their trust in Him.

In a commentary on Galatians, John Scott wrote, “This, then, is the gospel. It is not a general instruction about the Jesus of history, but a specific proclamation of Jesus Christ as crucified. . . . Sinners may be justified before God, and by God, not because of any works of their own, but because of the atoning work of Christ; not because of anything they have done or could do, but because of what Christ did once when He died.

“The gospel is not good advice to men, but good news about Christ; not an invitation to us to do anything, but a declaration of what God has done; not a demand, but an offer.”* This means that trusting in our own works and using the law as a tool for self-righteousness will not give us freedom in Christ. This is the point Paul wanted to get across to the Galatians. It is the point we are to understand today. It is my goal now as an Adventist in this generation. Let it be your goal also.

REACT
1. Consider your own salvation. What, if anything, is preventing you from experiencing full freedom in Christ?
2. What are the disadvantages of self-righteousness (legalism)?
3. How has Christ proved His worthiness as a Savior in your life?

CONCLUDE
True freedom is not about the physical context in which we find ourselves. We can be locked up in prison, constrained by a physical disability, limited by social pressures or cultural expectations, or restricted by our financial and social limitations. True freedom is an attitude of the mind. It is a gift from Jesus that we can all enjoy, wherever we are and whoever we are. When we understand our total freedom in Jesus, nothing and no one can ever take it away from us.

CONSIDER
- Listening to a piece of music that expresses what freedom means to you. Allow the music to inspire your movement as you thank God for the freedom you experience in your life.
- Exploring the Web site of Amnesty International (http://www.amnesty.org) to learn more about the experiences of prisoners of conscience. Follow one suggestion from the site to be part of making a difference to at least one of these prisoners.
- Writing a poem, parable, story, or word picture about the time when you first experienced spiritual freedom in your relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Making a scale of 0–10 and measuring how free you feel socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually. What would you need to do to experience greater freedom in each of these areas?
- Working together with a team from your church to create an interactive worship experience on the topic of freedom. Share this program with the prisoners at your nearest prison.
- Experiencing “imprisonment” by limiting your movement in some way for an hour or two. Reflect on how this changes your understanding of freedom.
- Creating a sculpture or tableau of objects that illustrates spiritual freedom.

CONNECT
Terry Waite, Footfalls in Memory: Reflections in Solitude (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Merlin Carothers, Prison to Praise (Published by author, 1970).
Living by the Spirit

“I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16, ESV).
In his book *An Enemy Called Average*, John Mason points out that the “measure of a man is not what he does in church but what he does in his everyday life.”¹ I remembered what a pastor said during one of his sermons, when he was talking about living a Christian life. He said, “We should be an Adventist not only on the seventh day, but on all seven days of the week.” How true this is, especially for those of us who are living now.

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**God gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us.**

How easy it can be to compromise with the world, to put aside God’s Word for a while, just so we can blend in and satisfy our own desires. It is easy to claim that we are Christians, but how do we react when we are faced with the troubles of everyday living, either when no one is looking or when we are with other people?

It may seem to be too hard, and it may even sound boring to live as true Christians every day. But that is what God calls us to do. It may be hard or even impossible to live every day without giving in to our sinful nature, but we do not have to do it ourselves. God gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us.

With the Holy Spirit guiding us, we will not fall prey to Satan’s temptations. The Holy Spirit will help us to be on guard so that we can direct our thoughts toward God, so that we can hear Him talking to us at school, at work, at church, or when we are relaxing with friends. Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy, but when we do follow Him, we can find real joy, peace, and eternal life. This week we will learn how we can overcome our sinful nature and have new lives, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us every day.

**REACT**

1. To walk in the Spirit means to “constantly think about Christ.”² What things do you find yourself thinking about during any given day? How many of your thoughts actually involve your Savior?

2. In what ways can being average be a hindrance to living the Christian life?

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Marq Wilson Bello, Quezon City, Philippines
The practice of living according to “the flesh” rather than according to “the Spirit” permeated the church even during Paul’s time. In their attempts to attain spiritual perfection, the Galatian Christians burdened themselves with their feeble efforts to keep the ceremonial laws of Moses in general and the law regarding circumcision in particular. In their attempts to gain merit for themselves by doing so, they separated themselves from God; and despite their devotion to the “works of the law,” their relationships with each other were horrendous (Gal. 5:15). Galatians 5:15 presents a “vivid metaphor that paints a picture of cannibalism. The Galatians were conducting themselves like wild, ravenous beasts. By word and deed they were preying upon one another. Activities such as gossip, slander, and sharp dealing are no doubt included.”*

No wonder then that Paul admonishes them to live by the Spirit. Instead of relying on their human efforts to attain righteousness through their works, they should submit to the wooing of the Holy Spirit. For when one is led by the Spirit, the desires of the flesh will no longer prevail. Love for God and for one another will abound. No longer will there be “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (Gal. 5:19–21, NASB) in the church. Instead, such attitudes and behaviors will be replaced by the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23, NASB). These will flourish in the life of a Spirit-filled Christian. With the Spirit, religiosity is replaced by spirituality.

The church today is not exempt from the problem of living “by the flesh.” We see members who are blind to God’s Holy Spirit because they have burdened themselves with rules and regulations. When we welcome the Holy Spirit into our hearts, our motivation to follow God’s law completely changes. His law is then written on our hearts, and we obey out of love.

**REACT**

1. What rules and regulations apart from the Ten Commandments do we sometimes focus on, thinking that doing so will assure us of salvation?
2. How can we invite the Spirit into our lives?

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*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, 1st ed., p. 980.*
The Greatest Commandment (Matt. 22:35–40)

In a conversation that Jesus had with a Pharisee, a person well versed in Jewish religious law, we learn the basic difference between living according to the flesh and living according to the Spirit. By quoting portions of the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:4, 5), Jesus taught him, and us, that there “must first be love in the heart before a person can, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, begin to observe the precepts of God’s law. . . . Obedience without love is as impossible as it is worthless. But where love is present a person will automatically set out to order his life in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His commandments.”¹

There are only three things that we will bring with us to eternity.

If we truly love God and our neighbor, we will want to keep His commandments. Rather than worrying about all we should not do, we will concentrate on what we can do to show our love for God and for others. That deep and personal relationship with Him should extend to those around us and help to prepare us to be heavenly neighbors.

There are only three things that we will bring with us to eternity: our relationship with Christ, our relationships with others around us, and our character. Our character should mirror the character of Christ. When we have a personal relationship with Him, others will see Him in us, and thereby be drawn to Him.

Jesus to the Rescue (Rom. 7:14–25)

Romans 7:14–25 is another passage that depicts the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. Here Paul describes “the relationship that exists between [God’s] law, the gospel and the person who has been awakened to earnest struggles against sin in preparation for salvation. Paul’s message is that, although the law may serve to precipitate and intensify the struggle, only the gospel of Jesus can bring victory and relief.”²

When we are living according to the flesh, God’s law will be nothing more than lists of what we should and should not do. His law will be a burden, because it is impossible to earn salvation.

However, if we focus on His great love for us, we will understand that all of us must depend totally on Him for our salvation. We cannot earn salvation by our good behavior. The other law that Paul refers to in verse 23 is the sin that is within us. This law mirrors our selfish being, which is...
constantly at war with God’s law of love. “This is our vulnerability to sin; it refers to every thing within us that is more loyal to our old way of selfish living than to God.”

Here we must ask ourselves the same question Paul asks, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (verse 24, NIV). His answer is “Jesus Christ” (verse 25). Only when we surrender our lives of flesh to Him, only as His Spirit lives in our hearts, will we be successful in prevailing against the sin that lives in us (see Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

Led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–24)

In Galatians 5:16–24, Paul once again contrasts life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. He again points out that salvation is not obtained by complying with Jewish rituals (verse 18). He continues by giving two lists. The first one (which is not exhaustive) contains activities and attitudes that are typical of life in the flesh (verses 19–21). The second list (verses 22, 23) describes the fruit of the Spirit, and, in essence, the character of Christ. If we are led by the Spirit, if Christ lives in us, we will develop this fruit (see John 15:4, 5).

Paul closes this section by stating that those who belong to Christ “have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (verse 24, NIV). This crucifixion involves the “decision to surrender the heart and will to Christ so that He may purge every wrong tendency from the life. This decision is to be reaffirmed every day, and as often during the day as temptations may arise. . . . God accepts this resolute decision of the will and proceeds with the heavenly work of transforming the life (Rom. 12:2) and conforming it to the likeness of Christ.”

REACT

1. Review Matthew 22:34–40. How do the Ten Commandments reflect the two laws Jesus cites in these verses?
2. As you review the fruit of the Spirit, consider which ones you need help with the most. Ask God to help you develop them.
3. Review the list of acts of the sinful nature. What other acts might you add to this list?
4. Which acts of the sinful nature are you struggling with? Ask God to help you overcome them.
5. Consider each fruit of the Spirit. What will each one look like in the life of a Christian?
6. How is a Christian who is living by the Spirit rather than “in the flesh” a better witness than any sermon?

2. Ibid., vol. 6, 1st ed., p. 554.
As we live by the Spirit as opposed to the flesh, we will learn that “Christianity is simply living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. We are to believe in, and live in, Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. We have faith in God when we believe His word; we trust and obey God when we keep His commandments; and we love God when we love His law. Believing a lie will not put any one of us in the way of being sanctified. Should all the ministers in the world tell us that we were safe in disobeying a single precept of the holy standard of righteousness, it would not lessen our obligations nor make our guilt less, if we reject a plain ‘Thou shalt’ or ‘Thou shalt not.’ We need not think that because our fathers did a certain way, and died happy, we may follow in their footsteps, and be accepted in rendering the same service, and doing the same works, that they did.

“Believing a lie will not put any one of us in the way of being sanctified.”

“We have more light than they had in their day; and if we would be accepted of God, we must be as faithful in obeying the light and walking in it as they were in receiving and obeying the light that God sent to them. We must accept and improve the light that shines upon our pathway as faithfully as they accepted and improved the light that fell upon their pathway in their generation. We shall be judged according to the light that shines into the soul-temple in our day; and if we follow the light, we shall be free men and women in Christ Jesus.”

“The life of the Christian is not all smooth. He has stern conflicts to meet. Severe temptations assail him. ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.’ The nearer we come to the close of this earth’s history, the more delusive and ensnaring will be the attacks of the enemy. His attacks will grow fiercer and more frequent. Those who resist light and truth will become more hardened and unimpressible, and more bitter against those who love God and keep His commandments.”

1. The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, March 25, 1902.
I’ve cried many times to God, asking for forgiveness and freedom. Each time I felt cleansed and ready to face temptations head on. But after a few weeks, or sometimes just days, I fell again. God, however, has taught me some things that help me to live more in the Spirit. Here are three of them:

Confess and admit (1 John 1:9). Only when you realize how desperate and broken you are will you realize how much you need a Savior. Remember that you can never overcome temptations on your own. You may try to stop doing evil, read your Bible every day, go to church, avoid certain friends, and focus on good things, but doing so will never solve the problem. This is because you’re relying on yourself—as if the answer to your problems is what you do rather than what Jesus has done for you and what He can do in you.

Deal with the root of your sins (Jer. 17:14). When you don’t deal with the root of your sins, they will continue to hurt you. Quite often the root of your sins grows in the soil of what happened to you in the past. Were you physically, verbally, or sexually abused as a child? Are you still hurt by what your parents did? Have you forgiven them? Surrender your anger to God. It’s the only way for wounds to heal. You will never fully experience God’s love and healing unless you’re willing to surrender these things to Him.

Never give up (Rom. 5:20, 21). For many people, living in the Spirit can be a struggle. That’s OK, because if sometimes you don’t work hard for your freedom, you won’t cherish it as much. So even if you fall, keep trying. Never give up. When your strength fails, God’s Holy Spirit living in you will fight with you and for you. The harder the struggle, the more power Jesus is going to give you to overcome!

**REACT**

What is the root of your sins? What do you need help with right now? Before this day is over, make plans with God to go through each of the three steps above, and vow to make each day a new day of life in the Spirit.
God blesses us with the gift of desire, but sin has twisted that gift so we often don’t desire Him. Synonyms of the word desire include want, crave, and covet. And more likely than not, we want, crave, or covet things that are not good for us, things that are of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. Often we want just the opposite of what God desires for us. Often we depend on our all-to-human feelings for selfish love and attention to satisfy our desires. Thus, we struggle and fail, because the devil’s only goal is to distract us from our relationship with Christ.

The devil is purposely doing everything he can do to bring us down.

Yet through our struggles, God’s strength can be shown. Our failure to live in the Spirit can remind us just how much we need to depend on our Savior, how much we need to pray, study, and meditate on His Word. When we do these things, God will help us to desire lives in accordance with His will—lives of obedience and of service to others. In Galatians 5:22–26, Paul urges us to live by the fruit of the Spirit, to crucify the flesh, to not be conceited, to not be envious, and to not provoke one another.

The devil is purposely doing everything he can do to bring us down. But in so much as we live by the Spirit, we are strengthened to overcome evil. “If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:8, 9, NRSV).

**REACT**

1. How can living in the Spirit draw people to Christ?
2. For every wrong feeling/attitude that you have, think of a fruit of the Spirit as its opposite. For example, if you are an impatient person, the opposite would be the fruit of patience. After you have a written list of three or four wrong feelings and their opposite fruit, pray over the list that God will help to prune out the bad fruit and help the good fruit to grow.
CONCLUDE
Only when we love Jesus with all of our hearts, souls, and minds can we truly live a life in the Spirit. Only then can we really obey God. Belonging to Christ requires daily commitment and intense focus. Constantly surrendering our lives to Him will help us to triumph over sin and to develop the fruit of the Spirit.

CONSIDER
- Reading Galatians 5:13–26 from at least three different Bible versions you haven’t used before. As you read, take notes on how each translation helps you to better understand each aspect of the Spirit-filled life.
- Listing each of the deeds of the flesh in one column and the fruit of the Spirit in another. After each deed of the flesh, write a consequence (for example: anger can result in the loss of friendship). Then after each fruit of the Spirit, write a consequence (for example: self-control can result in a healthier lifestyle and better relationships). Contrast the two lists, and ask yourself which one you want your life to be like. Pray that God will help you to develop His spiritual fruit.
- Observing people in your church who emulate the fruit of the Spirit, especially those fruit you feel you need to develop. Journal what they do, what they say, how they treat other people, and so on. How do they inspire you to develop these fruit?
- Praying a sunrise prayer for seven days, that God will help you to live a Spirit-filled life during that new day. At the end of the week, reflect on how the Spirit has helped you to grow the various fruit.
- Role-playing with a group of friends some of the fruit of the Spirit that all of you have difficulty developing. For example, role-play being kind to someone who is usually rude to you. Ideally, by acting out these behaviors, the Holy Spirit will help you to make them a part of your being.
- Researching three or four of your favorite fruits to eat to see what health benefits they provide. Then consider how God's spiritual fruit keeps us spiritually healthy. Also search the Web to see how kindness, love, joy, peace, and so on, can actually help us to be physically healthy, as well.

CONNECT
Ephesians 5:1–21; Colossians 3:1–17.

Frank A. Campbell, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
The Gospel and the Church

“As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10, ESV).
Decorations adorn store windows. Shoppers are laden with packages. Children are pointing out the toys and clothes they want their parents to purchase for them. People go to church, sing songs, buy gifts, and enjoy the festivities of the season, many restricting their giving to close friends and relatives, and perhaps their workmates. It's that time of year again when some people reflect on Christ's birth. But there are many others who have never heard the name of God. When we have the opportunity, or when we make the opportunity, do we feel a responsibility to tell someone about Jesus? And what do our actions tell people about the God we serve?

Should it be a matter of controversy as to the exact date of Jesus’ birth, or should we be concentrating on telling as many people as come across our paths that Jesus came and died and is coming again? He came to save us all; and He has gone to prepare a place for all who will accept His invitation. Should our concern be more for serving one another in love (Gal. 5:13), or does it not matter because we know that not everyone will be saved?

Christ came the first time as a baby. He was born in a smelly cow barn. As an adult, certain “church members” ridiculed Him. But He also astounded the church elders with His deep understanding of spiritual things. Eventually, they crucified Him. But, thank God, He rose again and will fulfill the promise of His second coming. He will redeem people of every race and religious persuasion who ultimately accept His salvation.

May Christ’s likeness and character be evident to all with whom we come in contact, especially during this holiday season. Let it not be manifest just because everyone is giving gifts to friends and family, but may we show the stranger, the less fortunate, the widows and the orphans, kindness in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

We're almost at the end of this world’s journey. What are we as church members commissioned to do? Let us do the work of Him who sends us while it is day, because the night comes when no one can work. Let us fulfill the gospel as set out in Galatians and draw all people to Him by our lives and our actions.

Carl Henry, Biloxi, Mississippi, U.S.A.
In Galatians 5:13–26, Paul calls us to lead a Spirit-led life. In Galatians 6:1–10, he writes that living and walking in the Spirit involves lovingly relating to fellow believers in the church.

**Forgiving and Restoring the Erring (Rom. 15:1, 2; 2 Cor. 2:5–8)**
Paul exhorts us to forgive, comfort, and affirm our love for the erring, and states that “we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak” (Rom. 15:1, NIV). In Galatians 6:1, he calls for the “spiritual” (pneumatikoi)—the only ones in a position to carry out the task—to restore (katartizo-) the fallen one. *Katartizo*-, which is used in Matthew 4:21 for mending nets, conveys the idea of restoring to a former condition a right relationship with God and His church.

The act of restoration must be done “in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1, ESV). Gentleness is also listed as part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). The “spiritual” restorer is advised to demonstrate a spirit of gentle humility, to “watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1, NIV). Elsewhere Paul warns, “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12, NIV). He knows that even the Spirit-led are not immune to temptation and are capable of falling. Therefore they should gently and compassionately deal with the fallen. If we remain mindful of our own susceptibility to temptation, we will be gentler with those who have erred. A constant consciousness of our own standing before God produces a consistent disposition of forgiveness toward others, making us more patient with, and more supportive of, those who fall into moral lapses.

In switching to the singular form skopon, rendered “considering” (KJV) and “watch” (NIV), Paul shifts the focus from the congregation at large (Gal. 6:1) to the individual believer (verse 2). While the restoration of those who have fallen is the task of all who are Spirit-led, the responsibility of “keeping an eye” (skopon) on the individual, as it relates to acknowledging weaknesses and susceptibilities, is not the role of the group, but the personal responsibility of each believer. It is a call for a humble self-examination of our frailties, which will prompt us to forgive and restore, rather than to condemn and ostracize those who fall.
Supporting the Burdened (John 13:34; James 2:18)

Paul exhorts us to “carry each other’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2, NIV). The word translated as “burdens” is from the Greek word *baros*, which denotes “oppressive suffering.” The immediate context suggests that these burdens are in the form of trials and temptations, and the guilt that results from having fallen into sin. However, they also could refer to any burdensome challenge faced by a fellow believer.

No one is exempt from the crushing burdens of life in a sinful environment. Whereas in Galatians 6:1 Paul admonishes one set of individuals, the “spiritual,” to restore another group, the fallen, here in verse 2 all believers are in the same category, and the call is for mutual support. It speaks of an interdependency that knows no spiritual or social stratification. We all have our oppressive burdens, and we need to support one another by helping to bear each other’s burdens. Paul states that by doing so we “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2, NIV). Here he reaffirms the assertion made in the preceding section that love for others is the centerpiece of the Spirit-led life: “The entire law is summed up in a single command ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Gal. 5:14, NIV). This mandate, referred to as the “royal law” (James 2:8, NIV), Paul describes as “the law of Christ,” because the law of Christ is the law of love. Not only did Christ assert that love for God and love for humankind constitute the core of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:37–40), but He gave a “new commandment” to His disciples: “ ‘Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another’ ” (John 13:34, NIV). When we love each other in this way, we will forgive and restore those who fall, and we will bear each other’s burdens.

Loving and Serving Everyone (Gal. 6:1–10)

Moving beyond his injunctions on how to relate to erring and burdened church members, Paul ends the section with the admonition to persist in living the love-infused, Spirit-filled life. As members of the church, it is our duty to demonstrate love by doing good to everyone, especially our fellow believers. We should not grow tired of doing so, even if we don’t presently see any positive results, as these will come in due time in the form of life eternal, as “the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:8, NIV).

REACT

1. How does one reconcile the call to bear each other’s burdens with the statement that each one should bear his or her own burdens (Gal. 6:5)?

2. Is the practice of dropping members from church fellowship consistent with the teaching of 2 Corinthians 2:5–8 and Galatians 6:1 regarding how to treat the erring? Explain your answer.

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Orlando Moncrieffe, Teaneck, New Jersey, U.S.A.
“The means in our possession may not seem to be sufficient for the work; but if we will move forward in faith, believing in the all-sufficient power of God, abundant resources will open before us. If the work be of God, He Himself will provide the means for its accomplishment. He will reward honest, simple reliance upon Him. The little that is wisely and economically used in the service of the Lord of heaven will increase in the very act of imparting. In the hand of Christ the small supply of food remained undiminished until the famished multitude were satisfied.”

“Liberality both in spiritual and in temporal things is taught in the lesson of seed sowing. The Lord says, ‘Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.’ Isa. 32:20. ‘This I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.’ 2 Cor. 9:6. To sow beside all waters means a continual imparting of God’s gifts. It means giving wherever the cause of God or the needs of humanity demand our aid. This will not tend to poverty. . . . The sower multiplies his seed by casting it away. So it is with those who are faithful in distributing God’s gifts. By imparting they increase their blessings. God has promised them a sufficiency that they may continue to give. ‘Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.’ Luke 6:38.

“And more than this is wrapped up in the sowing and the reaping. As we distribute God’s temporal blessings, the evidence of our love and sympathy awakens in the receiver gratitude and thanksgiving to God. The soil of the heart is prepared to receive the seeds of spiritual truth. And He who ministers seed to the sower will cause the seed to germinate and bear fruit unto eternal life.”

**REACT**

1. What lengths should we go to ensure that we sow “bountifully”?
2. What does faith have to do with seed sowing in the human context?
3. Wouldn’t it be easier to leave “seed sowing” to the Holy Spirit and not be frustrated that humans don’t accept our admonition? Explain your answer.

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Mark Henry, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, U.S.A.
“God has had one plan for the ultimate salvation of the world—a plan which was devised from the beginning of creation—and God has never deviated from it.”1 We are all prone to sin because of our nature, but we can all overcome because of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross for our sins.

Abraham is an example of faith in action.

When Paul founded the Galatian church, he didn’t leave the members unattended, but encouraged them by periodical visits as well as through letters. His mission was to bring the gospel to the non-Jewish populations of Europe and Asia. He did not require the Gentiles to become Jews, be circumcised, or follow certain rituals. Instead, he taught that salvation comes through faith in Christ only—faith being a necessary rite of passage from sinner to saint (Gal. 5:6). Because there was a squabble in the early church, people in this age, anticipating the return of Christ, may wonder if they’ve got it right; but Paul reminds us that the focus is always about being a new creature in Christ (Gal. 6:13–15).

God accepts all who come to Him by faith. Abraham is an example of faith in action. He left Ur, and by faith went to a land that he didn’t know anything about. Then God told him that he should look at the heavens and count the stars because “So shall your descendants be” (Gen. 15:5, NKJV), indicating that he and his wife would have offspring despite the fact that they were 100 and 90 years old respectively. However, Abraham “believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, NKJV).

Is the change that God can make in one’s life more important than what we expect from this world? Should we therefore ask God to transform our minds and our hearts? (Ezek. 36:26, 27; 2 Cor. 5:17, 19). We are “to make the religion of Jesus Christ so attractive that others will be drawn to surrender their lives to the Saviour. God’s church is now to be a blessing to the world.”2

REACT

1. Describe the proper relationship between rites and ceremonies regarding salvation.

2. In light of Paul’s attitude to nonbelievers compared with his attitude toward the Jews, what should our attitude be toward persons who are seeking a Christian community?

Galatians 2:20 presents quite a paradox. How can we be crucified in Christ, yet be alive? Is Christ living in a person the same as wearing His robe of righteousness? We don’t all wear the same size clothes, so really, how can Jesus’ jacket fit us all? Thankfully, it’s not a one-size-fits-all. Instead it’s something that has to be experienced by each individual person. So how can we help others to personally know God and experience His life-changing salvation?

**Anything we do, big or small, to enhance God’s kingdom, is valuable in His sight.**

*Prepare yourself.* Surrender all to Christ so that you can have a real-time relationship with Him through prayer, Bible study, meditation, and service. In the process, hone the talents He has given you by working diligently for Him.

*Use what you have at hand.* Many people crave privacy. This doesn’t make it easy to share “the gospel in Galatians.” Furthermore, people in general are suspect if they’re distributing literature door-to-door or if they want to share Christ with someone. In some countries, people might even go to jail for witnessing. In many such cases, we can use the technological advances that are literally at our fingertips (iPods, iPads, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to share our faith.

*Serve as Christ did.* We were created to do good works. We who have received the gift of salvation should be willing to share the good news with others by volunteering in our communities, being good neighbors, and being Christlike in our everyday dealings with others. Anything we do, big or small, to enhance God’s kingdom, is valuable in His sight.

*Let go and let God.* We need to accept Christ in His perfection and completeness and allow Him to refashion our lives into a beautiful message that tells the world, “Jesus is enough for you. Look what He has done for me!”

**REACT**

1. Why is being crucified in Christ so important to a successful, realistic, life-changing, soul-saving relationship with Him?

2. What practical steps can be taken to ensure this crucifixion is actualized?

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*Raina Simmonds, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies*
True obedience to the law of God is only possible when we have a relationship with Him. For this relationship to be meaningful, it has to be built on a foundation of faith. It is through faith that we can come to God, accept and believe in Him. It is by faith that we accept His existence, His creative power that called this world into being, and His redemptive power to transform our lives.

A cursory reading of Galatians 2:15, 16, could give the idea that keeping the law is not important. However, as one digs deeper, it becomes clear that Paul is teaching that salvation is not achieved by our efforts to strictly adhere to the law, neither is it possible by trying to do a host of good deeds to cancel out our sins. The Jews in Paul’s era added their own requirements (traditions) to the law and enforced them rigorously. They erred in that they emphasized righteousness by works rather than righteousness by faith in Jesus. Salvation is free. This means that there is nothing we can do to obtain righteousness.

We live in a world where we have to pay for almost everything. We give gifts mainly to people who are significant to us. We take a gift to a wedding mainly in return for having been invited to the ceremony. Hardly would we give a gift to a total stranger or to someone we don’t know well. If someone gives us something we did not earn or ask for, we wonder what the giver wants in return.

In order to be saved, we must accept God's grace and believe that salvation is made possible through the merits of Jesus. Our works do not count in this equation. What counts is Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Complete faith and trust in God means that we will unreservedly give all our plans to Him and allow Him to have total control of our lives. Then we will truly understand that without faith, righteousness is impossible.

**REACT**

What are some of the “faith things” that we do daily?
CONCLUDE
Paul’s testy conflict with the Galatian believers led him to write forcefully, even passionately, about the freedom that can be offered only through Christ’s righteousness. The deep divisions sowed by the false teachings of Jewish teachers must have left many of these believers scarred, to say nothing of its effect on prospective converts. The book of Galatians closes with a challenging call to Spirit-filled living, Christ-centered giving, and love-filled sharing. This week we have studied the high note of Paul’s letter. It is this: When we accept Christ’s righteousness, we walk in newness of life. We put away the deeds of the flesh, we love others, and we share with them the good news of salvation!

CONSIDER
• Finding a photo that depicts a diverse group of people. Select two people from the picture and think about how you would go about sharing the good news of salvation with them.
• Keeping a record of two things: (1) every act of kindness you do this week, and (2) each act of kindness you receive. Beside each act, write a single sentence that describes how you felt before and after the act occurred.
• Listening to biblical narrator Stephen Johnston’s reading of Luke 10, the passage in which Jesus sent out His disciples two by two to minister to the lost. You can find it at http://www.audio-bible.com.
• Creating a short, silent dramatic presentation based on Paul’s challenge to the Galatian believers found in Galatians 6:1.
• Inviting your neighbors to your home for dinner. Let them see you living the truth.
• Writing a short journal entry based on the meaning of Galatians 6:9 and how it can change your life.
• Identifying features in nature that marvelously restore themselves as the seasons change. If God believes in rebirth and restoration, why do we sometimes find it difficult to restore those who have fallen?

CONNECT

Dwain Esmond, Hedgesville, West Virginia, U.S.A.
Boasting in the Cross

“Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14, ESV).
Once upon a time and far away, there lived two men. One of them was affluent, full of pomp and pride. He was self-made, with a list of achievements as long as the grand hallway in his magnificent home. He loved sharing these accomplishments with any and all who would listen. This man also professed to be a Christian. He was sure he was headed straight up the highway to heaven. How could he be so sure? Well, he wouldn’t hesitate to inform you that he was baptized at the age of eight, had faithfully been paying his tithe for the past 35 years, gave generous offerings to the church coffer, wore Armani suits to church every Sabbath, ate only organic vegan foods, and kept the Sabbath faithfully with a long list of rites and rituals.

At this point you’ve probably lost interest in this pretentious man, so I will now tell you about the other one. He was as humble as the first was proud. He was a hard-working farmer, known by all to be kind, generous, and courteous. In all of his accomplishments and whenever he received praise, he was quick to respond, “It is only by God’s grace.” Like our pompous friend, this man also professed to be a Christian. However, if you were to ask him why, his answer would be quite simple. He would hang his head and confess, “I am but a pitiful sinner who deserves nothing but the cruelest death,” and then with a smile he would continue, “but God in His unfathomable grace and mercy sent His Son Jesus to pay the penalty for my sins so that someday I would be with Him in Paradise, and for this I shall be eternally grateful!”

Now which man do you suppose was more accurately living the Christianity taught by Scripture? The man living the pharisaical life of outward perfection, or the man whose life mirrored that of Paul’s in his simple obedience to Jesus’ teachings on love, and who confessed to his own sinfulness and the glory of his crucified Savior? More importantly, with which of these men do you most identify?

As you study this week’s lesson, reflect on your own attitudes toward yourself, your achievements, and your salvation. Remember that there is nothing in you worthy of the inestimable gift Christ has given. May you come to glory only in Christ and in Him crucified.

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Kriselle Dawson, Lae, Papua New Guinea
God goes to great lengths to show us the sinfulness of pride. When the people in the land of Shinar tried to build a city at Babel in defiance of God’s sovereignty, God showed that they could not successfully conspire against Him (Gen. 11:4, 9). When Nebuchadnezzar became so haughty that he worshiped himself, God humbled him to where he was on all fours eating grass (Dan. 4:28–33). When the king of Tyre boasted in his supposed self-sufficiency, making his heart “like the heart of God” (NASB) in the process, God declared that he and his city would be scraped off the face of the earth and that Tyre would never be rebuilt (Ezek. 26:4, 14; 28:6–8). Paul himself wrote that boasting was excluded (Rom. 3:27). So why does he tell us to boast in the cross?

[Boasting in the cross] is recognizing that Christ is everything.

The Greek word Paul used for “boasting” in Galatians 6:14 is kauchao-mai, which can also be translated as “glory,” “joy,” or “rejoice.” In Philippians 3:3, he uses the same word in this way: “We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (NASB; emphasis added).

Indeed, the Bible teaches us not to glorify ourselves; but boasting in the cross is the exact opposite of glorifying ourselves. It is recognizing that Christ is everything, and all our best efforts have about as much saving power as a dirty dishrag. It is rejoicing in the consummation of compassion at Calvary. It is living in the Spirit and leaving our fleshly sinfulness behind (Col. 2:11).

When we behold the cross, we behold the One whose love led Him to give up His life so that we could live forever in that love. As we look upon His battered brow, we are instantly aware of the fact that there is nothing in us worth bragging about. That’s the moment when we put no confidence in the flesh but glory in Christ Jesus. That’s when we truly boast in the cross.

REACT

God wants us to be humble, but He also wants us to be happy about who we are in Him (John 15:11). Describe the balanced self-concept God wants us to have.

The Cross Still Speaks (1 Cor. 2:2)

A few years ago, Christianity & Renewal—an evangelical magazine published in the United Kingdom—reported a marketing campaign formulated by Khameleon Advertising, aimed at enhancing the perceived relevance of the church. Their suggestion? Drop the cross. “We don’t think people want to be preached at, and we didn’t want traditional images like pictures of Jesus on a cross.”

The symbol of the cross has been abused, but there remains a good reason for displaying it. “For all the false and misleading associations that may surround it, [the cross] still says—even without the knowledge of the one displaying it—‘I am bought by the sufferings and death of Jesus and I belong to God. The divine conspiracy of which I am a part stands over human history in the form of a cross.’”

Such marketing suggestions like the one above are a long way from the focus of Paul’s life and mission: “I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross” (1 Cor. 2:2, NLT). The Cross is the center of the great controversy, the history of our world, the center of Christianity, and it should be the center of our lives.

The Centrality of the Cross (Gal. 6:11–18)

Other writers also have tried to describe the centrality of the Cross. “The Cross is the abyss of wonders, the centre of desires, the school of virtues, the house of wisdom, the throne of love, the theatre of joys and the place of sorrows; it is the root of happiness, and the gate of Heaven.” Then there is this from an Adventist writer: “The issue isn’t Christians, or churches, or councils, or creeds. The issue, instead and only, is the cross, the pivot point upon which human destiny hinges, the place where reality divided into two eternal options.” All such descriptions struggle to convey the preeminence of this event and its centrality to the Christian faith and practice.

At the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul took on this task again, seeking in any way possible to impress on these early believers the profound riches of the cross of Christ. His concluding remarks begin with an attention-getter. Not only does he write in big letters, he points out that he is writing in big letters for a reason (see Galatians 6:11). Perhaps it was the first-century equivalent of ALL CAPS in an online conversation, shouting in writing to get the reader’s attention and to drive home his point. At
a time when paper, vellum, or whatever it was that Paul was writing on would have been expensive, he wanted to make clear that he was not wasting paper. He wanted them to notice.5

In verses 12, 13, Paul continues by acknowledging the questionable motivations of those who had been suggesting that the Cross was not sufficient to assure salvation. Through his writings, Paul is always alert to those who would subvert the simplicity and assurance of the gospel, and the centrality of the Cross. Perhaps he reflected on his own days as a Pharisee and persecutor of Jesus’ followers, recognizing how easy it is to do wrong things for seemingly good reasons and how easily we can be distracted from the core of what following God should be about. Thus he asserts, “GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD BOAST EXCEPT IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST” (Gal. 6:14, NKJV). Compared to the boasts of his earlier religious experience—and remembering that this letter was written perhaps only a few years after his dramatic conversion—this statement shows the profound change he himself had experienced: “Because of that cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world’s interest in me is also long dead” (Gal. 6:14b, NLT). This was the same change he sought for those to whom he was writing: “What counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people” (Gal. 6:15, NLT).

Focusing on the cross of Christ should move us, inspire us, and motivate us—but most of all, it should change us. When we accept the centrality of Jesus’ sacrifice in the history of our world and the history of our lives, we become new people, with new visions and new missions.

And that’s Paul’s conclusion to his letter: “May God’s mercy and peace be upon all those who live by this principle. They are the new people of God” (Gal. 6:16, NLT).

REACT

1. Which of the quotations above, Bible and otherwise, is your favorite? Why?
2. How might you describe the importance of the Cross in your life in the style of one or another of the quotations above?
3. Typing in ALL CAPS in online conversations is considered bad etiquette, so do you think Paul is justified in “shouting” at his readers in these concluding verses? Why, or why not?
4. In what specific ways should focusing on the cross of Christ change us?

5. It should be noted here that some commentaries suggest that Paul wrote in all caps because his eyesight was poor or because he dictated his letters to a scribe and was therefore not used to writing so it was the best he could do.

Nathan Brown, Melbourne, Australia
“Hanging upon the cross Christ was the gospel. Now we have a mes-
sage, ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.’
Will not our church members keep their eyes fixed on a crucified and
risen Saviour, in whom their hopes of eternal life are centered? This is our
message, our argument, our doctrine, our warning to the impenitent, our
encouragement for the sorrowing, the hope for every believer. If we can
awaken an interest in men’s minds that will cause them to fix their eyes on
Christ, we may step aside, and ask them only to continue to fix their eyes
upon the Lamb of God. They thus receive their lesson. Whosoever will
come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
He whose eyes are fixed on Jesus will leave all. He will die to selfishness.
He will believe in all the Word of God, which is so gloriously and wonder-
fully exalted in Christ.

“The cross of Calvary . . . will finally vanquish every earthly and
hellish power.”

“As the sinner sees Jesus as He is, an all-compassionate Saviour, hope
and assurance take possession of his soul. The helpless soul is cast with-
out any reservation upon Jesus. None can bear away from the vision of
Christ Jesus crucified a lingering doubt. Unbelief is gone. . . .

“The cross of Calvary challenges, and will finally vanquish every earthly
and hellish power. In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence
goes forth. It is the great center of attraction; for on it Christ gave up His life
for the human race. This sacrifice was offered for the purpose of restoring
man to his original perfection. Yea, more, it was offered to give him an entire
transformation of character, making him more than a conqueror.

“Those who in the strength of Christ overcome the great enemy of God
and man, will occupy a position in the heavenly courts above angels who
have never fallen.

“Christ declares, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto
me.’ If the cross does not find an influence in its favor, it creates an influ-
ence. Through generation succeeding generation, the truth for this time is
revealed as present truth. Christ on the cross was the medium whereby
mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each
other. This is the means that is to move the world.”*

So you’ve done something great. Good for you! Step into the spotlight and let everyone see how wonderful you are. You aced an exam? Congratulations! Tell us about how hard you studied. You gave a generous donation to a charity? Well done! Let us throw compliments at your feet, accompanied by long-stemmed roses. You studied your Sabbath School lesson every week for a year? Great job! Wow us with your extensive Bible knowledge and spiritual insight.

Being in the spotlight feels good. But I have some bad news for you. It's not where God wants you to be. The apostle Paul, who had much more to brag about than you or I, put it this way: “The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is my only reason for bragging” (Gal. 6:14, NCV). We need to focus on the Cross rather than our achievements. But how do we do that?

Give God the glory in every situation. When you ace that exam or earn that scholarship or win that coveted place in a prestigious music school, accept compliments and congratulations from others humbly, reminding them that it was God who gave you those abilities and opportunities in the first place. Responses such as, “I’m so thankful that God blessed me with musical talent” or “I gave it to God and asked Him to open and close the right doors,” show others where the true credit for your success lies; and every time you remind someone else that God deserves the glory for your success, you’re reminding yourself as well.

Spend time at the foot of the cross. It’s easy to get swept up in our own self-importance and achievements. Before we know it, we’ve lost perspective. Regularly contemplating the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf and the sinless life He lived is a sure-fire way to put us back in our rightful place. Knowing that Jesus died because of our sins has a way of making our own achievements seem insignificant.

So go on, step out of the spotlight and show people what’s really worth bragging about—Christ crucified for you and me.

**REACT**

1. Why is Paul so outspoken against bragging? What are the potential short- and long-term implications of bragging about our own successes?

2. How would you respond to the popular notion that the only way to get ahead in life is to promote yourself at every opportunity?

Karen Collum, Brisbane, Australia
Many Christians emphasize how to “perform” your spiritual life. If you don’t go to prayer meeting and Sabbath services, tithe every week, participate in the church’s bake sales, and don’t want to grow up to be a pastor, people start to wonder if you have a spiritual life. There’s no harm in getting heavily involved in your church. However, we need to remember that our involvement isn’t something that saves us. This is the sort of thing Paul cautioned believers about in his letter to the Galatians.

Being a Christian is not about . . . doing things to “win points” with God.

Paul had visited Galatia during his second missionary journey, but after his departure, the Christians there were led astray by other people who espoused a “different gospel” (Gal. 1:6–9) which focused on salvation through obedience to the laws of Moses (legalism).

Paul’s problem with the people who brought this “different gospel” was fourfold: (1) they tried to force the Galatians to be circumcised; (2) they were motivated by fear; (3) they themselves did not keep the Mosaic laws; and (4) their goal was to flaunt.¹

Being a Christian is not about following a list of laws and doing things to “win points” with God. We can’t boast in anything we do and say it makes us better Christians than others. Good works are nice and following the law of Moses will keep you busy with trying to find clothes that aren’t a poly-cotton blend, but they won’t atone for our sins.

Isaiah wrote that no matter how good we feel about what we do, we’re all unclean, and our good acts are like “filthy rags” (64:6). Jesus is our only Savior, and the Holy Spirit will guide us in our lives if we let Him. Paul wrote, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14, NIV). Isaac Watts wrote the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” after meditating on this verse. The Cross reveals God’s love to everyone and gives us access to His redeeming grace. Indeed! “Love so amazing, so divine, / Demands my soul, my life, my all.”²

². The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, no. 154.

Adele Nash, Cooranbong, Australia
CONCLUDE
The Romans and Greeks considered the cross a symbol of shame and unspeakable horror, not to be discussed in polite society. Even in Christian circles today, the crudeness of the cross is traded for a refined Christianity, centered in hopes of a profitable life on earth as a reward for choosing Christ. Yet, true Christianity is completely different from any other religion. Whether it be Buddhism or Hinduism, Islam or Judaism, it’s all about trying to achieve perfection through one’s own ability. However, for the true convert to Christ, there is no glory in human success, because, as we behold the Christ of Calvary, every confidence we hold in our own achievements falls away. Like Paul, we realize that we can glory only in the Cross. Why? Because in fixing our eyes on the Cross, we understand that our sins drove a God of grace and love to engage in the ultimate act of disgrace in order to save us. The Cross helps us to realize how needy we are and how little the world really has to offer us. In the shadow of Jesus’ cross, we find ourselves encompassed by His love that continually transforms us. This is the view we always need to find ourselves coming back to, lest we lose our perspective.

CONSIDER
- Reading through the words of the song “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (no. 154 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal). Hum the tune to yourself, and let the words fill your mind throughout the week. What verse speaks most to you?
- Recording in your journal the feelings you have about yourself and your salvation. As you list your achievements, consider whether they give you confidence and assurance regarding your standing with God and your salvation.
- Making a list of things people might use to justify their acceptance of God and their readiness to face Him. What personal achievements do Christians use to replace the prominence of the Cross in their lives? Think about how that perspective changes from our early experience in our salvation.
- Drawing a picture that depicts Paul’s testimony in Galatians 6:14. Put yourself in Paul’s place, illustrating how you see yourself in light of the Cross.

CONNECT
Ty Gibson, Shades of Grace: Exploring the Depths of God’s Healing Love, chap. 8, “From Whom We Avert Our Eyes.”
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Ty Gibson

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If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for first quarter 2012, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 The Triune God

Logos: Gen. 1:26, 27; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; John 14–16; Phil. 2:6.

Memory Text: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20, 21, NKJV).

Key Thought: Scripture contains references and hints to the deity and unity of the divine Godhead.

Though the word Trinity itself doesn’t appear in the Bible, the teaching definitely does. The doctrine of the Trinity, that God is One and composed of Three “Persons,” is crucial because it is dealing with who God is, what He is like, how He works, and how He relates to the world. Most important, the deity of Christ is essential to the plan of salvation.

In Scripture, there are three separate but interrelated types of evidence for the Trinity, or tri-unity of God: (1) evidence for the unity of God—that God is One; (2) evidence that there are Three Persons who are God; and (3) subtle textual hints of God’s Three-in-Oneness.

The distinctions among God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit found in the Bible must be understood as being the way God is in Himself, however difficult for our fallen minds to grasp. The “eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit,” as Ellen G. White calls them (Evangelism, p. 616), are equal but not identical or interchangeable.

Though some early Adventists struggled with the doctrine, our church today has taken a firm and unrelenting stand on this teaching. As Fundamental Belief number two says, “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons.”

Lesson 2 In the Beginning

Logos: Deut. 32:10, 11; Job 38:4–7; Psalm 19; Isa. 66:22; Matt. 19:4; John 1:1–13; Rom. 5:12.
Memory Text: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16, NKJV).

Key Thought: The doctrine of creation, a literal six-day Creation, is foundational to all that we believe.

It is hard to imagine two more diverse views of origins than the biblical model of creation and the atheistic evolutionary model. The first presents a creation that was planned, thought through, calculated, with nothing left to chance. Nothing. In contrast, the evolutionary model is all chance. Second, in the biblical account, everything was created for a purpose; God had an end goal, what the Greeks call a telos, a purpose for what He created. In contrast, evolution works on the premise that there is no final goal, no purpose-driven force motivating what’s created. Random mutation and natural selection (products of chance) work together blindly, keeping what functions and discarding what doesn’t. Finally, the biblical account teaches that humans were made in the image of God. Evolution teaches that they are made in the image of whatever primate just happened to precede Homo sapiens.

This week, we’ll look at the biblical doctrine of creation and see how it forms the foundation of all the biblical truth that follows. If we get Creation wrong, we’re all but certain to get much else wrong. That’s how crucial the teaching is to what we believe as Seventh-day Adventist Christians.