

ROMANS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. When and from where was the book of Romans written? Were any other books written by Paul about the same time? Do you think Paul personally knew any of the Christians in Rome? (Romans 16) Why would Paul write a book to a church he had never visited? How much of Romans would you understand if you had to sit in church while someone read it out loud all the way through from beginning to end? Is Romans the first book that Paul wrote? If not, why do you think it is in the position of the first of his books in the Bible?

Romans was actually the last book that Paul wrote while still in complete freedom. Nero came to power and began a major persecution of Christians. After spending about three years in Ephesus during which time he wrote his letters to the Corinthians, Paul traveled through Troas and Macedonia, probably visiting Thessalonika, Philippi, and Berea. Finally, he reached Corinth where he spent the winter months working with the Corinthians and writing Galatians and Romans. This was during the winter of A.D. 57-58. It was the last thing Paul did before beginning that fateful, final journey to Jerusalem. Any good commentary will give most of the details.

Scholars have puzzled over the question of why the books of the New Testament are in this particular order in most manuscripts. It appears that there is no more significant reason than that they were arranged from longest to shortest!

The Roman Republic was established c. 510 B.C. From relatively inauspicious beginnings the city had grown, surviving civil wars and military campaigns, until in Paul's day it had become a metropolis of wealth and power, as well as of poverty and slavery. Moral and spiritual deterioration was apparent enough when Christianity first began its permeation of the empire, but Rome's aura of greatness still prevailed. Although it is impossible to estimate accurately the number of Christians in Rome at the close of the first century, the enormous number of graves in the catacombs bears testimony to the rapidity and extent of the Christian advance. The fact that 27 persons are saluted by Paul in ch. 16 tends to verify that, by the time of writing (ca. A.D. 57), the church in Rome was numerically prosperous. The beginnings of the church in Rome are shrouded in antiquity. Conceivably, couriers present at Pentecost carried the message of the new faith back to Rome. It is also possible that Pauline converts from the east (i.e., Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia) had migrated here and had planted, or at least added to, the congregation of believers. In any case, representatives from a sizable and aggressive congregation met Paul and Luke at the *Appii Forum* and *The Three Taverns* when he approached Rome (Acts 28:15). One can imagine something of the excitement that gripped Paul, though a prisoner at the time, as he faced the dual prospect of viewing the legendary Rome and seeing the congregation of believers whom he had desired to meet. Though the Roman epistle predates that rendezvous, some of the

same spirit of anticipation can be observed in the epistle. (*Believer's Study Bible* - entry for Romans 1:7)

After greeting the people of the church at Rome and telling them of his prayers for them, Paul states the theme of the letter: "The gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end" (Romans 1:17).

Paul then develops this theme. All people, both Jews and Gentiles, need to be put right with God, for all alike are under the power of sin. People are put right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Next Paul describes the new life in union with Christ that results from this new relation with God. The believer has peace with God and is set free by God's Spirit from the power of sin and death. In Romans 5-8 Paul also discusses the purpose of the Law of God and the power of God's Spirit in the believer's life. Then the apostle wrestles with the question of how Jews and Gentiles fit into the plan of God for all people. He concludes that the Jewish rejection of Jesus is part of God's plan for bringing all people within the reach of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and he believes that the Jews will not always reject Jesus. Finally Paul writes about how the Christian life should be lived, especially about the way of love in relations with others. He takes up such themes as service to God, the duty of Christians to the state and to one another, and questions of conscience. He ends the letter with personal messages and with words of praise to God. (*Good News Bible* - Introduction to Romans)

Romans

The event that split history into "before" and "after" and changed the world took place about 30 years before Paul wrote this letter. The event—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—took place in a remote corner of the extensive Roman Empire: the province of Judea in Palestine. Hardly anyone noticed, certainly no one in busy and powerful Rome.

And when this letter arrived in Rome, hardly anyone read it, certainly no one of influence. There was much to read in Rome—imperial decrees, exquisite poetry, finely crafted moral philosophy—and much of it was world-class. And yet in no time, as such things go, this letter left all those other writings in the dust. Paul's letter to the Romans has had a far larger impact on its readers than the volumes of all those Roman writers put together.

The quick rise of this letter to a peak of influence is extraordinary, written as it was by an obscure Roman citizen without connections. But when we read it for ourselves, we begin to realize that **it is the letter itself that is truly extraordinary, and that no obscurity in writer or readers could have kept it obscure for long.**

The letter to the Romans is a piece of exuberant and passionate thinking. This is the glorious life of the mind enlisted in the service of God. Paul takes the well-witnessed and devoutly believed fact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and thinks through its implications. How does it happen that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, world history took a new direction, and at the same moment the life of every man, woman, and

child on the planet was eternally affected? What is God up to? What does it *mean* that Jesus “saves”? What’s behind all this, and where is it going?

These are the questions that drive Paul’s thinking. Paul’s mind is supple and capacious. He takes logic and argument, poetry and imagination, Scripture and prayer, creation and history and experience, and weaves them into **this letter that has become the premier document of Christian theology.** (*The Message*, introduction to the book of Romans)

2. During his early years, Paul had been the foremost persecutor of the young church. How had Paul changed as a result of his experience on the road to Damascus? After the Damascus road, did he have a different Bible? Had he changed his Decalogue? Had he switched his Sabbath? Had he changed his diet? What about his Pharisaical attitudes? Had he changed anything except his picture of God? Why would that make such a difference in his approach and attitude toward people? Does it make a difference what kind of picture of God we have? A difference in our lives now? In our prospects for heaven?

Paul had not changed any of the “doctrines” as derived from Scripture! He no longer paid any attention to the myriad of rules and requirements laid down by the rabbis and collected in such books as the *Mishnah* because he recognized that they had no validity for Jews or Christians. But, the most important thing that had changed in Paul’s experience was his attitude toward and understanding of God and His requirements. This “new” God that he worshiped never uses force to try to influence a person’s conscience. (*DA* 22.1; 466.4) This God truly honors a person’s free will. And His followers are supposed to do as He does. Since we become like the God that we honor and worship, it makes all the difference in the world what kind of Person we perceive that God to be. (*GC* 555.1; *PK* 177.1)

3. Paul started his book (Romans 1:1) by calling himself, “Paul, a slave....” (*Slave* is the real meaning of the Greek word). Why would he consider himself a slave? Isn’t the truth supposed to set us free? (John 8:32)

Think how much Paul talked about freedom. Wasn’t it a contradiction for him to talk about freedom and yet, call himself a slave? To be committed to Christ, totally and completely, might seem like slavery to some. But, to be committed to Someone who is so completely committed to freedom, how could you be a slave? Christ died rather than to compromise our freedom! It is perfectly safe to be a committed slave to such a Person!

Paul was a slave in the sense that he could not stop talking about his Lord and Savior. Everywhere he went he talked about the good news. He would rather have died than stop talking about Jesus. The best word that he could think of to describe that total commitment was *slave*.

4. Paul seemed to have been really “proud” of the “good news” or “gospel.” (Romans 1:16; compare Jeremiah 9:23) What do you think Paul was thinking of when he said, “Good news”? Are you proud to be a Christian? Proud enough to die for it? Do you know anyone—perhaps even a Bible writer—who seemed to know the truth about God, but was apparently embarrassed by it and certainly was not anxious to speak about his God? (Jonah 4:1-4) Of what was Paul actually proud? Romans 1:17 says the gospel reveals the “righteousness of God.” Why would that need to be revealed? Romans 3:4 suggests that God is on trial. What would that mean? If we are going to preach the gospel, it must be good news. Bad news is not gospel.

How do you decide what is truth? Do you go with what feels right? Do you look for scientific proof? How do you decide if a biblical doctrine is valid or not? Would you want some evidence to support your position? What kind of evidence would you accept as valid? Was Paul convinced about the truth as he understood it? How do you fit together Galatians 1:8-9 and Romans 14:5?

Paul clearly differentiated between what he called “personal opinions” and what he considered the gospel. Is the distinction clear in your mind?

How much is included in the gospel? The reason we have so many different Christian churches and even denominations is because we do not all agree on what the gospel is! The gospel is not about us. We are all sinners! (Romans 3:9-18,23; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; 1 John 1:8-10; Psalms 5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; 53:1-3; Isaiah 59:2,7-8) The gospel is not about the Devil and his friends! They are all evil.

The gospel is about God. If God were the kind of Person His enemies have tried to claim He is, you would not even want to be saved to live with Him forever! He would be arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving, even severe in His actions. You would never be at peace because you could never know for sure what was coming next.

But, the good news is that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be. He is, instead, just like His Son, Jesus, was when He lived here on this earth. (John 14:9; 10:30; 17:11; *That I May Know Him* 338.4)

One of God’s great modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, has described God like this:

I believe that the most important of all Christian beliefs is the one that brings joy and assurance to God’s friends everywhere—the truth about our heavenly Father that was confirmed at such cost by the life and death of his Son.

God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends. This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God’s loyal children throughout the universe.

Like Abraham and Moses—the ones God spoke of as His trusted friends—God’s friends today want to speak well and truly of our heavenly Father. They covet as the highest of all commendations the words of God about Job: “He has said of me what is right.” [Job 42:7-8] (A. Graham Maxwell, *Servants or Friends* p. 186)

5. In Romans we read of Paul’s convictions about the truth. Would you be willing to give up your job, your freedom, even your life for the “truth” as you understand it? What truths are worth dying for?

Which of the following convictions are important enough in your mind to die for?

The existence of God?
The existence of the Devil?
The divinity of Christ?
The virgin birth?
The resurrection and ascension of Christ?
The creation story as told in Genesis?
The existence of other inhabited worlds?
The second coming of Christ?
The reality of hell fire?

6. In Acts 16:31, Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your family.” Is that really true? Is faith/trust/belief/confidence enough for salvation/healing?

At first glance, it might seem that faith is not enough for salvation. Don't we have to confess our sins, and, maybe, do a lot of things that the Bible says are necessary before we can hope to be saved? And what about verses like Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Romans 2:6; and Revelation 20:12-13 that suggest that we will be judged by our works? If we are saved by faith, how can we be judged by our works?

To understand these issues, we must first understand what faith is. The New Testament word for *faith* is the Greek word *pistis* which is variously translated as faith/trust/belief/confidence. When asked what faith is, many people with a Christian background think immediately of Hebrews 11:1 (KJV): “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” But, this verse actually tells us what faith does rather than what faith is. A biblical definition of *faith* based on all of Scripture and stated so well by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

Faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God—based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed—to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it, without reservation, for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why?”—Stated many times by Dr. A. Graham Maxwell

Salvation means healing—it is the same word in Greek, *sōzō*. Salvation is much more than just forgiveness. God can heal any problem that we have except an unwillingness to listen and cooperate with Him. The Greek word for *obedience* is *hupostasis* which means literally “a humble willingness to listen.” It was the word used to describe a faithful gatekeeper. Since locks were not as strong or reliable in those days, slaves were employed

to guard the gates of wealthy homeowners. When the owner came home, he would simply call out to the gatekeeper; and the gatekeeper who was expected to be always at the ready and listening carefully would open the door from inside. We may not be capable of performing all that God asks of us, but we must be willing to listen and cooperate as far as possible.

7. What do you think Paul meant when he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, “The just shall live by faith”? Was his understanding different from Martin Luther’s? From Habakkuk’s? What was Paul trying to say in Romans 1:16-17? Note that bold and italics in the quotations below are added.

Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι. 17δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. (*Novum Testamentum Graece*)

¹⁶ non enim erubescō evangelium virtus enim Dei est in salutem omni credenti iudaeo primum et Graeco ¹⁷ iustitia enim Dei in eo revelatur ex fide in fidem sicut scriptum est **iustus autem ex fide vivit** (*Vulgate*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the good news of the Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to every one who is believing, both to Jew first, and to Greek. ¹⁷ For the righteousness of God in it is revealed from faith to faith, according as it hath been written, “And **the righteous one by faith shall live.**” (*YLT*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For therein is **the righteousness of God** revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.** (*KJV*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “**The just shall live by faith.**” (*NKJV*)

¹⁶ I am proud of the good news! It is God’s powerful way of saving all people who have faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. ¹⁷ The good news tells **how God accepts everyone who has faith**, but only those who have faith. It is just as the Scriptures say, “**The people God accepts because of their faith will live.**” (*CEV*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “**The righteous shall live by faith.**” (*ESV*)

¹⁶ I’m not ashamed of the Good News. It is God’s power to save everyone who believes, Jews first and Greeks as well. ¹⁷ God’s approval is revealed in this Good News. This approval begins and ends with faith as Scripture says, “**The person who has God’s approval will live because of faith.**” (*God’s Word*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes, of the Jew first and of the Greek as well.¹⁷ For in it **God's righteousness is being revealed** from faith to faith, as it is written, "**The righteous will live by faith.**" (*ISV*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile.¹⁷ For in it is revealed **how God makes people righteous in his sight**; and from beginning to end it is through trust—as the Tanakh puts it, "**But the person who is righteous will live his life by trust.**" (*JNT*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is God's powerful method of bringing all who believe it to heaven. This message was preached first to the Jews alone, but now everyone is invited to come to God in this same way.¹⁷ **This Good News tells us that God makes us ready for heaven—makes us right in God's sight**—when we put our faith and trust in Christ to save us. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scripture says it, "**The man who finds life will find it through trusting God.**" (*The Living Bible*)

¹⁶ It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! **God's way of putting people right** shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: "**The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.**" (*Message*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for Jew first, and then Greek.¹⁷ For in it is revealed **the righteousness of God** from faith to faith; as it is written, "**The one who is righteous by faith will live.**" (*NABWRNT*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.¹⁷ For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "**But the righteous man shall live by faith.**" (*NASB* and *NASB95*)

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.¹⁷ 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.**" (*NIV*)

¹⁶ For I see no reason to be ashamed of the gospel; it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who has faith—Jews first, but Greeks as well—¹⁷ for in it is revealed **the saving justice of God**: a justice based on faith and addressed to faith. As it says in scripture: **Anyone who is upright through faith will live.** (*NJB*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles.

¹⁷ This Good News tells us how **God makes us right in his sight**. This is

accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, **“It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”** (*NLT*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it ***the righteousness of God*** is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, **“The one who is righteous will live by faith.”** (*NRSV*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the good news. For God’s power it is, resulting in salvation to everyone who believes, to Jew first and also to Gentile, for ***God’s righteousness*** in it is revealed on the principle of faith to faith, even as it stands written, And **the one who is just, on the principle of faith shall live.** (*WUESTNT*)

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it ***the righteousness of God*** is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, **“He who through faith is righteous shall live.”** (*RSV*)

¹⁶ I have complete confidence in the gospel; it is God’s power to save all who believe, first the Jews and also the Gentiles. ¹⁷ For the gospel reveals ***how God puts people right with himself***: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says, **“The person who is put right with God through faith shall live.”** (*GNB*)

Notice the difference in the translations. Most of the more traditional translations say, “The righteousness of God is revealed” or something similar to that. Many of the more modern translations have something like, “How God puts people right with himself.” Why has this change come about?

The power in the gospel or “good news” is because it reveals “the righteousness of God.” But many do not believe that. Who would dare to question the righteousness of God? Even Luther said:

The righteousness, however, is not that according to which God himself is righteous as God, but that which we are justified by Him through faith in the Gospel. It is called the righteousness of God in contradistinction to man’s righteousness which comes from works. (Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1954, 41)

It is here that we beg to differ with Luther. Luther did not know what to do with the book of Revelation. He put it at the end of his New Testament along with Hebrews, James, Jude, and 2 Peter as a kind of New Testament Apocrypha; and he did not even number those books as being a part of the books of the New Testament.

But the first event now known to man was the war up in heaven. (Revelation 12:7-12) We have only a little information about that war and how sin got started in heaven. (See *EW* 145,146; *1SG* 17-19; *1SP* 17-23; *PP* 33-43; *SR* 13-19; *TA* 23-47) But, we do know what Satan said to Eve at their first encounter: “God is lying to you. You will not die if you eat of the fruit of this tree. Furthermore, God is actually holding something back from you. Don’t you want to be like God, knowing good and evil?” (See Genesis 3:1-5) These accusations have set the tone for Satan’s attacks and misrepresentations from that day until this.

But few people, even of theologians and biblical scholars, have recognized that there is a cosmic war going on. That war is focused on one point: Who is telling us the truth? Who can be trusted? God, or the former light-bearer (Lucifer) now called Satan or the Devil? Many people concede that there is a battle between good and evil. But, what is the basis of that battle? The bases are Satan's accusations against God. God has always stated that the only way to run a universe full of harmony and peace is on the basis of love, and that the greatest happiness comes from serving and loving others. On the other hand, Satan claims that happiness comes from serving oneself. Our one rebel world has chosen primarily to take Satan's side in this argument.

Put bluntly, the choice is between living a life based on love and caring for others or living a life mostly caring only about oneself. Sin and selfishness are ultimately self-destructive.

The whole universe is involved in this conflict. Remember that the conflict began in heaven. Satan was so persuasive that one-third of the angels—despite living right in the presence of God in heaven—sided with him before the war began. Even the angels who remained loyal had questions. So, the first coming of Christ was for their benefit as well as ours.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31,32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68.2-69.0 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 50.3,4 (1985)

And those beings in the rest of the universe have never sinned. So, the death of Christ involved much more than just forgiveness of sin. First of all, it was to teach us the truth about God, about Satan's accusations, and about sin and its consequences. (See handout on the website, www.theox.org: *The Plan of Salvation in the Setting of the Great Controversy*; <https://www.theox.org/index.cfm/pageid/756/index.html> which is filed in the section Resources, Sources/Authors, Ellen White)

The final generation of God's people living on this earth will stand firm in their belief and teaching about God and His character in opposition to Satan and his accusations against God. They will do this despite Satan's last massive “evangelistic” campaign during which he will apparently win over to his side almost everyone living on planet earth. (Revelation 13:3-4,7-8) They will stand firm even through the seven last plagues which are Satan's ultimate efforts to wipe them out. (Revelation 15-16)

That is why it is so important that we understand this “great controversy” and what it teaches us about God and about Satan. God needs to demonstrate that even here on this sinful planet there can be a group of people who will maintain their trust and faith in Him

and live according to His plan of love for their lives, even through the very worst that Satan can throw at them. Those plagues will be a final demonstration of what it would be like to live in a universe under Satan's control where everyone acts selfishly instead of lovingly.

This will be proof of God's righteousness and all that it implies for His followers. It is the reason why Paul talked about God's righteousness in Romans and elsewhere. (Romans 1:16-17; 3:1-4,25-26; Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20) If God is the kind of arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe Being that Satan has claimed He is, would you even want to live with Him?

So, God is waiting for a group of people who understand the truth about both sides in this controversy so clearly and are so convinced of this truth that they would die for Him rather than yield to Satan's deceptions. (2 Peter 2:9-12; Revelation 7:1-3; 14:1-5) Are we ready to stand faithfully for God? Considering all that He has done for us, shouldn't we be willing to do that for Him? God is calling us to prepare ourselves to stand up for Him just as John F. Kennedy said to all Americans: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." (John F. Kennedy, inaugural address, 1961) Will we do it?

Taking this approach is a complete paradigm shift for most Christians. The good news is about God and not just about how God saves you and me. God's concern goes far beyond merely clearing up our records in heaven. God wants to "heal" us and "save" us. *Salvation* does not mean simply adjusting our legal standing before God or paying up our fire insurance and buying our tickets to the kingdom. Salvation includes the complete healing, the restoration, of all the damage sin has done.

See "The Great Controversy in Scripture"; "The Plan of Salvation in the Setting of the Great Controversy" (both on www.theox.org); *Can God Be Trusted?* (A. Graham Maxwell)

8. What is God's wrath? Why would Paul apparently begin his discussion of the "good news" (see Romans 1:16) by talking about God's wrath? (Romans 1:18) What does God do to people on whom He "pours out His wrath"? (Romans 1:24,26,28) Does He beat them up? Burn them up? Torture them in hell? Considering the terrible sins that they were committing, what could God do with them? What other biblical illustrations do we have of God's wrath? Did Jesus die the death of a sinner? (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6; DA 25.2) Was "God's wrath" poured out on Him? In Romans 4:25 (GNB) it says, "Because of our sins he was handed over *to die*..." ("*to die*" is not in the original Greek but has been added by the translators). When God's wrath is manifest, it consists of His simply giving people up to the consequences of their own destructive behaviors. (Romans 1:18,24,26,28) The Greek word for "giving up" or "handing over" is *paradidomi*. It is translated, "He was given over..." in Romans 4:25 and is exactly the same word used in Romans 1:24,26,28 (GNB), "God has given them (these sinners) over..." What do you suppose this means? Should we be afraid of God's wrath? While sin is deadly, (Romans 6:23) God is loving. (1 John 4:8.16) We must learn to be afraid of sin and to love God. But, the dominant Christian church taught for centuries that we need to be afraid of God and His punishment—hell.

What is so serious about God letting us go? In discussing God's wrath beginning in Romans 1:18, Paul did not change the subject at all! The one subject that raises the most questions about God's righteousness is the question about how He deals with the wicked. What is God's wrath? How does it affect us?

The Old Testament is full of references to God's wrath/anger and what He does when He is "angry." See for example the following texts:

Numbers 12:9-10a (GNB): ⁹ The **LORD was angry** with them; and so as **he departed** ¹⁰ and the cloud left the Tent, Miriam's skin was suddenly covered with a dreaded disease and turned as white as snow.

Deuteronomy 31:16-18 (GNB): ¹⁶The LORD said to Moses, "You will soon die, and after your death the people will become unfaithful to me and break the covenant that I made with them. **They will abandon me** and worship the pagan gods of the land they are about to enter. ¹⁷When that happens, **I will become angry with them; I will abandon them, and they will be destroyed.** Many terrible disasters will come upon them, and then **they will realize that these things are happening to them because I, their God, am no longer with them.** ¹⁸And I will refuse to help them then, because they have done evil and worshiped other gods."

Deuteronomy 31:17 (quoting only the key words as stated by the LORD):

⁷ καὶ ὀργισθήσομαι θυμῷ εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ καταλείψω αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀποστρέψω τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ἀπ' αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔσται κατάβρωμα· καὶ εὕρησουσιν αὐτὸν κακὰ πολλὰ καὶ θλίψεις, καὶ ἐρεῖ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ Διότι οὐκ ἔστιν Κύριος ὁ θεός μου ἐν ἐμοί, εὐροσάν με τὰ κακὰ ταῦτα."(*Septuagint*)

"...Mine anger hath burned against it in that day, and I have forsaken them, and hidden My face from them." (*Young's Literal Translation*)

"...Wherefore my wrath will waxe hote against them at that day, and I will forsake them, and will hide my face from them." (*Geneva*)

"...My wrath shall be kindled against them...I will forsake them and hide my face from them." (*Rheims-Douay*)

"...My anger shall be kindled against them...I will forsake them...I will hide my face from them." (*KJV, Leeser, Darby, ASV, Amplified, NASB, NASB 1995, RSV, NRSV, NIV*)

"...My anger shall be aroused against them...and I will forsake them,...I will hide My face from them." (*NKJV*)

"...My anger will be roused against them...I shall abandon them and hide my face from them." (*NEB, REB*)

"...My anger will flare up against them; I will forsake them and hide my face from them." (*NAB*)

"...I will be so furious that I will abandon them and ignore their prayers." (*CEV*)

"...My anger will flare up against them...I will abandon them...I will conceal my face from them." (*Five Books of Moses*)

"...I will become angry with them. I will abandon them and turn away from them." (*God's Word*)

“...Then my anger will flame out against them and I will abandon them, hiding my face from them.” (*TLB*)

“...My anger will blaze forth against them. I will abandon them, hiding my face from them.” (*NLT*)

“...I will become very angry at them, and I will leave them. I will turn away from them.” (*NCV*)

“...My anger shall blaze against them,...I will forsake them, and withhold my favor from them.” (*Smith-Goodspeed*)

“Then shall my anger blaze against them, and I will forsake them, withdrawing my favour from them...” (*Moffatt*)

“...My anger will then blaze out against them...” (*Berkeley*)

“...My anger shall blaze against them; I will forsake them and hide my face from them.” (*Jerusalem*)

“...My anger will blaze against them; I shall desert them and hide my face from them.” (*NJB*)

“...My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them.” (*Tanakh*)

“...I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies.” (*Clear Word*)

Numbers 32:13-15 (GNB), [Moses said]: “**The LORD was angry** with the people and made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that whole generation that had displeased him was dead. ¹⁴And now you have taken your fathers’ place, a new generation of sinful men ready to bring down the fierce anger of the LORD on Israel again. ¹⁵If you people of Reuben and Gad refuse to follow him now, **he will once again abandon all these people** in the wilderness, and you will be responsible for their destruction.”

Deuteronomy 29:19 (GNB), [Moses said]: “Make sure that there is no one here today who hears these solemn demands and yet convinces himself that all will be well with him, even if he stubbornly goes his own way. That would destroy all of you, good and evil alike.”

Deuteronomy 32:15-30 (GNB), [Moses said]:

“**They abandoned God their Creator** and rejected their mighty saviour.

¹⁶ Their idolatry made the LORD jealous; the evil they did **made him angry**....

¹⁸ They forgot their God, their mighty saviour,
the one who had given them life.

¹⁹ “When the LORD saw this, **he was angry**
and rejected his sons and daughters.

²⁰ ‘**I will no longer help them,**’ he said;

'then I will see what happens to them,
 those stubborn, unfaithful people....
 21 So I will use a so-called nation to make them angry;
 I will make them jealous with a nation of fools.
 22 **My anger** will flame up like fire
 and burn everything on earth....
 26 **'I would have destroyed them completely,**
so that no one would remember them.
 27 But I could not let their enemies boast
 that they had defeated my people,
 when it was I myself who had crushed them.”

Joshua 7:1-12 (GNB): The Lord was furious with the Israelites...¹² “This is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They retreat from them because they themselves have now been condemned to destruction! **I will not stay with you any longer** unless you destroy the things you were ordered not to take!”

Judges 2:12-14 (RSV): And they forsook the LORD...they provoked the LORD to anger...he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and **he sold them into the power of their enemies round about,** so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.

Judges 2:19-23 (RSV): But whenever the judge died, **they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods,...the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel...** “I will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, 22 that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not.” 23 **So the LORD left those nations,** not driving them out at once, and he did not give them into the power of Joshua.

Judges 3:7-9 (RSV): 7 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God...**Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cu’shan-rishatha’im king of Mesopota’mia.**

Judges 10:6-7 (RSV): 6 And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD...the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites.

It should be very clear from all of these passages that God’s “anger” is not like our anger. **“The Bible repeatedly describes God’s anger as His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.”** (A. Graham Maxwell)

In the New Testament, we have this explanation of God's wrath:

Romans 1:18-28 (RSV): ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth...²⁴ **Therefore God gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,...²⁶ **For this reason God gave them up** to dishonorable passions.²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a base mind and to improper conduct.

Was God's wrath poured out on Jesus when He was on the cross?

Romans 4:25 (GNB): **Because of our sins he was handed over to die**, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God.

There is nothing in the Greek about dying although we know that is what happened. It just says, "He was handed over," using the same word translated in Romans 1 as "God gave them up."

What did Jesus say about what was happening while He was on the cross?

Matthew 27:46 (GNB): At about three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

Once again, we see that in this most important event in history when God's "wrath" is poured out, Jesus says that He felt abandoned.

How does God feel about leaving His children to the consequences of their own choices?

Hosea 11:1-2,7-9 (GNB): The LORD says,

"When Israel was a child, I loved him
and called him out of Egypt as my son.

²But the more I called to him,
the more he turned away from me....

⁷They insist on turning away from me.

They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them,
but no one will lift it from them.

⁸"How can I give you up, Israel?

How can I abandon you?

Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah,

or treat you as I did Zeboiim?

My heart will not let me do it!

My love for you is too strong.

⁹I will not punish you in my anger;

I will not destroy Israel again.

For I am God and not a human being.

I, the Holy One, am with you.

I will not come to you in anger.”

It seems that this turning away from God and reaping the consequences, which we have called God’s “wrath,” was a recurrent theme in Judges. (Judges 3:7-8,12,15; 4:1-3; 6:1-8; 10:6-16; 13:1) Doesn’t the section in Judges 10:6-16 seem like a very logical response on God’s part? What should God have done at that point? God’s wrath or anger or fury is a recurrent theme throughout the Bible. How does what we have learned in this section of Judges impact your understanding of Revelation 14:9-11?

As we have suggested above, rebellion arose in the very courts of heaven, in the most holy place beside the throne of God. And how has God dealt with that rebellion? By a long and very costly conflict of which we have become an integral part. But, in the end, God will weep as He must allow His enemies to perish. He cannot allow the cancer of sin to continue in His universe. God will weep as He watches Lucifer/Satan perish in the end. Lucifer was His highest creation, and God has done everything possible to bring him back without violating his freedom. But, Satan has persisted in his rebellion and will do so right up until the very end. In such a case, there is nothing more that God can do but let him go—let him reap the natural consequences of his disorderly behavior. As Romans 6:23 (GNB) states very plainly: “For sin pays its wage—death.” All who refuse to be separated from sin will be consumed by it.

9. What happens to the mind of a person who chooses to worship a frog, or a fly, or a beetle instead of our infinitely powerful and gracious Creator-God? (Romans 1:20,21) If you were God, what would you do with such people?

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. (*Great Controversy* 555.1)

Frogs, flies, and beetles were worshiped mainly because of their reproductive capacity. That was thought to be some special power from God. Since the lives of subsistence farmers is dependent on the fertility of their crops and their animals, worshiping creatures that seemed to have a lot of fertility seemed reasonable.

But, that obviously does not provide any intellectual enlightenment. Worshiping fertility soon led to an emphasis on human reproduction. The fertility cult religions were the result. Those rites were often celebrated with a lot of alcohol consumption, and Satan was completely in charge.

10. Read Romans 2:4 (GNB):

Surely you know that God is kind, because he is trying to lead you to repent.

What are the implications of suggesting that God’s kindness is supposed to lead us to repentance? Is the truth about God important? It is very interesting to note that Peter picked this verse and made a comment in 2 Peter 3:15. It is also very significant that he called Paul’s letter to the Romans a “passage of the Scriptures,” recognizing that this letter written by Paul in 57/58 A.D. was part of the inspired Scriptures even before his death and the death of Paul in 67 A.D.

But coming back to the main point, faith and trust are established on evidence. That evidence comes to us through the Holy Spirit by inspiration of the prophets and apostles. In Paul's day, that often meant listening to someone read a letter or a book out loud in the home church where people were attending. (Revelation 1:3; Romans 10:17) Speaking for the Holy Spirit, Paul told us that the main purpose of the Scriptures is to teach us the truth about God—that He is not a terrible Tyrant, threatening us with eternal hell fire. Instead, He is just like His Son proved Him to be. (John 14:9)

Texts like 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; John 5:39,40; and Luke 24:44 tell us that Jesus Himself was the God of the Old Testament. Our faith/trust is based on getting to know the truth about that God. Satan has claimed that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. If that is true, then God cannot be trusted, and we should run from Him. But, the truth is just the opposite.

11. Critics and superficial readers of the Bible have often suggested that the writings of Paul and James are opposed to each other. Martin Luther was so opposed to what he regarded as James' emphasis on works that he put James at the end of the New Testament along with Hebrews, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation—as if they were some kind of apocrypha to the New Testament. But, what is the truth? Read Romans 2:5-11 (*GNB*):

⁵But you have a hard and stubborn heart, and so you are making your own punishment even greater on the Day when God's anger and righteous judgements will be revealed. ⁶**For God will reward every person according to what each has done.** ⁷Some people keep on doing good, and seek glory, honor, and immortal life; to them God will give eternal life. ⁸Other people are selfish and reject what is right, in order to follow what is wrong; on them God will pour out his anger and fury. ⁹There will be suffering and pain for all those who do what is evil, for the Jews first and also for the Gentiles. ¹⁰**But God will give glory, honor, and peace to all who do what is good, to the Jews first and also to the Gentiles.** ¹¹For God judges everyone by the same standard.

Doesn't that sound like James? We will all be judged by our works. And what about Romans 2:13 (*GNB*)?

¹³ For it is not by hearing the Law that people are put right with God, but by doing what the Law commands.

Was Paul really saying that we are put right (justified) by doing what the Law demands? Isn't that justification by works? In the next few verses, Paul explained what he meant. Paul recognized the importance of the Law. (The Ten Commandments? Or, the whole Old Testament?) Romans 3:31 (*GNB*):

Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the Law? No, not at all; instead, we uphold the Law.

But earlier he stated categorically in Romans 3:20 (*GNB*):

For no one is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires; what the Law does is to make people know that they have sinned.

But isn't that essential in getting us to recognize our need of salvation/healing? There is no contradiction between Paul and James; both of them recognized that faith works! Paul emphasized the role of faith while James emphasized the fact that faith makes a

difference in the way we live. If you truly have faith in God, it will transform you, and your behavior will bring glory to God. (Matthew 5:16)

Paul's argument was that if one has the truth and even if he makes all sorts of claims but he is not being changed by his faith, it is useless. On the other hand, one may not have all of God's Word at his disposal; but, if he is loving and kind, he is demonstrating what God wants most.

Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God. [Doesn't that sound like Paul in these verses?] (*Desire of Ages*, 638.2)

If they are not backed up by a transformation of our characters, could it be that all our claims, even as Seventh-day Adventists, make us less savable than the heathen who have learned to truly love others?

12. What did Paul say, categorically, is the condition of all men? (Romans 3:10-12,23; compare 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:10; Galatians 3:22) What is the natural result of this condition? (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23)

We are all sinners! The Bible repeatedly states that. We do not even need to take the Bible's word for it; we can see it in the world around us! The Bible goes on to say (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23) that sin will produce its guaranteed result—death. But, we do not want to hear that part! There are billions of people living in our world that believe that somehow they can keep on living sinful, selfish lives and yet, somehow avoid receiving the wages of such a life—death. Virtually all of us want to believe that somehow we will end up in heaven. Some believe that they will manage to give up their sins at the last moment and will be saved. Others hope that God will “grade on the curve,” and they fervently hope that they will be in the upper portion of the class!

But, those who take God seriously are focusing on their relationship with Him so they can overcome their sins and become more like Him. These are the ones that will one day stand around the throne of God rejoicing in His salvation.

13. Romans 3:25,26 is the only passage in Scripture that specifically talks about why Jesus had to die and the meaning of His death. Why would it be necessary through Christ's death for God first to demonstrate that He Himself is righteous before He can “put right” those who trust in Jesus? Has anyone ever questioned God's righteousness or His truthfulness? (See Genesis 2:17; 3:1-4) Does the righteousness of God Himself, His own personal righteousness of character, need to be revealed? (Romans 3:1-4) Has anyone ever suggested that God is not righteous? Has anyone questioned God's truthfulness or behavior? Why does God need to go to court? And what does all of this have to do with my salvation? To get an idea of what this passage might mean and the many very different opinions about it, try to read the passage in as many versions as you have available.

The question of why Jesus had to die has stirred the minds of hundreds of Christians, even theologians and scholars, since that event happened. At first, the answers were pretty simplistic:

1) He died to deal with my sins or even sin in general. There are several verses in the Bible that suggest that. Some would say that the promise that God would do something to deal with our sins was first given in the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 3:15) Other verses that state something similar include: Isaiah 53; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Matthew 8:17; Romans 8:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:4; 1 Timothy 2:6; and 2 Corinthians 5:21.

The argument went something like this: In the beginning, God said to Adam:

¹⁷"...Except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad, You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day."
(Genesis 2:17, *GNB*)

So, when they sinned, they should have died. In effect, God was offended and demanded death as a payment for sin. This idea was supported by the entire sacrificial system. So, when Jesus came to this earth, He offered to die in our place. This apparently satisfied God the Father; and thus, Jesus having died in our place, God could now save us since Jesus took our place and paid the debt. The entire focus of that argument is how to save human beings.

One interesting version of this idea was the Ransom Theory. In the early centuries of the Christian era, children of rich families were often kidnaped and held for ransom which was usually used to pay for someone's freedom from slavery. The Ransom Theory of the atonement suggested that when we as humans sinned, we sold ourselves into the hands of Satan. When Jesus came to this earth, God offered to give Jesus as a sacrifice in exchange for all sinful humans. Satan grabbed at the chance because he believed that he would be able to take the place of Christ; and furthermore, he considered Jesus to be worth more than all sinners put together. So, he agreed to the exchange. But, Satan discovered that he could not hold onto Jesus; and Jesus escaped from him, leaving him with nothing. In this theory, in effect, the great controversy is won and the plan of salvation succeeds because God was able to trick the Devil!

2) Many years later, as the rule of law began to spread around the world, it was suggested that when we sinned we broke God's law; and as a result, a legal penalty—demanded by the law—had to be paid. Sinners could not pay their own debt because the wages of sin is death, and we all deserve to die. (Romans 6:23) Jesus was the only One capable of paying that debt since He was not a sinner. Jesus, who lived a sinless life and thus would normally not be subject to death, agreed to die to pay that debt so that we can be saved. The law said that someone had to die. So, when Jesus died, that satisfied the claims of the law; and God could then save human beings. This does not explain why **everyone** could not be saved by this plan. But proponents would say that only those who accept the provisions given by God can be saved. They say that we do not need to understand how this works, we just need to take advantage of the provision. Once again, in this theory it is clear that the focus is on how God will save you and me.

There are some problems with this explanation. Is it God the Father who is demanding the payment of the penalty? Or, is the law even above God so that God must meet the requirements of that law? Didn't God make the law? Couldn't He change it? An even bigger

question that is not dealt with by proponents of this view is the one raised some 1000 years ago by Anselm.

The widely accepted theory of **forensic atonement** suggests that “justice” demands the death of the sinner. In that view, in order to save sinners, God the Father agreed to accept the death of His Son in payment of the price of sin and pronounced that justice was satisfied, thus removing the legal barrier so that He can accept sinners back again. Wouldn't a human judge be worthy of condemnation if He condemned the Innocent in order to free the guilty? As asked by the literary character Bozo/Boso in Anselm's (ca. 1033-1109) *Cur Deus Homo*: **If God could only save sinners by condemning the Innocent, is He truly omnipotent? If, on the other hand, He could, but is not willing to do so, how are we to think of Him as wise and just? What justice could there possibly be in accepting the death of the most innocent Man who ever lived in place of the guilty? No human legal system would accept that, so how can God do such a thing?** And if this “legal” transaction makes it possible for God to save sinners because they are “covered with the righteousness of Christ,” would that suggest that we are brought into heaven without God the Father realizing that we are still sinners? Is this legal fiction?

3) A third explanation of why Jesus had to die is quite different from the previous two. In the beginning, God had said: “You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.” (Genesis 2:17, *GNB*) Satan responded at the tree by saying: “That's not true; you will not die. ⁵God said that, because he knows that when you eat it, you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.” (Genesis 3:4,5, *GNB*) So, who was telling the truth? Does sin result in death? Or, doesn't it? Although it is true that if sin had never happened there would have been no death of any kind, the death that God was talking about is the death that results from sin, not heart attacks, cancer, or some other human disease or problem. Everyone who dies of the first death, whatever the cause, will be resurrected to stand before the judgment seat of God. (John 5:28,29; Revelation 20:12-15) God calls that first death, *sleep*, (John 11:11) because He will raise every one of us back to life either at the second coming or at the third coming.

But Jesus died the awful death that results from separation from God. (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 1:18,24,26,28; 4:25; Matthew 27:46) Paul attempted to explain this to us in Romans 3. After mentioning the advantages that the Jews had been granted—they had been the recipients of the prophets and their writings—he went on to state that no one can impugn God's righteousness because God Himself is taking the matter into court. (Romans 3:4)

If the death of Jesus is primarily to save you and me and if the plan of salvation—including the primary reason why Jesus had to die—is to save us, then the transparency of God's government is not so important. He just needs to do whatever is required to save and heal us. On the other hand, if the primary reason why Jesus had to die was to answer the questions and accusations of Satan against God's character and His government, then the transparency of God's government is absolutely essential. God's main goal is to restore the trust, love, peace, and harmony of the entire universe. Without that, the great controversy would never end. In order to do that, we must all learn to love and trust each other, and most of all to love and trust the One who is in charge. If God cannot be trusted, then such a future outcome is impossible. So, God must find some way

to convincingly answer every accusation and question that has been raised by the Devil. And the first and probably most important of those accusations is whether or not God has told us the truth about sin leading to death. Let us review again those words.

Back in the beginning God had said:

Genesis 2:15-17 (GNB): ¹⁵ Then the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. ¹⁶He said to him, “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, ¹⁷except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. **You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.**”

As soon as Satan could get the attention of Eve at the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he said:

Genesis 3:1-5 (GNB): ¹Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

² “We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden,” the woman answered, ³ “except the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; if we do, we will die.”

⁴ **The snake replied, “That’s not true; you will not die.** ⁵God said that, because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.”

Satan could hardly wait to call God a liar! Furthermore, he accused God of withholding something very desirable from human beings—to be like God and to know everything (everything good and bad).

God had said that sin leads to death; Satan said it does not. Who is telling us the truth? Has that question/accusation been adequately answered?

Adam and Eve did not die that very day. So, it looked like Satan was the one who had told the truth. God was placed in a terrible bind when Adam and Eve first sinned. He could have just stood back and let them die. However, then it would have looked like God was the One who had killed them, and the entire universe would be inclined to start worshipping God out of fear. That would have destroyed the peace and harmony of the entire universe.

God could have done what we parents do all the time, punish Adam and Eve in some important way and then let them stay in the Garden of Eden. But, if He did that, Satan would have immediately claimed that he was right in calling God a liar when He said they would die that same day. So, why did God make that statement? Surely, God knew what was coming. Don’t we believe in His foreknowledge? Maybe He should not have said what He did! Unless, of course, it is really true. Was God’s “warning” a threat from God? Or, is it really true that sinning leads to separation from God (Isaiah 59:2) who is the only Source of life and thus results in death? Even Satan is being kept alive by God until the full and complete revelation of the truth can be demonstrated.

But, if that is true, why didn’t Adam and Eve die that same day? Like Satan, we too had to be placed on “life support” and kept alive until God had a chance to adequately demonstrate the truth of His original statement. When people began to die as a result of

the natural breakdown of life forces, no doubt, the angels began to ask God if that was the death He had talked about. As people were dying, Satan was also questioned about His claims. So, God explained that the first death was only a “sleep” until the truth could be fully demonstrated. Satan tried to turn that situation against God as well, claiming that human beings were not dying of the results of sin but rather that God was killing them because He was so upset by their turning away from Him and sinning. So, how could God deal with all of this?

No one could force God to go to court to defend Himself, and there is no authority above God to which He can appeal. God takes Himself into court before the entire onlooking universe. (Romans 3:4) God’s government has always been completely transparent. God never tries to hide anything. God asks His children to judge Him based on all the evidence that He has presented down through history. Using several passages from the Old Testament, Paul then pointed out that all members of the human family, both Jews and Gentiles, are sinners. (Romans 3:9-23)

Finally, in Romans 3:25,26, *GNB*, Paul tells us why Jesus had to die:

²⁵⁻²⁶ God offered him, so that by his blood he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order **to demonstrate that he is righteous**. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order **to demonstrate his righteousness**. In this way **God shows that he himself is righteous** and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.

It is very important to notice in these verses that three times it says that God must demonstrate His Own righteousness before it mentions how we are put right by believing in Jesus. Why is that? In order to prove who had told the truth back in the beginning, God had to answer a number of questions before the universe.

1) Does sin indeed lead to death? Jesus really died. And it was not from blood loss, His beatings, or from crucifixion. The soldiers were surprised to find that He was dead so quickly. (John 19:31-37) Jesus had agreed to die the death of sinners to demonstrate before the entire universe what happens when we refuse to give up our sins. In fact, Jesus had “died” in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night prior to Calvary and before anyone had touched Him. (*DA* 693.1) It was necessary for God to send an angel to revive Him. (Luke 22:43,44) Jesus “died” of sin alone. But, if God had let Him die there in Gethsemane, we would have assumed that He had died of some other cause. So, He was revived to go through all that torture and the mockery of several “trials” before finally being sentenced to death by crucifixion. Romans 1 tells us that God’s wrath is His giving us up and handing over people who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices. But, that death is so terrible and so final for the wicked that God does not want anyone to die that death without adequate warning. So, Jesus agreed to die that death as a demonstration that what God had said about sin back in the Garden of Eden was true: “Sin pays its wage—death.” (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23)

2) But, Satan is very clever. When people started to die of natural causes even before the flood, he began to argue that the reason people were dying was that God was angry with sinners and that He was killing them! According to Satan, it certainly could not be that sin leads to death as God had said!

So, we have the demonstration of the truth; Jesus really died. But, was it because God was angry and was killing Him? What did Jesus cry out just before His death?

Matthew 27:46 (GNB): ⁴⁶At about three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

God was not killing Jesus. Jesus was dying the way sinners will die in the end—of separation from God, the Source of life. (Isaiah 53:4-6; 59:2; Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18)

3) So, what is so wrong with not understanding that and, therefore, serving God out of fear, thinking that God will pour out His wrath on sinners as He was pouring out His wrath on His Son?

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. *MS 20*, 1897 (*MR # 970*); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897, par. 11 - section in [. . .] is included in several sources but is omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120.4; *12MR* 236.1

You could find yourself out there with the Pharisees and Sadducees, trying to kill God in God's name. They were excellent examples of what happens when one sullenly obeys God.

So, this third explanation of why Jesus had to die focuses primarily on what it says about God . This is the main reason why Jesus came and died. If God has not told us the truth—but instead is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe as Satan has claimed—would you even want to spend eternity with Him?

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. . .

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have

finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” [John 17:6,4] When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men. *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890, par. 6,9 (2ST 351:2:0-3:1); compare *ST* December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol 18, 359; *RH* August 14, 1900; *YI* November 21, 1883. [Content in brackets is supplied.]

The life and death of Jesus give us a choice. We can either choose to accept God’s generous offer of salvation and by beholding, gradually become changed to become more like God (*GC* 555) by allowing the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, and thus, learn to live the kind of life that Jesus lived, or we will die that awful death of sinners that He died.

God has not lied to us. Satan is the liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44) So, who should we trust? God came to this earth and died to prove the truthfulness of His Word. Have we gotten the message? A good friend wrote:

There is no clearer picture of God than may be seen from the foot of the cross.

God had told the truth when He warned that the wages of sin is death. In His Son He was dying that death. But God was not executing His Son. He only “gave Him up,” as He will give up the wicked at the end. And though by rights we should have died, God did not ask us to prove the truthfulness of His Word. He sacrificed Himself in His Son.

What more could God do to warn us from our sin and win us back to faith?

If you are a believer and are seeking to do God’s will, what makes you willing to obey?

Could you say, “I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy”? Is this why you don’t murder or commit adultery, because God has said you mustn’t? You would otherwise, but you can’t afford to incur His displeasure.

This might be all right for a beginner or a little child, but it suggests that God’s laws are arbitrary and do not make good sense in themselves. That does not speak very favorably of God.

Would you rather say, “I do what I do as a believer because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him”? Is this why you don’t steal or tell lies? You would see nothing wrong or harmful about doing these things. It is just that you want so much to please God. For some reason He does not like it when you steal or lie, and since He has been so good to us, you feel under some obligation to please Him. It would only be grateful and fair.

Again, this might be all right for a beginner or child. It might even be progress beyond the obedience prompted only by fear of punishment and desire of reward. But it still implies an arbitrariness in God’s commandments and does not speak so well of His character and government.

There is another possible approach to obedience. Could you say this? “I do what I do because I have found it to be right and sensible to do so, and I have increasing admiration and reverence for the One who so advised and commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity.” Then hastening to add, “Being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has always proved to be so sensible, when He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding.”—A. Graham Maxwell, *I Want to Be Free*, pp. 34,35

Unfortunately, we tend to go back and forth between doing God’s will and rebellion or sin. So, the lowest level of obedience is to say, “I do what I do because I want to and not because God wants me to!” At that point in time, we are, in fact, saying to God, “Leave me alone for a little bit, I want to do what I want to do right now.”

So, the lives of most of us could be described as a constant going back and forth between disobedience and obedience for one of the reasons mentioned above.

The Bible talks about intentional sins and unintentional sins, and what it says is very sobering.

Numbers 15:27-31 (GNB): ²⁷ If an individual sins unintentionally, he is to offer a one-year-old female goat as a sin offering. ²⁸ At the altar the priest shall perform the ritual of purification to purify the person from his sin, and he will be forgiven. ²⁹ The same regulation applies to all who unintentionally commit a sin, whether they are native Israelites or resident foreigners.

³⁰ But any person who sins deliberately, whether he is a native or a foreigner, is guilty of treating the LORD with contempt, and he shall be put to death, ³¹ because he has rejected what the LORD said and has deliberately broken one of his commands. He is responsible for his own death.

Are we taking sin seriously enough? Do we deserve to die because of our deliberate sins? What should we do about this problem?

14. If we can actually be “put right” with God through faith, (Romans 3:26,28) is there any further use for the “law”? (See Romans 3:31) If we have already been put right with God through trusting Him, what would be the function of law?

In the light of what we have just said above, it should be clear why we still need the law! There are several very instructive metaphors in Scripture to describe the law.

The law is a mirror.

James 1:22-25 (GNB):

²² Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice. ²³ Whoever listens to the word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks in a mirror and sees himself as he is. ²⁴ He takes a good look at himself and then goes away and at once forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But those who look closely into **the perfect law that sets people free**, who keep on paying attention to it and do not simply listen and then forget it, but put it into practice—they will be blessed by God in what they do.

The mirror does not clean a person’s face, it just points out the need for cleaning!

The law was “added in order to show what wrongdoing is.”

Galatians 3:19 (GNB):

¹⁹ **What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added** in order to show what wrongdoing is, and it was meant to last until the coming of Abraham’s descendant, to whom the promise was made. The Law was handed down by angels, with a man acting as a go-between. ²⁰ But a go-between is not needed when only one person is involved; and God is one.

Do we need that kind of instruction? Of course, especially when we are still acting like little children. We put fences around our yards to prevent our children from playing in busy streets. They do not yet understand the danger of cars. Is that a restriction on their freedom? Sometimes they think so! But, it is actually to preserve their freedom—and their lives!

The idea that the law was “added” was explained by Ellen White early in her ministry and should not have caused such a stir in 1888. Notice how she explained it.

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 364.2; compare 363.2; 3SG 299.2 (1864); 1SP 262.1; 264.2 (1870); 1SM 230.3; 3SG 296.1 (1864); SR 148.3

God had to keep adding more and more requirements in order to try to get people to take Him seriously and obey.

Paul explained further:

Galatians 3:23-25 (GNB):

²³ But before the time for faith came, the Law kept us all locked up as prisoners until this coming faith should be revealed. ²⁴ And so the Law was in charge of us until Christ came, in order that we might then be put right with God through faith. ²⁵ Now that the time for faith is here, the Law is no longer in charge of us.

When God puts a fence around us, we might feel that we are “all locked up as prisoners.” God is just trying to preserve our lives until we grow up enough to realize that He has never asked us to do anything that is not for our best good! And every time we “jump over the fence” and break the law, we suffer the consequences. It is God’s hope that we will eventually realize this fact and choose to do what is right because it is right.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the

joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. **This will lead us to do right because it is right**—because right doing is pleasing to God. *Christ's Object Lessons* 97.3-98.0 (1900)

God, in his wisdom and mercy, tests men and women here, to see if they will obey his voice and respect his law, or rebel as Satan did. **If they choose the side of Satan, putting his way above God's, it would not be safe to admit them into heaven; for they would cause another revolt against the government of God in the heavenly courts.** He who fulfills the law in every respect, demonstrates that perfect obedience is possible. *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1891 par. 13

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. **This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.** The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God's law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God's commandments. **Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven.** (COL 315.1; AG 148.4; compare ST, November 17, 1898 par. 8)

As long as we have not yet learned this lesson, we still need the law. Someday, in the better kingdom, God will be able to put the "law" in the museum because it will no longer be needed—everyone will do what is right because it is right. And hopefully, the day will come soon when we will be able to go up to God, give Him a big hug, and say, "Now I understand why you made so much use of law. Everything you have asked us to do makes such good sense when understood in the full context. I now choose to do what is right because it is right." At that point God might respond with a big smile and say, "Now you know the truth, and the truth has set you free." (John 8:32)

15. What is the meaning of "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous"? (Romans 4:3, *GNB*) Is this a legal transaction? Did any real change take place in Abraham? Why do you think God "accepted" him?

One's understanding of both faith and justification are involved in how we understand this phrase.

We need to remember that Romans 3:4, says:

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, **That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings**, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. (*KJV*)

Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the scripture says, "You must be shown to be right when you speak; you must win your case when you are being tried." (*GNB*)

In what sense does God need to be justified? He certainly does not need forgiveness from His sins! This is the same word in Greek that is used for our *justification*. It means to be “set right” or “put right.” Does this help us to understand the real meaning of *justification*?

The Greek word translated *justify* is the Greek word *dikaioō*. But, we have done an interesting thing when translating that word. *Dikaios* is translated as *righteous*. *Adikos*, the negative form is translated *unrighteous*. *Dikaiosunē* is translated *righteousness*. But when we translate the verb form of this word, we say, “*Justify*.” Why is that? We need a word, “*right-ify*.” But in the history of Christianity, the gospel moved west, and Rome became the headquarters of the Christian church. So, they eventually wanted the Bible to be in Latin. Jerome spent years translating the Bible into Latin which has come to be known as the *Vulgate*. In Latin the word for *right* is *iustitia* from which we get *justify*. In the verb form, it means to be “put right,” “set right,” or “made right.” But the meaning of *justice* in English has dramatically changed over the years. It now has to do with the court system, the police, and legal correctness. We need to go back to the original meaning of the word.

What does it mean to be “accounted righteous” or “accepted as righteous”? Abraham was later called God’s friend. (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23) So, why was he called God’s friend? Was it not because he chose to do what God asked him to do? What are the requirements for friendship? Don’t friends talk together and agree on things? Speaking to Isaac after Abraham’s death, God said: “I will bless you, because Abraham obeyed me and kept all my laws and commands.” (Genesis 26:5, *GNB*)

To be justified is not some legal or accounting process. It means that God, despite knowing all about our past in detail, sees that we really want to be His friends, and He treats us like friends. We may not be able to do all the things that we should. Abraham lied about his wife, twice that we know of. (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18) He took Hagar as a secondary wife in order to get a son. (Genesis 16:1-16) But, Abraham trusted God and was even willing to offer his son Isaac on an altar when God asked him to do that. (Genesis 22) Under those circumstances, God considered Abraham His friend. *Faith* is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a good friend. Abraham was a prime example; and so, God called him a friend.

16. Read Romans 4:25 in several different versions. What does it mean when it says:

Because of our sins he was handed over to die, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God. (*GNB*), or,

Who was put to death for our trespasses [the Greek says only that, “He was given up for our trespasses.”] **and raised for our justification.** (*RSV*)

The *SDA Bible Commentary* on Romans 4:25 says:

For our justification. Or, “on account of our justification,” meaning, “with a view to our justification.” Paul’s statement that our justification depends not only on the death of Christ but also on His resurrection sheds further light on the meaning of the experience of being accounted righteous by God. (See on ch. 3:20, 28) **God is not primarily concerned with a man’s sinful past, but with his future restoration. Justification is not only pardon, it is also**

reconciliation, the establishing of a new relationship, an experience of being set right with God.

So, what is Jesus doing right now in the heavenly sanctuary that “sets us right”? God decisively answered all of Satan’s questions and accusations against Him through the life and death of Jesus. But, what about us? Are there any questions that need to be answered about us? Surely, we all recognize that we are sinners. (Romans 3:9-23) Considering our past history and the history of the inhabitants of this earth, would it be safe for God to take some of us back with Him into heaven? Do the angels have any questions about us? If you were allowed to be present when your case comes up in the pre-advent judgment (Daniel 7:9,10) and after hearing all about your life spelled out in great detail, could you honestly vote for yourself? What does God need to do to convince our future neighbors and friends that it is safe to have us in heaven. (See #14 above)

When God opens our case in the courts of heaven, Satan immediately accuses us of all sorts of sins. (Job 1&2) He asks, “God, how can you admit these sinners and exclude me?” He makes our cases look as bad as he can and claims us as his. But, Jesus then steps in and answers Satan’s accusations. (Zechariah 3:1-5) When He can, He shows how our lives have been changed and how we now want to be His friends. God is not worried about our sinful past unless we are refusing to be changed. Only God knows if it will be safe to have us live with Him in heaven forever. And if He can assure the onlooking universe (Daniel 7:9,10) that it will be safe to have us there, based on the evidence that only God can present, then we are welcomed into heaven. Thus, by pleading our case before the universe, God has indeed “set us right.”

17. What kind of peace comes with living the new life in Christ? (Romans 5 & 6)

Notice that it is peace with God. It certainly is not peace with the world and certainly not peace with the Devil. When we choose to follow God, we are declaring ourselves to be on God’s side in the great controversy, and Satan is alerted to action! Then, we will be his enemies! If a sufficient number of us truly become Christians in the fullest sense of the word, Satan’s days are numbered. It is a life or death issue for him!

18. What does it mean to be “justified by his blood”? (Romans 5:9):

Since therefore we are now **justified by His blood**, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. (RSV)

By his blood we are now put right with God; how much more, then, will we be saved by him from God’s anger! (GNB)

Sometimes, when the question is raised, “Why did Jesus have to die?” the answer is given, because “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.” (Hebrews 9:22) You might ask, “Well, why would that be necessary? What would that mean?” The reply sometimes comes, “Well, that’s what the Bible says, I mean that’s the way God said it had to be. If that’s what He requires, then it’s all right with Him. Why do I need to understand? I just want to know that it’s all right with Him that He forgives us. What He had to do to feel all right about it is no business of mine.”

It is very dangerous just to accept someone’s statement—even if it is from the Bible—without asking for the meaning. That is what the ancient Jews did, and that is what the Pharisees did in Jesus day. Ellen White said:

Merely to hear or to read the word is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures must meditate upon the truth that has been presented to him. By earnest attention and prayerful thought he must learn the meaning of the words of truth, and drink deep of the spirit of the holy oracles.

God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures. (*Christ's Object Lessons* 59.5-60.1)

The *SDA Bible Commentary* on Romans 5:9 says:

By his blood. That is, by His death, the giving of His perfect life in the atoning sacrifice (see on ch. 3:25 [Romans 3:25]). In this verse Paul speaks of justification as being “by his blood” rather than “by faith,” because he is here considering justification from God’s point of view. Our faith adds nothing to God’s gift but only accepts it. The infinite price that was paid for our redemption reveals not only the wonderful love of God but also the high value that God places on the human soul. Paul is reasoning that since God loves us so much He was willing to pay an infinite price for our justification, surely He will keep that which has been so dearly bought.

If God was willing to come down to this earth and live as a human being that perfect Life through all those difficulties and then die on our behalf by answering all of Satan’s accusations and questions, why would He not now do whatever is necessary to defend us back in heaven? Surely, He will not let Satan’s accusations against us go unanswered. When the prodigal son came home, even before he got near the house, the father ran out to meet him and welcomed him. He did not even allow the son to finish his apologetic confession. (Luke 15:11-32) God is so happy to have some of us back that He and all the angels rejoice. (Luke 15:7) So, He answers Satan’s accusations against us if He can do so truthfully. (See #17 above)

19. Is Jesus pleading with the Father to forgive us? Does the Father’s attitude toward us need to be changed? Is our salvation dependent on a change in God’s attitude? (Romans 5:10)

Many Christians believe very strongly that just as we need to be reconciled to God, God needs to be reconciled to us. Many Christian churches teach that not only is Jesus pleading with the Father but also many other individuals—Mary and many “saints”—are pleading as well. What did Paul say? What does the rest of the Bible teach about this?

In the 1940s and 50s, Seventh-day Adventists sponsored a major effort to produce the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* series. While updates have been produced for the introductory articles, etc., the text of the commentary itself has never been officially changed. But, late in the 20th century, it was discovered that someone—and it is not known even today who it was—took it upon himself to change the wording of three passages in the commentary. Whoever did that did so on his own without any permission whatsoever from

church authorities or the *Commentary* editors or authors. Why did someone do that? See if you can determine why it was done.

See the handout: ***SDA Bible Commentary Changes - Reconciliation.***

Can you think of any evidence from the Scriptures or Ellen White suggesting that God needs to be reconciled to man? We do need to be reconciled or brought together again. Peace and harmony need to be restored. But, God has always been the One to reach out to us and appeal to us to come back. Did anything need to be done to convince the father of the prodigal son to accept him back? Didn't the father race out to hug the son and cover him with that expensive robe to avoid the son being embarrassed by his rags? (Luke 15:11-24)

But this great sacrifice was not made in order to create in the Father's heart a love for man, not to make Him willing to save. No, no! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." John 3:16. The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. Christ was the medium through which He could pour out His infinite love upon a fallen world. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. God suffered with His Son. In the agony of Gethsemane, the death of Calvary, the heart of Infinite Love paid the price of our redemption. (*Steps to Christ* 13.2-14.0)

Is there any way in which one might say that the death of Christ, in any conceivable manner, might have changed the Father's attitude towards us? Notice this.

Jesus said, "Therefore [it is because I have done this thing, *therefore*] doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again." John 10:17. That is [notice this], "My Father has so loved you that He even loves Me more for giving My life to redeem you. [Jesus said the Father loved Him even more after what He did.] In becoming your Substitute and Surety, by surrendering My life, by taking your liabilities, your transgressions, I am endeared to My Father; for by My sacrifice, God can be just, and yet the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." (*Steps to Christ* 14.1) [Content in brackets is added.]

But, down through the ages, the Christian church has taught that God is angry with us because of our sins. Many have been told that we need to do exactly what the church has told us to do, including paying a lot of money to convince God to accept us back again. That was how the Roman Catholic Church accumulated so much wealth in the Middle Ages. But, the truth is that God has always loved us, even those of us who continue to rebel against Him. (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-11)

20. When Adam sinned, did it make you a sinner? (Romans 5:12-19) What is "original sin"? Did his sin make you "guilty"? How did/does Adam's sin affect you? And how does the life and death of Jesus deal with Adam's sin and its consequences?

Many scholars regard this as the most difficult passage in the New Testament if not in the whole Bible. It is not because the passage is so difficult to understand, but rather, it is because it seems to contradict what they want to believe about the plan of salvation!

Read Romans 5:12-19. In this passage Paul's main purpose seems to be to compare and contrast Adam's sin and its consequences with Christ's life and death and their consequences. It is a logical follow-up of Romans 5:1-11. Stated in its simplest form, Paul's comparison would go something like this: "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, thus, death spread to all men because all men sinned; so also by one man, Jesus Christ, righteousness entered into the world, and life through righteousness, so that all, being justified by faith, might be saved."

But, Paul with his very busy mind—probably thinking while his amanuensis or secretary was writing down the first part of his comparison—took a detour to discuss some issues. It seems clear that Paul was suggesting that just as sin when introduced by Adam and Eve spread to all their descendants on this earth; in the same way, the life and death of Jesus make it possible for God's grace and eternal life to be given to all human beings. While every one of us is a sinner, (Romans 3:23) unfortunately, it cannot be said that all of us will become righteous. Only those who are willing to accept and follow God's guidance will be won back. But, those who do follow God's guidance will gain more than what Adam and Eve lost. (See *Desire of Ages* 25.3)

Paul seemed to make a distinction between rebellion or sin as a principal and the sins or acts of rebellion that we all commit as sinners. The principle of rebellion did not start here on planet earth but was brought down to this earth by Satan who first rebelled in heaven. (Revelation 12:1-12) God had warned Adam and Eve not to go near or eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:17) But, after their sin, God told them that they would return to the dust from which they had come. (Genesis 3:19)

What kind of death was God talking about? In the Bible we read about three kinds of death: 1) Spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1; 1 John 3:14); 2) Physical death, sometimes called "the first death" and described by Jesus as the "sleep" death (John 11:11-14; Revelation 2:10; 12:11); and 3) The final death, also called the "second death," which is a direct result of sin. (Matthew 10:28; James 5:20; Revelation 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8) Which of these deaths was God talking about in Genesis 2:27? Paul did not seem to be concerning himself with that issue at this point. He was simply suggesting that if sin had not come to this earth, death would never have come either. But, since sin came to this earth, God took the necessary action and made His "grace increase much more." (Romans 5:20)

Paul went on to say that this death introduced by Adam "has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned." This wholesale death which came upon all men could not be the second or final death because each of us is to be judged according to his own works, not according to Adam's sin. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Revelation 20:12-13; *Great Controversy* 544) God's judgment at the end of this earth's history is based upon our personal and individual choices. (Romans 2:6) For the time being, each of us is subject to the first death or "sleep death." Adam could not pass eternal life to his children because he did not have it himself. This is what it means when it says that "in Adam all die." (1 Corinthians 15:22) Having been banned from the Garden of Eden, Adam cannot return his children to that Edenic home.

While it is true that if God had not introduced His plan of reconciliation and salvation, Adam's death would have affected all of us, and that would be the end of us. (Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15:22) Before each human being comes back to life at either the second or

the third coming, (John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:4-6) each will be judged by his own deeds. Some believe that passages in the Old Testament such as Exodus 20:5 suggest that children might be punished for their parents sins. While it is true that behaviors are often passed along from parent to child, (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 306.3) it is abundantly clear from Scripture that each person will be judged according to his own attitudes and behaviors. (Ezekiel 18)

God did not hold the antediluvians—and those who lived after them until the experience on Mount Sinai—responsible for the specific details of what we call the Ten Commandments because they had not explicitly received those instructions yet. Nevertheless, as we well know, they all died as a result of sin. And thus, it could be said that death reigned throughout that period even though each of them did not disobey a specific command of God as Adam had.

But now following the life and death of Jesus, we do know that Christ died for the benefit of all. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2) Salvation is offered to all. (Matthew 11:28-29; Mark 16:15; John 7:37; Revelation 22:17) But, it is accepted only by those who are willing to be changed to be savable members of God's family. (John 3:16) Only a relatively few accept the offer. (Matthew 22:14) So now that God's free offer of salvation has been made, we have a promise that in the new earth God's original purpose for creation will be fulfilled, (*Great Controversy* 674.3) and all that was lost by man will be regained and even more. (*Prophets and Kings* 682.1,2; Psalms 37:29)

21. What is supposed to be the meaning of baptism? (Romans 6:1-4) Can you bury someone by sprinkling a little dirt on his head?

βaptizo [baptizo /bap-tid-zo/] verb. From a derivative of 911; *TDNT* 1:529; *TDNTA* 92; GK 966; 80 occurrences; AV translates as “baptize” 76 times, “wash” twice, “baptist” once, and “baptized + 2258” once. 1 to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk). 2 to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe. 3 to overwhelm. Additional Information: Not to be confused with 911, bapto. The clearest example that shows the meaning of baptizo is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be ‘dipped’ (*bapto*) into boiling water and then ‘baptised’ (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptising the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When used in the New Testament, this word more often refers to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism. e.g. Mark 16:16. ‘He that believes and is baptized shall be saved’. Christ is saying that mere intellectual assent is not enough. There must be a union with him, a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle! *Bible Study Magazine*, James Montgomery Boice, May 1989.—Strong, J. (1996); *The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*.

You do not have to argue with a Catholic friend as to how baptism was performed in the days of the apostles. It is admitted that it was by immersion. Here is the explanation from

a Catholic New Testament done by two Jesuit scholars, James A. Kleist, SJ, and Joseph L. Lilly, SJ. The footnote for Romans 6:3 says:

St. Paul alludes to the manner in which baptism was ordinarily conferred in the primitive church by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the descent of the body into the grave. And the ascent is suggestive of a resurrection to a new life.

Paul was trying to describe the change that is to take place when we leave behind our old lives of sin and join ourselves to Jesus in a new life. The old life is “buried” and we rise to live a new life in Jesus Christ.

The phrase “into Jesus Christ” means into union with Jesus Christ. This does not mean that the ceremony of immersion alone actually effects this union; baptism is a public proclamation of a spiritual relation with Christ that is entered into before the outward ceremony takes place. Baptism represents the joining of the life of the believer in such close union with the life of Christ that the two become, as it were, one spiritual unity (see 1 Cor. 12:12-13,27; Gal. 3:27).

Paul’s conception of union with Christ reveals that his conversion was more than an intellectual change. His personal acceptance of Christ as his Redeemer and Lord led to such a close and absorbing spiritual fellowship that it came to mean little less than an actual identification of will (Gal. 2:20). It is not uncommon in the case of ordinary friendship for two persons to share such unity of purpose that they seem to think and act almost as if they were one. Friendship with Christ is on an even higher level and bound by forces not only human but divine.—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 6. 1980 (F. D. Nichol, Ed.) (p. 537). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

The experience of baptism is intended to be the outward public manifestation of a change that has already taken place in the life of the believer. It is no less of a change than dying, being buried, and then arising to a new life. This is best symbolized by the act of being “buried” into the water and then being brought up again to live a new life in close connection with Jesus Christ. But, we need to be honest about the great controversy. Such a change alerts the Devil to go to work even harder to defeat that person’s intentions! Things may seem to get a lot worse for those who declare themselves for Christ!

22. What is implied by the idea that we are to think of ourselves as dead, as far as sin is concerned? (Romans 6:11)

Paul was suggesting that the “old man of sin” is to be regarded as dead because the Christian is to be living a new life in Christ. Can we do that consciously? If we feed the new man by Bible study, prayer, and active involvement in Christian activities and avoid our old practices and habits as much as possible, we are putting the old man to death while nourishing the new babe in the truth. This must be a daily task. But, so often we slip back and find ourselves doing the sinful things that used to be common to us. It could be illustrated like this: After we have buried the old man of sin, we keep prying up the lid of his coffin and slipping him a sandwich or two! If we keep doing that, the old man of sin will not die but will continue to survive.

23. How are we supposed to understand Romans 6:14? Should it be put together with Romans 10:4 and Colossians 2:14 to prove that the keeping of the Ten Commandments is no longer necessary for Christians? That is what many of our Christian friends do. Are the Ten Commandments still binding?

Romans 6:14, KJV: For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

6:14: Sin must not be your master; for you do not live under law but under God's grace. (*GNB*)

Romans 10:4, KJV: For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

10:14: For Christ has brought the Law to an end, so that everyone who believes is put right with God. (*GNB*)

Colossians 2:14, KJV: Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

2:14: He cancelled the unfavorable record of our debts with its binding rules and did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross. (*GNB*)

Think about the contrast between law and grace: **For example, law is demanding, exacting, exposing, accusing, unforgiving, provoking, irritating, unyielding, impersonal, and it leads to rebellion!** But is that the fault of the law? No! The law is perfect. (Psalms 19:7) The trouble is that we are rebels; we are sinners. But, sinners that we are, when we see God as He is—infinately gracious—then we realize that **grace is giving, forgiving, covering, persuading, very personal, and it wins us to repentance and faith.**

Here is an illustration of being under grace. The man who is apprehended for speeding on the freeway is brought before the judge and is about to be given the penalty when the judge notices that it is his first offense; "Oh," he says, "you've had a good record so far; we'll let you off this time. Under law you would have to pay the penalty. And don't you dare violate that speed law again, or I'll throw the whole book at you!"

In other words, how do you stay under grace? By being good! So, do you earn grace by being good? You cannot earn grace. Besides, if you are good, you do not need grace! What is the ideal place to be? Look at the condition of Adam and Eve when first created:

God placed man under law, as an indispensable condition of his very existence. He was a subject of the divine government, and there can be no government without law. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 49.1)

Then, "under Law" is the ideal place to be, but not for sinners; because when we are under Law, what does it do to us? It makes us rebellious! What is it that wins us from rebelliousness to faith? Grace! It is because of the kind of people we are—we cannot survive under law—that we need to be under grace.

Since we are all sinners, the law provokes! The law discourages! But, grace encourages! The picture of a gracious God softens the heart of the rebel and wins him to

repentance and faith. “The kindness of God leads you to repentance.” (Romans 2:4, *NASB*, 1995)

Of course, our Christian friends do not want to get rid of nine of the Ten Commandments; they only want to get rid of the Sabbath commandment. But, there is no easy way to directly attack the Sabbath; so, they try to say we do not need to keep the law as a whole. But then, they rush to say that the other nine commandments are supported by the teachings of the New Testament.

Look at the major miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath as recorded in the Gospels. (John 5:1-18; 9:1-34; Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6) None of these healing miracles was an emergency! Jesus was obviously trying to say something about the proper keeping of the Sabbath.

God instituted the Sabbath back in Eden. He reemphasized it in the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai. He kept the Sabbath Himself as a faithful Jew in His day. (Luke 4:16) We will again be keeping the Sabbath in the new earth. (Isaiah 66:23) Why would God switch to another day for the few thousand years from the crucifixion until the third coming?

There is no evidence anywhere in the New Testament that Jesus or any of the apostles kept Sunday or that they intended for us to keep Sunday. Sunday worship was originally instituted as a day for the worship of the sun. It was incorporated into Christianity by the Roman Catholic Church around 350 A.D. to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Those who choose to worship on Sunday are following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and not the Bible.

The law was never intended to be a means of salvation. If we could keep it fully—loving God and our fellow human beings—we would not need a plan of salvation, but we cannot! We are all sinners in need of grace and healing.

24. Read Romans 6:23. This is a crucial text in our understanding of all of Scripture. It is a reminder of God’s original statement in the Garden of Eden, i.e., Genesis 2:17, *GNB*: “You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.”

As we know, as soon as Satan got an opportunity, he responded to that statement by saying that God is a liar:

Genesis 3:1-5, *GNB*: ¹ Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

² “We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden,” the woman answered,

³ “except the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; if we do, we will die.”

⁴ The snake replied, “That’s not true; you will not die. ⁵God said that, because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.”

This is the most fundamental question in the great controversy: **Does sin lead to death? Or, doesn’t it? Whom do we believe?** Bible-believing Christians will immediately say that we believe and trust God, but do we live as if sin is deadly? Every time we sin, we

are saying to God, “Leave me alone for a few minutes—or maybe longer—while I do what I want to do.” By acting in selfish ways like that, we are saying as Eve did that we trust ourselves or even Satan more than we trust God at that point! Are we actually joining Satan’s side in the great controversy when we do that? Why do we like to sin? Is it because of our native selfishness? If no selfish people will be admitted to the new earth, do we really want to continue acting in selfish ways?

25. At what time in Paul’s life did he face the struggle in Romans 7:14-25? Was that before conversion? At the time of conversion? Or, after conversion? Have you ever found yourself in that struggle? Which commandment was it that led Paul finally to understand the real meaning of the commandments? What changed in his thinking? What should be the function of the commandments?

In Romans 6 and 7, Paul gave two illustrations of what it means to live lives under grace: 1) Like a new babe in the truth, having put to death the old man of sin; and 2) Like a woman who is bound to her husband so long as he is alive; but when he dies, she is free to marry another.

Paul pointed out the truth that he must have learned in his days as a Pharisee: Trying to earn salvation by keeping the law never works. The law just keeps on pointing out our sins and failures. So, Paul told us that we must give up on that old way of trying to prove that we can live righteous lives in our own strength under the law, and instead, accept God’s way of righteousness which is to focus on the life of Christ until “by beholding we become changed.” (GC 555)

But, then Paul admitted that when we do this, Satan and his evil angels come out against us in full force. By continually reminding us of our weaknesses and old habits—our failures to keep the law—Satan hopes to discourage us until we give up on living the Christian life. The law is not what is at fault, it is Satan’s use of the law to remind us of our sins that may prove discouraging.

More than that, Paul pointed to the tenth commandment as the one that is most troubling. (Romans 7:7) Remember 1 John 3:4. Sin is not so much “the transgression of the law.” The Greek word for *sin* is *lawlessness/rebelliousness*. It is an attitude. And the commandment that touches on that innermost attitude is the tenth. The original language suggests, “Thou shalt not have any evil desire.” Jesus focused on that tenth commandment in Matthew 5. You can convince yourself, as the Pharisees did, that you are keeping the other nine commandments by specific things that you do or do not do; but, the tenth commandment deals with the very root cause of sin, our evil desires! Surely, no honest Christian can claim that he never has an evil desire! And those evil desires seem to be unending. How can we prevent them from popping into our heads? Can we eliminate Satan’s access to us? Even Jesus was tempted! Most of us would admit that if we could eliminate those evil thoughts and desires, sin would be much easier to avoid! But, Satan is alive and well and very busy!

So, Paul went on to describe the struggle that takes place every day. We should not be surprised that Satan is active against us at every time in our lives! No doubt, he will be more active if we are choosing to be growing Christians. Is there any time in our lives that we are free from the temptations and irritations of the Devil? The Devil’s approach may change depending on our age, our cultural background, our gender, even our profession

and education. But, he will certainly do everything he can to thwart and prevent us from joining and remaining on God's side in the great controversy. Is this why Jesus said, "In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent." (Luke 15:7, *GNB*) Remember that if enough of us truly and permanently join God's side, the Devil's days are numbered!

Our minds are the battlefield in the great controversy! Paul kept talking about two different aspects of our lives: the old man of sin vs. the new babe in Christ; the mind vs. the body; etc. People cannot be divided like that, but we all know about the two forces that are at war in us.

At the end of his discussion of this controversy, Paul said: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24, *KJV*) The word *wretched* that Paul used to describe himself in this verse is *talaipōros* which is used in only one other place in the New Testament—in Revelation 3 to describe the Laodiceans!

In what sense could Laodiceans be wretched? Aren't we the faithful, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Sabbathkeeping saints in the church of God? Could all of our efforts be wasted? God said that they make Him nauseated! (Revelation 3:16) Nauseated enough to vomit. (That is the real meaning of the word *emeō*.)

Christ declares that pretentious piety is nauseating to Him. To the ones so full of self-sufficiency He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." Their works are opposed to the holy principles of God's word. (*Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 2, p. 20.1)

A lifeless profession is nauseating to God. Christ can not present before the Father those who are lukewarm. [She then quoted Revelation 3:16-17.] (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 6, 1903 par. 27) [Content in brackets is added.]

In any sense are we like the Jews referred to in Romans 2:19-20? Don't we claim to be "a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor for the foolish, and a teacher for the ignorant"?

Do we not sometimes feel that we are "worn out from hard work" one of the meanings of the word *wretched* in Greek? Is that the result of trying to earn our own salvation by keeping the law, paying tithe, etc.?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we should be known for our picture of God and our explanation of the great controversy. Instead, we are thought of as legalists for our Sabbathkeeping, etc. Are we legalists? Or, do we present to the world a correct understanding of the plan of salvation?

This is not to suggest that there is no effort to be put forth to be saved. Note these words from Ellen White about Paul:

The life of the apostle Paul was a constant conflict with self. He [Paul] said, "I die daily." 1 Corinthians 15:31. His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did God's will, however crucifying to his nature. {*MH* 452.4. Compare *ST*, September

12, 1878 par. 8; 4T 299.2 (1879); YI, August 24, 1899 par. 3; 8T 313.3; LS 237.1; NL 60.3; IHP 26.3; RC 291.8; RH, October 15, 1908 par. 13} [Content in brackets is added.]

Our efforts need to be focused on developing and maintaining a close relationship with Christ through Bible study and prayer and not just on trying to keep the law. So, there is a struggle going on in the life of a true Christian.

The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while **pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe.** He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give. (*Steps to Christ* 30.1; 5T 337.2) [Bold type is added.]

Do we still have a way to go in our struggle against pride, selfishness, and covetousness?

Jesus had presented the cup of blessing to those who felt that they were "rich, and increased with goods" (Revelation 3:17), and had need of nothing, and they had turned with scorn from the gracious gift. He who feels whole, [Think of all the bad things he doesn't do, i.e., *the man who feels reasonably whole.*] who thinks that he is reasonably good, and is contented with his condition, does not seek to become a partaker of the grace and righteousness of Christ. Pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give. There is no room for Jesus in the heart of such a person. (*Mount of Blessing* 7.1; SD 301.4) [Contents in brackets is added.]

The grace and righteousness of Christ will not avail for him who feels whole, for him who thinks he is reasonably good, and is contented with his condition. There is no room for Christ in the heart of such a person; for he does not realize his need of divine light and aid. (*RH*, August 6, 1889 par. 5; 1SM 327.1)

If we are serious about being Christians, then we still have work to do. God can only admit to heaven people who really want to be loving and kind all the time!

Your energies are required to co-operate with God. Without this, **if it were possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influences of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven.** The stronghold of Satan would not be broken. There must be the willing and the doing on the part of the receiver. There must be an action, represented as coming out from the world and being separate. There must be a doing of the words of Christ. *ST*, December 28, 1891 par. 2; May 18, 1904 par. 9; *MB* 142.1; *HL* 304.5. [Bold type is added.]

God will never try to force us to do His will. *Salvation* means healing. If we refuse God's medicine, there is nothing more that He can do for us.

The effort to earn salvation by one's own works inevitably leads men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin. For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey. All this turns the mind away from God to self. His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men. A system of human invention, with its multitudinous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard. The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies.

The Pharisees were of this class. They came forth from their religious services, not humbled with a sense of their own weakness, not grateful for the great privileges that God had given them. They came forth filled with spiritual pride, and their theme was, "Myself, my feelings, my knowledge, my ways." Their own attainments became the standard by which they judged others. Putting on the robes of self-dignity, they mounted the judgment seat to criticize and condemn.

The people partook largely of the same spirit, intruding upon the province of conscience and judging [124] one another in matters that lay between the soul and God. It was in reference to this spirit and practice that Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." That is, do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of Scripture, a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them. (*Mount of Blessing* 123.1-3) [Content in brackets is added.]

So, what about us? Are we developing characters like that of Christ?

It is the will of God that each professing Christian shall perfect a character after the divine similitude. **By studying the character of Christ revealed in the Bible, by practicing His virtues, the believer will be changed into the same likeness of goodness and mercy.** Christ's work of self-denial and sacrifice brought into the daily life will develop the faith that works by love and purifies the soul. There are many who wish to evade the cross-bearing part, but the Lord speaks to all when He says, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16:24. (*Counsels to Teachers* 249.1; See also GC 555)

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And **if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.** The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. **When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of**

Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.
(*Desire of Ages* 668.3) [Bold type is added.]

This struggle is what Christianity is all about. It is so easy to get side-tracked and focus on some other way of “earning” our salvation. It can never be done! Sin cannot be stamped out; it can only be crowded out. We need to fill our minds and thoughts with the right material. (Philippians 4:8) That is God’s way of salvation.

26. Doesn’t God know everyone? Even the number of hairs on their heads? (Matthew 10:30) Romans 8:29-30 suggests that those whom God foreknew (knew in advance) will be saved? Does this suggest that everyone will be saved? (Compare Matthew 7:22-23.) If not, how should we understand these verses?

In these verses Paul was talking about the normal process that is to take place in the life of a Christian. God calls everyone, but not everyone responds. With His infinite foreknowledge, God already knows who will respond. (Romans 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 4:13; Isaiah 46:10; Acts 15:18; Revelation 13:8; Ephesians 1:4-6). God’s wish for us is that everyone will return to Him and be saved. (Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17) But, God knows that not all will return to Him.

Those who do receive the call and do respond, He sets right or puts right (justifies). We might expect Paul next to mention sanctification; but, he apparently considered that obvious and moved straight on to glorification. (John 17:22; Ephesians 1:4-6) Thus, he could say:

Romans 8:30, GNB: And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.

If we respond as we should to God’s call, God’s action in our lives, and God’s future plans for each of us, we will one day enjoy that eternal glory with Him.

God’s plan for each one of us is that we allow ourselves to be saved/healed by an ever closer relationship with Him called faith/trust. If we would rather go our own way, doing what we feel like doing, failing to spend time studying, worshiping and sharing with others the life of Christ, then God will one day have to say to us simply: “I am sorry. You didn’t take the time to get to know Me. We never had the chance to become friends.” (Matthew 7:22-23) Don’t we like to spend time with our friends? What about our best Friend? Studying the life of Christ and learning everything we can about Him through all sixty-six books of the Bible may not seem at first to be a lot of fun! But, the more we do it, the more interesting and exciting it becomes. Give it a try!

27. Read Romans 8:31-34. After saying, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” and “Who will accuse God’s chosen people?” what was Paul trying to tell us by saying: “Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life . . . is at the right-hand side of God, pleading with Him for us”? Does the Father need to be pleaded with? Why would that be necessary? What does it mean? What is Jesus doing right now in the heavenly sanctuary?

Would it be correct to say that the One who is interceding on our behalf understands us better (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16) or even perhaps loves us more than the One with whom He is interceding? How does that fit with John 14:9, (*GNB*), “Whoever has seen me has seen the father.”

And what about the role of the Holy Spirit? Read Romans 8:26-27. In what way does the Holy Spirit intercede for us in our weakness?

Romans 8:26-27, GNB: ²⁶In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will.

Do both the Son and the Holy Spirit need to plead with the Father? Do we need even more people pleading like our Roman Catholic friends suggest? How would their intercession differ? And isn't all of this in conflict with John 16:26-27, *GNB* where Jesus Himself said to His disciples: ²⁶ "When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you."

Was John confused? Read 1 John 2:1, *GNB*:

I am writing this to you, my children, so that you will not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have someone who pleads with the father on our behalf— Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

It is interesting that in this verse the word *Paraclete* is used to describe Jesus Christ. That is the word that Jesus Himself used to describe the Holy Spirit back in John 14:16,26; 15:26; and 16:7. And where is this intercession and pleading taking place? How does that fit with Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7? Does it help to read Zechariah 3:1-5 and Revelation 12:7-12? Who is doing the accusing in those passages? Isn't Satan the accuser of our brethren? (See also *Prophets and Kings* 585-589 and *Great Controversy* 479-491, especially 482-484.)

Zechariah 3:1-5 make it clear that the one who is accusing us, as he did Joshua the high priest in Zechariah's day, is Satan himself. And these accusations are not taking place in some private gathering, but rather before the entire onlooking universe. (Daniel 7:9-10)

Adventists believe that beginning in 1844, a new phase of Jesus's heavenly ministry began. This is based on our understanding of the ancient Jewish ceremonial system and particularly our understanding of what happened on the Day of Atonement. We put this together with our interpretation of Daniel 8:14 and Daniel 9:24, suggesting that the prophecy of the 2300 days/years ended in 1844.

We also believe, based on our understanding of many passages in Scripture, e.g., John 11:15; Matthew 9:24; 1 Corinthians 15:20, that the dead are sleeping, awaiting resurrection at either the second coming or the third coming. The righteous will rise at the second coming and go to heaven; but, the wicked will arise at the third coming and condemn themselves to eternal death. (John 5:28-29) To our Christian friends who do not believe in the mortality of the soul and thus believe that people go to heaven or hell at the time of their death, there can be no final judgment at the end of this earth's history because people have already gone to their reward. In any case, some decision is needed before the second advent to decide who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost.

God does not need to take a long time to make up His mind about us. He already knows who is savable and who is not. But, our future neighbors and friends surely must have some questions about us. So, God—always ready to be open and fair to

everyone—opens the “books” of heaven and reviews all of our cases before the onlooking universe. Every question is given consideration; and when He is finished, the “court” will agree that God has been absolutely fair to everyone and that His judgments are correct. (Romans 3:4) If there is any way God can safely admit us to heaven, He will do so.

In the whole process of judging, Satan does his best to point out all of our faults and sins. God does not argue with him. God has a better recordkeeping system than Satan does! God could probably make our cases look even worse than Satan does because He can also read our thoughts! But, when Satan is finished, God will respond by saying that our past sinful lives are no longer relevant because we have chosen to accept His salvation, and our lives have changed. We will not be a threat to our future neighbors and friends in heaven or even in the new earth because we will have been convinced that God is right, and we will want to do His will for the rest of eternity.

God the Father is not accusing us; we are His children. (John 3:16; Romans 8:31-32) The Holy Spirit is not accusing us; He is our Counselor, Comforter, and is actually pleading for us. (Romans 8:26-27) And none of us would dare to say that Jesus is our Accuser because He is the One who died for us and is at God’s right hand pleading for us! (Romans 8:34) Only Satan and his followers are our accusers! (Revelation 12:10; Zechariah 3:1-5)

Unfortunately, many of our Christian friends have ceased to believe that Satan even exists! That is exactly what he wants them to believe. But, without an understanding of the great controversy and exactly what Satan is up to, it is difficult to understand why the final judgment is necessary. When the righteous get to heaven, we also will be given the opportunity to look over all the records to see if we agree that God has done everything He possibly could to save each one of us. (Revelation 20:4,11-15) Then, at the third coming, even the wicked and Satan himself will admit that God has always been fair and done the right thing in His dealing with sin and sinners. (Philippians 2:5-11; Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11)

When the great controversy is finally over and God is able to recreate this earth back into its original condition like the Garden of Eden, there will never again be any doubt about God’s handling of the sin problem. Everyone will trust God, and God will be able to trust them. That is what the new heaven and the new earth are all about.

28. Do Romans 9:1-21, especially 14-21, suggest that we are predestined? Either to be saved or to be lost? Does this mean that God’s will is completely sovereign and our will and our decision really count for nothing? Is that the way God runs His universe?

Certainly, all of us would recognize that God is all-powerful. So, how does He exercise that power? Remember that in Romans 8 we learned that all three Members of the Godhead are on our side. The accuser is Satan. (Job 1:6; 2:1; Zechariah 3:1-5; Revelation 12:10)

Who were the people that Paul was writing to in Rome? Romans 1 and 2 make it quite clear that some of his audience were formerly pagans, now turned Christian, while some of his audience were Jews, now turned Christian. And the Jews were having a hard time trying to decide how much of their Judaism they should retain. Clearly, Paul understood Jewish and Pharisaical thinking very well! (After all, we know that he had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. See Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:5-6.) He also knew that Jews in other cities

had tried to kill him because of what he was preaching. So, in Romans 9 he turned specifically to the commandment-keeping, Sabbathkeeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-reading-and-believing, God-fearing, “adventists” (they were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah/Christ) Jewish Christians in Rome listening to his letter who considered themselves to be the “chosen people.” He knew that what he had said in Romans 1-8 about the gospel being freely available to all equally, both Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female (Galatians 3:28; Romans 4) was very offensive to some of them. Paul’s message about trust and faith being the only requirement for salvation really upset some.

So, Paul took three chapters, Romans 9-11, to speak specifically to them. To begin, read Romans 9:1-10:4. Does this immediately seem like the gracious God Paul had been preaching about? There is some apparently very harsh language in there! We need to recognize that Paul was using pure Jewish logic with plenty of Scripture to back him up. They all knew that what he was saying was true according to Scripture!

Does it sound like the God you know when Paul answered his own question about fairness by saying in Romans 9:20: “But who are you, a man, to answer back to God?” and then he seemed to make it worse by talking about potters who had complete control over what they make!

Paul had already said that he would be willing to die if that would bring about salvation for his fellow Jews. (Romans 9:3) But, why does the Bible say, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”? (Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:2-3) Isn’t it a sin to hate someone? (Matthew 5:21-22) Please note carefully that this statement was made centuries after Jacob and Esau were dead. It is simply a description of how things turned out. Compare other places: Genesis 29:30-31; Luke 14:26; John 12:25. *Hate* can mean not a malicious feeling of animosity and despising, but rather to “love less.” It suggests a choice, to love someone or something less than someone or something else. You “love” the one and you “hate” the other. The Jewish Christians had to admit that not all of Abraham’s children were of the “chosen race.” (The descendants of Ishmael, Esau, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah [see Genesis 25:1-2; Romans 9:6-7; Hebrews 11:18] for example, were physically descended from Abraham, but were not considered by the Jews to be Abraham’s “true” descendants.) Compare Amos 3:2.

Paul was saying that we have no right to tell God how to run His universe or even who He can or should save in His kingdom! Belonging to the Adventist Church—or any other church—does not guarantee anyone a place in the kingdom. Does God have the right to determine who is fit to enter His kingdom or not? Some of the Jewish Christians were accustomed to feeling that they had a special inside track on salvation since God had chosen their ancestor Abraham to be the father of the faithful. They were very upset that Paul would suggest that God could save anyone He chose based on God’s chosen criterium, faith/trust alone. God’s plan of salvation is open to everyone—and not just to Jews. That no longer gives Jewish people any special advantage. Jewish Christians will be saved on exactly the same basis on which any other believing Christian is saved: faith or trust.

If God had a right to choose the Jews as His people in Old Testament times, shouldn’t He have the right to choose Christians in Paul’s day and in our day? Faith or trust has

always been God's only requirement for those who want to be a part of His eternal kingdom, even the beings in the rest of the universe. That is why Satan and his followers had to leave heaven. (Revelation 12:7-13; Luke 10:18) So, how about it? Do you qualify?

29. Did God harden Pharaoh's heart? See Exodus 9:34-10:1. (See handout, "**Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.**") And what are we to say about the death of Saul? (See 1 Samuel 31:1-6; 1 Chronicles 10:1-6) It is very clear from these verses that Saul was mortally wounded and then committed suicide to prevent any of the Philistines from gloating that they had personally killed the king of Israel.

But, how do we then explain 1 Chronicles 10:13-14? Did God kill Saul? This passage is very important in explaining many passages in the Old Testament and even some in the New. To the Jews, God is all-powerful (omnipotent) and completely Sovereign. (He has the ability to control everything.) Nothing could happen without God's active involvement or at least God's permission. So ultimately, God is responsible for everything that happens because if He thought it was necessary to do so, He could have prevented it! While the Jews were specifically addressed in Romans 9-11, could the message also be for us as Christians in the final stages of this earth's history? For Laodiceans?

30. How should we understand Romans 9:22? (Compare Proverbs 16:4.)

Romans 9:22, GNB: And the same is true of what God has done. He wanted to show his anger and to make his power known. But he was very patient in enduring those who were the objects of his anger, **who were doomed to destruction.** [Bold type is added.]

Are we predestined to be saved? Or, to be lost? Does God make some of us "doomed to destruction" from our birth? This is the view of those who believe in predestination. But, the Greek word could be translated in the middle voice, i.e., those people have done it to themselves. Look how some translators have worked on this:

KJV: . . . fitted to destruction.

RSV: . . . made for destruction.

Amplified: . . . ripe for destruction.

NIV: . . . prepared for destruction.

NEB: . . . due for destruction.

Jerusalem: . . . however much they deserve to be destroyed.

Moffatt: . . . ripe and ready to be destroyed.

Berkeley: . . . maturing for destruction.

Clear Word: . . . who eventually will be destroyed?

Message: . . . crafted to show his glorious goodness, isn't that all right?

Living Bible: . . . fit only for destruction.

Goodspeed: . . . already ripe for destruction.

NET Bible: (margin) . . . Or possibly "have fit themselves for destruction."

Phillips: . . . cry out to be destroyed.

Does God determine who will eventually be saved and who will be lost? Or, do we do it to ourselves? The Greek can go either way. It should be clear from the rest of Romans and especially if we consider all of Scripture that God will save everyone who trusts Him. God's patience is incredible. He is keeping the Devil alive until he has had a full opportunity to demonstrate the truth about his own character and what would happen if he were in charge! Lucifer/Satan will eventually be destroyed, but would anyone say that he was made for that? Was that God's original plan for him? (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-15) However, eventually, God will have to let those who are rebels go—to reap what they have chosen for themselves.

31. In Romans 13:1 (KJV), it says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." What is the meaning of *soul* in the Bible? The Hebrew word is *nephesh*, and the Greek is *psuche*. What do these terms imply?

Many of our Christian friends—people like Billy Graham—take this passage and put it along with Luke 16:19-31—the story of the rich man and Lazarus—and interpret them to "clearly" indicate that the moment people die, their "souls" will be taken off to heaven where they will dwell in the bosom of Abraham, wherever that is. There, they believe they are to enjoy the heavenly music without any ears, to eat the fruit of the tree of life without any mouth or any stomach, to communicate with God and the angels and remember all that has happened in the past without a brain. If all that is possible, why would people want to come back and pick up their bodies sometime later? (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

And what about the people who have gone to "hell"? Will they have to come and pick up their bodies also? So, what does the word *soul* mean? Compare different versions:

Romans 13:1a:

Nestle-Aland Greek: Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω....

KJV: Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers....

NIV: Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities....

Good News Bible: Everyone must obey the state authorities....

NEB, ESV: Let every person....

NASB (1995): Every person is to be in subjection....

The Living Bible: Obey the government, for God is the one who has put it there.

The Jerusalem Bible: You must all obey the governing authorities.

Jewish New Testament: Everyone is to obey the governing authorities.

Message: Be a good citizen.

NLT: Everyone must submit....

Of course, the issue over *soul* begins with Genesis 2:7 which says, "And man became a living soul." (KJV)

In Genesis, of course, the word is *nephesh*.

Some years ago, the *Jewish Publication Society of America*, began a totally new translation of the Hebrew *Torah* (the Law, the five books of Moses). And when they came

to Genesis 2:7, they translated it, “And God blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.” Rabbi Lewinsky, the chairman of the translation committee, said that the Hebrew word *nephesh* used there means: “The whole person, even the blood in his veins.” They completely dropped the use of the word *soul* because it has come to mean so many different and unbiblical things never intended by the original language.

The Anchor Bible (translated by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews) translates Genesis 2:7 like this:

God *Yahweh* formed man from clods in the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living being.

Compare the following translations:

New American Bible (an authorized Roman Catholic translation):

God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.

Good News Bible:

God breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live.

The Living Bible:

The Lord God formed a man's body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And man became a living person.

The New English Bible:

God breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living creature.

For Seventh-day Adventists, it is interesting to see what Ellen White did with the Greek words. In *Christ's Object Lessons* p. 60.1, she said:

The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of the Scriptures.

Isn't it clear that she was referring to the person? Questions about the soul, its identity, and what happens to it at death are not discussed as much any more since many of us have moved away from the *King James Version*.

How do you understand Romans 13:1-7? Is there ever a time to speak out against government or civil authority or law? Is every government legitimate and placed there by God? Does the book of Philemon help us to understand this issue? How should we deal with civil governments. Does this passage really suggest that every government whether it is a democracy or a dictatorship—even governments like those of Pharaoh, Nero, Hitler, Stalin, and Idi Amin—were placed there by God? Jesus also said that we should pay to the government what is due them. How is that defined? (Matthew 22:15-22)

How should Christians relate to communist governments which are avowedly atheistic such as the former USSR and communist China? These few verses certainly are not a complete or detailed description of how we should deal with every government under every circumstance. It should be obvious that Christians should not do evil or criminal things to stir up problems. Peter joined Paul in saying that if you are punished, be sure you do not deserve it! (1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 Peter 3:8-4:19)

And how do we explain God's relationship with people like Pharaoh? Did God specifically place him on the throne so that He could destroy him? Did God want him to refuse and refuse and refuse to let the children of Israel go? The Bible clearly says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. But, it also says Pharaoh's heart was hardened; and it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. (Exodus 9:34-10:1, *KJV*) Should Paul and Peter in their day have organized a revolt to overthrow the Roman government? As it was, they were both killed by that Roman government. In the case of Pharaoh, his hardening of his own heart helped to demonstrate the uselessness of the Egyptian gods. (Exodus 12:12)

32. What should we learn from the relationship Jesus showed with the Jewish civil and religious leaders in His day? There are many verses suggesting that He tried to avoid conflicts with them. (John 4:1-3) But, on certain occasions, He addressed them directly and said some very startling things. (John 8:44) Should we follow His example in this respect and speak to the U. S. Congress like that?

Wasn't Paul suggesting that establishing governments or removing them is God's responsibility and not ours? The governments under which we live may be evil, or even repressive; but, the best way for the Christian to deal with those governments is to work to hasten the second coming of Jesus Christ.

How should we relate to various political movements? Should we become involved in current ethical and political issues? Or, should we as Christians have one central issue that we need to be promoting: the truth about God? Peter and John made it very clear in their day (Acts 4:19; 5:29) that we must obey God rather than men if it becomes necessary to make a choice. Shouldn't we add the good advice in Romans 13:13 (*GNB*), "Let us conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day" to Paul's advice in Romans 13:1-7?

In order to understand Paul's full recommendations in dealing with governments, we should consider some of his other writings. For example, look at Philippians 3:20. The *King James Version* says, "For our conversation is in heaven." The Greek word is *politeuma* which we should recognize is related to the word *politics*. But the specific meaning in this case is talking about our "citizenship"—how we conduct ourselves in relationship to the government. Paul was saying, "Our citizenship is in heaven." Virtually all modern versions reflect this meaning.

Once again, Ellen White got it right even though she did not know Greek or Hebrew:

So the people of God—the true Israel—though scattered throughout all nations, are on earth but sojourners, whose citizenship is in heaven. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 447.2)

Those who stand as educators, as ministers, as laborers together with God in any line, have no battles to fight in the political world. **Their citizenship is in heaven.** The Lord calls upon them to stand as a separate and peculiar people. He would have no schisms in the body of believers. His people are to possess the elements of reconciliation. (*Gospel Workers* 393.2; compare *4T* 51.1; *PP* 447.2; *CT* 455.3; *FE* 478.3; 481.1; *AG* 57.2,3) [Bold type is added.]

Should Seventh-day Adventist Christians ever engage in activities that are directly forbidden by the government? Do you remember the story of Brother Andrew who smuggled Bibles into the USSR? Could an Adventist do that? Some of us might be able to; but, many others definitely could not.

Perhaps the best illustration from Paul's writings about how to relate to the government is the story of Onesimus and Philemon. It is estimated that in Paul's day 60% of the population of the Mediterranean world were slaves. They were not slaves because of their race or nationality. Of course, some of them had been conquered and made slaves because they belonged to nations that had been conquered by the Romans. But, most of them were serving a period of time to pay debts or even serve some religious commitment.

Onesimus was a runaway slave. He had been a slave of Philemon, a Christian. Perhaps he thought he could get lost in the crowds in Rome. In any case, while at Rome, he ran into Paul and became a Christian. So, after some time, Paul told him he needed to go back to his master, Philemon. At first, Onesimus must have been shocked. No doubt, he thought he would surely be killed. That was the usual treatment for runaway slaves. So, Paul said, "Let me send a letter with you." In that letter he basically said, "I'm sending Onesimus back to you. Receive him as a Christian brother. If he stole anything when he ran away, he doesn't have any way to pay you back. Put that to my account—not to mention, of course, brother Philemon, that you owe me your very life." Paul certainly did not expect to pay anything! But, Paul did not stop there. He said to Philemon, "I'm planning to visit you soon." In other words, "I'm coming to check on you." Furthermore, he said to a neighboring church, "Make sure you read the letter I wrote to Philemon."

There is a fairly well-founded tradition that the same Onesimus not only went home and served Philemon well, but also some time later actually became the Bishop of Ephesus.

Sometimes, we feel that we need to get involved in social issues. What about the work, for example, that the Salvation Army is doing? Should we be competing with them? No! Ellen White indicated that God blesses the Salvation Army, but let us get on with our work. (8T 184.3) And what about the American Bible Society and the International Bible Societies which are producing millions of copies of the Bible in a thousand languages. Should we compete with them? No! We should support them!

So, how should we relate to governments? Being a Roman citizen saved Paul's life on more than one occasion. Of course, the same Roman government eventually beheaded him. In summary, notice this from the *SDA Bible Commentary* for Romans 13:2.

Paul does not imply in these verses that God always approves the conduct of civil governments. Nor does Paul mean that it is the Christian's duty always to submit to them. The requirements of government may at times be contrary to the law of God, and under such circumstances the Christian is "to obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Paul's point is that the ruling power of human governments is entrusted to men by God, according to His own purposes for man's welfare. Their continuance in power, or their fall from authority, is in His hands. Therefore, the Christian will support the authority of the existing state. He will not presume to take it into his own hands to resist or to depose "the powers that be."

Such instruction was especially needful in Paul's day, for at that time the Jews were in a turbulent mood and had already stirred up rebellion in various parts of the Roman Empire. For Christians to reveal a similarly unsubmissive spirit would have been to incur the same displeasure that was beginning to fall upon the Jews. It would also have resulted in their forfeiting the protection of the Roman state, which had often been a blessing to the early Christians, as Paul could testify from his own experience (see Acts 22:24-30). Furthermore, it would have brought reproach upon the Christian church and its message of peace and brotherly love. Therefore, Paul elsewhere urges believers to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1, 2) and to obey them (Titus 3:1). Likewise Peter commands Christians to submit "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13-17). (*SDA Bible Commentary*, article on Romans 13:1)

Imagine how exciting it would be if someday the church would call a great conference for us to sit down together and decide what our one main task is. Then we would need to look at all the other things we do to try to determine how well those other things support the one main task. Can we afford the enormous healthcare industry operated by the church? Can we afford our very extensive educational system? Or, should we ask, "Can we afford not to have them?"

And while talking about leadership, how should we relate to the leadership in the church? Should our relationship to those leaders be different from what it is to world leaders?

Angels of God are commissioned to have oversight of the work; and if it does not move right, those who are at the head of the work will be corrected, and things will move in God's order without interference of this or that individual. (*1 Testimonies* 204.1)

33. Read Romans 13:8-10. If love is the fulfilling of all law, then what is the purpose of the Sabbath? If the first three commandments describe our love for God and the last six describe our love for our fellow human beings, then perhaps we do not need the Sabbath any more. Could that be true as many of our Christian friends suggest?

It is often thought that the Old Testament is all about laws and rules and sacrifices, etc. while the New Testament is all about love and peace. This may come from a misreading of John 1:17 (*KJV*) where the word *but* appears in italics. "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." It is very important to understand that words in the *King James Version* are in italics not for emphasis but because they are not present in the original!

Look at Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:4 and compare Matthew 22:37-40. All of Leviticus 19 is about how we should relate to our brothers and sisters—and in their case, to their fellow Israelites. As you will remember, in Romans 3 Paul said the righteousness of God has been demonstrated throughout the Old Testament. Leviticus 19 says we must not hate a brother or take vengeance on him. (Compare the Sermon on the Mount.)

But, what about Jesus's statement to the disciples on His last night with them as recorded in John 13:34-35: "And now I give you a new commandment: love one another." What was new about that commandment? In the Old Testament, we are told to "love our

neighbors as we love ourselves.” Jesus repeated this. But, in John He said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” This was an entirely new standard. There are people who do not even like themselves.

Think what it would be like to live in a society where everyone’s life could be described by that kind of love and care for his neighbors.

But, then the question must be asked: If all God wants of us is love, why has He given so many detailed laws and requirements? (See Galatians 3:19-25) Shouldn’t God just have said, “I want you to love each other”? Look at the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21) Is it necessary to say to people who are not doing all those wrong things to stop it? You do not need to tell people to stop killing unless they are killing. You do not need to tell people to stop committing adultery, stealing, or lying unless they are doing those things. Think how comfortable it must be for God to associate with perfectly behaving and loving angels and how distressing it must be for Him to see what is happening here on this earth!

What is the purpose of the Sabbath? Does the Sabbath help us to become more loving and lovable Christians? The Sabbath is our date with God. It is a time for us to consider creation and our Creator. It is a time to remember that God is the One who frees us from the slavery of sin as well as slavery to our fellow men. It is a time to remember all that Jesus did through His life and death and why He rested in the grave on that very important Sabbath following Passover in A.D. 31. Most likely, Paul also wrote Hebrews, and he gave a good discussion of the Sabbath there.

34. Read Romans 13:11-14. We call ourselves Adventists. What does that imply? Are we focused on the second advent of Jesus Christ? The signs that the Bible gives to indicate that “the time of the end” has come are now hundreds of years old: 1) the Lisbon earthquake on November 1, 1755; 2) The dark day and the moon turned to blood on May 19, 1780; 3) The end of the 1260 day-year prophecy in 1798; 4) The falling of the stars on November 13, 1833; and 5) The end of the 2300 day-year prophecy on October 22, 1844. Does it support our contention that God is completely trustworthy for us to keep saying, “The end is near... The end is near... The end is near,” and nothing seems to be happening?

God has been telling us through His prophets and apostles that the day of the Lord is near since the days of Joel around 800 B.C.! (Joel 1:15; 2:1) One possible way to explain these verses is to suggest that for every individual Christian that whenever his life ends, for him it is the day of the Lord. After s/he closes her/his eyes in death, the very next thing that person knows will be the coming of the Lord.

The disciples thought that the first coming of Christ would be the time when He would establish His kingdom on this earth. When Jesus began suggesting that that was not true, they asked Him, “When will these things happen?” (See Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) Then, Jesus gave us some of the signs we have mentioned. The last “time prophecy” to be fulfilled was 1844. However, we do have one prophecy that needs continual updating: Daniel 12:4. But, a flexible time prophecy does not help us.

So, who is responsible for the delay? Do we look good as we continue to say that the day of the Lord is near? What about God? Why is He delaying His coming? What does the long delay say about Him? (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:1-12; *Evangelism* 694-697)

Or, are we more like Jonah—announcing our failures as prophets? Jonah only cared about his own prophetic reputation. He did not care about the people of Nineveh. They were his enemies. Nor did he care about all the animals that lived there. (Jonah 4:10-11)

How many of the things we do that others do not do and the things we do not do that others do cause people to look at us and say we admire you for your willingness to obey all these rules; but, we do not admire your fussy, fuddy-duddy God?

Are we so sensitive and careful about misrepresenting God that if we do so it hurts us? Do we hasten to make any corrections necessary? Can we explain these verses at the end of Romans 13 in such a way as to make God look good? Every additional year that God waits makes Him look better. Peter explained that what we are seeing is God's patience with us because He does not want any of us to be lost. (2 Peter 3:9)

We should have expected the delay. But, should God still have to be waiting after almost 170 years of delay? Consider the parable of the 10 virgins. (Matthew 25) Are we proud of the good news about God? Paul certainly was.

Look at *Evangelism* pp. 694-697. It is very clear from those statements of Ellen White that God is waiting for us to get over our selfishness and our rebellion and to become like Him so He can return. "God's unwillingness to have his people perish has been the reason of so long delay." (2T 193.3 [1868]; *Mar* 56.4; *Ev* 694.2)

There will be a group of people—God's people—at the end of time who will be so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually (*MS* 173, 1902; *4SDABC* 1161.6) that no matter what Satan does to them they will not be deceived or moved away from their trust in God. Revelation 7:1-3 suggests that God is waiting for us to be sealed. What is the truth into which we are not yet settled? We point to our keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. But, the people who crucified Jesus kept the Sabbath much more scrupulously than we do! They would have agreed with most of what is on the back of our baptismal certificates.

In Romans 1-8, Paul tried very hard to describe the gospel—the good news about God. He assured us that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be.

Do we believe the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:17) that His Father is just as loving and kind as He is? If we truly accept that message and all that it implies, we will be won back to become like God. And we will become so settled into the truth that it will be safe for Jesus to come back again. Could we understand the gospel and explain it with such clarity—perhaps even better than any group has done before us—so that the end could come? How many of our ancestors have thought that they might be the final generation. Now, it is our turn. The final generation of Christians will not need the baling wire of rules and regulations to tell them what to do. They will do right because it is right. Society changes; but, the good news about God never changes. We do not have to worry about God's part; He will do what He needs to do.

The only condition that God cannot heal is an unwillingness to listen, trust, and have faith. If we refuse His healing advice, we only lose. We will die, but it will not be His fault. If we are willing to trust Him and follow His advice, there is no condition that God cannot heal.

35. What would happen in a church if the members really acted as suggested in Romans 14:1-23? What is the main point of this chapter? Do you feel comfortable saying to someone

who disagrees with you, “Each one should firmly make up his own mind.” (Romans 14:5, *GNB*) Does Romans 14:3-6 mean we should give up our health practices and the Sabbath? Why would Paul conclude by saying, “And anything that is not based on faith is sin”? (Romans 14:23, *GNB*) If this is true, what really is sin? Is it an action? An attitude? Or, a broken relationship? (Numbers 20:12)

Read Romans 14:1-3,14. Read superficially, these verses might seem to suggest that Seventh-day Adventists are mistaken in their understanding of vegetarianism and healthful eating. These verses have sometimes been put together with 1 Corinthians 10:25-27; Mark 7:18-19; and 1 Timothy 4:1-5 to suggest that our health message is completely unbiblical. How do you understand these verses?

Once again, we notice—as we have seen so many times before—that to understand anything written, it must be viewed in its context. Romans 14 needs to be read along with Acts 15 and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10 to understand how Paul dealt with a very touchy subject in Corinth and Rome. It is particularly useful to read these passages in various versions.

Consider an example of why we must read things in context. Look at 1 Timothy 2:8-12. There are those who would like to use this passage to say that we must not wear gold and that we must not allow women to speak in church. If we are going to take this passage very literally—and out of context—and if we are to follow the *King James Version*, we must not allow women to braid their hair, and we must not put on any clothes! Don't you think it would be better to put the passage back into its original context?

Ellen White wrote things in the past against bicycles, against tennis, and against photographs. She did so because our relatively small and poor church in those days could not afford those items which were very expensive when they first became available. For example, at that time, one could furnish an entire house with very excellent furniture for the price of a bicycle.

We sometimes hear people saying that Ellen White advised women to keep their skirts 9 inches from the ground. That is true, but she was not recommending that they get them down to 9 inches from the ground; she was recommending that they get them up to 9 inches off the ground! (*1T* 521.1; compare *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1867 par. 4-11)

Some people have quoted Ellen White out of context saying that she opposed the use of drugs. In her day, even the Sears & Roebuck catalog was advertising things like Dr. Rose's French Arsenic Complexion Wafers and Dr. Hammond's Nerve and Brain Pills! You could even purchase a Heidelberg Electric Belt! Morphine and cocaine were readily available in stores without a prescription. Is it any wonder that Ellen White recommended plenty of fresh water, hot and cold treatments, and a healthy diet instead of those drug concoctions?

Romans 13 discusses how Christians should relate to government and to others living around them who are non-Christians. Romans 14 turns to what is often a more difficult subject: How to relate to other church members! In order to understand Romans 14, we need to read it along with Acts 15 and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10. When reading these four chapters together, we notice that 1 Corinthians 8 specifically mentions that the subject is food offered to idols.

This is not a discussion about diet and what is healthy to eat. It is a discussion about food offered to idols and whether or not that food was rendered unfit for Christians to eat by having been offered to an idol.

In the city of Corinth, there was a central market; and there were several roads leading from the countryside toward that central market. On each of those roads was located a variety of different shrines or temples dedicated to the gods of various mystery religions and other pagan deities. When a farmer took his produce from his farm to the market in Corinth, it was expected that he would stop at one of those pagan temples and offer a portion of it to one of those gods. As it turned out, for a variety of reasons, the “gods” always seemed to prefer flesh meat and wine as offerings. Fruits and vegetables virtually never were offered to the pagan deities. Thus, if one purchased meat or wine when he went to the market in Corinth, it was assumed that he was worshiping and respecting the god to whom that meat or wine had been offered. However, one could purchase fruits and vegetables without anyone raising any questions on the basis of conscience since those foods had not been offered to the gods.

That presented a dilemma for the Christians in Corinth. The formerly-Jewish Christians were reluctant to purchase those items for fear that they had somehow been contaminated by being offered to the pagan deities. And the recently-converted, formerly-pagan Christians were still not sure whether the idols might have actually affected the food in some way.

So, are these chapters talking about vegetarianism? No. The Bible says very little about vegetarianism. We do know that the original diet included fruits, nuts, and grains. Genesis 1:29 says, “I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat.” In this context, *fruit* includes the product of every tree with seeds in its fruit. It is interesting to note that it was not until after sin had entered our world that we were given vegetables to eat! (Genesis 3:18)

When God chose to feed the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness, He gave them angel’s food which they called manna, meaning, “What is it?” Whatever it was, it was certainly not flesh.

But, what about the example of the Lord Himself? When He chose to visit Abraham as recorded in Genesis 18, what did He eat? Sarah prepared a young calf to feed to Christ Himself and His two fellow angels! (Genesis 18:7-8) He did not even follow the kosher rules later adopted by the Jews!

And what did Jesus feed the 5000 men—not including women and children—and then the 4000 in His day? Did He only multiply the loaves? Or, did He multiply the fish as well? Since He was miraculously providing the food, couldn’t He have provided whatever He thought was best for them? (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14; Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10)

Worse than that, what did Jesus provide for the group of disciples after His resurrection as recorded in John 21:9-10? Jesus could have started the whole health-food industry by giving them soy meat or perhaps Ruskets or Weetabix! No. Jesus gave them the common food with which they were familiar. He wanted to talk to them about issues which were much more important than diet. “But He supplied only that which would suffice for their need, that which was **the daily food of the fisherfolk about the sea.**” *Testimonies*, vol.

6, p. 345 (1900); *Adventist Home*, p. 451; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 87. [Bold type is added.]

Think of other times when God acceded to human wishes and allowed His people to do things which were certainly not His ideal. He gave divorce laws. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) When Israel demanded a king, He gave them the kind of king they wanted: tall, handsome, and head and shoulders above all the others. (1 Samuel 9:2-30) But, He knew what a disaster that king would become. So, how are we to relate to these concessions on the part of God? On one occasion, a student at Loma Linda University when asked why Jesus fed His disciples fish replied, "I understand that He was living up to all the light He had!"

Seventh-day Adventists often point to the story of Daniel in support of their dietary preferences. But, it is important to notice what Ellen White said.

At the very outset of their career there came to them a decisive test of character. It was provided that they should eat of the food and drink of the wine that came from the king's table. In this the king thought to give them an expression of his favor and of his solicitude for their welfare. **But a portion having been offered to idols, the food from the king's table was consecrated to idolatry; and one partaking of it would be regarded as offering homage to the gods of Babylon. In such homage, loyalty to Jehovah forbade Daniel and his companions to join.** Even a mere pretense of eating the food or drinking the wine would be a denial of their faith. To do this would be to array themselves with heathenism and to dishonor the principles of the law of God. *Prophets and Kings* p. 481.2. [Bold type is added.]

The main reason Daniel and his friends refused to eat the king's rich food including the wine and the meat was because it had been offered to idols and eating it would have been a denial of their Hebrew faith. Thus, Daniel's simple diet of fruits, vegetables, and water was not only the healthy choice but also it was a way of refusing to worship the gods of Babylon.

Paul and Daniel faced somewhat the same issues. However, the denial of pagan gods manifested itself in seemingly opposite ways. By eating meat, Paul refused to worship the pagan gods; by not eating meat, Daniel refused to worship idols. It is very useful to read widely in the Bible, and you will discover that the Bible often provides much of the necessary information to understand these more difficult passages. Read Mark 7:1-4, *GNB*:

¹ Some Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus. ²They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their food with hands that were ritually unclean—that is, they had not washed them in the way the Pharisees said people should.

³ (For the Pharisees, as well as the rest of the Jews, follow the teaching they received from their ancestors: they do not eat unless they wash their hands in the proper way; ⁴nor do they eat anything that comes from the market unless they wash it first. And they follow many other rules which they have

received, such as the proper way to wash cups, pots, copper bowls, and beds.)

We are all aware that the Jews did a lot of ceremonial washing of hands, etc. What was the reason for all of that? Was it for hygienic reasons? Or, for ceremonial reasons? When Jesus instructed the servants to fill those six large stone jars with water (approximately 180 gallons) at the wedding feast in Cana—water which He subsequently turned into wine—those six large stone jars were there at the entrance of the house for ceremonial cleansing. In Mark 7:3, it says, “They do not eat unless they wash their hands” There is a word which follows which is much debated. Scholars are not even sure what the Greek word is: *pugme* meaning “fist,” or *puknos* meaning “dense” or “solid” but which could mean “frequently.” Some have translated it “washed their hands often,” “wash it with the fist,” “wash to the elbow,” and “wash their hands in a peculiar way.” In the *Harper Study Bible*, there is a footnote which says: “The statement is literally that they washed their hands with or to the fist. Some translate with the fist, others as far as the wrist, or elbow, others in a more general sense – carefully.”

In any case, it was done for ceremonial reasons as the *New English Bible* says, “For the Pharisees and the Jews in general never eat without washing their hands in obedience to an old established tradition.”

But, the bigger challenge is what is implied by the phrase in Mark 7:19: “Thus he declared all foods clean.” (*NASB, 1995 update*) What would that mean? Even more puzzling is the *King James Version* which says, “Purging all meats.” Does this mean that we are now free to eat whatever we want? Even whatever is sold in the meat market?

Now we see the challenge! New converts whether from paganism or from Judaism still were not sure about those idols. If one of them should have happened to go to the market and had seen a long-term church member purchasing some items that they had questions about, it could have shaken his faith. So, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:28-11:1 that truly loving Christians—mature Christians—will never do anything that would upset a new Christian. To be loving and kind and helpful for those who are coming into the truth is far more important than one’s dietary preferences.

So, what was actually happening in the Corinthian church? The conservatives were judging and criticizing those whom they considered to be liberals for buying and eating things which they considered unacceptable.

And the liberals were judging and criticizing the conservatives for being so straightlaced and even ignorant fanatics! So, Paul was effectively saying: “Let all the criticism stop. It is not your job to judge anyone else. That job is to be left to God.”

In order to get the full picture, read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. Paul made it very clear that he considered these idols to be nothing more than chunks of wood, stone, or metal. There is only one true God. Knowing the truth about that God sets us free. (John 8:32) Once again, notice this was not a discussion about health or diet. What Paul was talking about was doing things that might upset a fellow believer. Those who believe that they have the knowledge that allows them to eat anything may be acting very arrogantly. And they may be wounding a fellow believer whose conscience is still weak. And so he concluded, “I will never eat meat”—and he was talking about flesh—“if it causes my brother

to fall.” And we might ask, “Are we then to limit ourselves to the consciences of the weakest members of the congregation?”

But, he hastened to add in the next chapter: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”

36. Now turn to 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1. What we have just discussed is the setting for reading Romans 14. Where was Paul when he wrote Romans and Galatians? Was he not in Corinth? Read Romans 14:5. Are we really free to be convinced in our own minds about the seventh-day Sabbath? Why didn't Paul proceed to give a very clear resounding Bible study on the necessity of the seventh-day Sabbath? But, Paul moved right on and said that if one observes a certain day in honor of the Lord, he is just like the person who eats in honor of the Lord or the person who abstains in honor of the Lord.

In Romans 14:5-21, Paul was stating unequivocally that one cannot eat his way into heaven or “abstain” his way into heaven. And finally, he concluded with Romans 14:21-23 saying that if one was violating his conscience by what he was doing, he was damaging himself. And if one feels free to do certain things which he believes are in agreement with God's plan for him, keep that between himself and God. And then, he concluded, “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin,” (*RSV*) or “Anything that is not based on faith is sin.” (*GNB*)

Paul was thus saying that those who are mature enough in faith who have been Christians longer should be willing to defer to the beliefs of those who are new in the faith. Jesus said something similar in Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; and Luke 17:2. But, how do you feel about this? Is it right for someone else's conscience to determine what you can do? Are you willing to do the loving thing as opposed to the legally right thing? God cannot admit to heaven people who do not care about the impact they might have on others. God's guarantee of safety in heaven is the fact that He will only admit people who are loving all the time. No wonder John said in 1 John 3:14, *GNB*:

We know that we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love our brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love is still under the power of death.

Paul himself had written that famous love chapter which we read in 1 Corinthians 13. It describes the kind of people who are safe to admit to the kingdom of heaven.

Probably the greatest test of whether or not we are living up to 1 Corinthians 13 is how we treat people who have newly come into the church. Paul felt completely free, and he knew he was free. But, he would not do anything which would upset another member of the church, especially one who was just beginning to learn about Christianity.

Paul went on to say that this applies to a whole variety of things, not just to what we eat. Might it apply to something that we wear? Or, something that we do?

But, what if the person that you are offending has been a Christian longer than you have? What if they are—claiming at least that they are—mature Christians? Remember what happened in Acts 15? Paul and Silas had been at that conference in Jerusalem where the consensus was that:

Acts 15:28-29, *GNB*:

²⁸ The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides these necessary rules: ²⁹ eat no food that has been offered to idols; eat no blood; eat no animal that has been strangled; and keep yourselves from sexual immorality. You will do well if you take care not to do these things. With our best wishes.

Did Paul really believe that the Holy Spirit had agreed with them that Christians should avoid eating meat offered to idols? In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, was he directly contradicting what they had agreed upon at that conference?

Paul looked over the situation in Corinth and Rome as he understood it and effectively said: "In light of what I know about the gospel, we need to set aside that ruling made at the General Conference in Jerusalem." So, how about it? Is it more serious to upset a new convert? Or, more serious to disagree with church leadership?

From that winter of A.D. 57-58 in Corinth, Paul went back to Jerusalem with that very large offering that he had collected from among the Gentile churches. And when he arrived at Jerusalem, he and the others traveling with him went to visit the church leaders. Take a look at Ellen White's comments in *Acts of the Apostles* about that meeting and what the result was.

Never before had the apostle approached Jerusalem with so sad a heart. He knew that he would find few friends and [Begin page 398] many enemies. He was nearing the city which had rejected and slain the Son of God and over which now hung the threatenings of divine wrath. Remembering how bitter had been his own prejudice against the followers of Christ, he felt the deepest pity for his deluded countrymen. And yet how little could he hope that he would be able to help them! The same blind wrath which had once burned in his own heart, was now with untold power kindling the hearts of a whole nation against him.

And he could not count upon the sympathy and support of even his own brethren in the faith. **The unconverted Jews who had followed so closely upon his track, had not been slow to circulate the most unfavorable reports at Jerusalem, both personally and by letter** and some, even of the apostles and elders, had received these reports as truth, making no attempt to contradict them, and manifesting no desire to harmonize with him.

Yet in the midst of discouragements the apostle was not in despair. He trusted that the Voice which had spoken to his own heart would yet speak to the hearts of his countrymen. . . . (AA 397.5-398.2)

In the earlier years of the gospel work among the Gentiles some of the leading brethren at Jerusalem, clinging to former prejudices and habits of thought, had not co-operated heartily with Paul and his associates. In their anxiety to preserve a few meaningless forms and ceremonies, they had lost sight of the blessing that would come to them and to the cause they loved, through an effort to unite in one all parts of the Lord's work. Although desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church, nevertheless, they had failed to keep step with the advancing providences of God, and in their human wisdom attempted to throw about workers many

unnecessary restrictions. **Thus there arose [at headquarters] a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor. They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions.** (AA 400.1)

Afterward, when it became apparent that the converts among the Gentiles were increasing rapidly, there were a few of the leading brethren at Jerusalem who began to cherish anew their former prejudices against the methods of Paul and his associates. **These prejudices strengthened with the passing of the years, until some of the leaders determined that the work of preaching the gospel must henceforth be conducted in accordance with their own ideas. If Paul would conform his methods to certain policies which they advocated they would acknowledge and sustain his work; otherwise they could no longer look upon it with favor or grant it their support.** (AA 401.2)

These men had lost sight of the fact that God is the teacher of His people; that every worker in His cause is to obtain an individual experience in following the divine Leader, not looking to man for direct guidance; that His workers are to be molded and fashioned, not after man's ideas, but after the similitude of the divine. [Begin page 402] (AA 401.3)

In his ministry the apostle Paul had taught the people "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The truths that he proclaimed had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. . . . Which things," declared Paul, "we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." 1 Corinthians 2:4, 10-13. (AA 402.1)

Throughout his ministry, Paul had looked to God for direct guidance. At the same time, he had been very careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem, and as a result the churches were "established in the faith, and increased in number daily." Acts 16:5. And now, notwithstanding the lack of sympathy shown him by **some**, he found comfort in the consciousness that he had done his duty in encouraging in his converts a spirit of loyalty, generosity, and brotherly love, as revealed on this occasion in the liberal contributions which he was enabled to place before the Jewish elders. (AA 402.2)

After the presentation of the gifts, Paul "declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." This recital of facts brought to the hearts of all, even of those who had been doubting, the conviction that the blessing of heaven had accompanied his labors. "When they heard it,

they glorified the Lord.” They felt [Begin page 403] that the methods of labor pursued by the apostle bore the signet of Heaven. The liberal contributions lying before them added weight to the testimony of the apostle concerning the faithfulness of the new churches established among the Gentiles. **The men who, while numbered among those who were in charge of the work at Jerusalem, had urged that arbitrary measures of control be adopted, saw Paul’s ministry in a new light and were convinced that their own course had been wrong, that they had been held in bondage by Jewish customs and traditions, and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their failure to recognize that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by the death of Christ.** (AA 402.3)

This was the golden opportunity for all the leading brethren to confess frankly that God had wrought through Paul, and that at times they had erred in permitting the reports of his enemies to arouse their jealousy and prejudice. But instead of uniting in an effort to do justice to the one who had been injured, they gave him counsel which showed that they still cherished a feeling that Paul should be held largely responsible for the existing prejudice. **They did not stand nobly in his defense, endeavoring to show the disaffected ones where they were wrong, but sought to effect a compromise by counseling him to pursue a course which in their opinion would remove all cause for misapprehension.** (AA 403.1)

“Thou seest, brother,” they said, in response to his testimony, “how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are [Begin page 404] informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.” [Acts 21:20-25] (AA 403.2)

The brethren hoped that Paul, by following the course suggested, might give a decisive contradiction to the false reports concerning him. They assured him that the decision of the former council concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law, still held good. But the advice now given was not consistent with that decision. **The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction; it was the fruit of cowardice.** The leaders of the church in Jerusalem knew that by non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the Jews and expose themselves

to persecution. The Sanhedrin was doing its utmost to hinder the progress of the gospel. Men were chosen by this body to follow up the apostles, especially Paul, and in [Begin page 405] every possible way to oppose their work. Should the believers in Christ be condemned before the Sanhedrin as breakers of the law, they would suffer swift and severe punishment as apostates from the Jewish faith. (AA 404.1)

Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. **He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.** (AA 405.1) [Bold type and content in brackets is added.]

So, who was right in this whole matter of food offered to idols? Who was on God's side in this matter? The "General Conference" brethren? Or, Paul? Imagine Ellen White telling us that God did not authorize Paul to compromise with "General Conference" leadership as much as he did. As a result, Paul was arrested and spent almost all of his remaining life in prison.

Have you ever wondered how things would have turned out if Paul had stood firmly on this point? What if Paul had said to James and the rest of the Jerusalem leaders: "I'm sorry, but God will not allow me to compromise with you to that degree"? Probably, Paul would have eventually been arrested and probably beheaded in Rome. But, he might have had several more years of freedom to pursue the spread of the gospel? Might he have actually traveled to Spain and started the gospel there?

But, what about those other verses we talked about? Is it true that 1 Timothy 4:1-4 does not apply to Seventh-day Adventists? Notice that the first thing that is mentioned about the group described there is that their practice was to forbid marriage. We have never forbidden marriage. But, there is a large Christian church that says that those who are particularly dedicated to Christianity should do as Paul did and not get married so they can focus their lives on preaching and practicing the gospel. And certainly, we would understand that under Paul's circumstances, he made a wise choice. But, the restrictions that the Roman Catholic Church used to have about eating meat were certainly ceremonial and not based on health reasons. Where is the proof of that? Before Vatican II, Catholics were told they must not eat red meat on Fridays. But, if one was flying in an airplane, he would find a small card on his tray saying that since he was in the air, it was all right to eat red meat.

And there were other times when to accommodate certain situations, the church lifted the ban on eating red meat on Fridays. And then, at Vatican II, they eliminated that rule completely. This proves that it was just a ceremonial restriction.

It is interesting to take a look at Daniel in comparison to Paul. In order to reject pagan idolatry, Daniel and his friends refused to eat the king's rich foods which had been offered to idols. By contrast, Paul said that in order to reject the pagan idols in Corinth and to show that they believed that the idols had absolutely no effect on the food, Christians were free to eat the food which had been offered to those idols. Daniel and Paul did the opposite things but for the same reason. Both of them acted to reject the pagan idols.

We have a name for that kind of behavior; it is called situation ethics. It is a term that we avoid using because it has a bad reputation. We just need to practice our ethics responsibly.

A similar situation arises when we talk about higher criticism. What is higher criticism? It is the practice of asking questions like: Who wrote this book? To whom was it written? Why was it written? When one asks who wrote those last few verses in Deuteronomy about Moses going up into the mountain and dying and being buried and raised to life again, he is practicing higher criticism.

If you are studying the Bible with a Roman Catholic and he begins to quote from Maccabees or some other portion of the *Apocrypha* and you say to him, "We do not accept the Apocrypha as inspired," you are practicing higher criticism. Would it be correct for your Catholic friend to say to you, "I have been warned about you higher critics"? He might say, "Maccabees is in my Bible, and I have been taught that 'All Scripture is inspired by God.'" (2 Timothy 3:16)

Recorded in Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; and Luke 6:1-5 is the occasion when the Pharisees challenged Jesus about how He and His disciples were keeping the Sabbath. Jesus answered, "Have you never read what David did that time when he and his men were hungry?" David actually took the holy shewbread from the temple and fed it to his men. It was supposed to be eaten only by Levites. Jesus went on to explain how at other times even the priests in the temple broke the Sabbath law. Jesus concluded by saying, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:28)

Like Jesus, when we make ethical decisions, we should take into account the largest possible situation. For Seventh-day Adventists, that includes the entire great controversy.

And what about Paul saying that when it comes to which day of the week we should worship God, (Romans 14:5) let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind? Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists have taught that this must refer only to the ceremonial sabbaths which the Jews were celebrating in those days. This would certainly be true, but what about the seventh-day Sabbath? If we take that approach, are we saying that we should leave people free to observe or not observe ceremonial sabbaths as they see fit; but, when it comes to the weekly Sabbath if they do not keep it correctly, we are free to criticize and condemn as much as we like? Surely, we would all agree that more conflicts have arisen in the Christian church over the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath than ever have come over ceremonial sabbaths. When Paul was saying—and hopefully we would agree—"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," we are not saying that the seventh-day Sabbath is not important. We are saying that we should keep the seventh-day Sabbath because we fully and completely agree with the teachings of Scripture that it is the right thing to do.

37. In light of all that we have studied in Romans 14 so far, how should we understand Romans 14:22-23 (GNB)?

²² Keep what you believe about this matter, then, between yourself and God. Happy are those who do not feel guilty when they do something they judge is right! ²³ But if they have doubts about what they eat, God condemns them when they eat it, because their action is not based on faith. **And anything that is not based on faith is sin.** [Bold type is added.]

There are three verses in the New Testament defining *sin*. Traditionally, we have usually quoted 1 John 3:4 from the *King James Version*: “Whomsoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” That is a very free translation of the Greek of this verse. It would be more correctly translated—as the *RSV* does—“Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” Sin is an attitude of rebelliousness. It is choosing to do what we want to do rather than doing what God through Scripture says is best for us.

James 4:17 says, “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (*RSV*) Isn’t that rebelliousness or lawlessness?

So, what about our definition of *sin* in Romans 14:23? Paul was saying that any time one violates his faith and chooses not to trust in God, that is sin. He is damaging his conscience and damaging himself. Remember that all God asks of us is trust. Of course, that trust or faith means that we really care about doing what is right. Within the limitations of our humanity, we will try to do what is right.

God does not condemn those who fail to follow Him perfectly on every occasion. But, those who consistently make it a practice to cheat will reap what they have sown. (Galatians 6:7)

Romans 14:23 is the most fundamental and basic explanation of sin. Whenever we practice following God’s guidance and thus exercising faith, we are moving closer and closer to becoming more like Jesus Christ. By contrast, whenever we intentionally do what is wrong, we are violating that trust, and we are moving away from God, and that is sin. Isaiah 59:2, *GNB* says: “It is because of your sins that he doesn’t hear you. It is your sins that separate you from God when you try to worship him.”

38. Read Romans 15:1-3. “The strong should help to bear the failings of the weak.” That is exactly what Paul was trying to say in Romans 14. Does this agree with his writings elsewhere?

Look at Ephesians 4:11-16. We need to grow up in our Christian faith. We need to become mature and do as Paul has suggested in Romans 14. We must no longer be like children, tossed about by every wind of doctrine. And we must not be shaken even by the behavior of some other church members who may be doing something that we think is questionable. In other words, when we have doubts about what we are doing, we are sinning.

In actual fact, the more we know about God the freer we become. It is a law that we become like the person or thing that we worship and admire. (*GC 555*) So, how should we practice this newfound freedom? Should we allow church leadership to make our ethical decisions for us? God is holding us personally responsible for our ethics. This does not

mean that we are free to do whatever we feel like doing! But, ultimately, it means that after carefully considering a given situation and in the light of the entire great controversy and ideally after having an opportunity to discuss the matter with fellow believers whom we trust, we must finally do what we believe is right because that is the basis on which God will judge us.

Do doctors condemn their dying patients who fail to follow their directions? Taking certain medicines or doing certain physical therapy treatments may not be comfortable. We may wish that we did not have to do them. Assuming the doctor has made a correct decision about the proper treatments, they are necessary. It is none of our business to look at our fellow patients in the hospital that we call the church, condemning and criticizing them because they are not doing exactly what we think is right. They will stand or fall not based on our opinions but based on the judgment of God. Would we admit the thief on the cross into heaven? God will!

Jesus gives us marvelous examples of how God feels about sinners. Look at the story of the woman taken in adultery. (John 8:1-11) There is some suggestion that this woman was Mary Magdalene. She was the one about whom Ellen White said that her uncle Simon had led her into sin! (*ST*, May 9, 1900 par. 15; *DG* 239.4) That same Simon was criticizing Jesus for allowing her even to touch Him! (Luke 7:39) But, when it came time to give His friends the greatest news of all time—the truth about the gospel and the resurrection—who was the first one to be given that good news? It was Mary! (John 20:1-18)

And remember the story of Peter on crucifixion weekend. God is not interested in condemning any of His children. He wants to help each one of them to become more like Him and to do what is right because it is right. No wonder Paul said: “There is, therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in union with Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) Of course, it is important for us to recognize that at least part of the reason why Jesus gave that good news to Mary first was because she came to the tomb and was there.

So, what does God do with His cheating children? And how should we relate to others around us that we may feel are cheating?

No one has ever been reclaimed from a wrong position by censure and reproach; but many have thus been driven from Christ and led to seal their hearts against conviction. A tender spirit, a gentle, winning deportment, may save the erring and hide a multitude of sins. The revelation of Christ in your own character will have a transforming power upon all with whom you come in contact. Let Christ be daily made manifest in you, and He will reveal through you the creative energy of His word—a gentle, persuasive, yet mighty influence to re-create other souls in the beauty of the Lord our God. (*Mount of Blessing*, 128.3)

Elsewhere, Ellen White said:

Parents, you are the ones to decide whether the minds of your children shall be filled with ennobling thoughts or with vicious sentiments. You cannot keep their active minds unoccupied; **neither can you frown away evil.** (*Adventist Home* 410.2)

The effort to earn salvation by one's own works inevitably leads men to pile up human exactions as a barrier against sin. [Begin page 123] For, seeing that they fail to keep the law, [although they want to keep it] they will devise rules and regulations of their own to force themselves to obey.

All this [preoccupation with the rules] turns the mind away from God to self. His love dies out of the heart, and with it perishes love for his fellow men. A system of human invention, with its multitudinous exactions, will lead its advocates to judge all who come short of the prescribed human standard. The atmosphere of selfish and narrow criticism stifles the noble and generous emotions, and causes men to become self-centered judges and petty spies. (MB 123.1)

The Pharisees were of this class. They came forth from their religious services, not humbled with a sense of their own weakness, not grateful for the great privileges that God had given them. They came forth filled with spiritual pride, and their theme was, "Myself, my feelings, my knowledge, my ways." Their own attainments became the standard by which they judged others. Putting on the robes of self-dignity, they mounted the judgment seat to criticize and condemn. (MB 123.2) [Bold type and content in brackets is added.]

Doesn't that remind you of Romans 14?

The people partook largely of the same spirit, intruding upon the province of conscience and judging one another in matters that lay between the soul and God. It was in reference to this spirit and practice that Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." That is, do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of Scripture [even], a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them. (MB 123.3-124.0) [Content in brackets is added.]

39. But what about calling sin by its right name? How are we supposed to do that? In actual fact, we are probably calling a lot of things sin which are not really sin. Sin is rebelliousness, lawlessness. A faithful Sundaykeeper who believes he is doing right is not rebellious or lawless. Hopefully, someday s/he will discover the truth as we know it. But, it certainly does not help to condemn them. And we are probably committing a worse sin as we, in our pride and arrogance, condemn them. No wonder Ellen White said, "Christ declares that pretentious piety is nauseating to Him." (*Special Testimonies, Series B, 2:20.1*)

In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, Paul was dealing with a problem with which the early Christians were very, very familiar. (Acts 15) It was a very contentious issue. And what should we learn from Paul's handling of that problem? Are we free to do whatever we feel like doing? To conclude that from these very carefully thought out and worded chapters, would be very sad indeed.

40. Read Romans 15:1-6. There should not be any break between Romans 14 and 15. Romans 14:1-4 and Romans 15:1-2 show a very close connection. Paul was challenging

us to accept new believers into the church without criticizing them because of their former behavior. Perhaps, the pagans who came into the church still thought the idols were real. Do not criticize them. Maybe the former Jews who came in were still constrained by their many little rules. Do not criticize them.

Do we have any examples from Paul himself about how to deal with new believers coming into the church and bringing with them some of their very unchristian behaviors?

Probably the best example is 1 Corinthians 12-14: The question of speaking in tongues. Take a careful look at the tongues experience at Pentecost as described in Acts 2:1-12 and contrast it with what was happening in Corinth as described in 1 Corinthians 12-14. First of all and perhaps most important, at Pentecost, everyone understood what was said—understood in their own language. In Corinth no one understood! An interpreter was required. Paul started off by almost agreeing with the Corinthians in their tongues experience. In 1 Corinthians 14:18, *GNB*, he said, “I thank God that I speak in strange tongues much more than any of you.” And he did not explain what he meant right there. This could not possibly be the babbling that they were experiencing in Corinth because he said in 1 Corinthians 14:19, *GNB*: “But in church worship I would rather speak five words that can be understood, in order to teach others, than speak thousands of words in strange tongues.”

Paul went on to say, “Let me suggest a better way.” (1 Corinthians 14:5,23-25,31-33,39) Each church member should learn to speak clearly the truth about God otherwise known as prophesying. And, of course, there is love as described in 1 Corinthians 13. But, then he went on in 1 Corinthians 14 to say that if you want to continue speaking in tongues, make sure that only one person at a time speaks and that there is present an interpreter qualified to explain to the other members. (1 Corinthians 14:27) And finally, he concluded by saying, “Let everything be done decently and in order.” (1 Corinthians 14:40) If they had followed Paul’s advice, the whole tongues-speaking experience in Corinth would have dissipated. And that is probably what actually happened by the time Paul got back there.

41. How should we relate to people who believe that unless one speaks in tongues, he has not yet received the Holy Spirit? Some Pentecostal groups would suggest that until you have had that experience, you do not even understand the gospel. First John tells us that God can be trusted and that He will forgive us and accept us without any special manifestations. (1 John 1:9) First Corinthians 14 is a near-perfect example of how to correct people without insulting them. Do you agree with Paul’s methods? Sometimes, we feel like we are having to bend down to accommodate our fellow brothers and sisters in the church. How far did God have to reach down to accommodate us?

Look at the myriad of examples in the Old Testament of God reaching down to meet us where we are. He discussed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham as if they were equals. (Genesis 18) Look at Gideon’s experience. (Judges 6-8) A wet fleece on the dry ground and then a dry fleece on the wet ground and still Gideon was not convinced. He still needed additional signs. And he never gave up his concubines or all of his idols. But, God was able to use him.

How do loving parents respond to the victories and defeats of their children today? Aren’t they almost more involved than the children themselves? Shouldn’t it be like that in

the church also? If someone in the church is having difficulty, shouldn't we rally around him and help him and support him in whatever way we can, trying to win him back?

Consider some of the other ways that God has condescended to meet us where we are. Did Jesus really need to be circumcised on the eighth day? Why was it necessary for Him to spend almost 30 years working, at first with His stepfather, and then by Himself in that carpenter shop in Nazareth? How did the people of Nazareth respond to His time there? Did He win any souls? Or, did He just practice excellent carpentry? Why do you think the people of Nazareth responded the way they did on two different occasions when Jesus came back during His ministry? (Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6) Jesus waited until He was 30 years old to begin preaching. That was the custom in His day. Don't you think He could have done a good job at 21? He did an excellent job at age 12! Was God ashamed to look and act like an ordinary Jew in His day? He got tired; He got dirty; He associated with all kinds of sinners! Think what an incredible contrast there was between that "mystery of righteousness" and the "mystery of iniquity." Although only a creature created by God, Satan wanted to be equal with God. (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28) When Jesus came as a human being to this earth, Satan asked the God-man to bow down to him and worship him! (Matthew 4:8-11)

Read Philippians 2:1-11. What does this say to us about the condescension of God? Imagine Jesus coming down and living His impeccable, sinless life and yet, dying the death of a common criminal! We actually do know of one time when Jesus got down on His knees. But what was it for? To wash a dozen pairs of dirty feet! Can you imagine God the Father doing that? (*TMK* 338)

After Jesus called Matthew, one of the tax collectors at Capernaum, to be one of His disciples, He was invited by Matthew to a feast. And who was at that feast? Tax collectors, prostitutes, and drunkards. (Matthew 9:9-13; 11:19; Luke 7:34)

42. About six months after beginning His ministry by being baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus attended the first Passover of His ministry. During that time, somehow—we do not know exactly how—Nicodemus was impressed by Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He wanted to talk to Jesus, but he certainly did not want to be seen talking to Jesus in public! As you know God, would He (The Father? The Son? The Holy Spirit?) be willing to grant an interview with such a person at nighttime? (John 3) Can you imagine being embarrassed to be seen talking with your God? The so-called "sovereign" God that many worship would have denied such a request.

Look at Ellen White's comments about the time shortly after the war in heaven when Lucifer and his fallen angels requested an interview with Christ. (*EW* 146.1,2; *1SP* 29.2-30.3; *ST*, January 16, 1879, par. 9-12, *SR* 26.1-27.2; *TA* 46.3-47.1) They wept at that interview. And Jesus wept with them. But, He had to tell them that they had become so accustomed to thinking and doing evil things that it was impossible for God to take them back because it would only result in further war in heaven! And Satan responded by saying he would destroy the government of God. Think of Satan wanting to negotiate terms for being taken back by God. Do you think any of the followers of Satan wanted to humble themselves and return to heaven on that occasion? What kept them where they were? Are we constrained by our habits and peer pressure from practicing the Christianity we believe that we should be practicing?

Look at how gracious Jesus Christ was with His enemies on that occasion—angels for whom there was no hope. And what about Judas?

Does this kind of behavior remind you of Paul's words, "I am all things to all men so that by any means I might win some"? (1 Corinthians 9:22) When we choose to treat sinners in a kind and generous way—even forgiving them if they have wronged us personally—isn't that a dangerous thing to do? People might even accuse us of being soft on sin.

43. How was it that Paul got into trouble with the church leaders in Jerusalem? Wasn't it because of his close association with so many "sinners" (Gentiles)? But, isn't that what Jesus did? And Paul was determined to act as much like Jesus as he possibly could. To be forgiving one must necessarily run the risk of being misunderstood. Would it be safe for a Christian who is trying to be "all things to all men so that he might save some" to associate with hardened sinners? (Romans 15:3; Psalm 69:9)
44. Because He has given us the freedom to rebel, is God responsible for sin?

We could profitably spend considerable time discussing all the incidences recorded in the Bible of the times when God reached down very low to meet us where we are. Think of David and the story of Bathsheba and Uriah. What he did to Uriah was unthinkable. What would we do with a David in the church today? With his many wives and his other problems, David would be disfellowshipped; and, no doubt, his murder of Uriah would result in him permanently being disfellowshipped. But, how did God treat him? Even after that terrible crime and sin, David continued to write Scripture as one of the "holy men of God." (2 Peter 1:21) And Psalms 51 is one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible. David's repentance was full, complete, and unconditional; God's acceptance of David was full, complete, and unconditional. In his early years, David was a man after God's own heart. Was he a man after God's own heart again after that dreadful experience and his repentance?

And what about David's son, Solomon. Imagine a man with 1000 wives! We would have to disfellowship him every week for almost 3 years just to cover the wives! In his youth while writing much of Proverbs, his wisdom became so renowned that people came from all over the then-known world just to listen to him and hear what he had to say about God. Doesn't that parallel the position that Lucifer held back in heaven before his fall? But, even when one understands God's purposes, His character, and His government very well, he still has the capacity to rebel. When it seemed like Solomon had gone so far that it was almost impossible for him to come back, he changed and did come back. How did God respond? He asked Solomon to write some more Scripture! He wrote Ecclesiastes after that dreadful fall. Unlike Lucifer, Solomon came back. Solomon does not look very good in Ecclesiastes; but, God looks marvelous and very forgiving. But, just because God is very forgiving, it does not take away the consequences of one's sins. Solomon's mistakes led to the breakup of the kingdom and the beginning of the downfall of both Israel and Judah.

45. How many biblical characters remained faithful to God through their entire experience? What about Joseph? And what about Daniel? Were there others?

Read Hebrews 11:30-32. Would you have chosen that group of people as your representative "saints"? Rahab? Samson? Jephthah? Gideon? However, this is certainly no recommendation for us to do what they did!

46. But, what about those who did not come back? What about King Saul? In his youth, he was tall and good looking, head and shoulders above others. God gave him a new heart and a right spirit. (1 Samuel 10:9) But, Saul wasted all those advantages and ended up by consulting a medium, trying to consult the dead; and then he went out the next morning and committed suicide in the midst of battle. (1 Samuel 28:3-25; 31:1-6) And what about Judas? How did Jesus treat Judas? Could the story of Judas have turned out like the story of Peter? Did Jesus look at Judas differently in the judgment hall than He did Peter? What if Judas had gone crying out to the Garden of Gethsemane as Peter did and knelt beside Peter as both of them poured out their hearts in repentance? Would God have taken him back? But, Judas was not willing to give up his pride.

Isn't the kindness of God supposed to lead us to repentance? (Romans 2:4) We should not be surprised at God's incredible patience. See 2 Peter 3:8-9. If we are lost, it will be entirely our own fault.

So, if you really believe God is like that and you want to be as much like Him as possible, how would you treat other members of the church family? We are to welcome everyone but, of course, not for disputes over opinions. (Romans 14) How sad it would be for two so-called saints to argue their way into hell!

47. Remember Paul's statement in Galatians 1:8-9? How many issues in Christianity would you be willing to die for? What was it that Paul was speaking about in Galatians 1? He was talking about the gospel, the good news, the truth about God. Would you be willing to die defending God's reputation? Will we ever be asked to put our lives on the line in defense of God? Is it worth risking the destruction of some new convert because we are arguing about what they eat, what they wear, or some other minor detail of little consequence?

Read Romans 15:7-13. Paul was quoting from several places in the Old Testament. (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isaiah 11:10) From these verses isn't it clear that God has always intended for the Jews to share the good news with Gentiles. It clearly says so in the Old Testament. Think of how much trouble Paul got into for opposing the idea that the good news—the gospel—was exclusively for Jews. On the basis of all of Scripture, don't we believe that the good news—the gospel—is for everyone? Is that why we have stories about faithful Canaanites so early in the Scripture? Consider Tamar (Genesis 38) and Rahab (Joshua 2; 6:22-25) as well as the story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. (See the book of Ruth.) Did Tamar become one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ because she was so cleverly deceptive?

Consider the story of Rahab. Was she saved because she did such a good job of lying? Didn't she lie by saying the spies were not there? If you had been lying under the flax on the roof overhearing what she was saying, how would you have prayed? "Dear Lord, please help Rahab tell the truth"? Or, as one medical student once suggested, "Lord help me not to sneeze!" Wouldn't it have been a perfectly natural thing for Rahab to say: "No. They are not here"? How often had some wife from Jericho looking for her husband been told by Rahab: "No. He's not here"? There are many stories like this in the Old Testament, and they are told without comment. There was no voice from heaven which said, "Well lied, Rahab." Nor was there a voice from heaven saying, "You shouldn't have done that."

48. Read Acts 10. It took a very dramatic event to convince Peter to associate with Gentiles and speak to them about God. Would you have dared to say, "No" to God three times?

Based on what he already knew about the truth, Peter said, “No” to that sheet three times. And Peter finally got the message: Do not treat a fellow human being like one of those indigestible things in the sheet. And it was not only Peter who had problems. Look at what happened when Peter came back to Jerusalem to meet with the brethren! (Acts 11:1-18) And even after that experience, Peter’s behavior was not always consistent. (Galatians 2:11-14)

Look at how gracious Paul was to those Roman Christians in Romans 1 and in Romans 15. (Romans 1:12; 15:15)

Look at Paul’s handling of the problems in Corinth through those four letters including that very harsh “Sinai letter.” Did Paul believe that when he wrote that very harsh letter (probably now found in 2 Corinthians 10-13) that he was acting just as God would have acted in that situation? It is interesting to note that having written that letter and then become very anxious about the response, when Paul received the news that the letter had worked, he wrote once more to the Corinthians and then went to Corinth. It was in light of all of that that he sat down and wrote Galatians and Romans. Paul had learned that God’s methods—firm, but kind and loving—really work. No wonder he concluded that the good news has power. (Romans 1:16-17)

As we know, Paul believed it was his calling to go to those new territories. Some of those places were very difficult and dangerous. So, why did Paul go there? Was it because he thought that he needed to pay the church back for having persecuted believers in his early days? He was not trying to win God’s favor; he just considered it his highest privilege to speak the truth about God. He did not even ask the church to support him; he earned his way as he worked in all those dangerous places.

49. Notice that Jesus worked using signs and wonders. Paul also talked about signs and wonders. (Romans 15:17) At the end of time, Satan will try to deceive by working signs and wonders.

Will God also work signs and wonders at the end of time?

Look at *Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, p. 54. Doesn’t this make good sense?

The way in which Christ worked [and the apostles followed in his footsteps] was to preach the Word, and to relieve suffering by miraculous works of healing. But I am instructed that we cannot now work in this way, for Satan will exercise his power by working miracles. God’s servants today could not work by means of miracles, because spurious works of healing, claiming to be divine, will be wrought. [Content in brackets is added.]

In the final days of this earth’s history, will God be performing signs and wonders to win people to the truth? Or, mainly just to protect His faithful ones who are already in the truth? People are supposed to be won to the truth in our day not so much by stunning miracles that we through God might perform but rather by the wonderful way in which we represent the truth about God.

An important proof of the fact that signs and wonders and healing miracles are not the best kind of evidence is by watching the religious channels on television on any given Sunday. One so-called “miracle worker” will perform a miracle and then say, “Now listen

to what God has told me.” In the next hour, another so-called “miracle worker” will perform his miracle and say something that contradicts what the previous person said.

50. Which is a greater miracle in God’s eyes? A miracle of healing? Or, the miracle of converting a sinner to become a believer? There are three times in Scripture when there were many miracles: 1) In connection with the exodus from Egypt, 2) In the days of Elijah and Elisha, and 3) During the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. Were those times of great faith? Often, it has been suggested that if we had more faith, we would perform more miracles. Those three occasions were times in the Bible of very low faith. God had to do dramatic things just to get people’s attention.

What God wants most of all in our day is to pull together a group of people who are so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually that they cannot be moved. (4SDABC 1161.6) Then, they will be ready to face the Devil and all his deceptions. And God will finally be able to say to Satan: “Here are my people. You cannot destroy them; but, you can do whatever else you want to do, and they will not be deceived.” That group will be called the 144,000. And that is when Satan’s time will be finished.

Notice that even in Jesus’s day, He said to the 72 who had been sent out to perform miracles around Perea: “But don’t be glad because the evil spirits obey you; rather be glad because your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20) The goal is not to perform miracles but to represent God correctly.

51. What was it that had prevented Paul from going to Rome earlier? (Romans 15:22) Paul thought that he had spent enough time in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. He thought it was time for him to move on. There is no evidence that he ever reached Spain. Unfortunately, we know what happened when he carried a very generous offering back to headquarters in Jerusalem. Could such a thing happen in our day?

The Saviour’s words of reproof to the men of Nazareth applied, in the case of Paul, not only to the unbelieving Jews, but to his own brethren in the faith. **Had the leaders in the church fully surrendered their feelings of bitterness toward the apostle, and accepted him as one specially called of God to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, the Lord would have spared him to them. God had not ordained that Paul’s labors should so soon end, but He did not work a miracle to counteract the train of circumstances to which the course of the leaders in the church at Jerusalem had given rise.** (Acts of the Apostles 417.2) [Bold type is added.]

Why not? She closed the chapter with this.

The same spirit is still leading to the same results. A neglect to appreciate and improve the provisions of divine grace has deprived the church of many a blessing. How often would the Lord have prolonged the work of some faithful minister, had his labors been appreciated! But if the church permits the enemy of souls to pervert the understanding, so that they misrepresent and misinterpret the words and acts of the servant of Christ; if they allow themselves to stand in his way and hinder his usefulness, the Lord [Begin page 418] sometimes removes from them the blessing which He gave. (AA 417.3)

Satan is constantly working through his agents to dishearten and destroy those whom God has chosen to accomplish a great and good work. They may be ready to sacrifice even life itself for the advancement of the cause of Christ, [Paul was. Wasn't he?] yet the great deceiver will suggest to their brethren doubts concerning them which, if entertained, would undermine confidence in their integrity of character, and thus cripple their usefulness. **Too often he [Satan] succeeds in bringing upon them, through their own brethren, such sorrow of heart that God graciously interposes to give His persecuted servants rest. After the hands are folded upon the pulseless breast, when the voice of warning and encouragement is silent, then the obdurate may be aroused to see and prize the blessings they have cast from them. Their death may accomplish that which their life has failed to do.** (AA 418.1) [Bold type and content in brackets is added.]

52. What do you think Paul's converts in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia thought when they received the news of Paul's imprisonment and how and why it happened?

Paul asked his friends in Rome to pray for him. We know that God was in favor of what he wanted to do. So, why bother to pray about it? We sometimes struggle with the question about praying for something which we are almost certain God wants us to do anyway. But, while we are struggling with how to answer that question, we should keep praying, just as Paul suggested.

53. At the end of the book of Romans, there is a doxology. (Romans 16:25-27) Some ancient manuscripts have this doxology both in Romans 16:25-27 and after Romans 14:23. Other ancient documents have these verses only in Romans 14:23. One has it after Romans 15:33. Is that a problem? How did these verses end up in three different locations? Did that happen under inspiration?

And Paul ended his book in Romans 16:26 talking about the "obedience which springs from faith," just where he began in Romans 1:5.

54. How could Paul have known so many people in Rome if he had never been there? We are reminded of the saying that "all roads lead to Rome." In those days, no doubt, there were people that he had met in many different places who were then residing in Rome. And notice the kind and gracious words he had to say about many of those fellow Christians.
55. Wasn't Paul the one who wrote this letter? How do we explain Romans 16:22 which says: "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, send you Christian greetings." This is another evidence of the fact that Paul used secretaries or amanuenses when writing his letters.

And so, Paul ended his magnificent letter to the Romans with this glorious doxology.

Romans 16:25-27 (GNB):

²⁵ Let us give glory to God! He is able to make you stand firm in your faith, according to the Good News I preach about Jesus Christ and according to the revelation of the secret truth which was hidden for long ages in the past.

²⁶ Now, however, that truth has been brought out into the open through the writings of the prophets; and by the command of the eternal God it is made known to all nations, so that all may believe and obey.

²⁷ To the only God, who alone is all-wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever! Amen.

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