

Families in the Family of God
Families of Faith

Lesson #10 for March 11, 2006

Scriptures: John 1:12,13; 3:7; Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22; 1 John 5:1.

1. In our lives where are the boundaries between family, culture, religion, race, and nationality? **Which of these forces are most powerful in our lives?** Do the thousands of Muslims who have died for their religion and their countries in the last few years have greater “faith” than we do?
2. If we say that God and Christianity are supposed to be the predominant forces in our lives how does that affect our relationship to these other entities? How do we educate and inform our children in deciding which of these forces will predominate in their lives?
3. Most of the population of Rwanda are Christian. They were Christian before the genocide of 1994. Which of the forces in their lives seemed to be most dominant? Why are there conflicts between English and the Irish? Between the Norwegians and the Swedes? Between different tribes in Africa? Between the Pakistanis and the Indians?
4. **When missionaries travel from North America or Europe or Australia to some of the more primitive areas of the world is it possible for them to leave their cultural norms behind and carry with them only the Gospel? Would that be desirable?** In our day in North America we live in a culture which is rapidly changing and being modified by movies, by the Internet, and by television and radio in many ways. How do we relate to these forces? **How does a Gospel which is thousands of years old stay up-to-date with all of these advances in science and technology?**
5. Read Acts 10:1-28,34,35. What should we learn from this story about the conversion of Cornelius and his family? Would you as a Christian be willing to go to the home of a Moslem and witness to them if they asked you to and if the Lord revealed the way?
6. There is a great deal of discussion in the letters of Paul and in Acts about conflicting opinions and the prejudices of Jews and Gentiles. It is fairly easy for us who are familiar with those stories to look back and say, “Get rid of your prejudices”!
7. What prejudices do we have today that prevent us from spreading the gospel? Do we feel comfortable in speaking to atheists, communists, even our fellow workers or those who believe in evolution?
8. 1 Thessalonians 5:21,22 seems to suggest a general principle about how we should deal with such differences. We are to evaluate everything and hold on to the good. How do we do that? Is it possible for a person, even a Christian, to set aside their prejudices?
9. When coming to Corinth Paul said (1 Corinthians 2:2): ²For while I was with you, I made up my mind to forget everything except Jesus Christ and especially his death on the cross.” **How did this affect the way Paul acted, behaved and talked in Corinth? What would happen if we did this today?**
10. Those who study sociology and anthropology and especially those who seek to improve the health of primitive groups have suggested a general rule for how to approach their cultural health practices. Try to first of all determine whether a given practice is helpful, harmful, or neutral in effect. Then try to promote the ones that are helpful, ignore the ones that are neutral and modify if possible the ones that are harmful for the benefit of future generations. What would happen if we tried to do that with our own cultural surroundings? Could we teach such a practice to our children? Even teenagers?
11. We must not forget that the Bible was written by human beings who lived also in a cultural,

racial, tribal, and language setting. Do we understand the context of those days adequately so that we can properly interpret what we read in Scripture?

12. **How many of our Christian beliefs are passed down to us as cultural norms from our European and North American ancestors and how many are verified as biblical truth?**
13. To what extent do cultural differences affect “Christian standards”? Ellen White once said that ladies should get their skirts up 8 or 9 inches higher than they were! This, of course, was in a day when their skirts were dragging in the mud and the horse manure! {3SM 278.1; 1T 521.1}
14. Are there differences in the role of the family, religion and Christianity in different cultures around the world?
15. How do we develop our own personal set of values? Can you look back in your own life and see the process taking place?
16. **We believe that biblical principles are universal in application. How do we determine for sure that our particular understanding of those principles is not unduly influenced by our own personal cultural background?**
17. Within the Adventist Church there are quite significant differences in the way Seventh-day Adventists observe the Sabbath and determine what is allowable and what is not allowable during the Sabbath hours in Australia versus the United States versus Europe! Is one of these groups correct while the others are wrong? Or is there room for a certain amount of variation within the Gospel framework?
18. Could you make a hierarchy from your own experience and clearly delineate at least in your own mind which of the following influences were the most powerful in your own life: family? Church? Christianity? Culture? Country? Race? Tribe? Nationality?
19. Think of how cultural norms affected biblical history. How would we feel about a church leader today taking a secondary wife, if his first wife was not able to have children? How would we accept a church leader with a thousand wives? Or giving nose rings to his daughter-in-law?
20. **Jewelry has often been an issue in Christian groups and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. How do we explain the difference seen in Genesis 35:1-4 in contrast with Genesis 24:22? Why do you think only the Genesis 35 passage was mentioned in our study guide?** In Ezra 10 there is a discussion of how mixed marriages were carefully separated and those who did not accept the Jewish religion were sent home. How does that compare what Nehemiah 13:23-29?
21. We accept as a general principle that God does not force us but allows us to exercise our own freedom of choice. How does this impact this broad area of culture? **What are our children learning about culture, race, religion, atheism, evolution and creation from their usual sources of information such as the Internet and television? How do our children compare and contrast those ideas with the ones we have been trying to teach them which we regard as biblical principles?**
22. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists, even anthropologists have known for a long time that when people undergo change or disruption of their normal living patterns they are much more likely to accept changes in ideas, than if they are in a fairly typical standard pattern with which they're familiar.
23. How do we deal with changes that impact our lives? The death of a family member? Moving to a new location? Finding a new job? **Consider the changes that impacted the lives of Abraham, Sarah and Lot. (Genesis 12:1-5). And what about Hadassah (Esther 2:7-9). How much of their culture were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah able to keep?**

(Daniel 1:1-21). Is it possible when such large changes impact our lives to grow from those experiences or do they more often just produce stress and anxiety and a breakdown of our values? Think of the story of Jacob and Laban. (Genesis 29:14-30) how many cultural influences impacted Jacob's life?

24. **Have you ever had the experience of living immersed in another culture? How did you feel about that experience?**
25. What kind of cultural changes take place in the lives of those who choose to become Christians? Seventh-day Adventists? Do we make it easy for our new members to feel comfortable among us?
26. There are some disturbing stories in Scripture about culture. How do you explain Judges 2:7-13. What cultural, racial, or religious forces were behind this story?
27. You may have heard a sermon by Morris Venden and perhaps others suggesting that **God has no grandchildren!** What is implied by this statement? What does it mean when we read in John 3:7: you must be born again? Compare John 1:12,13; 1 John 5:1.
28. How many of our young people who leave the church do so because the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has never really been their faith? Do your children consider your faith to be theirs?
29. Some would summarize the gospel by the use of a few verses such as: Matthew 28:5-7; John 3:16; Romans 1:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 2:2; and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. The message in these verses seems to be that Jesus died and rose again and thus God has conquered death and sin for us. God loves us and the Gospel is God's power to save. So by all of these methods together God seeks to change us from enemies into His friends.
30. The original opening headline of almost every Gospel sermon was that Jesus Christ had risen again. How do you suppose the people in Jesus' day and shortly thereafter understood these statements?
31. **Why do you think people like the original disciples and Paul and Barnabas became so passionate about the Gospel?**
32. **Think of all the things that you believe because they are taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? How many of those beliefs are so compelling in your mind that you would die for them? Some have suggested that the Gospel is not about us but about God. Is that an important concept in your mind?** If the world looked in through your window and into your home would they see that the Gospel is good news? Does your family live the Christian gospel? Someone has said "success depends on how much we allow the urgent to get in the way of the important!" How often do we allow our children to be entertained by the television because it is more convenient? How often do we spend extra time at the office because it's urgent?
33. If you could ask the apostle Paul to rate the forces in his life such as family, religion, Christianity, culture, race, even Phariseeism how do you think he would arrange them? How much would we be willing to give up if God called us to be his apostles to some group that needs to hear the gospel message?

© 2005 Kenneth Hart M. D. ***Permission is hereby granted for any non-commercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.***

Khart@llu.edu

Last modified: February 11, 2006
C:\My Documents\WP\SS\TG-Hart\Families\SS-Families#10-2006-03-11.wpd