

Living the Life of Faith



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

THIS QUARTER we’ve looked at one of the foundations of the Christian faith—forgiveness, without which we would have no hope of anything beyond the spasm of cellular metabolism we call human life. And that’s not just any forgiveness; it’s the forgiveness that a perfectly holy and righteous God grants to unholy and unrighteous people, a forgiveness that inevitably leads them to a life of holiness and a righteousness that reflects, however imperfectly, the holiness and righteousness of God Himself.

We’ve seen, too, that being forgiven by God brings about a radical change in a person’s life, changes that should influence every part of our being, because the most fundamental aspect of our existence, our relationship to our Creator, has been altered.

This week we’ll take one more look at what forgiveness means in the lives of those who, however unworthy, have been forgiven.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What does it mean to live by faith? In what ways are we “complete in Him”? What are some of the blessings that we have been given through Christ? How should these blessings influence the way we treat others? Though salvation is free, what costs are still involved? How do we manifest our love for God because of what He has done for us?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.

LIVING BY FAITH.

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17).

Romans 1:17 is one of the most well-known texts in Scripture. It was a verse that changed Martin Luther’s life (not to mention the history of the Christian church). But the question is, If the just shall live by faith, *faith in what?*

Dwell on Romans 1:17. If need be, look up the other places where the same phrase is used (Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) and then write out what you think the answer to this crucial question is.

Whatever answer you gave, one thing is for sure: If it didn’t include, either openly or tacitly, the notion that our sins are forgiven by God, then your answer is woefully incomplete. To even be called “just” implies that we have been forgiven. Good deeds, kind words, a loving heart, however fundamental to Christianity, doesn’t make a person just in the sight of God. Only those whose sins have been forgiven, only those who have the merits of Christ granted to them, are “just.”

The question then arises, How do we know that our sins are forgiven? Do we hear a voice shouting down from heaven telling us so? Does God write letters in the sky assuring us of forgiveness? Do we have visions in which the Lord tells us that we are forgiven?

No. We believe it *by faith*. We claim it *by faith*. We accept it *by faith*. How else?

This is why the just, the forgiven, *live by faith*—faith in the promise of forgiveness made to us through the life, death, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. The hope, the peace, the assurance we have because of the forgiveness that is ours, we have only by faith. Not blind faith, not reckless faith, but faith, nonetheless.

Why is the understanding that our sins have been forgiven so crucial to the Christian? Think of what it would mean if we *didn’t* have that assurance of forgiveness. And why, in order to have that assurance, must our forgiveness be based not on what we can do but only on what Christ has done for us at the Cross? If it were based on ourselves, what assurance would we have?

COMPLETE IN JESUS (Col. 2:10).

Look at the text for today. If need be, read a few verses that precede it. What an incredible statement. Verse 9 says that in Jesus “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” The NIV says “for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.” And now we, through faith, become united with Christ! No wonder, then, the text says that we are “complete in him.” That completeness becomes easier to understand when we know who He is—the one in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells. Talk about knowing people in high places! Talk about connections!

Thus, through Jesus, who has all power in heaven and in earth, we have been given access to so much that others just don’t have.

“Shall we not strive to use to the very best of our ability the little time that is left us in this life, adding grace to grace, power to power, making it manifest that we have a source of power in the heavens above? Christ says: ‘All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.’ Matthew 28:18. What is this power given to Him for? For us. He desires us to realize that He has returned to heaven as our Elder Brother and that the measureless power given Him has been placed at our disposal.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 186.

Think about what we have through Jesus. First and foremost, we have forgiveness of our sins (Col. 1:14). We have the promise of “no condemnation” (Rom. 8:1). We have the promise, now, of eternal life (1 John 2:25). We have the promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). We have the promise of power to overcome sin (Jude 24). We have the promise of His righteousness (Rom. 1:17). We have the promise that no matter what happens we can trust in the goodness of our Lord (Rom. 8:28).

In short, because of the forgiveness offered us at the Cross, we have the promise that whatever our toils, struggles, pains, fears, and failures, we have a God who loves us, who died for us, and who offers us the assurance that when all is said and done, we will live with Him forever in an eternal paradise where there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more of the terrible things that we suffer here.

Now, with all these promises in Christ, shouldn’t we as Christians be the most loving, giving, and self-sacrificing of all people in the world? Because we have been given so much, shouldn’t we be giving so much? Because we are given so much help, aid, comfort, and hope, shouldn’t we be the most generous in giving others aid, comfort, and hope? Ask yourself, If you are not giving freely to others, could it be because you haven’t fully claimed or grasped, by faith, the promises offered you? If so, what can you do to change?

TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

“The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

There’s no question: We have through Jesus Christ been given so much. As fallen, sinful beings, we barely can begin to comprehend the blessings we have in Jesus. And only as we marvel at what happened at the Cross can we start to understand how much those blessings cost.

Yet, those blessing come with a cost for us too. Sure, the gap between heaven and esarth, caused by sin, was way too great for us ever to be able to bridge ourselves. That’s why Christ had to do it for us. Yet, only those who have surrendered to Christ, in faith—however faulty the exercise of that faith at times is—will be saved in the end.

Look at the quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Do you agree? Is his statement too strong? Look up the following texts and see whether they help illuminate what he meant. Luke 9:23; Luke 18:22; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:8; Col. 2:20. After reading them, in the context of the Bonhoeffer quote, write down below your understanding of what being justified by faith alone costs us as followers of Christ.

Only the most misguided and imbalanced notions of what salvation by faith alone means could cause anyone to believe that being a follower of Christ doesn’t cost us anything. If need be, it could cost us everything. This isn’t salvation by works; this isn’t legalism; this is simply the biblical principle, expounded especially in the New Testament, of dying to self and living a new life in Christ, a life of faith, humility, obedience, reverence, and self-denial. These are not easy objectives for beings who, by nature, are consumed with greed, carnality, egoism, and self-exaltation.

Look at your own life in the past twenty-four hours. In what ways, if any, have you revealed, either in words, deeds, or thoughts, the biblical principle of death to self?

“MAH TOV” (Mic. 6:8).

One of the great struggles of living in what has been called the Information Age is that we have so much information. Yet, information isn't the same as knowledge or, especially, the same as truth. With so much information coming from so many directions, from so many sources, some of the most basic and important questions can get muddled or lost amid the barrage of data and facts that often come with conflicting viewpoints. And one of those crucial questions is, simply, How do we know what is good or evil?

Today's text comes with the simple Hebrew phrase "Mah Tov," which means "What is good?" And how fortunate for us that it's followed by the answer—from God Himself.

What are the three things the Lord says are good?

- 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Notice the two directions these three points move in: our attitudes and actions toward humanity and our attitudes and actions toward God. This isn't surprising, because the same principle can be found not only in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) but also in the words of Jesus Himself (Matt. 22:37-40).

What's interesting, too, is the balance between justice and mercy here. Justice and mercy are, in some ways, opposites. You can be just and give someone their due; or you can be merciful and spare someone their due. And yet the Lord tells us here to do justly and to love mercy? How are we supposed to do both?

Jesus came to reveal the Father to us (John 14:9), and the Father is a God of mercy and justice (Ps. 89:14). What happened at the Cross that reveals both the mercy and the justice of God?

Look at the third component of what's required of us, and that is to walk humbly with God. Certainly, that shouldn't be too hard, should it? Fallen, sinful creatures before the Creator of the universe? Walking humbly before Him should be easy. Nothing to it, at least in contrast to doing justice and loving mercy.

On the other hand, could one of the ways we walk humbly with God be by doing justice and by loving mercy? Is how we treat others a manifestation of walking humbly before God? If so, why? In what ways are the first two requirements linked to the third?

FEAR AND LOVE (1 John 4:18).

Of the things we have spoken, this is the sum: God loves us, and because of His love, Christ died in our behalf; and as a result of His sacrifice, we stand before Him with all our sins forgiven. And, because of the love, the graciousness, the kindness, and the forgiveness He has poured out upon us, we should pour out love, graciousness, kindness, and forgiveness on others. And that should be easy for us, because we know and have experienced the love of God. It is a love that should cast out fear from our lives and free us to live for the good of others, because we have nothing to fear, not now and not in the judgment (see the previous verse).

Look at verses 19-21 of the same chapter. In what ways is what John is saying here parallel with what we looked at in yesterday's study? How does He link love for God with love for fellow human beings?

Look carefully at verse 21. Why does He say that those who don't love others can't love God? What's the link there, as well?

In the end, anyone can say he or she loves God; most anyone, too, can go through rounds of rituals that express love for God. But that's not what John is talking about here. We love God because of what He's done for us; and because of what He's done for us, we manifest that love to others.

Of course, sometimes that's not always easy. Some people are just not easy to love. But if we're told to love our enemies (Luke 6:35), then we have no excuse not to love our "brother," no matter his or her disposition.

In short, we have been loved; now we must love.

Why would spending as much time as possible dwelling on Jesus, on the Cross, and on what He has done for us help us learn to love others? Take some time to think prayerfully and earnestly about what God did for us through Jesus. Praise Him for this, worship Him for this, and then see whether these experiences don't lead you to be more kind, loving, and gracious to others.

FURTHER STUDY: Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 146, 147.

Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 70, 71.

“Our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. . . .

“More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. . . .

“He desires to restore you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 62–64.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look at Galatians 6:7, 8. Here is Paul, the great teacher of justification by faith alone, stressing how important obedience, holiness, and victory are in the Christian life. In fact, he makes it a matter of salvation versus destruction. In light of what we read about being “complete in him,” how do we understand Paul’s words about those who “soweth to the Spirit”? What does that mean, and what promises do we have that assure us we can do the same?
2. If you would summarize in one paragraph the essence of what you’ve learned this quarter, what would you say? If possible, have members of the class stand up and read their paragraphs. Compare. Is there any one particular point that stands out in common? If so, what?



Changed Completely

Reina Iris Hernandez Gonzales de Ortiz

God had mercy on me even before I knew Him. I was an eager student in school; all I did was study. But when it came to real life, I was naive.

I was spiritually hungry, but I did not know where to find God. I studied several different religions and eventually joined the Hare Krishna sect, and even when they told me to forget my family members, I obeyed. My mother sensed the danger I was in and asked people to help free me from this religion. But she found no one who could help her.

One day as I sold Hare Krishna books on the street, a man stopped to talk to me. He quoted John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Hearing this Bible verse made me want to return to Christ, but something pulled me toward Hare Krishna. Later I found a scrap of paper containing a Bible verse. It was Proverbs 16:25, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” As I read this verse, I struggled with the question, *Is it Krishna or is it God?* Suddenly I knew I must leave this religion and return home.

I joined a church and thought I had found what I had been searching for. But as time passed, I slipped back into my former sinful ways.

I met and married a young man, and soon he wanted to start a family. I had trouble becoming pregnant, so I prayed for a baby. Several months later I became pregnant and delivered a healthy baby girl. Still, I searched for something to fill the spiritual void in my life.

My father was attending a small group meeting in an Adventist neighbor’s home. Later, the woman invited him to attend the Adventist church. I wanted to learn more about what attracted my father to this church, so my husband and I visited the church. We felt loved from the start. Church members visited us and offered to study the Bible with

us. Within a few months my father, my husband, and I were baptized.

I praise God that even before I knew Him, He protected me from false religions, and when I asked, He gave me a child. With Christ in my heart, my heart is full, and I rejoice in God, my Savior. I want to tell others about God’s love, people who may not have found God and are searching as I was.

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Inside Story

Bible Study Guide for Third Quarter, 2003

Hebrews is all about Jesus, a fuller and clear revelation of Him. This quarter's lesson study, *Sanctuary Themes: The Book of Hebrews*, by Ekkehardt Mueller, will focus on Jesus, as He appears in the book of Hebrews.

Lesson 1: Jesus and the Book of Hebrews

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: From Whom and To Whom?

Monday: The Content of the Epistle (Heb. 2:3).

Tuesday: The Brightness of His Glory (Heb. 1:1, 2).

Wednesday: The Multi-Purposed God.

Thursday: "So Great a High Priest" (Heb. 4:15).

MEMORY TEXT: Hebrews 13:8.

SABBATH GEM: The book of Hebrews was written in order to help keep faithful those who were tempted to fall away from the faith.

Lesson 2: Jesus Our King

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Jesus, the King (Hebrews 1).

Monday: Jesus, the Promised Priest-King (Psalm 110).

Tuesday: Jesus' Kingship.

Wednesday: The Character of Jesus, the King (Heb. 7:1-3).

Thursday: Jesus, King for Us.

MEMORY TEXT: Hebrews 1:3.

SABBATH GEM: Though Hebrews repeatedly presents Jesus as our High Priest, He also is pictured as King.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired

The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.