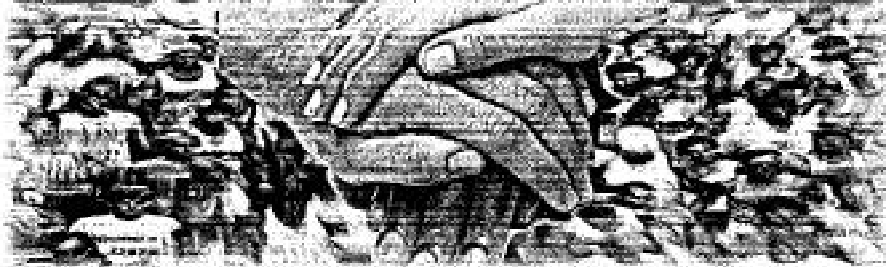


Adopting the World



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK: Matthew 13:33; Matthew 25:31-46; John 17:15-18; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 4:14.

MEMORY VERSE: “I [Jesus] do not pray that you [God] will take them [Jesus’ disciples] out of the world. I pray that you will keep them safe from the evil one [Satan]. . . . You sent me [Jesus] into the world. In the same way, I have sent them into the world.” (John 17:15-18, NIV).

THE HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH tells us that it took some time for the church to understand the great work God had given it. At first, the small group of believers saw a very limited work. That work was to encourage fellow Adventists after 1844.¹ But slowly they saw that God had given them more important work. So they looked for more believers and began to spread their message in America. In 1874, the first official Adventist missionary left for Europe. By the year 1900, Adventism had gained small amounts of members in many parts of the world. Now Adventism is a worldwide church that is trying to reach “every nation, tribe [group], language and people” (Revelation 14:6, NIV) with the good news of the everlasting² gospel.

The question for us is: How should Adventist Christians relate to the world?

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: What image (picture) should we show to the world? How can we be in the world but not of the world?³ What does Jesus’ death tell us about our own work for the world?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 25.

¹1844—the year a group of Christians thought Jesus would return. But when He did not, they were greatly disappointed.

²everlasting—lasting forever.

³“not of the world”—when Christians refuse to become involved in the lifestyle and ways of worldly people.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 19

REPRESENTING THE KING
(Matthew 13:33; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

What images (pictures) did Paul use to teach church members in Corinth that they are ambassadors⁴ of God?

2 Corinthians 2:15-17 _____

2 Corinthians 3:1-3 _____

2 Corinthians 5:20 _____



We are like letters from Jesus sent to other people.

Our life should encourage people to make a decision for the truths we preach

and live. For people who refuse to accept these truths, our lives will be a “smell of death” (2 Corinthians 2:16, NIV). But for people who accept these truths, we will be a “fragrance [sweet smell] of life” (2 Corinthians 2:16, NIV)!

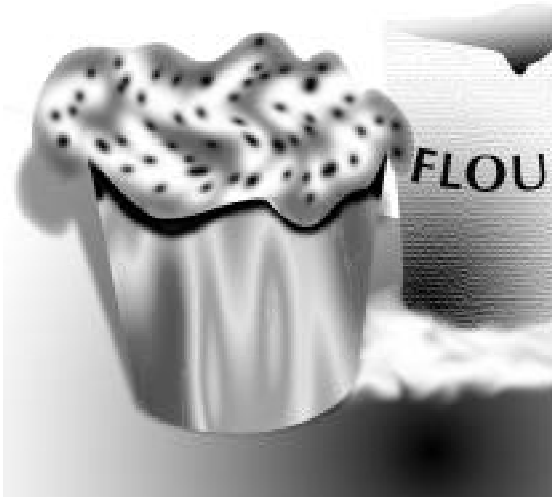
We are ambassadors. Ambassadors are a small but important group of people. They go wherever they are sent to represent their government. Often they must deal with a culture that is very different from their own culture. Their work requires knowing how to say the right things politely but honestly and courageously. Their duty is to guard the interests and the reputations of their home country. What a perfect example for people who are ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven!

What other example teaches the influence Christians are expected to have in the world? What does this example mean? Matthew 13:33.

Leaven (yeast) is often a symbol for evil influences because leaven can carry infection. Jesus used leaven as a symbol for evil influences when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees⁵ (Mark 8:15). Leaven also is used as a symbol for a wholesome (positive) influence, because leaven spreads quickly through the bread dough. At first, the leaven is *hidden*, and nothing appears to happen. But then the leaven begins to grow larger and to bubble inside the dough.

⁴ambassadors—people who represent their country’s government to another country’s government.

⁵Pharisee—a religious leader who believed a person must keep God’s law to be saved.



Let us spread God's truth through the world the same as leaven spreads through bread dough.

The moment you become a Christian, you become an ambassador for the kingdom of heaven. If you are *good, bad, or uncaring*, you are still representing God to the people around you. What kind of ambassador are you? Where and how can you improve?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 20

“IN THE WORLD” BUT NOT “OF THE WORLD” (John 17:15-18).

For many Christians, the church is the same as a private club for members only! They will say they want their church to grow. But their actions and their atti-

tude⁶ show that they really do not want the church to grow.

**How are we to relate to the world?
John 17:15-18.**

If we want to be true followers of Jesus, we must mix with the people around us. We must not spend all our time in prayer, thanking God that we are different from all those *worldly* people around us. We must be different in the way we live. But we must not keep away from people who must hear about Jesus. Jesus tells us to “‘Go into all the world’ ” (Mark 16:15, NIV). As Paul did, we need to mix with the people we meet (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

What did God do and why, when the people of the world decided to build a great tower where they all could live? Genesis 11:4, 7.

The future children of Noah and his sons wanted to live together. But God did not want them to live together.

“Babel plays itself out over and over again in the lives of local churches. A new church is built with excitement, energy, and hope for the future. But as the years pass, the church does less and less to introduce Jesus to nonbelievers. It tries to give a safe place to people who already believe and belong.” —Adapted from Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations*

⁶attitude—how you think or feel about something.

Meet (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 25, 26.

Luke 1:52, 53 _____

Read again John 17:15-17. Are you really “not of the world”? Explain your answer. How can we truly be “not of the world”?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 21

**“RELIGION IN OVERALLS”
(Matthew 25:31-46).**

The title of today’s study is the title of a book by William G. Johnsson. In the book, Johnsson looks at the meaning of the book of Matthew.

“In a time that preaches on its T-shirts, ‘Only Believe’ and ‘Jesus loves you!’ . . . Matthew argues that what we do should balance what we say we believe. People with faith and love must put on overalls and get their hands dirty where the people are. The people are in jails, in the slums, and in shelters for homeless people.”—Adapted from William G. Johnsson, *Religion in Overalls* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), p. 22.

What are the following verses telling us about how we are to relate to the world around us?

Matthew 25:31-46 _____

⁷ADRA—Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

⁸undefiled—not having any faults; holy.



“Religion in Overalls.”

Followers of Jesus should both preach and help people in need. Christians share in the worldwide responsibility of helping other people who are hungry, thirsty, uneducated, poor, sick, in prison, treated unfairly, et cetera. Jesus is our best example. He ministered to (worked for) the spiritual, the emotional, and the physical parts of people. The early church did not forget its social responsibility. And we should not forget our social responsibility. Community service activities, religious-liberty work, educational programs, prison ministries (work), and ADRA⁷ are just a few of the ways we can minister to people.

“Pure and undefiled⁸ religion is not a feeling. Pure and undefiled religion is doing works of kindness and love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry (Work)*, p. 38.

Serving people requires denying self. When we learn to surrender and die at the foot of the Cross, we will be able to serve people the same way Jesus did.

What are you doing for people who are poor, sick, and suffering? The next time you see people who need help, think of Jesus' words, "Anything you did for one of the least important of these brothers of mine [Jesus'], you did for me [Jesus]" (Matthew 25:40, NIV). Why would it be hard for a true Christian *not* to help people?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 22

THE POWER OF PRAYER (Matthew 5:44).

Intercessory prayer⁹ is a source¹⁰ of power we should use often. Prayer for our own needs is important. But prayer for the pastors, literature evangelists¹¹ and missionaries, the church's leaders, for the leaders of our countries, and for the world should be high on our prayer list.

If someone were to ask you to write a thirty-second prayer for the world, what would you pray, and why?

Praying for other people and pleading with God for other people is a duty and an honor for every Christian. We can never be sure when and in what way God will answer our prayers. But we can be sure that the prayers will have results. "The prayer of a godly person is powerful" (James 5:16, NIV).

What do the following verses teach us about intercessory prayer? Genesis 20:1-7; Numbers 11:1, 2; 1 Samuel 12:19, 23; 1 Kings 13:6-9; Psalm 122:6; Matthew 5:44; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

"Our intercessory prayers show a sense of connection with other humans. We are woven into the great cloth of humanity.¹² What happens to other people involves us. What we do influences other people. And God has ways of working in the world we cannot understand."—Adapted from Richard Rice, *The Reign [Rule] of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 376.

What influence does intercessory prayer have in your life? How have your prayers influenced other people?

⁹intercessory prayer—praying for other people.

¹⁰source—where something comes from. Power comes from intercessory prayer.

¹¹literature evangelists—people who sell Bibles and other religious books to people in their homes.

¹²humanity—all the people of the world.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 23

THE CROSS AND THE WORLD (Matthew 28:19).

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives us our job description as a church. We are to go to all nations with the message of salvation in Jesus. We see this same basic description in the first angel's message (Revelation 14:6, 7).

God's church is to influence the whole world, because Jesus' mission (work) was for the whole world.

What do the following verses say about who Jesus died for? Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:14.

Jesus' death covers every person in the world. So the whole world needs to know about Jesus.

"Salvation for a lost world was to be full and complete. Jesus' death was more than enough to cover every person God created. Jesus' death could not be limited to just the people who would accept Jesus. All people are not saved. But the plan of salvation is not a waste because it does not reach all it can cover. There must be enough with plenty left."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 565, 566.

We cannot be true followers of Jesus if we do not try to let the world know

about what Jesus has done. We must not flee the world. We must be involved in the world. We need to make a difference by the way we live and mix with people. Another way we need to make a difference is to help meet the needs of fellow humans in our own town and far away. Helping people is the best way to share Jesus.

Not everyone can be missionaries in other lands. So what can you do to have a part in the church's worldwide job description?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "Suffering people and poor people are our neighbors. When their needs are brought to our knowledge, it is our duty to help them as much as possible. The parable of the good Samaritan¹³ gives a good principle¹⁴ for Jesus' disciples to follow (Luke 10:25-37). First meet the needs of poor people. Then you will have opened up their hearts to receive Jesus."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry (Work)*, p. 118.

"Every way has been made for the salvation of humanity. All power has been given to Jesus, who offered Himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of every son and daughter of Adam. 'Some people did accept him [Jesus]. They believed in his [Jesus'] name. He [Jesus]

¹³Samaritan—a person from Samaria. The Samaritans and Hebrews were enemies.

¹⁴principle—basic rule that is the basis for a specific rule.

gave them the right to become children of God (John 1:12, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 7, 1902.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We are “in the world.” We must mix with people we want to reach. We must understand how they think. We must speak their *language*. How can we do this without receiving negative influences from worldly people?
2. It is important to meet the needs of people. We must also remember that meeting the needs of the people is

not the goal but a way to reach the goal. What is this goal? How can we avoid the danger of forgetting that goal?

SUMMARY: We are “not of the world.” But we should be very much “in the world.” We should make the world a better place. True Christianity is not just having correct doctrines¹⁵ or calling people to a faith in God. It also is helping people. We also have the responsibility of praying for people in the church and for people in the world. Jesus’ death covered the whole world. Our ministry (work) must also cover the whole world.

¹⁵doctrine—church beliefs based on the Bible.

