

God's Servants in the New Testament Church



SABBATH—AUGUST 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 2:42–47; Acts 9:36; 2 Corinthians 8:7–15; Romans 12; James 2:1–9.

MEMORY VERSE: “Here are the beliefs and way of life that God our Father accepts as pure [holy] and without [with no; not having any] fault [problem]. When widows are in trouble, take care of them. Do the same for children who have no parents. And don't [do not] let the world [the ways of life on this earth] make you impure [full of sin]” (James 1:27, NirV).



Jesus said, “Go and make followers of all people in the world [on the earth]. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, ERV).

IN MATTHEW 28:18–20, Jesus told His followers what He wanted them to do. Matthew 28:18–20 is Jesus' Last Command. Many Christians today say that these verses show us our work as a church. These verses led Christians in the past to serve God. Today, these verses lead Christians to share the Good News about Jesus with other people too.

What did Jesus say exactly in His Last Command? He told His followers to “go and make followers of all people in the world [on the earth]. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have told you to do” (Matthew 28:19, 20, ERV). Jesus' words show us that He wants His people to take care of people in need. Jesus wants us to take care of people who are hurting. He wants us to take care of sick people. Jesus' orders to His followers were nothing new. He was not giving His followers new work to do. He wanted them to keep doing the work that He did on earth. We can see Jesus' followers doing this work in the New Testament church.

A NEW COMMUNITY (Acts 2:42–47)

Jesus went to heaven. A little while later, God sent the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers. Then the group of believers grew fast. They started the New Testament church. The group of believers became a new community. This community was not something they made. No, Jesus started the church. It was built on His teachings, His work, and the Hebrew Bible.

Read about the New Testament church in Acts 2:42–47 and Acts 4:32–37. What important work did the church do?

The Israelites in the Old Testament failed to fully live God's plan for their lives. God wanted Israel to be fair. But the New Testament church was different from Israel. They followed God's words in Deuteronomy 15:4 very closely. "There should not be any poor people in your country" (Deuteronomy 15:4, ERV). What did Christians do to show their faith? They sold the things they owned. They even sold their land. Then they used the money to help poor believers. The New Testament church also helped sick people who needed to be healed in the community (read Acts 3:1–11; Acts 5:12–16).

The New Testament church was not perfect. As the church grew bigger, the problems grew bigger too. One of the problems was about the food given each day to widows (read Acts 6:1). The leaders of the church wanted to preach the Good News about Jesus. How did the church solve the problem? They chose seven men to be in charge of giving food to the widows.

The church chose these seven men to take care of the everyday business in the church. The church started to put different people in charge of different parts of God's work. The daily work of the church included taking care of widows and healing the sick. The church felt that it was important to witness to other people by helping them.

Make a picture in your mind of life in the New Testament church. How did New Testament Christians show that they cared about other people? What can we, as a church, do to show that we care about other people too?



The leaders of the New Testament church chose seven men to be in charge of giving food to the widows.

DORCAS'S WORK FOR JESUS (Acts 9:36)

The New Testament church starts to grow fast. Jesus tells His followers how this will happen: “ ‘But the Holy Spirit will come on you and give you power. You will be my witnesses. You will tell people everywhere about me—in Jerusalem, in the rest of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world’ ” (Acts 1:8, ERV). Many new believers joined the church. One new believer was Dorcas. She also was named Tabitha. Dorcas lived in the city of Joppa. Clearly, Dorcas believed Jesus' words about giving clothes to the poor. Jesus told His followers to give clothes to the poor. Jesus said it was the same as giving the clothes to Him (read Matthew 25:38, 40).

Read about Dorcas and her special work for Jesus in Acts 9:36. What special work do you do for Jesus? What work do you want people to remember that you did for God?

Many people knew about Dorcas and her work for Jesus. “She was always doing good and helping poor people” (see Acts 9:36, NLV).

Peter visited Lydda, a town near Joppa where Dorcas lived. The people of Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda. They asked Peter to come to their city because Dorcas died (read Acts 9:37–41). When Peter arrived in Joppa, many people met him. They were people Dorcas helped when she was alive. The people showed Peter the clothes Dorcas made them. Surely, they told Peter many stories about all the wonderful things Dorcas did to help them and other people.

Peter prayed for Dorcas. Then God woke Dorcas up from the dead. Of course, we cannot say that life always will turn out well for Christians who serve the poor and the needy their whole lives. We must remember that Dorcas got sick before she died. We also must remember what happened to another Christian named Stephen. He was one of the seven men chosen to take care of the widows in the church. Stephen was killed with stones (read Acts 7:54–60). So, our life of service does not mean that life will be easy.

During her life, Dorcas showed God's love in the work she did to help the poor. So, God used Dorcas's death to work a miracle. Her coming back to life showed the people in Joppa the power of God. “News of this went through all Joppa. Many people put their trust in the Lord” (Acts 9:42, NLV).



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GIVING IS ANOTHER WAY OF SHARING (2 Corinthians 8:7–15)

What does Paul do after he accepts Jesus? He preaches the Good News to the non-Jews. God gives Paul much success. Many non-Jews join the church. Then Jewish Christians start to worry about all the non-Jews joining the church. They worry that the non-Jewish Christians will not respect Jewish practices and beliefs. So, the New Testament church leaders meet together to talk about the problem. They ask God for help. This big meeting was named the Jerusalem Group. You can read about it and what happened in Acts 15.

Paul gives a report about the meeting in Galatians 2. He gives more information about the Jerusalem Group's decision about Paul's work for the non-Jews. "They asked only one thing. They wanted us to continue to remember poor people. That was what I had wanted to do all along" (Galatians 2:10, NIV).

Paul always continued to help the poor in all his future work for God.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:7–15. How does Paul show the connection between the Good News and giving?

Paul told believers to give a lot and to take care of each other in hard times. He told the story about the time God gave manna to the Israelites. Paul used this story to show the church an example of giving and sharing (read 2 Corinthians 8:15). Paul also told believers to remember what the author of Psalm 112:9 wrote: "The Holy Writings say, 'He has given much to the poor. His right-standing with God lasts forever' " (2 Corinthians 9:9, NIV).

Paul tells his members to give with all their hearts. Believers also should save part of the money they earned. Soon, Paul or Titus will come to visit their church. Then Paul will take the offerings the church collected back to Jerusalem. The money will be used to help the poor Christians there. Paul uses the example of one church to encourage other churches to want to give more. Paul writes, "You are proving by this act of love what you are. They will give thanks to God for your gift to them and to others [people]. This proves you obey the Good News of Christ" (2 Corinthians 9:13, NIV).

Of course, we cannot give money to every good cause that needs help. We must choose. So, how do we make the right choice about how much to give and who to give to?



Paul tells church members to give a lot and to take care of each other in hard times.

PAUL'S ADVICE ABOUT LIVING AND LOVING WELL (Romans 12)



Paul says we should give our bodies as a holy gift to God because Jesus died for us.

In Romans 1–11, Paul talks about how God saves us by faith in Jesus. But in chapter 12, Paul starts talking about something else. He gives us advice about showing other people God's love and living a good Christian life. "Christian brothers, I ask you from my heart to give your bodies to God because of His loving-kindness to us. Let your bodies be a living and holy gift given to God. He is pleased with this kind of gift. This is the true worship that you should give Him" (Romans 12:1, NLV). Why does Paul say we should give our bodies as a holy gift to God? Because of what God did for us in Jesus. That is why we should live for God.

Read Romans 12. What is this chapter about? What does Paul say about love and taking care of other people? What does he say we should do for people in need?

In Romans 12, Paul talks about the different jobs we do as Christians in the church. He also talks about the gifts God gives us to do His work. Some of these gifts include serving other people and encouraging them. Another spiritual gift is giving offerings to God (read Romans 12:3–8). Yes, Christians should do these things. We also should do them with love (read Romans 12:9–11).

What does it mean to work for God with a heart of love? Paul explains. He says believers should be patient during hard times. Christians also must take care of the needy. Believers also should work hard for peace. They should be kind when people are not fair. They should fight the war against evil by doing good (read Romans 12:20, 21).

Romans 12 shows us how to live as a new person. It also shows God's people how to serve God in their personal lives and in their communities. Paul told the new Christians that their faith should change their whole lives. The Roman Christians had difficult lives. They lived in the capital city of the Roman Kingdom. Paul tells them to stay strong. He also tells them not to live the way non-Christians around them live. "Don't [do not] change yourselves to be like [the same as] the people of [on] this world [earth], but let God change you inside with a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to understand and accept what God wants for you. You will be able to know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect" (Romans 12:2, ERV).

JAMES “THE FAIR” (James 2:1–9)

Many Christians believe that Jesus’ brother, James, became a leader in the New Testament church in Jerusalem. They also believe James was the leader of the Jerusalem Group (read Acts 15; also read Galatians 1, 2). If so, then it is possible that James also wrote the book of James.

There was a church leader in New Testament times named James the Fair. He got this name because he cared about people that no one thought were important. He fought hard to make life better for them. Many people believe that James the Fair is the same person as Jesus’ brother. The book of James is the New Testament’s book of proverbs. Proverbs are wise sayings. The book of James gives Christians wise advice about how to live for God.

The author of James wanted his Christian readers to “Obey the Word of God. If you hear only and do not act, you are only fooling yourself” (James 1:22, NLV). James also talks about the only religion that God accepts. God wants us to take care of the needy and to keep our hearts clean (read James 1:27).

Read James 2:1–9 and James 5:1–5. How does James think and feel about the rich? How is his thinking different from the way most people think? How should we think about the rich and the poor in our churches? What does James say we should do for them?

James says that it is not enough to give God’s blessing to people with no food or clothes. You need to give them clothes and feed them first. We must show people we care about them by taking care of their needs. Then they will believe us when we tell them about God’s love (read James 2:14–16). James said that it was important that our faith be more than words. Our faith is made perfect by our good works or the things we do for other people. James also explains what loving your neighbor means. We must show this love every day by serving other people. We do not help other people as a way for us to earn God’s love or to be saved. We help other people because God saved us. Then our lives will show this truth in all the good things we do.



James cared about people who no one thought were important.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Dorcas—Her Ministry and Its Influence,” pages 66, 67, in *Welfare Ministry*; “A Liberal Church,” pages 335–345, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “This Is Pure Religion,” pages 35–41, in *Welfare Ministry*.



“The believers’ gifts and offerings showed that their faith in God’s loving favor was real.”

“The Savior wanted His church to care for people who were sad. He also wanted His church to help people who were fighting against sin. So, the Savior gave His life to start a church that takes care of people. A group of believers may be poor. They may have only a little education. No one may really know who they are. But in Jesus, this same group of believers may do God’s work in the home, the neighborhood, the church, and even in places far away. The work Jesus’ followers do will change other people’s lives forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 640, adapted.

“The Christians during New Testament times had unselfish hearts. They gave a lot. They gave all the time. They loved to give. Giving filled the whole church with joy. The believers knew that their gifts helped send Jesus’ followers to work for God in other places. There, Jesus’ followers shared the Good News about Jesus with people who did not know it. The believers’ gifts and offerings showed that their faith in God’s loving favor was real. The Holy Spirit changed their lives. He made them holy. That is why they gave so much. Their giving was a miracle. It showed God’s grace working in their lives. [Grace is God’s gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin.]”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [teachers and leaders]*, page 344, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 How can your local church become the same as the church that we read about in Acts 1–3?
- 2 This week we learned about how the New Testament churches collected offerings and shared them with other believers in different places. The Seventh-day Adventist Church follows some of these same rules. We send offerings to different places on earth, too, so that we can help God’s work grow there. Why is this plan for sharing a good one to follow?
- 3 James 5:1–5 gives us a strong warning about money. Why is this strong warning necessary?