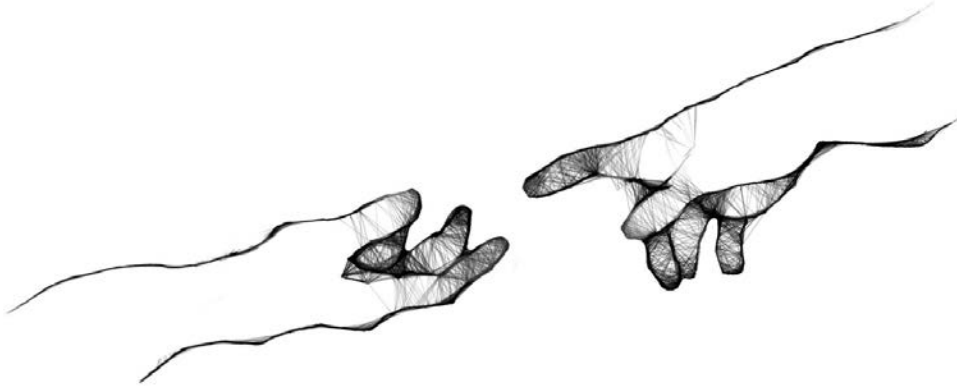


The Missionary Nature of God



SABBATH—JUNE 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 1:26–28; Genesis 2:15–17; 1 John 2:16; John 3:14, 15; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 5:13, 14.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples’ ” (Isaiah 55:4, NIV).

OUR WORLD IS A MESS! As humans we are the big reason the world is such a mess. And that is because we are sinners with evil natures. We like to think of ourselves as improving, but the history of the past century is not too encouraging. And the future does not seem that bright from here either. If the past is an example of the future, all we can expect is “blood, toil [hard work], tears, and sweat” as the famous Englishman, Sir Winston Churchill, used to say.

But all is not lost. Jesus Christ has died for our sins. Through His death we have the promise of salvation and that all things will be made new. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1, NKJV).

We have *not* been left alone in the limitless space of an uncaring universe to fight for ourselves. We could never do it. The evil armies against us are so much greater than we are. That is why God had the plan of salvation so that He could do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

GOD CREATED MAN AND WOMAN (Genesis 1:26–28)

One of the never-ending questions humans have asked is, *Where do I come from?* In the first two chapters of the Bible (really, all through the Bible) we have been given the answer to this most important question. If we know where we came from, then we are off to a good start in knowing who we are, why we have life, how we are to live, and where we are finally going.

Skim through Genesis 1 and 2, but focus especially on Genesis 1:26–28. What are the great differences between the creation of man and everything else that is created? What is it about humans that stands out from other parts of this Creation?

1. Man and woman were the last of all the living things created. They had the whole creation in front of them to study and care for.

2. God’s method for creating man and woman was different from how He created the other creatures. Up to this point the divine command had been *“Let there be”* (light, firmament [sky], water, fish and birds, animals, and so on). Now the command was turned into a meeting to discuss how best to proceed: *“Let us make man. . . .”* The Three Persons of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—planned it.

3. Man and woman were created in God’s image (likeness). And this is something that has not been said about anything else that was created at that time. The verse does not say what it meant to be made in the image and likeness of God. But it must mean that humans showed in some way the character (goodness) of their Creator. Humans have the ability to know the difference between right and wrong that other living things do not. (Butterflies might be beautiful, but they do not struggle with questions of right and wrong). To be made in the likeness and image of God means that in some way humans were created to reveal God’s righteous (holy) character.

4. Man and woman were to have authority (power) to represent God on earth and to rule over the rest of the living things. This calling requires responsibility.

Humans are introduced in the Bible in the first chapter, but not as creatures made to live alone. We live in relationship to God. What does this tell us about how important God should be to our lives and why we are not really complete without Him? Read also Acts 17:28.



Butterflies might be beautiful, but they don't struggle with questions of right and wrong. Only humans do.

FREE WILL¹ (Genesis 2:15–17)

**Love, to be true love,
must be freely given.
Otherwise, we could
not love God.**

DEFINITIONS

1. free will—the freedom to choose between right and wrong.

Tied with the Creation story is the warning God gave about not eating from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9). So from the start, we can understand that God has given human beings the freedom to make choices between good and evil. No other living creatures have this gift. As we said yesterday, the ability to make righteous judgments is one way that humans reveal the image and likeness of God.

What does Genesis 2:15–17 say about how real the gift of free will is among humans?

God could have created humans so that they automatically did His will. That is the way the other created things, such as light, sun, moon, and stars, were made. They obey God without making choices. They fulfill the will (desires) of God automatically through the natural laws that guide their actions.

But the creation of man and woman was special. God created them for Himself. God wanted them to make their own choices. He wanted them to choose to worship Him of their own choice without feeling forced to. Otherwise they could not love Him. For love to be true, it must be given freely.

Because it came from God, human free will is protected and respected by God. We can make wrong choices. Wrong choices have results, sometimes very terrible ones too. But it is against the character of our Lord to force obedience.

The principle (important rule) of human free will has three important ideas:

1. An all-powerful God does not control our individual will and choices.
2. Persons will be held responsible for their actions.
3. Free will means we have a choice about our actions, especially in choosing between doing what is right or wrong.

What are some of the choices you are free to make between right and wrong during the next few hours, days, or weeks? How can you be sure you are using this holy gift in the right way? Think about the possible results of the wrong use of it.

THE FALL (Genesis 3:6, 7)

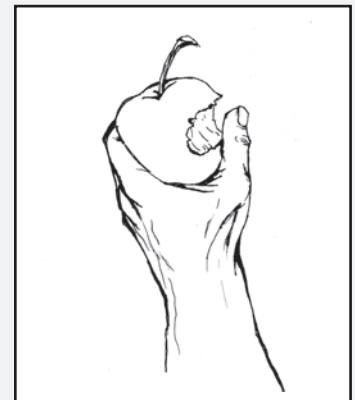
Eating a little bit of fruit was not a sinful act in itself. But we have to consider carefully what happened afterward. Adam and Eve were created with a free will, because they were made by God in His image (likeness). This included the freedom—but also the duty—to obey God’s will. They did not eat the fruit because they had nothing else to eat. Instead, they did it by choice. It was an act of Adam’s and Eve’s own free will in rebellion (war) against God’s clear orders.

In the same way, we must choose for ourselves whether or not to follow God. And we must decide whether to obey or to rebel (go against) the Word of God (the Bible). God will not force anyone to believe His Word. He will never force us to obey Him. And He cannot force us to love Him. God lets each one of us choose for ourselves which path we will follow. But, in the end, we must be prepared to live with the results of our choices.

By eating the fruit, Adam and Eve told God that He was not the perfect ruler. His rulership was challenged. Adam and Eve became disobedient. As a result, they brought sin and death to the human family.

Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23, 24). It was a necessary but merciful punishment. The Lord would not let humans who were rebels have the right to the tree of life. With loving care He kept Adam and Eve away from the fruit that would make them live forever in their sinful condition. (Imagine what eternal life would be like in a world filled with such pain and suffering and evil as ours is!) Adam and Eve were driven out from the lovely garden to work the less friendly ground outside (verses 23, 24).

Compare today’s study with 1 John 2:16. This verse warns about the seeds of sin. What seeds of sin were in the story of the Fall? In what ways do we have to deal with these same temptations in our lives too?



With just one bite of the fruit, Adam and Eve lost eternal life.

GOD'S BOLD ACT TO SAVE US
(John 3:14, 15)

The Bible teaches that after the fall of our first parents, it was God who came searching for them, not the other way around. Instead, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. What a powerful lesson for our fallen human race! We flee the One who comes looking for us, the only One who can save us. Adam and Eve fled from God in Eden. Without the leading of the Holy Spirit, people are still doing the same thing today.

Fortunately, God did not push aside our first parents. And He does not cast us aside either. From the time that God first called out “ ‘Where are you?’ ” to Adam and Eve in Eden (Genesis 3:9, NKJV) until today, He is still calling us.

“In the matchless gift of His Son, God has covered the whole world with an atmosphere of grace [mercy; forgiveness] as real as the air which covers around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the full measure of men and women in Christ Jesus.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 68.

Of course, the greatest example of God's missionary work can be understood in Jesus' coming to earth as a human and in His work. Jesus came to this earth to do many things—to destroy Satan, to reveal the true character (holiness) of the Father, to prove that Satan's charges against God are false, and to prove that God's law can be kept. But the most important reason was for Him to die on the cross in the place of humans. His sacrifice provides us with salvation from the full result of sin, which is eternal death.

What do John 3:14, 15; Isaiah 53:4–6; and 2 Corinthians 5:21 teach us about the death of Jesus?

“Christ didn't [did not] have any sin. But God made him become sin for us. So we can be made right with God because of what Christ has done for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV). This idea has been called the “great exchange [trade].” Jesus takes on our sins and suffers as a sinner so that we sinners can be made right with God as Jesus Himself is.

EXAMPLES OF MISSION (Matthew 5:13, 14)

Mission is God's personal desire to save lost humans. God's saving mission is driven by His love for each one of us. There is no deeper reason for it. God sent Christ on a mission to bring salvation for the whole world. John's Gospel alone holds more than forty announcements about Jesus' mission. (Read, for example, John 3:17 and John 12:47.) Christ was sent by the Father to save the world. And Jesus, in turn, sends His disciples with the words " 'as the Father has sent me, I am sending you' " (John 20:21, NIV).

Read Matthew 5:13, 14. What two word-pictures, also known as metaphors, are used for mission in these verses? What can these word-pictures teach us?

The word-pictures, or metaphors, of salt and light teach us how Christians influence humans. Salt works by joining itself to what it is mixed with. But light works by giving brightness to all that it reaches. The word *earth* in Matthew 5:13 means men and women with whom Christians are expected to mix like salt mixes into food. But the words *light of the world* tell us that there is a world of people living in darkness. They need to receive the light of the gospel.

The children of Israel were encouraged to live holy lives and follow health rules that God had given them. They were to be "a light for the Gentiles [non-Jews]" (Isaiah 49:6, NIV). Their lives of good health, success, and loyalty to God's Sabbath and other commandments would teach the surrounding nations that God is a powerful Creator and Savior. The nations, studying the Jews' successful lifestyle, would want to learn more about the Lord.

When Christ came, He also talked about how His followers were to be like *salt*. By their influence in the world, Christians are to help the world turn from sin. Unbelievers are often kept from evil actions because of the influence of Christians. Christians have a good influence on the sinful world by their pure actions, and they also mix with people in order to share the Christian message of salvation.

How good a witness are you and your church to the surrounding world? Is your light dimming? Is the salt losing its punch? If so, why is it important to keep in mind that being right with God begins with your choice to turn back to Him?



Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth. This means we are to mix with others to bless their lives.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: We have dealt with some parts of the missionary nature of God. Mission is a business operation of the Three-in-One God. Mission is largely related to Jesus Christ. His stay on earth as a human is important to the Christian faith and mission. By His life and death, Jesus has opened the way for the salvation (saving) of all humans. As His followers, His missionaries, we have to let people know the good news of just what Jesus has done for them.

“The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes. And the Lord desires to see the entire church developing ways for the high and low, rich and poor, to hear the message of truth. Not all are called to personal labor in foreign fields. But all can do something by their prayers and their gifts to help the missionary work.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 6, page 29.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more about how humans were created. Why are beginnings important? How does a proper understanding of our beginnings help us to better understand who we are and what the purpose of our Christian life really is?
- ② How does the following quote help us to understand free will, love, and evil in our world? “So, if God wants to create loving people—perfect copies of His perfect love—God has to create free people who also can cause suffering and evil in the world by their choices. Love and freedom encourage God to give us the room to grow in love through our human freedom. If God did not want us to be free to choose between right and wrong, He could have chosen not to make us at all.”—Adapted from Robert J. Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence [Life] of God: Contributions [Ideas] of Contemporary [Today’s] Physics [Study of Natural Laws of Science] and Philosophy [Study of Truth]*, Kindle edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), page 233.
- ③ The death of Jesus was a single act that happened in a small nation within the larger Roman Empire, almost two thousand years ago. But this act is of eternal meaning for every human being. What responsibility falls upon us, who know about this act and what it means, to tell those who do not know about it? How else will they learn of it if those who know about it do not tell them?