

6. Religion in the Workplace

Texts: Gen. 2:15; 3:17-19; Lev. 19:35, 36; Eccles. 9:10; Matt. 18:21; Luke 15:11-32, Prov. 10:9.

Quotes:

- Try not! Do, or do not. There is no try. *Yoda, The Empire Strikes Back*
- Job was a man of God and God gave him many riches for speaking and representing God correctly. *Gale*.
- Nothing more clearly show how little God esteems his gift to men of wealth, money, position and other worldly goods, than the way he distributes these, and the sort of men who are most amply provided with them. *Jean De La Bruyere*
- Can it be fancied that Deity ever vindictively, Made in his image a mannikin merely to madden it? *Edgar Allan Poe*
- Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way. *Karl Barth*

Introductory questions

What is the most important aspect to reveal to others, in the workplace or wherever? When we are working, should we be thinking about representing God? What about the issue of improper use of time? How is God best represented? Is it a condition of church membership to be honest and fair in business, or is this truly the way we *want* to live?

Discussion ideas

We all have to work. All too often this is a source of complaint—"I hate my job." But the Bible defines work as good, as a positive activity that builds. Martin Luther commented: "Just look at your tools...at your needle and thimble...your goods, your scales...everything our bodies do, the external and the carnal, is and is called spiritual behavior if God's Word is added to it and it is done in faith."

Similarly Dorothy Sayers wrote that work should be seen "not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself, to the glory of God. It should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of work itself; and man made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing."

As an extension of this, then, speaking for God at the workplace should similarly not be seen as "work." While pasturing, I would often mention that if you don't have a positive attitude to God, then please don't witness! All too frequently "evangelism" is seen as a duty, which kills the right perspective. Which God are you representing?

Work as initiated in Eden (see Genesis 2:15). What does that tell us? Why is it important to use honest weights (Leviticus 19:35)? When in Ecclesiastes 9:10 we're told to do everything with all our might, does this apply to evil? We're told to read the parable of the prodigal son. What does this tell us about the workplace? What of eating with the pigs, maybe? Most of all, this parable is about God and what he wants for each and every one of us. Check out "Seeing Potential in Others" in Thursday's lesson, in which we follow the way God looks at us.

In Tuesday's lesson: "Thus, we should do what is right and honest, because what's right and honest are rooted in God, our Creator and Redeemer." To copy an example, or because we're commanded to, or because we agree that rightness and honesty are fundamental to the way we want to live? As we represent God to the world, always ask "which God"?

Ellen White Comments on Representing God

Jesus loves those who represent the Father, and John could talk of the Father's love as no other of the disciples could. He revealed to his fellow men that which he felt in his own soul, representing in his character the attributes of God. The glory of the Lord was expressed in his face. The beauty of holiness which had transformed him shone with a Christlike radiance from his countenance. In adoration and love he beheld the Saviour until likeness to Christ and fellowship with Him became his one desire, and in his character was reflected the character of his Master. {AA 545}

Suppose you were in a garden where bloomed beautiful roses, and lilies, and pinks; but instead of gathering the beautiful flowers, you should seek for everything objectionable to take away to show to others as a sample of that garden. Would the objectionable things you had gathered properly represent the garden?--By no means. If Christians gather up gloom and sadness to their souls, and murmur and complain, are they representing God and the Christian life as it really is? Christ tells us that if we abide in him, he will abide in us. Are we doing as he has bidden us? Will we gather the roses and the lilies and the pinks, and present to the world the hopeful, bright side of religion? {RH, April 16, 1889}

...Christ said. "Go, teach, bring into discipleship, all nations. Give them the knowledge of the truth of My gospel, which is founded on truth. Lead them to understand that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are heaven's loving, powerful agencies for the accomplishment of the work of representing God in the world..." {16MR 15}

Extra material

Jesus: rightly representing God. Jesus said many things about God. In his very life he revealed the true character of God--he came to make the Father known so that we could see him properly (John 1:18; 12:45; 14:7). But in one particular story he used such a powerful image of God's true nature: The parable of the ever-loving Father (Luke 15:11-32). A parable that includes all of us. All of us are strangers in foreign land, wasting our time and our money, destroying ourselves until we end up starving with the pigs. When and if we wake up to our situation and make our weary way back to our loving Father, what kind of God do we find? A stingy, crabby old man who tells us how bad we've been? A thundering dictator who beats us into submission? An insipid, bored ruler who just couldn't care less?

No. A God who runs. When Jesus told that story he blew the minds of his hearers. In that society older people were highly respected. They were treated with much deference. And they in turn acted with due propriety, with regard to their elevated status. No one, but no one, could believe that such an elder would ever run to meet someone, certainly not someone younger, even if it was his son. How unseemly! It's as if Jesus is saying "God cares so much about you that he'll run to meet you, help you on your way home, kiss you and shower you with all his healing love. In all of this God doesn't care about his reputation or his fame. He doesn't care about the esteem in which he is held, or what others might think of his running. He only cares about you."

But as you take those faltering steps back towards him, God comes running down heaven's highway to take you home.

What a vivid picture of a God who overwhelms you with his love, reaching out his hand to you, wanting only that you should be put right and be back with him again!

What a delight to know such a God, a God who welcomes you back, holds your head to his chest and weeps together with you for joy as his child comes home!

7. Respect for Authorities

Texts: Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 22:15-21; Acts 5:29; Rom. 13:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-15.

Quotes:

- Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God. *Thomas Jefferson*
- Liberty is obedience to the law which one has laid down for oneself. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*
- ...doing right where there is no one to make you do it but yourself. *Edwin J. Delattre*
- The doctrine of blind obedience and unqualified submission to any human power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is the doctrine of despotism, and ought to have no place among Republicans and Christians. *Angelina Grimke*
- Only he who believes is obedient and only he who is obedient believes. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*
- All religions have based morality on obedience, that is to say, on voluntary slavery. That is why they have always been more pernicious than any political organization. For the latter makes use of violence, the former -- of the corruption of the will. *Alexander Herzen*

Introductory questions

We are to be “salt” and “light” to the world. What does this mean in terms of obedience to government authorities? Early Christians were considered subversive—why? Are there areas where we need to counteract the state? What is the real meaning of the separation of Church and State? How do we truly obey—both in the civil and in the spiritual areas?

Discussion ideas

When the Pharisees came to ask Jesus about paying tax, was this a religious or a political question? Remember that the zealots had said it was wrong to pay tax to the heathen occupiers. In a sense this was the dilemma in which state and religion conflicted. Jesus’ answer is the solution, and the model for our response.

However the stress on being “model citizens” cannot mean that Christians endorse every aspect of civil leaders. All too often there are points of conflict. Under dictatorships, what are Christians to do? Don’t forget that the Roman rule was particularly brutal, and many emperors total tyrants. During the British rule of the colonies, George III would seem a saint in comparison with Diocletian, for example...

“The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted,” writes Paul in Romans 13:1-2 NIV. How is this passage to be interpreted in the context of rebellion or revolution?

So what is true obedience? Just doing what you are told, no matter what? Is this what God expects? Are we to do what we’re told, and not ask any questions? Or is it a matter of doing always what is right, no matter what rulers say? The question then becomes, who defines what is right, and to what extent should Christians reject unjust laws?

In obeying God, and keeping God’s commandments, what is the key? Is it unthinking submission, or thoughtful agreement? If God had only wanted compliance, why give the ability to think and reason? The answer must be that “God seeks comrades and claims love, the Devil seeks slaves and claims obedience.” (Rabindranath Tagore).

Ellen White Comments on Obedience

We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. {AA 68}

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely--because he is required to do so--will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey... True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right--because right doing is pleasing to God. {COL 97-8}

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. {DA 668}

Any form, any outward symbol, if it be not prompted by holiness and true goodness, is but mockery. True goodness, true obedience to God, is not in need of outward show and parade. Vital godliness will be revealed without a great effort at display. Spiritual life will be made manifest by transformation of character in him who is possessed of the divine power that works sanctification. {ST, March 14, 1895}

No one can keep the commandments of God who does not cherish love in his heart; for without love there is no true obedience. {ST, February 24, 1898}

Extra Material

In his formulation of Robot Laws, Isaac Asimov, arguably the foremost science fiction author of the 20th century, illustrates a principle that operates in the spiritual arena. Apart from the three original Robot Laws, the so-called Zeroth Law places a principle behind the other laws that challenges their application. The Zeroth Law lifts the laws from individual application to the wider concept of what is best for humanity. So the First law is re-defined into the Zeroth law. "A robot may not injure a humanity or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm."

God's "Zeroth Law" which precedes and gives meaning to all other laws. This is not situational ethics; rather it illustrates the truth that a higher principle applies to all behavior. For to claim obedience to orders and rules was not enough to absolve the guilty in the Nuremburg trials after World War II. To say "I was just following orders" did not make concentration camp guards guiltless as they murdered.

When Jesus' disciples 'broke the law' by picking and eating grain on the Sabbath, the law-keepers complained to Jesus. His answer, referring to how David 'broke the law' by him and his followers eating the holy shewbread, demonstrated that he recognized this higher principles. Jesus pointed this out to the legalists again after he healed a man on the Sabbath, saying it was legal to do good on the Sabbath. He referred them to their own laws which allowed them to "work" on the Sabbath in an emergency, such as pulling an ox out of a ditch.

Jesus' accusers also tried to trap him into a conflict between laws. The law of the occupying Romans required taxes to be paid. To create dissension, Jesus is asked whether such laws are to be obeyed. For if no, then to the Romans he is encouraging rebellion. If yes, then he is a Roman sympathizer, and not supportive of the Jewish cause. Jesus' response identifies the different laws. What is in the realm of Caesar belongs to him, and what is God's belongs to Him. The implied contrast also indicates that if the two systems conflict, then God's "Zeroth Law" takes precedence.

For "whoever obeys God's commands lives in union with God and God lives in union with him," (1 John 3:24 TEV). Why? Because "what he commands is that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as Christ commanded us." (1 John 3:23 TEV). And love cannot be commanded anyway! God's "Zeroth Law" is a law that cannot be commanded; it is a truth that is accepted and endorsed. This command to love brings law full circle back to the graciousness of God. For all the laws have this at their heart, every act of obedience is a demonstration of this principle of love in action. And "our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." (1 John 3:18 TEV). Something any robot would find hard to understand, human or not...

8. Christ's Other Sheep

Texts: John 10:16; John 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 14:1-12.

Quotes:

- Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.
- There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is saved. Pope Innocent III.
- We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff. Pope Boniface VIII
- The most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, can have a share in life eternal; but that they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her...Pope Eugene IV.
- A serial rapist-murderer who accepts Jesus will go to heaven, but Ghandi is now in hell because he wasn't a Christian. David Edelstein (speaking sarcastically)
- And they say: None shall enter the Garden except he who is a Jew or the Christians. These are their vain desires... Quran 2:111

Introductory questions

If Adventists are not the only people to be saved, does that mean God saves just anybody? What is the point of preaching the truth if others can be saved where they are? What about us as the remnant church—or is this just *remnant-itis*? How should we relate to other believers? What of non-Christian faiths? What *is* the most important thing?

Discussion ideas

If it is true that “God has children, many of them, in the Protestant churches, and a large number in the Catholic churches” {3SM, 386}, why are we bothering? Is it not better to leave people alone, rather than to try and convince them that we are right? We have often identified ourselves (sometimes perhaps rather proudly) as the remnant? But is this something to be proud of? The bit that's left that nobody wants?

“Salvation comes only from Jesus Christ and what He did for humanity at the Cross; it doesn't come from joining any particular religious community, including our own.” (Monday's lesson). What's right/wrong with this statement?

What is the real difference between Adventist beliefs and those of other Christians? Is it down to the fundamental beliefs, or is it something different? How would you explain how we are different to someone who was honestly seeking to know?

What has 2 Peter 1:12 to do with truth and being reminded? How can we best help those “other sheep”? What are some of the right ways and wrong ways?

“The Adventist message helps us to know where we are in human history. It unveils the Great Controversy perspective, which shows us the larger picture of what God is doing for our rebellious planet.” (Tuesday's lesson). So what is our emphasis to be? How can we speak well of God to those who believe they already know him, maybe even know him very well? How to avoid the charge of being superior and “having the truth”?

Revelation 14:1-12 has been chosen as “the Adventist motto.” What does this text really say? How can we best present this to our modern world?

Ellen White Comments

We should not, upon entering a place, build up unnecessary barriers between us and other denominations, especially the Catholics, so that they think we are their avowed enemies. We should not create a prejudice in their minds unnecessarily, by making a raid upon them. There are many among the Catholics who live up to the light they have far better than many who claim to believe present truth, and God will just as surely test and prove them as He has tested and proved us. {Ev 144}

I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different denominations many who can be reached only by the greatest caution. Therefore let us be careful of our words. Let not our ministers follow their own impulses in denouncing and exposing the “mysteries of iniquity.” Upon these themes silence is eloquence. Many are deceived. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ Jesus be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. Never leave the straight path God has marked out, for the purpose of giving someone a thrust. That thrust may do much harm and no good. It may quench conviction in many minds. Let the Word of God, which is the truth, tell the story of the inconsistency of those in error. People cannot be expected to see at once the advantage of the truth over the error they have cherished. The best way to expose the fallacy of error is to present the evidences of truth. This is the greatest rebuke that can be given to error. Dispel the cloud of darkness resting on minds by reflecting the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness. {Ev 576-7}

You did not labor judiciously. You sought to make up for your lack of real knowledge by censoring other denominations, running down others, and making hard and bitter criticisms upon their course and condition. Had your heart been all aglow with the spirit of truth, had you been sanctified to God and walking in the light as Christ is in the light, you would have moved in wisdom and would have had enough ways and means at your command to maintain an interest without going out of your way and aside from your specific work to rail out against others who profess to be Christians.

Unbelievers have been disgusted; they think that Seventh-day Adventists have been fairly represented by you, and they decide that it is enough and that they want no more of such doctrines. Our faith is unpopular at best and is in wide contrast to the faith and practices of other denominations. In order to reach those who are in the darkness of error and false theories, we must approach them with the utmost caution and with the greatest wisdom, agreeing with them on every point that we can conscientiously. {3T 461-2}

Extra material

“Of the mass religions, Christianity made the most effective use of these principles. Possessed of the tightest organization, the most bewildering logic, the most impressive sacred literature, and the most fanatical spirit of any, it captured the Principate while Christians were still a small minority in the Empire. Then armed with the terrifying doctrines of exclusive salvation, eternal damnation, and the imminent end of the world, and backed by the Emperor’s executioners, it soon swept its rivals from the board.” L. Sprague de Camp.

“Do the Witnesses believe that their religion is the only right one? Anyone who is serious about his religion should think that it is the right one. Otherwise, why would he or she be involved in it? Christians are admonished: ‘Make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine.’ (1 Thessalonians 5:21) A person should make sure that his beliefs can be supported by the Scriptures, for there is only one true faith. Ephesians 4:5 confirms this, mentioning ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism.’ Jesus did not agree with the modern, relaxed view that there are many roads, many religions, all leading to salvation. Instead, he said: ‘Narrow is the gate and cramped the road leading off into life, and few are the ones finding it.’ Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that they have found it. Otherwise, they would look for another religion.” www.watchtower.org

9. How to Relate to Non-Christians

Texts: John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Rev. 14:6, 7; Phil. 2:5-11.

Quotes:

- An atheist is one point beyond the devil. Anonymous.
- ...religious fervor triumphed over reason. “Quit grumbling about the futility of seeking truth,” the religious believers said. “We have the truth. The truth has been divinely revealed to us, and you’d better believe it or you’ll be condemned to Hell. Don’t even question our religious truths, for that indicates a lack of faith, and that’s punishable too, not only in the afterlife. We can punish unbelievers in this life as well.” Thus began the sordid saga of the rise of the religions which still afflict us today. *Don Simanek*
- ... believing in a God whom we cannot but regard as evil, and then, in mere terrified flattery calling Him ‘good’ and worshipping him is a still greater danger... The ultimate question is whether the doctrine of the goodness of God or that of the inerrancy of scripture is to prevail when they conflict. I think the doctrine of the goodness of God is the more certain of the two. Indeed, only that doctrine renders this worship of Him obligatory or even permissible. *C. S. Lewis, letter to John Beversluis*

Introductory questions

John 14:6 is often quoted as proof on an exclusive view of salvation. What does this really mean? Are we preaching a mechanism of salvation or the truth of a saving God? Is truth absolute? How do we explain our ideas without coming over as exclusivistic? What about contextualizing the message? How different is that to compromise? What is the message?

Discussion ideas

Acts 4:12 says that salvation is found nowhere else. This can be used to reinforce ideas of superiority, even arrogance. How does Romans 1:18 fit into a beneficent picture of God? How can some actions of well-meaning Christians fit into the command of Philippians 2:5?

In dealing with non-Christians, it’s important to take nothing for granted. In today’s world, even basic Biblical ideas cannot be assumed. In explaining the Bible, you have to be very simple—like the lady I once studied with who looked up the copyright notice in the front of the Bible and thought it had just been written...

The really important question is “what is the real message?” What is the fundamental aspects we want to share. It’s all too easy to get trapped into side issues. Often people will ask, “so what makes Adventists different?” which can lead into debates over the more “peculiar” aspects of faith. The aim is to share concepts of God that speak well of our loving Lord, not to get into useless debates or creedal formulas.

“Christ came to meet us where we are. He assumed human form. He expressed Himself in human language. He became one of us. If, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church wants to reach the modern world with the message of Christ, it will have to meet people where they are and speak the language of the people of today and not of a century ago.” (Wednesday’s lesson). What does this really mean for us, and how do we put this into practice?

How to reach people where they are is the primary objective, to be able to share with them God’s good news—and not turn this into something punitive or bad. The revelation of God’s character and his gracious offer to save us is still the greatest good news.

Ellen White Comments

The Lord desires that His word of grace shall be brought home to every soul. To a great degree this must be accomplished by personal labor. This was Christ's method. His work was largely made up of personal interviews. He had a faithful regard for the one-soul audience. Through that one soul the message was often extended to thousands. {COL 229}

The Saviour devoted more time and labor to healing the afflicted of their maladies than to preaching. {CH 34}

From Christ's methods of labor we may learn many valuable lessons. He did not follow merely one method; in various ways He sought to gain the attention of the multitude and, having succeeded in this, He proclaimed to them the truths of the gospel. His chief work lay in ministering to the poor, the needy, and the ignorant. In simplicity He opened before them the blessings they might receive, and thus He aroused their soul's hunger for the truth, the bread of life. {CH 387}

Our work is to study to weed out of all our discourses everything that savors of retaliation and defiance and making a drive against churches and individuals, because this is not Christ's way and method. {CW 64}

This was the method of Christ's teaching. As he spoke to the people, they would question as to His meaning. To those who were humbly seeking for light, He was always ready to explain His words. But Christ did not encourage criticism or caviling, nor should we. When men try to provoke a discussion of controverted points of doctrine, tell them that the meeting was not appointed for that purpose. When you do answer a question, be sure to have the hearers see and acknowledge that it is answered. Do not let a question drop, telling them to ask it again. Feel your way step by step, and know how much you have gained. {Ev 153}

Extra material

This morning Lord, I have only thanks for you. Thanks for who you are, and for loving me. Because it is only the sure knowledge that you love me that gives me value—that makes life meaningful and worthwhile. Because of you Lord, I can laugh and smile and shout out loud for joy.

How long it's taken me to realize that I am only truly happy with you, my loving Lord. How often I have wanted to be me, just me, without anything else. And then found in this me nothing to make me happy. If I am only me, then there is nothing--I have no reason to be, no past and no future.

You are my God, my family, my closest relation. My connectedness to you makes me part of it all—the whole vast Universe you made and you sustain. To be born, to live for a few brief moment, and die—what is that?

But to be made by you, live for you and with you, and even if I die I live in you memory and am resurrected to be with you forever--how incredible, how wonderful, how brilliantly loving.

To give us all a part, a voice, lines in the script of the Universe—Lord, let me ever give you thanks, because you are the one who includes me in, and makes me a part of all you are.