MERCY AND JUSTICE

Christ’s statement in Matthew 26:11, “For you have the poor with you always,” is descriptive of the state of the world until He comes to destroy sin. Not only is it a reality we must accept, but it is one that God uses to mold our Christian characters. As Ellen White puts it, “In the providence of God events have been so ordered that the poor are always with us, in order that there may be a constant exercise in the human heart of the attributes of mercy and love.”

While poverty is a reality we must accept in a sinful world, it is not one we must embrace. The “attributes of mercy and love” are not cultivated when we turn a blind eye to the needs of those around us. On the contrary, God calls His followers to care for the poor among us. “He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given” (Prov. 19:17).

Moreover, a Christian’s duty is to practice justice and mercy in all situations. “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). It may be easier to keep silent when we see oppression around us, but God enjoins us to engage our societies in seeking justice and mercy for the downtrodden.

The Christian realizes that full justice will only be realized when Jesus comes again. But they also recognize their duty to mediate on behalf of the weak and voiceless. This week we consider how Sabbath-keeping Christians ought to be at the forefront of seeking the welfare of the needy.
Write out Leviticus 25 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Leviticus 25:13–17. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
Go back to your scribed text and study the passage. Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas. Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you. Draw Arrows to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases. What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse in Leviticus 25. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

How do you balance caring for the environment while not worshiping nature?

In what ways can environmentalism be evangelistic?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/sab09-3

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Creationists and evolutionists are polar opposites regarding their view of the origin of life; however, their divergent views do not alter the reality that they occupy the same planet. Neither the creationist nor the evolutionist has yet discovered a habitable alternative beyond earth. This means that irrespective of their views of origin, each has a vested interest in preserving planet earth.

For the evolutionist, this vested interest springs naturally from self-preservation. For the Seventh-day Adventist creationist, it proceeds from a nonnegotiable divine mandate! The creationist’s authoritative text, the Bible, states that the Creator gave Adam and Eve “dominion” over creation (Gen. 1:26). This dominion or rule must be interpreted more biblically than etymologically, and is best understood in the context of an additional directive God gave Adam: “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15, KJV). “Dress” connotes service, and “keep” expresses protection. Not abuse! Not exploitation!

As surely as Adam was to develop and manage the Garden of Eden, his home, so surely were he and his descendants to manage the entire planet. This is beautifully expressed by Ellen White: “The Garden of Eden was a representation of what God desired the whole earth to become.” (White, Education, 22.) This means that the divine “dress it” and “keep it” mandate for Eden was to apply on a global scale. In the same breath that God said, “Be fruitful and multiply,” He said, “Have dominion” (Gen. 1:28).

The “Seventh-day” segment of Seventh-day Adventist proclaims creation—that from which God rested and which He entrusted to mankind’s loving care. A genuine Seventh-day Adventist is an environmentalist of the highest order.

This care for the environment has a higher motivation than preserving pristine surroundings. Since “the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3), and since His glory is His character, that is, His image (2 Cor. 3:18) (See also Ellen G. White, God’s Amazing Grace (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), 322.), those who preserve the earth are preserving the evidence of a loving God. Pollution, exploitation, and neglect of nature effectively efface this evidence of a mighty power. No pollutant threatens to erase that glory more than sin! A biblical environmentalist, therefore, will do all that human effort mingled with divine power can accomplish—avoidance of sin, the original and current pollutant!

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of humanity’s sacred responsibility to care for the earth, not only as a dwelling place but as a living laboratory of the glory of God.
THE RESET

A key text when considering what Scripture says about the Sabbath is Isaiah 58:13, 14. It delineates what to do and what not to do on the Sabbath concomitant with blessings that will attend the faithful Sabbath keeper. However, the chapter does not begin with a discussion of the Sabbath, and its beginning cannot be divorced from its conclusion.

God’s people have transgressed (Isa. 58:1) despite the fact that they are devoutly engaged in religious activities (vv. 2, 3). But their religiosity is counter-productive (v. 4) and does not even accord with God’s expressed will (v. 5).

In contrast to their self-centered religious activity, God desires that they express their commitment to Him through acts of selfless service to others (vv. 6, 7, 9, 10). As John would later articulate, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

One cannot miss the language in verses 9, 10, and 13—“if.” These statements come in response to the negative evaluation of the current state of God’s people’s religion. The first “if” calls for God’s people to refrain from hurting each other (v. 9). The second “if” invites them to minister to the needs of those around them (v. 10). And the third “if” brings us to the Sabbath commandment (v. 13). Thus, true Sabbath observance is inextricably linked to acts of selfless service.

The seventh-day Sabbath meant a time of rest not only for humanity but for the beasts of burden as well. In fact, everything involved in humanity’s secular toil enjoyed a weekly repose. As Israel entered the promised land, God further instituted a sabbath rest for the land.

Every seventh year, the land was to rest from being worked (Lev. 25:1–7). Then after seven cycles of seven years, the Israelites were to observe the year of Jubilee in the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:8, 9). Not only would the land rest during the year of Jubilee, but it was a time to “proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants” (v. 10). Land was reverted to its original owner, debts were remitted, and slaves were granted their freedom. In summary, the message of the year of Jubilee was that “you shall not oppress one another” (v. 17).

In the Jewish economy, through the year of Jubilee, God had instituted a reset button, so to speak. “Great evils would result from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class, and the poverty and degradation of another. Without some restraint the power of the wealthy would become a monopoly, and the poor, though in every respect fully as worthy in God’s sight, would be regarded and treated as inferior to their more prosperous brethren. The sense of this oppression would arouse the passions of the poorer class. There would be a feeling of despair and desperation which would tend to demoralize society and open the door to crimes of every description. The regulations that God established were designed to promote social equality. The provisions of the sabbatical year and the jubilee would, in a great measure, set right that which during the interval had gone wrong in the social and political economy of the nation.” (White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 534.)

Even from one week to the next, the Sabbath reminds us of our equal standing under God. Fully understanding our worth as humanity instills a responsibility to uplift the downtrodden and humble our lofty notions of self-worth. True Sabbath keeping leads to Christian benevolence.
inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Genesis 2:15
John 5:1–16
Luke 13:15
Isaiah 58
Matthew 12:9–14
Revelation 11:18
Micah 6:1-8

What other verses come to mind in connection with Leviticus 25?

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 25.
BETTER STEWARDS

The first three commandments delineate our duty to God, and the last six outline our duty to our fellow humanity. In the fourth commandment we find a merger of our duty to God and our duty to humanity. Because God worked, we may rest (Exod. 20:11). God rested and commands us to follow His example. But we must also foster rest for all within our sphere of influence on the Sabbath day, even the beasts of burden (Exod. 20:10).

The sabbath that the land experienced every seven years (Lev. 25:1–7) gave it the opportunity to replenish its nutrients, just as our weekly Sabbath rest allows the body to rejuvenate. Every seven years the land was to rest from its work of providing food for Israel, and Israel was reminded that it is God who ultimately provides for them (Lev. 25:21).

The seven-year Sabbath cycle had some faith-challenging implications for Israel. When they harvested their crops in the sixth year, they needed to trust that God would provide an adequate harvest to meet their needs (Lev. 25:21). They would have needed food for that seventh year and seed to plant in the eighth year that would begin a new seven-year cycle, as well as food for that eighth year as well. Reminiscent of their manna experience in the wilderness, the Israelites had to trust God to take care of them (Exodus 16).

Beyond the seven-year cycle, God also instituted a fifty-year cycle of rest for the land. The Israelites were to number seven cycles of seven years, and after the forty-ninth year, they were to celebrate the year of Jubilee in the fiftieth year. By keeping the year of Jubilee, Israel declared their dependence upon God for their physical sustenance. Their harvest in the sixth year would provide food for them in the seventh year, the eighth year (or the year of Jubilee), and the first year of the next cycle, in addition to enough seed to plant in that first year (Lev. 25:22).

In a graphic way, this system highlighted Israel’s dependence upon God. It was in that context of a heightened focus on God that the social reforms (discussed in inTerpret) were to take place as well as the environmental care for the land (discussed in inGest). The more fully we are established in our relationship of dependence upon God, the better stewards we will be of the earth and of our fellow humankind. Every week, the Sabbath affords us an opportunity to embrace a faithful relationship with our Creator, which translates into a better relationship with His creation.
inSight

Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the chapter, what are personal applications you are convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church?

His Glorious Work

Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the word of God. Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. (White, Education, 128.)

God created man in His own image. Here is no mystery. There is no ground for the supposition that man was evolved by slow degrees of development from the lower forms of animal or vegetable life. Such teaching lowers the great work of the Creator to the level of man’s narrow, earthly conceptions. Men are so intent upon excluding God from the sovereignty of the universe that they degrade man and defraud him of the dignity of his origin. He who set the starry worlds on high and tinted with delicate skill the flowers of the field, who filled the earth and the heavens with the wonders of His power, when He came to crown His glorious work, to place one in the midst to stand as ruler of the fair earth, did not fail to create a being worthy of the hand that gave him life. The genealogy of our race, as given by inspiration, traces back its origin, not to a line of developing germs, mollusks, and quadrupeds, but to the great Creator. Though formed from the dust, Adam was “the son of God.” (White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 45.)

Years ago I was shown that God’s people would be tested upon this point of making homes for the homeless; that there would be many without homes in consequence of their believing the truth. Opposition and persecution would deprive believers of their homes, and it was the duty of those who had homes to open a wide door to those who had not. I have been shown more recently that God would specially test His professed people in reference to this matter. Christ for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be made rich. He made a sacrifice that He might provide a home for pilgrims and strangers in the world seeking for a better country, even an heavenly. (Ellen G. White, Adventist Home (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1952), 170, 171.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What has been your reaction upon seeing the poor, weak, and voiceless in the past?

Though seemingly similar on the outside, how is biblical environmentalism different from humanistic environmentalism?

How is your Sabbath observance connected with planet earth?

How does Sabbath inform our sense of justice?

What are the differences between equality, equity, and justice?

What is the difference between social responsibility and social transformation? Which does the Bible call God’s people to?

How were Sabbath principles revolutionary for Israel’s day? How are they revolutionary today?

How can you manifest God’s justice on this Sabbath?