



STANDING FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Grateful for Freedom

February 25, 2017

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Acts 17:16-34 • (The story of Paul’s visit to Athens is an interesting one within the context of a study of pluralism.)

John 10:16 • “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

Isaiah 56:6, 7 • “Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

(See additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “RELIGIOUS LIBERTY”

Today’s teens grow up in a world in which non-Christian religions or no religion at all are considered just as valid in the popular culture as Christianity. How does a Christian teen approach this pluralistic world? Youth hear

voices urging them to accept and embrace everyone and everyone’s philosophy as equally valid. How can you help them to “take a firm stand” without becoming judgmental of others?

As you explore this complex topic with teens, help them see the importance of having a firm basis for their own beliefs as they are exposed to the beliefs of others. Stress the importance of separating “tolerance” from “acceptance or agreement”: they can love others and treat their beliefs with respect without needing to agree with those beliefs or lifestyles. Likewise, they’ll need to learn how to share the truth found in God’s Word lovingly, respectfully, and with Christlike gentleness.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “RELIGIOUS LIBERTY”

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Express a solid basis for their own belief in Jesus.
2. Respect the beliefs of others even when they differ.
3. Discuss the difference between tolerating others’ beliefs and accepting/agreeing with them.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) chalkboard or flipchart, chalk or markers; (Activity B) glass of water, food coloring, dropper.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

Allow 10 minutes as students are arriving to:

1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for *Adventist Mission for Youth and Adult* at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Have a flipchart, chalkboard, or whiteboard available to write down suggestions as students brainstorm them.

Get set • Ask students to list as many Seventh-day Adventist beliefs as they can. Write the list up front while they brainstorm.

Go • When the list is complete, go through it with the students. **Ask:** **How many of these biblical beliefs are you actually practicing? Do you know of other people who live by these beliefs?**

Debriefing • **Ask:** **In a world in which Christian teens your age are exposed to a multitude of different beliefs, what is your response when you meet someone whose religious beliefs are very different from yours?**

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Prepare a large, clear glass of water and a dropper with food coloring in it. For a large class, divide into groups and give each group a glass of water and some food coloring.

Get set • Add a single drop of food coloring to the water and watch closely as it enters the water.

Go • Observe how the food coloring remains separate from the water for a time and then begins to spread. Show how you can speed up the process of its permeating throughout the water by shaking the glass. If a small amount is added, the whole glass of water will eventually become faintly colored. See what happens to the color if you add several more drops of food coloring.

Debriefing • **Ask:** **How easy is it for someone to stay “separate” and unique from others around them? How can you live among other people and still hold firmly to your beliefs that are based on the Word of God? In John 17:15-17 Jesus said, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” How does the prayer of Jesus help us better understand our responsibility to remain faithful to God’s truth and at the same time to mingle with people and help them find Jesus?**

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

Brad grew up in a small church in a small town. Everyone he knew pretty much agreed about the important things and distinguished between right and wrong. Then Brad's parents moved to a larger city so Brad's dad could take a new job. In Brad's new junior high school, he met kids from all over the world. One day Brad and some friends start talking about what they believe. One of his new friends is a Muslim who says, "You pray to God, I pray to Allah. Same God, different names. No big deal." Another friend says, "I don't believe there's a God at all, but I can still be a good person and live a good life." When Brad says, "I believe that Jesus died for our sins and that believing in Him is the only way to be saved," his friends say, "That's just your opinion. It's OK for you, but you have no right to say it's true for the rest of us. You have to accept our different beliefs, just as we accept yours."

Debriefing • Ask: How can Brad show his friends that they need Jesus? How can you accept people without accepting their beliefs?



CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

If your class is large (20 people or more), divide into seven small groups and have each group read one of the Bible verses from Wednesday's section of the student lesson: Acts 4:12; Romans 12:18; 1 John 2:6; Philippians 2:4; Ephesians 4:4-6; Matthew 28:19, 20; Romans 12:1, 2.

Say: Suppose that as Seventh-day Adventist Christians you live in the world believing as you do, surrounded by people with all kinds of different beliefs. You have been told that the Bible verse in front of you is the most important one in the whole Bible

and that it must guide you in all your dealings with people outside the church. Decide, based on this text alone, how your church will relate to people with different beliefs. What will your outreach program be? How will you react when confronted with different beliefs?

Allow groups a few minutes to read their texts and discuss. Then ask each group to report back. Point out some of the differences: for example, a group that read only Matthew 28:19, 20 would have a very active evangelism program, while a group that read only Romans 12:18 might not want to do anything that would stir up controversy. Point out the importance of having a balanced approach that takes the whole Bible into consideration. Based on all of these Bible texts, how should Christians approach those others in their world?

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath's section of the lesson.

Say: Seventh-day Adventists have always been very strongly in favor of religious freedom. **Ask:** How do we handle sharing Jesus with the world while at the same time respecting other people's beliefs?

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

Your church is holding prophecy seminars, and you have several invitations to give to your friends. You give one to a friend after school on the bus, saying, "Here is an invitation I want to share with you to an event that my church is organizing, if you're interested."

Have students turn to the person sitting next to them and in pairs practice possible conversations that could emerge after this encounter between the person receiving the invitation and the one who has given the invitation. Have them practice responding both to a favorable recipient and to a hostile recipient.

Debriefing • Ask: Why is it important that regardless of people’s reactions, we as Christians always maintain a positive, calm, and Christlike attitude when we share Jesus?

5 APPLYING

GLOBAL YOUTH DAY

Take the opportunity to announce Global Youth Day. This event will happen on March 18, 2017.

To learn more about Global Youth Day you may visit www.gcyouthministries.org. You may also want to download the Global Youth Day app.

You can start planning with your Sabbath School class ways to get involved and participate in a community service project or a mission initiative on that day. The possibilities for service are endless. Some examples may include: visiting a nursing home, hospital, orphanage, or prison to comfort, sing, and pray for those who are sick, needy, and destitute, feeding the homeless, inviting people from the community to an open house event, etc.

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Imagine your community is holding a “Diversity Day” in which members of different religious groups will have the opportunity to put on displays that illustrate their beliefs and their style of worship. The idea is that everyone will have a chance to wander around, visit different displays, and experience someone else’s point of view. The program will include representatives of many different Christian churches as well as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and even atheists. Your earliten Sabbath School class has been asked to produce a display highlighting the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Divide the class into small groups (unless your class includes five people or less, in which case

you may want to do this all together) to discuss and plan your presentation. **What would you show and do? How would you highlight the distinctive Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in such an attractive way that others who have no idea what we believe would gain a clear understanding of the Word of God?** After allowing a few minutes for groups to plan what they would present, have them come back and share with the whole group.

Debriefing • Ask: What do you think your presentation would tell others about the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you usually handle discussions about religion with friends who believe differently?
2. How would you approach someone who believed that any attempt to share your faith was intolerant and that Christians should keep their religion to themselves?
3. Do you feel that people in general are tolerant of your Christian beliefs? Have you ever felt discriminated against or as if you don’t fit in because of your faith? How did you handle it?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

We have so many opportunities to meet the world of people with whom Jesus told us to share the gospel. But sharing our beliefs can be seen as narrow-minded and intolerant. We have to walk a fine line between respecting the beliefs of others and holding firmly to our own. Loving people as Jesus did is the ultimate key. Love is never seen as intolerant. Let God’s love shine out from you to everyone, and whenever

you have the opportunity, ask Jesus to guide you to share His love through actions and words.



STUDENT LESSON

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Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 22, Christian Behavior:** “We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life.”
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 134-137.

GRATEFUL FOR FREEDOM

A number of years ago religious freedom was severely restricted in some countries that today enjoy freedom. Students who worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath often faced serious challenges in their academic journey. Sometimes they were threatened that they would be expelled from school. Many families knelt in prayer asking for God’s intervention and direction.

Christina’s parents decided to enroll their daughter in a music school. Several days before the scheduled entrance exam, a public announcement went out. The principal of that school announced the decision that Seventh-day Adventist students would not be admitted to the music school. It was known that Adventist stu-

dents were determined to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy according to the Bible.

Christina’s parents received the news with considerable disappointment. Yet they did not lose heart. They prayed and entrusted the matter in God’s hands. With renewed interest they anticipated the day of the entrance exam.

On the appointed day, a member of the examination committee was charged with the specific responsibility of asking each student about the religious beliefs they held. Notwithstanding their aptitude in music, the students who would not attend school on Sabbath would not be granted admission.

Christina waited prayerfully outside the examination room. Right before it was her turn to enter, a teacher from the examination committee was asked to leave and assist with an urgent matter. Christina entered and took her turn. One by one the teachers on the committee tested her musical skills. After the exam was over, Christina left the room. No one had asked her about her religious convictions.

Christina’s family praised God for the answered prayers! Now they prayed for guidance in the next step. There remained one more challenge—talking to the homeroom teacher.

To the family’s surprise, the teacher accepted Christina in her class and offered not to mark Christina’s absences on Saturday. Her desire was to help her students succeed. Each Friday, at the end of the school day, the teacher gave Christina the homework that she would need to do for Monday. Christina had a successful academic year.

It was a time of great joy for many Christians when religious freedom was finally granted and there was no longer instruction in schools on Saturday. God answered in marvelous ways the prayers of His faithful children!

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read Ephesians 5:1-17.

Discrimination against people because of their religious beliefs can be minor, serious, or even life-threatening. It can happen across the world or here at home. It can happen to Christians as well as to people who hold different beliefs. We need to show our gratitude to God for the freedoms we enjoy, and pray for those who do not enjoy these freedoms. We also need to utilize these privileges to share the hope we found in Jesus.

When religious freedoms are restricted, what should be the Christian's response? Read Acts 5:29. How can we be Christ's witnesses when political or religious authorities restrict religious freedom? How can we hold firm to God's great commission to share Jesus with everyone?

Log on to www.guidemagazine.org/rtf to post your responses. Be up-front and honest. Say what you think.

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

- » Read Psalm 106:3; Acts 5:12-42; 2 Corinthians 10:5.
- » Part of being a follower of Jesus is showing His love to everyone—especially the person who does not know Him. Jesus has called us to share the “good news” with everyone—those close to home and those far away. We are to love our neighbor. There are no conditions to us loving others. We are to stand for what is right and love others—regardless of how they respond. God's message is a message of love.
- » What are some ways we can show God's love to unbelievers?
- » How can you show respect to others who believe differently and also share Jesus?
- » “It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. . . . But Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love” (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 541).

Religious Persecution in the Bible?

Stop and think about the Bible stories in the Old and New Testament. The Bible contains stories about religious persecution and intolerance. Look up the references below and match them with the person, persons, or group of people that are mentioned in the stories. All verses are taken from the NKJV.



See activity at the end of this lesson.

Tuesday REFLECTING

- » Read Romans 12:18.
- » How should a Christian young person respond to the different religious beliefs in the world around us? Do we simply “agree to disagree”? How can we show tolerance and respect for people who hold different beliefs and at the same time share Jesus with them?
- » As the agents of God's kingdom in this world, how do we live in society without offending people, turning them off, or being disrespectful? We have a fine line to walk. Jesus calls us to be fearless and bold in standing for Him, yet to always treat others the way we would want to be treated. That means respecting other people's right to their beliefs just as we want our own rights to be respected.

- » “What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 102).

Wednesday BIBLE INSIGHTS

Match the verse with the text. All Bible passages are taken from the New King James Version.



See activity at the end of this lesson.

Thursday CONNECTING

- » Read Matthew 22:37-39.
- » Review the memory text.
- » In a world that says that “there are many different truths for different people,” can you believe in “the truth” anymore? Seventh-day Adventist Christians say yes! But in a world with more diversity, more different views and opinions than ever before, we have to think carefully about how to share that truth.
- » While we have to stand firm on what we believe, we also have to respect and love others whose beliefs are different. In fact, love is the key here. Bible doctrines have their place, but the best way to share Jesus with our world is to live His love in everything we do. When people see our love in action, they’ll be ready to hear our message of God’s love.
- » “When those who profess the name of Christ shall practice the principles of the golden rule, the same power will attend the gospel as in apostolic times” (Ellen G. White,

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 137).

- » What are possible ways you can speak about God’s truth?

Friday APPLYING

- » Read 1 John 3:23.
- » Interview three to five friends whom you know have a different religious background or outlook than you do. Read the questions below and be prepared to know how to answer them yourself based on what you believe. Here are some Bible answers to these questions: 1. Hebrews 11:6. 2. John 3:16. 3. John 11:11, 14, 25, 26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. 4. Micah 6:8; Deuteronomy 30:14-16, 19, 20. 5. John 17:3. Ask them:

1. Do you believe in a God?

2. If so, what do you think God is like?

3. What do you think happens to people after they die?

4. How should people decide what’s right or wrong to do?

5. What’s the ultimate point of life?

- » Make notes of their answers. Then look back over their answers and think about how their views differ from yours. What could you say about your belief in Jesus and the teachings of His Word that would be meaningful to each of these people?

Pray for your friends and ask God to impress their hearts with His truth. Ask Jesus for wisdom to know how you can share Him with your friends.

- » “Doing, not saying merely, is expected of the followers of Christ” (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 149).

Monday activity

Stop and think about the Bible stories in the Old and New Testament. The Bible contains stories about religious persecution and intolerance. Look up the references below and match them with the person, persons, or group of people that are mentioned in the stories. All verses are taken from the NKJV.

Daniel 6:4-24	_____	Stephen	A
Acts 8:1-4	_____	Gentiles	B
Daniel 3:1-30	_____	Church (Christians)	C
Acts 6:8-7:60	_____	Jesus	D
Acts 10:40-48	_____	Samaritans	E
John 11:30-49	_____	Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego	F
Luke 10:29-36	_____	Daniel	G

Wednesday activity

1. Acts 4:12	_____	"... one God and Father of all ..."	A
2. Romans 12:18	_____	"... do not be conformed to this world ..."	B
3. 1 John 2:6	_____	"... teaching them to observe all things ..."	C
4. Philippians 2:4	_____	"... there is no other name under heaven ..."	D
5. Ephesians 4:4-6	_____	"... walk just as He walked."	E
6. Matthew 28:19, 20	_____	"... also for the interests of others."	F
7. Romans 12:1, 2	_____	"... live peaceably with all men."	G

