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A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION AND PRAXIS

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez



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Silver Spring, Maryland

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Introduction

It is well-known that humans are by nature social beings in constant interaction with others. It is in that interaction that they reveal who they are, their values, and their aspirations and goals for life. Actions disclose identity. Obviously the human race is not an amorphous, homogenous, or an undifferentiated mass of human beings. Each person wants to see himself or herself as unique within the conglomerate of humans; this is good. Within the Christian church personal identity is directly connected to Christ and the collective identity that He granted to His followers, those who placed their faith in Him. United in commitments and goals, believers develop their own unique characters in the likeness of their Savior. The values that define them are not from below but from above. They have a common God, Savior and Lord, a common hope, a common faith, a common goal or mission; they worship together and live as pilgrims on earth heading toward the heavenly city of God. They also live in a hostile world in conflict with the values they exhibit in their lives; the values of the kingdom of God.

Theological Foundation of Church Standards

As we approach the topic of a Christian lifestyle it is useful to realize that the Bible offers us a number of important concepts, regulations, and principles that together constitute a foundation upon which we can identify and establish biblical standards for the Christian life. They unquestionably contribute to validate the need for such a way of life and help to clarify the contours of a Christian identity in a world deeply damaged by sin and evil. We will only offer here a few examples from the wealth of information found on the Scriptures.

God's Will and the Human Condition¹

It may surprise some to realize that a significant amount of the content of the Bible is devoted to instruct God's people on how to relate to Him and to others in the form of laws, wisdom instructions, prophetic speeches, and narratives. We will briefly examine the Old Testament, limiting ourselves to law and wisdom, and in the New Testament we will sample the teachings of Jesus before discussing some of the apostolic exhortations to church members.

¹ In this paper I will be using the NASB.

Old Testament Law and Wisdom

In the Old Testament the best example related to a lifestyle is the covenant law. The divine instruction (the *Torah*) aimed at establishing harmony and order within the covenant community by teaching God's people how to relate to Him and to others. The Decalogue summarizes the people's responsibilities toward the God who freely and lovingly redeemed them from Egypt (Exod 20:1-11) as well as their responsibilities toward the other members of the community (Exod 20:12-17). It combines worship and ethics.² These commandments are fleshed out through other laws that were much more specific in nature, for instance, laws related to worship (Deut 6:4-7; 12:5-7; Lev 1-4), purity (Lev 12-14; 15:32), social interaction (Deut 18:15-20; 24:10-18; Lev 21:33-34), property (Deut 18:14; Lev 22:2-4), dealing with slaves (Lev 21:1-6), health (Lev 11), and the moral and spiritual life of the Israelites (Lev 22:20-24, 28; 23:1-3).

The violation of the covenant law by the Israelites upset the religious and social order established by God within the community. As time passed, idolatry prevailed and social abuse, particularly of the poor and marginalized, became a common phenomenon. Israel became a nation like the nations of the world and consequently God sent into the exile—back to “Egypt.” It was God's intention to use His law to instill in the hearts of His people principles that would shape their characters and order their private and public lives. But above all, through these laws God provided for them a way of life that made them unique in a world of idolatry and moral corruption. Moses clearly expressed this idea through two rhetorical questions: “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?” (Deut 4:7-8; cf. 7:14). The Israelites functioned as witnesses of God's highest plans for the nations of the earth (Exod 19:6; 22:31; Lev 19:2; 2 Sam 7:23).

In the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes there are specific instructions on how to live a good life that preserves order in society and in the personal life of the Israelites and contributes to the development of a trustworthy character.³ In fact, the primary purpose

² See M. J. Selman, “Law,” in *Dictionary of the OT Pentateuch: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*; ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 512.

³ The role of the emphasis of the wisdom literature on character development has been carefully discussed by William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). He tries “to demonstrate that the idea of character constitutes the unifying theme or center of the wisdom literature, whose *raison d'être* is to profile ethical character” (21). Whether

of wisdom is life: “He who finds me [Lady Wisdom] finds life and obtains favor from the LORD. But he who sins against me injures [*khamas*, “to be violent”] himself; all those who hate me love death” (Prov 8:35-36). The primary emphasis is on human life in the here and now that is to say, on a life that is enjoyable and at peace with others and with God. This was also one of the fundamental purposes of the law (Lev 18:5; Deut 32:47). Those who do not listen to Lady Wisdom damage themselves by violating God’s plans for them. Humans are benefited by living a life as ordered by God.⁴

Teachings of Jesus

When we come to the New Testament we realize that Jesus spent more time teaching people how to live a meaningful and useful life than revealing to them deep theological concepts.⁵ His Sermon on the Mount is the best and deepest description of what the Christian life should be like and invites us to be well-acquainted with it (Matt 5:1-7:29). He speaks against murder (Matt 5:21-22) and adultery (vv. 27-30), about loving enemies (vv. 43-48), the cure for anxiety (6:25-34), etc. Jesus taught through His exemplary life and by His words. He taught about His loving Father (Matt 6:8, 31-32; John 3:16), the kingdom of God (Matt 4:17; 8:11; John 18:36), grace (Matt 20:1-16; Luke 18:9-14), the Sabbath (Luke 4:16; John 5:1-15; 9:1-41; Mark 1:21-28), prayer (Luke 5:16; 18:11; 22:42; Matt 6:9-13; 7:9-11; John 16:23-24), and about power, sex and money (Mark 9:35-37; 10:42-44;

it is the theological center of the wisdom literature or not is a matter of debate, but he has certainly touched on a topic that is not peripheral. See also Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 4, 8.

⁴ Apart from the legislative materials, we also find introduction in the Old Testament narratives through which God illustrates for His people how to live a meaningful and productive life. In some cases the bad examples are used to identify the dangers of a selfish life that ignores God’s plans for them. The use of Old Testament stories in the formulation of ethical principles have been debated among scholars. For a useful discussion about methodologies and approaches, see Robin Allison Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004). Due to lack of space, we have not discussed the Psalms and poetry of the Old Testament as a source of ethical values. For a good introduction to their contribution, see Dirk J. Human, ed., *Psalms and Poetry in Old Testament Ethics*, Old Testament Studies 572 (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2012).

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the teachings of Jesus, see William G. Johnsson, *Jesus of Nazareth II: His Message, His Passion* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 1-110. See also S. McKnight, “Ethics of Jesus,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, 2nd. edition, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perri (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 242-251.

10:7-11, 17-25; Matt 6:16-24). The kingdom of God, that in the person of Jesus had invaded the world, called for a life of total commitment to Him as the only source of life. The righteousness of His followers was to be superior to anybody else's because they were His disciples.

Exhortations and Instructions⁶

In the epistles of the New Testament we find a combination of theology or doctrinal matters followed by large sections of instructions about how to live the Christian life (e.g., 1 Thess 4-5; Gal 5-6; Rom 6, 12-15; 1 Cor 6-7). In other cases the exhortations and instructions run throughout the epistles (e.g., Heb, Jas, 1 Pet). This is understandable if we keep in mind that many of the new believers came from a pagan background and that consequently they needed to understand the radical impact that the redemptive work of Christ would have in their daily life. Therefore specific instructions were required. For instance, Paul instructs them: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:1-2); "Consider the members of your body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Col 3:5); "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks" (1 Thess 5:16-18). Christians were also instructed to "put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility . . . ; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other; . . . just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col 3:12-13; cf. Gal 6:2), and to "do good to all people" (Gal 6:10). The model for Christian behavior was Christ Himself (e.g. Phil 2:5; Col 3:13), but a contemporary living example was also useful (cf. 1 Thess 1:6). Thus Paul dares to say to the Philippians, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Phil 3:17; cf. 4:9).

We also find instructions for husbands and wives (Col 3:18; Eph 5:22-33), children and parents (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21), and masters and slaves about how to relate to each other as Christians (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1).⁷ There are lists of sins and vices that Christians are

⁶ The exhortations of an ethical or practical nature found in the New Testament are usually called "parenesis" (Gk. *parainesis*, "counsel"). Scholars have debated the origin of the content of the New Testament parenesis with a variety of results. It appears to be more realistic to consider them as coming directly from the teachings and ministry of Jesus Himself and from the oral traditions preserved mainly by the apostles in order to show the implications of the teachings of Jesus for Christian faith and practice (1 Thess 4:1-2; Rom 6:17; 16:17). These were communicated to address the specific problems that the churches were facing, see D. Schroeder, "Parenesis," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), 643; see also Michael Wolter, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. Robert L. Brawley (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 301-304.

⁷ Scholars refer to these instructions as "household codes;" for a discussion of these

not to practice (e.g. Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 4:25-32). The exhortations and instructions deal not only with the personal life at home and the spiritual condition of the believer, but they also address Christian behavior in the public arena—how to relate to those in authority in society (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17). The exhortations and instructions are abundant and rich and provide what is needed to live a Christian life that brings honor to the Lord and that makes the church more effective in accomplishing its mission. A Christian lifestyle is to be firmly grounded on the biblical text, its specific instructions and principles.

Summarizing, the abundance of biblical instructions, teachings, and exhortations in narrative form, in legal materials, and in the wisdom literature concerning how to live a life dedicated to the Lord demonstrate, first, how important this topic is in the eyes of the Lord. These instructions run from Genesis to Revelation accompanied by a constant call to God's people to choose life and not death. Second, the fact that the information reaches us as a divine revelation, preserved for us in the Scriptures, says something about the human condition. Due to their sinful state, humans are unable to know by themselves how to live a good life. What they call a "good life" is a selfish existence that through greed and hatred makes them feel realized but that, at the end of the road, happens to be a vacuous life. Humans exist in deep darkness and they need to listen to the Word of the Lord—incarnated and written—telling them how to live a meaningful life; a life that is a testimony to the loving character of God and that is characterized by service to others.

Third, the description of a life committed to God found in the Bible is an expression of God's will for sinful human beings. It is not an arbitrary, domineering will imposed on humans but a will that always seeks what is best for them. This is about the goodness of God's will for all proclaimed for the first time on earth immediately after creation: "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). Its goodness is grounded on the fact that He created everything there is in the cosmos. It is good because, as Creator, God knows better than anyone else what is good for His creatures—how they can function harmoniously at optimum capacity. This also implies that by living such a life, which corresponds to God's intentions for them, they are personally enriched in order to be of service to others.

codes see David L. Balch, "Household Codes," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, John David Pleins and Astrid B. Beck (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 3:318-320; and P. H. Towner, "Household Codes," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed., Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 513-520.

The enrichment consists in developing a character like that of the Creator and Redeemer who is the model for a fruitful and enriching life. Therefore, the biblical instructions provide for Christians an indispensable foundation for the development of a lifestyle that is unquestionably biblical.

The Cosmic Conflict

We cannot appropriately address the importance of a Christian lifestyle without bringing into the picture the reality of the cosmic conflict. As depicted in the Bible, this conflict is about uncovering the truth. The conflict offers an alternate lifestyle that is in conflict with the divine one. Perhaps the question that Pharaoh asked Moses when Moses asked him to let God's people go, is the basic one: "Who is the LORD [YHWH] that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD" (Exod 5:2). The question implies a certain level of ignorance or disdain or even indifference. But what is especially important for us, is that it does show that the Lord has competitors in the arena of human history.

The enemy is a fallen cherub who aspired to sit on God's throne and who in the process questioned God's authority and character (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:13-18; Gen 3:1-6; Job 1:7-11; 2:1-8). In a world in which there are several claims to divine sovereignty, the true God could not remain in anonymity or undifferentiated. He made Himself known in Egypt: "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst" (Exod 7:5). God's power was displayed in Egypt through His works of judgment and by the redemption of His people. Actions disclose identity. We often find on the lips of the Lord the formula of self-introduction: "I am Yahweh your God" (e.g. Gen 15:7; 26:24; 28:13; Lev 18:3-5; 19:2; Isa 45:7). In the original use of this formula, "individuals previously unnamed or unknown step forth from their unfamiliarity (e.g., Gen 45:3: 'I am Joseph') to reveal themselves and to be called by their proper name."⁸ When on the lips of the Lord, this formula demonstrates that God wants to be known within history; otherwise deception will triumph⁹ and polytheism would remain unchallenged.¹⁰ He introduced Himself to Moses saying, "The LORD,

⁸ Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 1:204; see also Walther Zimmerli, *I am Yahweh*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 1-2.

⁹ K. Gunther, "שֵׁן נֹס person," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1:165, writes, "The self-presentation formula reveals God's name in association with his historical activity."

¹⁰ Preuss, *Theology*, 1:205, writes, "This formula of self-introduction . . . may be linked

the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Exod 34:6-8; cf. Jer 9:23). He has a well-defined character and personality and proclaims it with power. He presents Himself as “Creator” (Isa 44:24), “Savior” (49:26), “holy” (Lev 11:45), as the God “who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things” (Jer 9:23), etc. It is natural for the biblical writers to describe God as incomparable because He is indeed unique (e.g. Deut 4:34-35; 1 Sam 2:2; Jer 10:12-16; Isa 40:18, 25; 46:5, 9) and it is His intention that the nations will come to acknowledge it (Ps 46:8-10; 83:17-18; Ezek 25:3-5,17; 38:16).¹¹

This glorious God chose Israel and made out of it a nation. This nation is also visible and through it God revealed His plans for the human race. In the cosmic conflict, when takes place not only within the inner being of a person but also in the arena of history, God saved a people and intended them to be holy as He is holy (Lev 11:45). He has the power to transform human lives (Jer 24:7). To them the Lord declared, “I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. . . . I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine” (Lev 20:24, 26). They are involved in the conflict on the side of the Lord and they reject the idolatry and the moral and spiritual corruption of the nations. They, like their God, display the values of the heavenly realm. They have indeed taken a stand in the cosmic conflict and it is manifested in their way of life.

The most sublime historical manifestation of the identity of God is found in Jesus Christ, God in human flesh. John says, “We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The question of truth in the cosmic conflict was now answered by the one who declared “I am the truth” (14:6). There was no attempt on His part to hide His identity and be one more on the planet. On the contrary, He displayed the love of God on a cross for all to see it. His life exemplified a life committed to the Father, and His followers are likewise to display in their life the values of His kingdom in a world involved in a cosmic conflict. He said to His disciples, “No one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come may see the light” (Luke 8:16).

to the pressure exerted by polytheism.”

¹¹ On the topic of the incomparability of God in the Old Testament, it is still valuable to consult C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, Pretoria Oriental Series vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 64-153. See also Preuss, *Theology*, 1:207.

Summarizing, the reality of the cosmic conflict as depicted in the Bible provides a fundamental context for the Christian call to live a life of service to God and others; a holy life. Each human being has to take a stand for or against God in the conflict. The side chosen is revealed in the values that rule their lives and therefore in the way they live on the planet. For Christians, their way of life is an expression of their commitment to a God who made Himself known to all, thus differentiating Himself from false gods. This He did through His actions within human history and particularly through His Son. Christians reveal their commitment to Jesus Christ in the cosmic conflict through a life shaped by Him and His teachings.

The Cross of Christ

When we discuss a Christian lifestyle the natural tendency is to speak about doing or not doing certain things. This is to be expected. But here a caution is needed: Salvation is not the result of our lifestyle. It totally rests on the saving work of Christ. In fact, we will suggest that the saving death of Christ is the most important theological foundation for a lifestyle because it defines it as a transformational response of gratitude to God.¹² The divine decision to solve the cosmic conflict through the substitutionary death of Christ for sinful human beings was not motivated by the goodness of the human race. Paul clarifies that when Christ died “you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is

¹² The connection between salvation and the human response to it is also found in the Old Testament. As is well known the covenant between God and Israel came after God’s redemptive action on behalf of Israel. Concerning the Sinai covenant theology, “law is not given as a way of attaining Yahweh’s salvation/deliverance but as a response to such salvation/deliverance. . . . Put another way, law is given to a people already redeemed, as a way of manifesting gratitude for the deliverance they have graciously received” (John Kessler, *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013], 252). God’s election of Israel was an act of divine grace that will benefit the human race. A permanent relationship was established between God and Israel when He liberated them from the land of Egypt. This redemptive relationship was formalized through the covenant that permanently constituted Israel into God’s people and God in His gracious love became their God. The introduction to the covenant law expressed the idea unmistakably clearly: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exod 20:1). The self-introductory formula—“I am the LORD your God”—, as we already indicated, speaks about a God who makes Himself known through His actions within history. This God, and no other god—Yahweh— is identifiable as the One who liberated Israel and who now, elicits a loving response from His people consisting of willingness to display their new identity within history—as He displayed His—by living in a way that will distinguish them from the rest of unredeemed humanity.

now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:1-1). The natural way of life of human beings—their walk of life—is in accordance with the way of life of the prince of this world. This means that the human condition was desperate. Hence Jesus could not wait until they changed their way of life to save them; that would have been a soteriological impossibility. God’s love in Christ was manifested to us while we were sinners (Rom 5:6, 8). Therefore salvation is by grace through faith in what God has accomplished for sinners in Christ; it is not theirs “as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (v. 9). We could suggest that Christians behave in a certain way because the sacrifice of Christ makes it possible for them to live in a particular way; in a Christian way.

Therefore, salvation through faith in Christ is not in conflict with a Christian lifestyle. On the contrary, the power of the cross of Christ is specifically unfolded in what it accomplishes in the life of the believer. Jesus confronts humans with a call to discipleship. They, under the influence of the Spirit, are moved to react to what Christ accomplished for them as their Savior. After confronting His audience with the message of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus appealed to them: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). Peter proclaimed the saving work of God through Jesus, the Messiah, and the audience touched by the Spirit asked: “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The answer was, “Repent, and each of you be baptized” (v. 38). The cross of Christ calls for a total reorientation of one’s life. From that moment on nothing will be the same. Instead of walking according to the will of the prince of this world, believers are exhorted “to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance to one another in love” (Eph 4:1-2).

The salvation Christ obtained for us is ours only in union with Christ. The New Testament uses two main expressions to define this union with Christ. The first is to “abide/remain” in Jesus, used mainly in the Gospel of John. This is a reciprocal or mutual dwelling according to which Christ abides in the believers and they abide in Him (John 15:4-7). This reciprocity is indispensable because “as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me” (v. 4). This implies living according to the way of life modelled by Jesus: “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6). This is possible because now the love of God abides in her or him (3:17). The believer is no longer in the world but has found a new sphere of life;¹³ a new home. According to John

¹³ See H. Hübner, “μένω *menō* remain, stay; await,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New*

8:32, remaining in Jesus “involves continual holding to his teachings. . . . The disciples must abide in Jesus, in particular in his love, by obeying his commandments (John 15:9-10),”¹⁴ It could even be said that “John’s ‘abiding’ theology is part of the biblical trajectory of new-covenant theology, which promises a ‘new heart’ and the presence of God’s Spirit in the new-covenant community, cleansing believers both individually and corporately and enabling them to obey God’s commandments (e.g., Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:25–27).”¹⁵

The second phrase used in the New Testament to designate our union with Christ is “in Christ.” This is basically the Pauline equivalent of the Johannine “to abide in Jesus” and it could simply mean “to be a Christian” (Rom 16:7). After speaking about being justified “in Christ” Paul goes on to say, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). There is an element of reciprocity according to which Paul is in Christ and Christ is also in Paul; a mutual indwelling. It is because of this personal union with Christ that salvation and all its benefits are accessible to repentant sinners. This is not a mystical union with Christ in which believers lose their individuality. On the contrary, this is a very personal response to the sacrificial death of Christ in which the union with the crucified and risen Lord is manifested in the personal and corporate life of the church. Outsiders know that these persons are different by the way they live. After describing his union with Christ and how Christ lives in him, Paul goes on to explain how this is expressed in his daily life: “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). His union with Christ is exhibited in a particular kind of Christian demeanor and is based on the saving death of Christ for him. It is through baptism that this union with Christ is initiated.

Summarizing, the most significant foundation for a Christian lifestyle is provided by the saving sacrifice of Jesus, the Christ, on the cross. Being the most sublime manifestation of the self-giving love of God, His death is powerful enough to move the human heart to respond with love and gratitude. Consequently, anything Christians do should be a response of thanksgiving to the One who has done so much for them. A Christian lifestyle is the embodiment of such love and gratitude in a demeanor that is pleasing to their Savior and based on a loving commitment to Him.

Testament, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:407-408.

¹⁴ A. J. Köstenberger, “Abiding,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 1-2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

Lordship of Christ

Through the rite of baptism believers participate by faith in the death and resurrection of Christ recognizing Him as Lord of their life (Rom 6:3-6). The death of Christ is appropriated by faith and repentant sinners see themselves as dead with Christ. The “old self/person,” who was under the power of sin, is dead and buried. But they have also been resurrected with Christ to a new life (v. 5) that is no longer under the rule of sin but under the power of the Spirit of the Lord. They “do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). Their “walk” or Christian lifestyle is not determined by themselves but by the Spirit of the Lord who enables them to fulfill the requirements of God’s law (v. 4). A Christian lifestyle is an expression of the lordship of Christ in the life of believers.

For believers, Christ is not only the Savior but their Lord. Through conversion they were liberated from the lordship of sin that oppressively ruled over them leading them to death (Rom 5:12; 6:23). The new freedom in Christ manifests itself in obedience “from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:17-18). The result of this transfer to the lordship of Jesus is “sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life” (v. 22). Accepting Jesus as Lord should not only be a verbal expression of a personal and communal conviction, but it is to become visible in a lifestyle that corresponds to the values and teachings of the One who gave Himself for us (cf. Rom 10:9-11).

Interestingly, “it is certainly the case that Jesus is referred to as *kyrios* [Lord] in passages where Paul deals with matters of Christian behavior.”¹⁶ For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Paul exhorts believers “in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God . . . that you excel even more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 1-2). Paul then proceeds to remind them of the importance of living a morally upright life because God called them to sanctification (vv. 4-8). Those who claim to be believers but who have not accepted Christ as Lord are considered by Paul to be “slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites” and are deceivers (Rom 16:18). A Christian lifestyle is the concrete expression or the actualization of our claim that Jesus is the Lord of our lives.

Summarizing, for Christians Jesus is both Savior and Lord. Through His death He liberated them from the enslaving power of sin and evil and transferred them to His kingdom of life. The freedom is a freedom to become subjects of His kingdom. He has become the center

¹⁶ L. W. Hurtado, “Lord,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 567.

of their lives, their Lord. They are now members of the kingdom of God any order their lives according to the values of this kingdom as exemplified by their Lord. Paul comments, “Walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12). A Christian lifestyle is not an option that a believer evaluates and then decides to accept or reject. It is a new way of being, a new creature, under the power of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit into the hearts of believers “remains beyond the perception of others as long as it is not embodied by a specific conduct.”¹⁷

Summary

The abundance of the biblical teaching on how to live a life dedicated to a loving Savior and Lord should inform and determine how each believer will live in the present world of sin. Instructions and principles found in legal materials, narratives, prophetic exhortations, wisdom sayings, the teachings and life of Jesus, and the exhortations and instructions of the apostles underline the importance of the subject and its relevance for the Christian life. The answer to the question, how should we live the Christian life, flows from the cross of Jesus where divine love resolved the human predicament and calls us through the power of the Spirit to follow the One who loved us so much. A Christian lifestyle is another way of speaking about enjoying a fellowship of love with God, the Son, the Spirit, and with each other. In following the Savior and Lord believers declare to the cosmos that they have joined Him in the cosmic conflict. For Christians, living according to the love and goodness of God, whose will always seeks what is best for them, is not something they procure to do but what they are. To be a Christian is to “walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 1:6). The biblical-ethical reflection “is then directed toward what specific behavior it is by which Christian identity is specifically embodied.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Wolter, *Theology*, 306.

¹⁸ Ibid. The Christian concern with living as Christians in the world continued to be a matter of reflection and discussion in post-apostolic Christian. Christians faced the challenges of self-definition vis-à-vis the Greco-Roman world and even Judaism. For a discussion on the issues involved see, Larry W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 37-104, 143-181; Judith Lieu, “Self-definition vis-à-vis the Jewish Matrix,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*, ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 214-229; A. J. Droge, “Self-definition vis-à-vis the Greco-Roman World,” in *Cambridge History*, 230-244; and Carolyn Osiek, “The Self-defining Praxis of the Developing *ecclesia*,” in *Cambridge History*, 274-292.

Profiling the Christian Life

It is practically impossible to describe the fullness of the Christian life by listing the elements that shape it. As we have seen this has to do with our profound fellowship with our Savior and Lord. Nevertheless we should keep in mind that under certain circumstances Jesus identified some of the most important aspects of a life consecrated to Him. This we witness in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) and in answers He gave to people who inquired about how to be a disciple (e.g., Matt 18:21-35; 19:16-22). The same can be said about the instructions of the disciples in their epistles, where they did not provide in each epistle the fullness of the Christian way of life but important aspects of it. This is to be expected because the Christian life is the result of the guidance of the Spirit that frees us from the power of the flesh and empowers us to submit to the will of God under all circumstances (Rom 8:1-5).

The Church and Christian Norms

Based on the previous comments, it is legitimate for the church to emphasize some important biblical components of the Christian life that those who will join it, or who are already part of it, will put into practice as a public testimony to the effect that Christ is both their Savior and Lord. These standards will be the minimum because a Christian lifestyle transcends any list without overlooking the specificity of the biblical instructions and principles that shape a holy life. We should guard our relationship with the Lord by being mindful of the fact that when a Christian begins to drift away from the Lord, usually the first casualty is the neglect of some aspects of the Christian lifestyle. Things that appear to be small matters are disregarded, such as daily prayer, Bible study, and regular church attendance. In such situations, the Christian standards could alert church members to the reality that they are slowly drifting away from the Lordship of Christ. It could also alert pastors to the spiritual needs of some church members. It is almost impossible to know at which point believers have drifted so far away from their commitment to Christ that He is no longer the Lord of their life, but Church standards could warn them concerning the danger they are facing during their spiritual pilgrimage.

In the Adventist Church, the biblical norms for the Christian life are established by the world church in a General Conference Session and, as already stated, they are the minimum expected from believers. These standards are taught to church members and, since they are founded on the Scriptures, members are expected to abide by them. We find them summarized in the *Church Manual*.¹⁹ But there is also

¹⁹ *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th edition (Hagerstown, MD: Review and

what we could call personal or individual norms for the Christian life. Church members could have some other personal standards that are not necessarily promoted or opposed by the world church. These are based on what they believe the Bible teaches. In such cases they should not try to impose them on other believers. They are simply individual decisions, e.g., Christians should pray *four* times a day; being a vegan; not taking a shower during the Sabbath hours.

Specific Church Standards²⁰

The biblical norms or standards, when activated in the life of believers, result in a Christian lifestyle that contributes to define their identity in a world where Christian values are being rapidly abandoned. For instance, Adventists promote around the world the importance of prayer and Bible study and create instruments and occasions that facilitate practicing these two components of the Christian life. Adventists also go to church every Sabbath and observe it from sunset to sunset. This aspect of their lifestyle contributes toward expressing in a very specific and concrete way their identity. Adventists around the world wake upon Sabbath morning and get ready to go to church, to worship the Creator and Redeemer. This is who they are. They also promote a healthful lifestyle. Not all of them are vegetarians but they all accept the distinction between clean and unclean foods and the importance of temperance in all they do. They also know, all over the world, about modesty and simplicity in dress and personal adornment, even though they may apply these principles in slightly different ways in different cultures. These things are important for the identity of the end-time remnant people of God and contribute to keeping Adventists united as one world family. As argued before, this lifestyle is not embraced because Adventists lack assurance of salvation; they do it because they have experienced the joy of salvation in Christ.

The standards taught and promoted by the global Adventist church can be grouped into five major types. The grouping is artificial because some of them could be placed under more than one type and they are all necessary for a well-rounded Christian experience; one cannot pick and choose which ones to practice. These types are: spiritual life, moral life, physical life, social life, and the stewardship of all possessions. We will spend some time with each one of them.

Herald, 2010), 136-144.

²⁰ For a more detailed study of Christian standards see, Miroslav M. Kiš, “Christian Lifestyle and Behavior,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Derden (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 675-723.

Our Spiritual Life

The Christian life begins with conversion and baptism and becomes a life-long transformative journey with the Savior and Lord in the fellowship of the church as the body of Christ. The believers are those who have been united to God through Christ's reconciling work and who will, in love and hope, remain united to Him. This personal union with the risen Lord needs to be nurtured and strengthened on a daily basis in order to develop and maintain a robust trust in the Lord and to resist the impulses of a fallen nature and the attacks of evil forces. We will list under this general category five norms of the Christian life that will in a unique way make our spiritual life enjoyable and healthy.

Study of the Scriptures

It is almost impossible to imagine a Seventh-day Adventist who does not spend time studying the Bible. The church considers this so important that it provides for its members Bible Study Guides that facilitate its daily study, and devotional books with an inspirational reading for each day. Adventists also have the writings of Ellen G. White for devotional readings and for the appropriation of significant theological insights. Useful as these helps are, nothing should distract believers from opening the Scriptures themselves to listen once more to the voice of the Lord speaking to them. Humans long to hear the voice of God and some have explored mystical exercises seeking to encounter the divine by supposedly merging their souls within it. But the voice of God is preserved and directly heard in the Scriptures, whose content is appropriated by humble believers in the fullness of their consciousness and not in an emotional rapture that neutralizes their rationality and personhood.

The Bible remains the living Word of God that transforms us and that pulls us into deep communion with the Lord. When humans open the inspired Word of God to study its message, the thoughts of God reach the human mind with transforming power (cf. Heb 4:11-12). We are instructed by the Lord who, through the silent guidance of the Spirit, makes the message of the Word relevant to our lives (cf. 1 Cor 2:14). Through the serious study of the Bible, the values of heaven contained in it are implanted in our being and we gain a deeper understanding of what God, through Christ, has done for us, thus instilling in us a spirit of gratitude and moving us to praise Him. The renovation of our beings into the image of Christ is only possible through the power of the living Word of God (cf. Rom 12:2). The spiritual life begins to die at the moment the Bible is set aside to gather dust . . . our dust.

Daily Prayer

Contact with the risen Lord in heaven, who is sitting at the right hand of God as our Mediator, is not only possible through the study of the Bible but also through a life of prayer (Eph 6:18; Col 4:2). Prayer and Bible study are inseparable in the life of the followers of Christ. This was the experience of the incarnate Son of God (cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). We open the heart to God in prayer before we open the Scriptures to listen to Him. Through prayer we ask the Lord to help us to listen to His voice in the written Word in order to know Him better and to understand His saving will for us. Prayer pulls us away from worldly concerns to enter into the sacred presence of the Lord to enjoy communion with Him. Therefore prayer is not transcendental meditation or the attempt of an immortal soul, trapped in a material body, to be in touch with the ineffable, immovable, impassible being who is absolutely detached from the material world. In prayer, the whole person—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23)—is reaching out to a personal God who is deeply interested in His creatures, particularly in those who have been damaged by sin. He suffers with them and acts on their behalf and has told them to bring to Him through prayer their concerns, joys, fears, and plans because He genuinely cares for them (Matt 7:7-11; John 14:13-14; 15:16).

Therefore, it is incumbent upon church members to organize their lives in such a way that they would have time on a daily basis to be in communion with the Lord through the study of the Bible and prayer. Before stepping out of their homes, let the person or the family listen to a passage of the Bible and pray together placing themselves at the service and under the protection of God for that day. Let their thoughts drift back throughout the day to the passage read and elevate silent prayers to the Lord during the day. We can maintain our communion with the Lord under any circumstance and from any place where we might be.

Church Attendance²¹

No one lives the Christian life in total isolation from others. Those who Christ forgives are engrafted into the community of the forgiven ones who have placed their faith and hope in His redemptive work. They reverently come together on a regular basis for collective worship; to listen to the proclaimed word of God; to be spiritually nurtured; to pray for each other; to find comfort, encouragement, and support in their fellowship with each other, with

²¹ See Raoul Dederen, “The Church,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 538-581; and Herbert Kiesler, “The Ordinances: Baptism, Foot Washing, and the Lord’s Supper,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 582-609.

the Lord, and with the Spirit, and to be trained for mission. Church attendance is such an important element in the Christian life that the Bible explicitly mentions it as an indispensable element of a healthy spiritual Christian way of life (Heb 10:25).

The collective Christian worship reaches its climax in the celebration of the Christian ordinances: Foot washing and the Lord's Supper (John 13:5-14; Luke 22:14-20). At such occasions believers renew, in the presence of the Lord, their commitment to Him and express their oneness as they serve each other through the rite of footwashing and as they together are of the bread and the unfermented wine. This is a re-appropriation of the cleansing power of the cross of Christ and a reaffirmation of their fellowship with the Lord in the new life given to them in Christ. The ordinances remind us that God's grace is constantly available to us during our Christian pilgrimage. It is the love of Christ that unites believers to Him and to each other and it is particularly in the setting of the church that we express love to each other and learn to carry the burdens of fellow believers.

Sabbath Observance

God's unquestionable interest in the quality of the spiritual life of His people is particularly manifested in His command to set aside the seventh day of the week to enjoy full communion with Him individually and in the company of those who are also recipients of His grace. This is a day in which the quest for self-preservation through work and business transactions stop and believers rest from the busyness of their daily life to rely totally on God's goodness (Exod 16:22-26; 20:8-11). He calls them to spend those holy hours in communion with Him through prayer and the study of the Bible at home and during church at worship. It is a day during which the whole family is to be in contact with the Creator and Redeemer through well-planned Sabbath activities. Following the example of the Lord, Christians use the Sabbath to do good to those in need, particularly by sharing the gospel of salvation to them (cf. Luke 6:9). It is a day in which self is set aside and others occupy the central stage in the life of God's servants. Thus they are trained to constantly place self at the service of others. By declaring this particular day, the seventh day, holy, the Lord's presence in it sanctifies His people thus strengthening their spiritual life. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exod 20:8).

Involvement in Mission

The Christian life is lived in communion with other believers but oriented toward the service of a perishing world; it is not characterized by personal or collective self-interests. The spiritual

life of church members grows exponentially when they are in some way involved in the mission of the church—the proclamation of the eternal gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (Rev 14:6). In the exercise of this particular Christian responsibility, a number of spiritual activities merge together focused on a very clear objective. Since in mission we proclaim Christ’s redemptive work on behalf of a fallen race, those who participate in it acquire, in preparation for their involvement in mission, a deep understanding of the biblical message of salvation, and, in order for their work to be more effective, they spend more time praying and asking the Lord to guide them and to touch the hearts of those whom they approach. One of the most effective ways of being firmly established in the understanding of the biblical faith is to share what we know with others. The Christian life manifests its dynamic nature when it seeks to fulfill the command of the resurrected Lord: “Go therefore and make disciples . . .” (Matt 28:19).

Our Moral Life

The phrase “moral life” is certainly too broad for our purpose, but we are using it primarily in the sense of the laws and principles that govern sexual behavior. It is about living a holy life in the sense of protecting our inner life in order to develop an inner integrity and purity that is compatible with biblical values and principles. Humans have been corrupted by sin in their inner being and consequently their thoughts naturally lean toward evil and this is reflected in their behavior. In this particular aspect of the Christian life the fundamental principle is: “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31)

Reading What Is Good

A holy life, that is to say, a life dedicated to the Lord and the values of heaven, is the work of the Spirit renewing our mind and life and guiding our choices. We cooperate with the Spirit when we select readings that support the values of a holy life over against written materials that support and promote the corruption of a sinful world. In the age of massive communication there are books and magazines designed to promote the corrupting influence of the world. Christians must not only reject them but actively speak against the moral corruption that is permeating modern societies.

Watching What Is Good

Perhaps one the most serious challenges to a holy life is the pervasiveness of images available through the Internet. Obviously, there is much that is good in what is offered to us, but all should be evaluated on the basis of the question, does this glorify God? Since

evil forces are active throughout the means of communication, more specifically through cinematography and the Internet, Christians are bombarded with the promotion of values that feed the fallen human nature. spiritual problems and risks of attending a cinema to watch a movie, the easy access people have today to movies in their homes, and almost anywhere they might be, through the use of iPhones, iPads, tablets, and through television. It is especially in the privacy that electronic equipment provides that the spiritual stamina of believers is tested as they face temptations that would require effort and divine help to overcome. If the aspects of the Christian lifestyle previously discussed are faithfully practiced, the spiritual life of the believer will be strong enough to watch only that which builds up a holy life to the glory of the Lord.

Proper Recreation and Entertainment

Recreational activities make it possible for humans to relax and refresh their physical and mental energies. The plethora of recreational and entertainment options in which to invest “free time” challenge Christians to be careful with respect to their choices. Many of the options at their disposal are closely linked to immoral activities, the use of alcohol and drugs, smoking, and the use of foul language, all of them absolutely unsuitable for the development of a holy way of life that glorifies God. Social dancing, although pervasive in society, is inseparable from corrupting influences that damage the development of a Christian character. Music itself has also become a vehicle for the promotion of debased behavior. Christians will seek music that elevates their thoughts to what is good and that promotes a healthy way of thinking. Finally, there are the electronic games. Some of them seem to be innocuous but others are characterized by violence. Through them the human mind is trained to hurt or even kill other human beings as part of the process of winning in the game. A rehearsal of violence in the mind could lead to violence in society. Christians will find a better way of investing their God-given time by spending it in nature or by being involved in other activities that edify the soul and are useful to others.

Our Physical Life

The Bible defines human beings not only as spiritual persons but also as physical beings whose bodies were created by the Lord. The body-soul dichotomy is not found in the Bible because according to it each human, as created by God, is life in bodily form (Gen 2:7). Consequently a healthy spiritual life cannot be separated from the physical dimension of human nature. Created by God, both mind and body are so intricately connected that the one is constantly influencing

the other. Christians ought to do all they can to preserve their body in as good, a health as possible in a world of sickness and death: “Whether, then, you eat or drink, . . . do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31; cf. 3 John 2).

Consumption of Animal Flesh

The God who created humans assigned to them a specific diet immediately after they were created—a plant-based diet (Gen 1:29; cf. 3:18). Soon after the flood, He allowed humans to consume animal flesh but limited its consumption to clean animals (7:2; 9:3; Lev 11). By defining what humans should eat, God was placing that aspect of the human life under His loving rule. Therefore, to claim that God is indifferent to what we eat is to claim that there is a sphere of our life that remains totally outside His lordship, where we as fallen creatures can do as we please. Sin has damaged human life as a whole and every aspect of it is to be brought under submission to God. In His wisdom, God identified the flesh of some animals as not proper for human consumption and we joyfully submit to the kindness of His wisdom.²²

Following Health Principles²³

Caring for the body is not only about eating clean animals, but about a way of life that that is balanced and rational. Christians are to avoid what is unhealthful and use what is good in a moderate way. The use of alcohol, tobacco, and addictive drugs are damaging to the body, no matter the amount used, and will interfere with the physical, mental, and spiritual life. Since the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is the Christian duty to exclude from it anything that damages it and instead to practice what would strengthen it (cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20).

²² Adventists have taken seriously the law of clean and unclean animals as representing the minimum the Lord requires from us concerning proper diet. Since animal flesh was not eaten by humans in the Garden of Eden and biblical evidence suggests that it will not be consumed in the New Earth (e.g., Isa 11:6-9; 65:25), many Adventists promote and practice some form of vegetarianism as the biblical ideal for the human race. Such an ideal is very relevant in a world that is slowly realizing the tremendous benefits of such a diet. Vegetarianism is on the rise in the world for a variety of reasons, including ethical, ecological, religious, and narcissistic. It should be pointed out that since the Bible allows for the consumption of clean animals, vegetarianism is not part of the Fundamental Beliefs of the church.

²³ See George W. Reid, “Health and Healing,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 751-783.

Proper Dress and Adornment²⁴

The first thing others see of ourselves is our body, more specifically the clothing we wear to cover it. Proper clothing and cleanliness contribute to a healthy body. Clothing and adornment also communicate our values and therefore display aspects of our moral and spiritual life. The Bible motivates Christians to practice modesty, simplicity, and purity in the way they dress as Christians (cf. 1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-5). In the selection of clothing, they ought to use as a criterion the biblical values and choose only that which contributes to their physical health and to the display of the values of the kingdom of God. The use of jewelry as adornment is replaced with the inner beauty that is manifested in a demeanor that is proper to a holy life (1 Pet 3:4).

Our Social Life

The Bible places great emphasis on the interaction of God's people with each other. In the Old Testament, the covenant law regulated in very precise terms how the people were to live together in a healthy and productive way. In the New Testament, the community of believers are instructed by the apostles about how to live in peace with each other in order to build up the church. By submitting to biblical instruction, the spiritual well-being of the church is protected and the psychological and spiritual peace of the believer strengthened.

Family Life²⁵

Humans are born into a social setting called the family—formed by the union of a man and woman in holy matrimony and the children that usually come out of that union. There they learn to interact with others, to respect properly established authority, and to learn the values that will make them better citizens within society (cf. Exod 20:12). In order for a family to be what it should be, the values of heaven should govern the quality of the relationship between spouses and the of parents with their children (cf. Ps 127:1-3; Eph 6:4). Family worship should be the occasion to teach and share these values and to pray and read the Scriptures together as a family (cf. Deut 4:9; 6:4-7; 11:19; Eph 6:4). Since the love of God, poured out into the hearts of all believers, is to rule family life (Eph 5:25, 28; Titus 2:3), physical, verbal, or sexual abuse are absolutely incompatible with

²⁴ On the standard of the church on jewelry, see, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Jewelry in the Bible* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1999).

²⁵ For a fuller discussion, see Calvin B. Rock, "Marriage and Family," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Theology*, 724-750.

a constructive interaction of the members of the family and damaging to their physical, emotional, and spiritual life.

Church Family

The fellowship of believers is a testimony to the reconciling power of the cross that transformed them and made them, out of their cultural diversity, one holy people dedicated to their Lord (Eph 2:11-13). Together they constitute the community of the forgiven ones who still struggle with the deformities of a fallen nature and that at times may fracture their interaction with each other. What holds them together is the love and teachings of Christ and they make relentless efforts to preserve that unity of love (Eph 4:1-6). They should patiently bear each others burdens of each other in love, encouraging one another in their pilgrimage and seeking forgiveness if there is an offense (Gal 6:1-2). The church should be a place free from the toxicity of aggressiveness and the use of abrasive language that leaves behind deep wounds. If such conditions were to prevail, the spiritual life of the believer and of the congregation would be seriously damaged and in need of reconciliation. The advice of the apostle is apropos here: “This is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11).

Interacting with Society

Beyond the perimeters of the church family lies the world in rebellion against God and in need of salvation. The primary responsibility of believers is to go out in to the world as missionaries for the Lord testifying for Him through the way they speak, dress, eat, and by sharing the message of salvation in Christ. In other words, they should testify through the incarnation of the values of the kingdom of God in their lives. They do not only condemn the condition of the world, but also offer to humans trapped in the vortex of sin a way to escape their hopelessness. In their interaction with the world, Christians ought to minister to the oppressed, the sick, and the needy in order to alleviate as much as possible their painful condition. In doing such things, Christians learn from the Son of God who went out to the world preaching and healing (cf. Mark 1:21-33).

Our Responsibility as Stewards²⁶

Every human being that comes into this world enjoys the blessings of the Lord that flow out of the goodness of His character.

²⁶ See Charles E. Bradford, “Stewardship,” in *A Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 651-674; Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Stewardship Roots*, reprinted and redesigned (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Stewardship Department, 2013).

The most important gift is life itself and it comes accompanied by what is needed to sustain it (sunlight, oxygen, food, water, etc.). Often the abundance of divine blessings is selfishly misappropriated by human beings in their desperate search for self-preservation. Instead of placing what they have received in service to others they hold unto them as their alleged owners. Christians acknowledge that all they have comes from the Lord and with gratitude they place it at the service of God and others (cf. Ps 24:1-2; 1 Chr 29:10-14). They see themselves as stewards of the Lord's gifts.

Use of Time and Talents

Time is the stage on which the flow of life is visibly apprehended. We all have and in most cases enjoy time as it approaches us in small segments of seconds, minutes, hours, days, etc. In the Christian life, time is valuable and how we use it is perhaps more valuable. We are called by the Lord to work during the week and to rest on the Sabbath to worship Him (Exod 20:8-11). We are to spend time with the family and with others whose life we can enrich or from whom we can learn and be spiritually enriched. The Lord expects us to use some of the time He has given us to nurture our spiritual life, to attend church services, and to share with others His good news of salvation. The different skills that the Lord in His grace gave us are also to be used to His glory in the service of human beings (e.g., 1 Cor 14:26).

Giving Tithes and Offerings

When all we have is put at the service of the Lord selfishness is subdued. The distorted face of selfishness tends to manifest itself with power when it comes to our financial concerns, which explains why God calls us to return to Him the tithe and our offerings (cf. Mal 3:10). Tithing is an act by which we recognize and declare that God is Creator and Redeemer and the legitimate owner of all there is. We see ourselves as administrators of the many blessings that He has bestowed upon us and faithfully return to Him ten percent of our income or increase (Lev 27:30-33; cf. Matt 23:23). Offerings are required by the Lord as a visible expression of our gratitude to Him for all He has provided. Tithing is a moral duty (Mal 3:8-10), while offerings, whose amount we determine, are primarily an expression of gratitude to God. Through tithes and offerings we become instruments of God through which He provides the financial resources needed to fulfill the mission of His church.

Summary

The lordship of Christ over us becomes visible to others in the concreteness of our actions, in our way of life. Actions disclose identity. The Scriptures instructs believers concerning the profile of those who

find their identity defined by the life and teachings of Jesus. Their style life is the result of integrating in their own life, in the power of the Spirit, the values, norms, and principles specified in the Word of God. Biblical anthropology, according to which the different dimensions of humans beings—physical, mental, spiritual, emotional—constitute an indivisible unity of life, clarifies our understanding of the Christian life as the expression of the values of heaven within the totality of the life of believers. Consequently the lordship of Christ touches the spiritual, the moral, the physical, and the social dimensions of our life as well as the use of all He has provided for us to administer for Him. His lordship procures to provide the very best for us and for those within our sphere of influence. It is an expression of His love.

Conclusion

The Christian life consists of a daily walk with the Lord that is transformative and that gives meaning and purpose to our life (Matt 11:28-30). We are called to display in our way of life the values of heaven in a world corrupted by sin. Those values are not natural to our fallen nature and, consequently, we must listen to the divine instructions preserved in the Scriptures in order to learn how to order our Christian life. In the setting of the cosmic conflict, believers display their identity and loyalty to God as Creator and Redeemer through their actions. They do not exist in anonymity. God has also entered the arena of the conflict and through His saving deeds, and particularly through the incarnation of His Son, have revealed who He is. His actions have disclosed the loving and merciful nature of His identity and differentiated Him from those who claim to be gods.

The very foundation of a Christian style life is located in the saving work of Christ and His lordship over believers. Living according to the values and principles of heaven is not a means of for salvation, but it is a manifestation of the power of the cross in the believer who through the Spirit is empowered to fulfill the will of God (Phil 2:13). Liberated from the power of sin, we lovingly place ourselves under the lordship of Christ and through our actions disclose our new identity in Him. The gift of Christ from God has opened the doors of heaven to all and it can move the human heart to a profound gratitude to Him embodied in our acts of love. To live a holy life is to return to the divine intention for the human race that enriches the personal and collective life of those who walk the way Jesus walked.

Since God created humans as indivisible units of conscious life, the physical, spiritual, moral, and mental dimensions of human nature are interconnected. Therefore God is interested in the well-being of the spiritual, moral, physical, and social life of His people

and in their role as stewards of His many blessings. Submission to the instructions He has provided in the Scriptures will, through the transforming presence of the Spirit, empower us to represent Him and the values of His kingdom in a world distanced from Him and in crisis. When we follow His loving will, the totality of life is attuned to the values of heaven and we are changed into the likeness of the Savior, enabling us to better serve others.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD, is the retired director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventhday Adventists and continues to work part-time for the Institute. He also served as pastor, academy teacher and director, theology professor and academic vice president at Southwestern Adventist University (Keene, Texas) and Antillean Adventist University (Mayagüez Arriba, Puerto Rico), and president of the latter. He has published over twelve books, numerous pamphlets, and hundreds of articles in books, journals, and magazines. Among his books are *Esther: A Theological Approach*, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* and *Jewelry in the Bible*. He is editor of the Biblical Research Institute Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology series.



Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600

Website: adventistbiblicalresearch.org
E-mail: biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org
Phone: 301-680-6790
Fax: 301-680-6788

