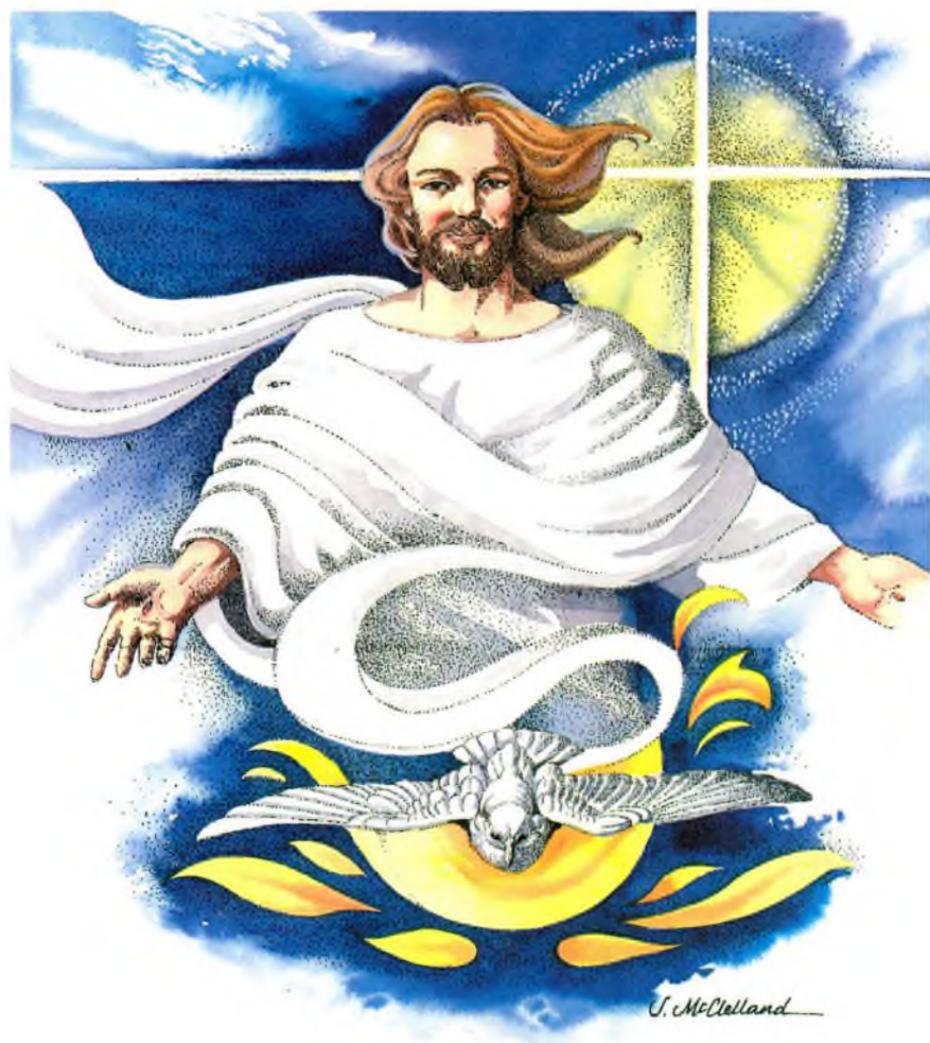


COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication • July-September 1991

Living the Gospel 1&2 Thessalonians



LISTEN...

TO WHAT THESE TOP PERSONALITIES
HAVE TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT OF
DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.



"If your image of reality is skewed from being intoxicated by alcohol or some pharmaceutical, you can't participate fully in life." Mae Jemison, astronaut
Listen, March 1990



"A few years ago, when I tried to talk about drugs, I'd get a few boos, but it didn't stop me. I'd tell them, 'You don't have to listen to me, you'll see it someday.' I've seen what drugs have done to some people I've known." Henry Lee Sumner, singer
Listen, August 1990



"When you're a teenager, it's hard to realize what a precious commodity time is. With drugs you lose so much time; you're losing time getting on with reality." Amy Grant, singer
Listen, May 1991

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Getting the Most Out of the Collegiate Quarterly

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young-adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

How-To (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

Opinion (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions, are expressed.

This Quarter's Artist



Jim McClelland is the featured artist this quarter. This is not the first time we have called on Jim to add his talent to *Collegiate*, and many of you will recognize his very communicative style.

Jim is a professor of art at Union College. He lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, with his wife, Huda, and his children, Jim and Laurel.

Jim has a keen interest in both natural forms and the religious arts of the masters. While he has worked in a wide variety of media and subject areas, he has found widespread recognition for his paintings of birds in watercolor. His watercolors have received awards in numerous competitions and exhibitions nationwide. His work is found in many private and corporate collections. He has illustrated several books, including *Hummingbirds of North America*, published by the Smithsonian. His work is also used by such conservation groups as the National Wildlife Federation, Quail Unlimited, and The National Quail Foundation. His art has been featured on conservation stamps and prints.

Of his work, Jim says, "I share with Douglas Cooper, the author of *Living God's Joy*, the thought that 'just as God receives joy and generates joy by creating, so may you and I. One way the heavenly Father has honored man is by sharing His nature with him in the form of creative ability. You are enough like God so that unless you are creating something, you are not experiencing fullness of joy.'"

Lesson 1, June 30–July 6

Your Other Vocation



J. McClelland

“Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake” (1 Thess. 1:5, NIV).

A Hope to Share

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Thess. 1:4

Magic carpet time again! The Boeing 747 jumbo jet tilted at the end of the concrete and nosed up into the clear air above Honolulu, Hawaii. Only five more hours on this third leg of the trip from my homeland of Australia, and I would be in Los Angeles.

I stared out the window, down at the restless sea below. This whole trip my mind had endlessly circled the central question of why I was on a plane heading for a new assignment so far away. Was it God's will? I remembered telling my wife just before she left on the same trip a few days before me, "Who knows? Maybe all of God's plans for my life are designed to bring me in contact with one person. One link in a series of contacts beyond my knowing."

"Since we'll be together for some hours, let me introduce myself. I'm John, and this," the man seated next to me gestured toward the woman one seat over, "is my wife Joan." I nodded at them both, noting instantly John's heavy British accent.

"Going back to England, then?" I queried.

"Yes," he answered gravely, "but we're not looking forward to it." I looked suitably puzzled, and he continued. "Joan and I grew up in Sheffield, England. Married there—raised our family there—expected to die there. But

something's changed. The Sheffield we know has gone. Now we are afraid for our lives—what with the crime, the ghettos, the social unrest, the wildness of the new generation." I nodded in agreement to his very real fears.

"Now we feel like strangers in our own land. So we sold our business and determined to move somewhere else. We are traveling the world searching for something."

The way he emphasized the last statement made me certain that John was looking for more than a safe haven, he was looking for answers. Time to speak up!

Well, to summarize the next five hours, we spoke of the meaning of current events; the master plan behind the disintegration of society, the renewed power of the papacy, and considered the nearness of Christ's coming. John and Joan nodded along with everything.

Then, just a few minutes out of Los Angeles, John said something that stopped me short with its implications. "You know," he said, fixing his eyes on mine, "I believe that we were meant to come on this trip just to talk to you."

The apostle Paul must have experienced many rewarding missionary contacts in his travels. Moments that gave ongoing proof that God was directing receptive minds to a knowledge of salvation. No wonder the excitement of discovery bubbles through so much of his writing. Those missionary contacts were special testaments to God's power.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Monday, July 1

Turning the World Upside Down

LOGOS

1 Thess. 1:1-10; 3:1-13; Acts 17:1-10

It seems ironic that Saul, distinguished before his Damascus road experience by an insatiable zeal to persecute Christians, should be in turn so doggedly pursued by Jewish troublemakers.

Obedient to the heavenly vision, Saul, now identified by the name Paul, moved out into the Gentile world with the startling message that Christ is the Saviour for all mankind. His travels can be traced in some detail on the maps of the ancient world, and they show a breadth of missionary concern that casts the evangelist in a more epic role than that of Homer's mythical Odysseus. On what is called his second missionary journey, Paul, in company with fellow evangelist Silas, took on the Macedonian city of Thessalonica. Known today as Salonika, one of the major cities of modern Greece, the city was back then an even more important commercial center and pivotal to Paul's plans for establishing a bridgehead for the gospel. He sought out the main Jewish synagogue, and for three weeks argued the case for Jesus Christ as the Messiah they expected.

Such single-mindedness had to have an effect. Paul's listeners

were taken by his earnestness. They were convinced by his appeals to Scripture for proof of Christ's ministry. Not a long evangelistic campaign, to be sure, but the record is that "some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4*). Clearly the appeal went beyond Jewish interests and the social inhibitions of the day.

It was great evangelistic success. Naturally the opposition were inflamed. "The Jews"—that fractious faction of Judaizers that harassed Paul throughout his ministry—roused the rabble, created a disturbance, and complained to the authorities. Their charge was simple: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). Quite true! And what a comment on the revolutionary power of persistent and spirit-impelled witness!

Concerned for their safety, the fledgling Thessalonian company bailed the missionaries out of jail and sent them on their way to Berea, pursued by the same Judaizers. It was high drama and sufficient cause for Paul to feel concerned for the company at Thessalonica. Of course he prayed for them; but his concern went further. He dispatched Timothy back to the city to further encourage them and to gather a report for the anxious head evangelist.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Paul's Positives:

"For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you" (1 Thess. 1:4).

As it has been divided up for us, the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians is an incredible paean of praise for the faithfulness of Paul's flock. No doubt Paul was writing so following a good report from Timothy. But what good psychology!

Significantly Paul gives the ultimate credit for their wonderful "performance" to God's power. "Our gospel," says Paul in verse 2, came to the Thessalonians "in power and in the Holy Spirit." Their response was overwhelmingly positive; imitating the lifestyle of Paul and Christ Himself—inspired again by the joy of the Holy Spirit (verse 6).

That said, Paul is hardly unaware of the strong relationship between the fervor of his original witness, the witness of his own behavior, and the resulting dedication of his converts. A good missionary such as Paul moved people by his unashamed testimony, his exemplary life and, as the letter itself further demonstrated, by his continuing concern.

In the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul lingers with well-deserved pride on the fact that the believers there had magnified his original witness by becoming "an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (verse 7). In fact, he continued, quite carried away, "Your faith in God has gone forth everywhere" (verse 8). What a vindication of Paul's hasty but not superficial evangelistic campaign! After such a commendation from their beloved mentor, the Thessalonians would be ashamed to betray his confidence and backslide. Rather, the letter must have stirred them on to greater witness.

The Follow-up

One of the tragedies of modern evangelism is that evangelists often move on before they have time to nurture their converts. No wonder they are sometimes seen as spiritual headhunters, content to post the required quota. Of course this scenario is not always the case. And Paul's words to the Thessalonians in chapter 3 show that evangelistic disinterest should never be the case; can never be the case with a true, spirit-impelled evangelist.

The sawdust trail was pretty hard on Paul. The rigors of travel in the early Christian age would alone have guaranteed trials to the apostle. On top of that, he was regularly beaten, imprisoned, maligned, and generally hunted down by detractors. Yet we see him constantly looking over his shoulder to check on the welfare of his children in Christ.

Imagine the weary evangelist holed up in pagan Athens, anxiously awaiting word from Timothy, whom he has sent back to "check" on the Thessalonians. Sent back because Paul could "bear it no longer" (verse 5)—and just had to know how they were faring.

The news was good. Good enough to comfort Paul in his "distress and affliction" (verse 7). It was the true reward for an evangelist.

Paul summed it up in verse 8 of chapter 3. "For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord." His prayer for the Thessalonians was for love, holiness and that they meet again soon (verses 11-13). No wonder this evangelist managed to turn the known world upside down!

*All texts taken from the Revised Standard Version.

Tuesday, July 2

Revealing Christ to the World

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Thess. 3:12

There is a certain natural connection between our taking the name Christian and our witness for Christ. Most of us shrink from formal witness, yet all of us have something to share with those not yet touched by the greatest gift.

“God has given us the gift of speech that we may recite to others His dealing with us, that His love and compassion may touch other hearts, and that praise may arise from other souls also to Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.”¹

“Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of

the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.”²

On the terms of witness described above, we each have something uniquely powerful to contribute to a needy world. Witness is a grand and all-encompassing call. It is not merely telling, but is itself part of the very process of growing in Christ.

“In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found—witnessing, and ever as we witness learning anew ‘the riches of the glory of this mystery;’ which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27.”³

REACT

Is witnessing a part-time activity or a constant state of mind? How can I maintain a constant readiness to share for Christ?

1. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 243.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

3. *Education*, p. 309.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Every Believer a Witness

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Thess. 1:7

A decade ago I wrote a book review on one of the newer releases from Pacific Press. At that time I had no idea I would ever work at the Press—much less have a hand in determining what books the Press produced. I'll never forget the title of the book: *Every Believer a Minister*. A radical concept! Indeed, as the subtitle claimed, this was "a new frontier."

I read the book cover to cover and wrote a glowing report. The author had hit the issue square on the head. I was inspired then by Dr. Rex Edwards's observations. They are even more relevant today as we face the monumental task of evangelizing an increasingly indifferent and secularized society.

"Obviously," wrote Dr. Edwards, "if there is to be any large-scale lay ministry and witnessing, then there must be large-scale conversion within the church. The word is conversion."¹ Quite obvious, but usually overlooked or ignored by well-intentioned "reaping" programs.

Witnessing comes in various forms; some, in reality, is pseudo-witnessing. In concluding his valuable book, Dr. Edwards put it this way:

"The categories into which church members will fall as witnesses of the church are analogous to three witnesses of an auto

accident, complete with tangled steel and shattered glass. One witness stood on the sidewalk and saw the wreck take place. He was an objective observer. The second witness was in the wreck, wounded but not seriously. Safe but badly shaken. His is a first-hand, subjective witness. The third witness was in the wreck and killed by it. He was *really* a witness; it took his life.

"Christ does collide with our human lives. Then men set about to communicate this. We call it witnessing."

"1. The Sidewalk Witness. Some of us have seen it happen. We love to talk about other people's conversions. We discuss it objectively, but somehow the impact is remote, because we are describing somebody else's wreck.

"2. The Wounded Witness. Most of us probably fall into this category. We know it happened because we were there and have the scars to prove it. The wreck was so real that we walk with a Christian limp as a result. We have had enough contact with God to ruin us for anything else. We work hard, dragging ourselves along through life in Christian service.

"3. The Exchanged Witness. There are only a few of these. He died in the wreck. And his old life has been buried as a consequence. But out of the crash, a new self was born—in fact, it was like a resurrection. This man demonstrates today what Paul

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

described: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Galatians 2:20. This man is not just witnessing; he seems dead to all religious activity. He is letting Christ witness through him. He lives an exchanged life.

"When Christ is ministering to men through us, in His way of calm, shattering honesty, outflowing concern, and transforming power, we can expect anything to

happen. And it will. For 'when we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure.' The earth will be lightened with *His glory*; the work will be finished. The 'impossible' will have been 'possible!'"²

1. Dr. Rex Edwards, *Every Believer a Minister* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1979), p. 97.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 117.

Thursday, July 4

Witnessing As Sport

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Thess. 1:8

Why is it that so many Christians are embarrassed to talk to strangers about their faith—and yet will unashamedly scream themselves hoarse at a ballgame? Somehow we have to trade our inhibitions for a little enthusiasm in telling the good news. Of course it's good news to any sports fan if their team makes it to the Super Bowl—and wins. It's shout-and-scream-it-from-the-roof-tops-time that our star player Jesus Christ made the ultimate touchdown for us!

Arthur Blessitt is a Christian evangelist with a difference. For over 20 years now, this irrepressible man has dragged a 90-pound cross with him, from continent to continent, seizing any opportunity to witness. In his book *Street Christianity*, Arthur quickly explains that this is not everyone's way of witnessing. His spontaneous, "street level" witness is at once quirky and inspiring.

How many Christians could sidle up to a drug addict, as Arthur has many times, whisper, "Want a red?" and slip a red capsule into the man's hand—a capsule containing a Bible text on a small roll of paper? How many of us, if asked, "Do you smoke?" would dare quip back, "No, but I burn for Christ?"

Passing a tennis court, Arthur heard a player call out, "Love-15." "Love, John 3:16," he yelled back.

The girl playing tennis with a partner was puzzled enough to investigate more about the meaning of the text.

Back to the ballgame. Arthur tells of an experience in a fast food restaurant. "I was reading the newspaper," he says "when a guy rushed up to me and asked, 'Who won?' I said, 'Jesus did.' The guy looked at me. Then he said, 'No, no, who won the *ball game*?' And I said, 'Ball games don't turn me on, but Jesus does.'" ¹ Pretty brave witnessing!

Tongue in cheek, Arthur Blessitt notes that "we get people excited over balls—pool balls, ping pong balls, volleyballs, handballs, baseballs, footballs, basketballs, every imaginable kind of ball. I'm thinking about making a round Bible. If we make a round Bible, you couldn't get down the street with it under your arm. Everybody would say, "Give me one, give me one."² I like his informal, irreligious approach to the sacred things of our secular society. Each of us in our own way needs to question the assumptions of secular life and inject the energy of the spiritual. That will result in outreach, in a witness that changes others.

Street Christianity is an upbeat, off-the-wall, take-any-chance outline of one man's mission. But don't dismiss Arthur as out of touch. Take a moment to digest this paragraph from his suggestions for witnessing.

"There is nothing that is essen-

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

tial for bringing someone to Christ except the conveying of the knowledge of Christ to them in whatever manner you can. That's why we call witnessing 'sharing Jesus Christ.' You don't have to have a gospel tract in order to lead a person to Jesus. You don't have to have a Jesus sticker to be a witness. You don't even have to have the Bible in your hand. All you really need is Jesus in your heart. You must keep reminding yourself that it's not the technique or the material that leads a

person to Christ. It is the witness of another person who already knows Jesus.³

REACT

Is there a risk of appearing ridiculous if we speak openly of our faith?

What is the cure for embarrassment in witness?

-
1. Arthur Blessitt, *Street Christianity* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House Publishers, 1978), p. 111.
 2. *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 112.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

The Missionary Report

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 3:12, 13

I've never bought the blanket condemnation often applied to all the "old" ways of Adventism. I remember too many spirit-filled, godly men, too many heart-warming evangelistic sermons, to dismiss it all as legalistic Stone-Age-ism.

However, I do remember the missionary report common until such things were counted intrusive. The idea was good, but there was always something ridiculous about the query, "Missionary contacts?" There never were very many. Now and then most of us got to answer "One." Luckily we were not asked to elaborate. Maybe some of those contacts involved a real discussion of the meaning of the Sabbath, the world's need for Christ—maybe most were some quick, embarrassed allusion in order to retreat. We never found out. All I knew was a few faithfuls dared to speak up each week with a smug "Nine" or maybe "Twelve." Never seventy times seven—but a lot. We were somewhat impressed.

Looking back on the exercise, I'm sure that many of those high scorers were real soldiers for Christ. I'm just as sure that many of the real go-getters for Christ were too busy making contacts to

keep count. For if the truth be known, a constant witness is a pretty hard thing to quantify. And yet it is relatively easy to spot in the everyday actions of one committed to the Lord.

We still tend to run in old ways. "Thousand Days of Reaping" and other goals for church growth are no doubt well-intentioned, but they often translate into the missionary report writ large. Somehow I don't ever recall Christ giving a quota of contacts to His disciples. And the early church left no record of this thinking—they seem to have been too busy caring for the many new arrivals and dealing with the state reaction to their unrestrained witness.

Reading the Bible record, I get the impression that they were not too concerned with training for witness, with the psychology of contacts. Rather, they felt compelled to share what Christ had done for them; compelled to gather more sons and daughters of God into the family; impelled to share news of Christ's promised return. It seems quite logical that baptisms resulted from this way of "witnessing."

REACT

How "formal" is my witness?

How can I loosen up and start letting my non-Christian friends and contacts share the good news?

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Lesson 2, July 7-13

Strength for Today



"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thess. 3:3, NIV).

Sunday, July 7

Christianity in Black and White

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Thess. 2:13-3:5

The bus rolled to a stop, and our small band of college students roused themselves after riding all night. It was April, and we were headed for Florida. But this was not spring break. It was a biology field trip.

I was in the back of the bus, where I could stretch out—as a freshman it wasn't that hard to find a seat by myself. Being in the back of the bus meant that I was just about the last one off as we all rushed to wash up and get some breakfast.

The eating establishment we stopped at had two areas where you could eat—one was a lunch counter, and the other was their more “formal” dining area with booths and tables. By the time I got there, most of the group were already in the dining area trying to decide between eggs and pancakes.

Just as I was about to find a seat, I noticed Ray, the only person of Afro-American heritage in

our group, sitting at the lunch counter. I called to him, asking him why he wasn't with the others. Ray replied, “They don't want me in there.”

Ray's answer didn't make any sense to me. So I asked again. But he repeated his answer. Then I realized. Ray was black, and we were in the South. This was “real” prejudice “up, close, and personal.” And it required from me a personal response. I sat down to eat breakfast with Ray.

That experience taught me several things about persecution. Persecution is not always overt or physical. Indeed, sometimes, the worst persecution may not be physical at all. But persecution, whether it is directed at you or another, always requires a personal response.

Furthermore, persecution affects more than just the person being persecuted. And finally, persecution has an up side. That's right, it can have a positive effect. Ray and I became good friends not only for that trip, but all through college till we went our separate ways.

by Peter Chiomenti

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Monday, July 8

For My Sake

LOGOS

1 Thess. 2:13-3:5

This week's theme is persecution and how Christians should relate to it. In one of those ironies that indicates God must have a sense of humor, we will be looking at persecution through the eyes of Paul, a man who knew persecution well both as the persecutor and the persecuted.

From the start, we should note two points: (1) Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is a letter of encouragement—not a warning to “hunker down”; and (2) even though Paul deals with persecution in his letter, it is not the theme of the letter.

Paul was instructing and encouraging a group of Christians for whom persecution was a new experience. So it is instructive to see what he says. First, Paul reassures the believers that what they accepted and believed was not just his word, but was in fact God's word (see 2:13). This is important, since Christ Himself indicated that believers were “blessed” if they were persecuted because of Him (see Matt. 5:11). Even though Jesus, when instructing His disciples, said, “He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38), there is no indication that suffering for its own sake has any merit. The fact that Paul's instruction parallels the instruction Christ gave in the Sermon on the Mount vali-

dates what Paul says.

Second, Paul tells the Thessalonians they are not alone in their sufferings. Their Christian brothers and sisters in Judea were also being persecuted. Christ Himself was persecuted by His very own people. Paul continues to parallel Christ's Sermon on the Mount with an echo of Christ's comment in Matthew 5:12, “For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” The parable of the wicked husbandmen (see Mark 12:1-9) reflects this message.

By stating that Christ Himself had been killed, Paul alluded to the inevitability of persecution for the Christian. Christ had in fact told His disciples that “a disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord,” and that “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.” But Christ also promised that “he that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 10:24, 16, 39, NIV).

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that “when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thess. 3:4).

The persecution of the Thessalonians didn't mean they were abandoned. Paul, again following Christ's example, sent a comforter, Timothy, when he was unable to be with them in person.

This brings up two questions we don't often think about when discussing persecution. Is there a

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role for those not being actively persecuted? And to what extent is the whole church being persecuted when only part of the church is being physically persecuted? Paul's responses, "Out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you" (2:17, NIV) and the fact that he sent Timothy, tells us that he felt that when part of the church is persecuted, *all* of the church is persecuted, and the whole church should be involved. It is important to note that the aid rendered to those persecuted is first to lift them up and encourage them to remain faithful, and then, if possible, to rescue them from their persecutors. Two prime examples are (1) the way Jesus dealt with the imprisonment of John the Baptist (see Matt. 11:2-15), and (2) how the early Christians prayed for Peter when he was imprisoned (see Acts 12).

In summary, it is honorable and inevitable that we will suffer for Christ's sake. But our suffering does not mean God has rejected us. Furthermore, we are to relieve the persecution of fellow believers through prayer, encouragement, and, when possible, through direct assistance.

How are free choice and persecution related?

What is our responsibility to those always in "hot water" because they practice "confrontational" religion?

Should there be a difference in our response to those who are persecuted because of "acts of conscience" committed for personal reasons and those persecuted because of a stand the church has taken?

How do we know when it is best to stand up to persecution and when it is best to flee from it?

Tuesday, July 9

The Conflict Goes On

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 69:29-33

Even though persecution and the time of trouble at the end of earth's history are two different subjects, Adventists usually discuss persecution only in relationship to the latter. The following statements by Ellen G. White seem to apply to both subjects.

"There is a time of trouble coming to the people of God, but we are not to keep that constantly before the people, and rein them up to have a time of trouble beforehand. There is to be a shaking among God's people; but this is not the present truth to carry to the churches."¹

"True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences. It does not ask, What will people think of me if I do this? or, How will it affect my worldly prospects if I do that? With the most intense longing the children of God desire to know what He would have them do, that their works may glorify Him. . . .

"What a lesson is here given to the faint-hearted, the vacillating,

the cowardly in the cause of God! What encouragement to those who will not be turned aside from duty by threats or peril! These faithful, steadfast characters [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] exemplify sanctification. . . . The amount of good which may be accomplished by comparatively obscure but devoted Christians cannot be estimated until the life records shall be made known, when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened. . . . The conflict still goes on between the children of light and the children of darkness. . . . As in the days of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so in the closing period of earth's history the Lord will work mightily in behalf of those who stand steadfastly for the right."²

"There was never one who walked among men more cruelly slandered than the Son of man. . . . While slander may blacken the reputation, it cannot stain the character. That is in God's keeping."³

1. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 13.

2. *The Sanctified Life*, pp. 39-41.

3. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 32.

by Peter Chiomenti

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The Persecution Experience

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 6:25-34

To be persecuted for obeying God's law might have been a new experience for the Thessalonians, but it certainly was not a new experience for God's people. Abel, the first martyr, and continuing through Jacob, Joseph, the nation of Israel, the prophets, Christ, the disciples, Paul, Huss, Jerome, and all those martyred or persecuted up to the present day have found a relationship with God to be more desirable than physical comfort.

All those who have been persecuted for obeying God's word share certain aspects of the persecution experience. Of these aspects we will note five.

Foremost of these aspects is a relationship with God, without which there is no way and no reason to withstand persecution.

The second aspect is what I refer to as the "wilderness experience," in which one takes time to break away from the world around them to commune intensely with God. Probably the most notable examples here would be Moses (see Exodus 2:11-4:18), Christ (see Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:9-12; Luke 4:1-13), and Paul (see Gal. 1:11-20).

The third aspect is suffering—both mentally and physically. Examples of physical suffering are numerous and ongoing, so I will name very few. There were Abel (see Gen. 4:3-8), Paul and

Silas (see Acts 16:16-28), and Huss and Jerome, both of whom were imprisoned and burned at the stake. (Huss died in 1415; Jerome in 1416.) Undoubtedly, those who suffered physically also suffered mentally. But there were those whose mental suffering seemed to overshadow anything else they suffered. This group includes Jacob, David, John the Baptist, and Jesus (see Luke 22:39-44).

The fourth similar aspect in persecution experiences is a demonstration of faith in the face of despair. The children of Israel had made it through the first three steps when they arrived at the banks of the Jordan. But there they faltered at the very point of victory (see Num. 14:1-35). This experience is not restricted to ancient Israel (see *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 68, 69; *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 450; vol. 9, p. 29). On the other hand, the ultimate demonstration of faith during persecution comes from Christ, who after feeling that His Father had forsaken Him, laid hold of God and said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

The final experience held in common is triumph. Israel did finally, years later, reach the Promised Land (see Joshua 3). And Christ was resurrected victor over sin and death. It is this triumph that the persecuted must focus upon. It is this triumph that will carry us through.

by Peter Chiomenti

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Thursday, July 11

A Fact of Life

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 5:43-48

If persecution is a “fact of life” for the Christian, then how are we to react? My first reaction would probably be similar to Peter’s when the mob came to arrest Christ—I’d lash out, do unto others the same as they did unto me and just a little more for “good measure”! That type of response, however, is about as far from God’s desire as one can get.

When we are persecuted for Christ’s sake, we are to rejoice. That’s right, rejoice (see Matt. 5:12). But that’s not all. We’re not even supposed to resist our persecutor. In fact, we’re even supposed to go the “extra mile” (verses 38-42).

But once we’ve gone that second mile, we’re not to rush off to put our persecutor’s picture on the dartboard. We’re instructed to *love* that person. Yet even that’s not enough, because we are sup-

posed to be perfect, even “as your heavenly Father is perfect” (see verses 43-48, NIV).

All of this is impossible, right? Wrong! Turn to Romans 12, and start reading with verse 9. “Love must be sincere” (NIV). Don’t just ignore your persecutor. Be concerned about what happens to him or her. Pray for him or her. Verses 10-16 have some excellent suggestions on how to get along with fellow Christians that would also seem to apply to everybody, including one’s persecutors. I especially like the advice: “Do not be conceited” (verse 16, NIV). When verse 19 says, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (NIV), it is not only telling us *not* to be vengeful, but it is promising that our all-knowing and all-wise God will make everything right. We don’t have to worry about it.

Finally, start small—be thankful for little victories. Think about life’s “small” persecutions as quizzes that will prepare us for the “final exam.”

by Peter Chiomenti

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The Gospel Is Life

OPINION

Key Text: Psalms 23, 24

Persecution and the time of the end are two closely related topics. And because they are at times presented in a sensational way, we tend to have a certain morbid fascination with them. Vivid imagination is used to present these topics—especially to young children—in ways that terrify. But in doing this, we miss the point. Christ never intended that these topics be used to scare the “hell” out of people. Being frightened is not part of the process of sanctification (see 1 John 4:15-19).

First of all, the entire point of the Bible is *life*. The greatest gift God has given us is the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, which ensures us of a second chance at eternal life. What possible pleasure could it give God to send His Son to suffer and die just to prolong our life so we could be frightened and suffer? It's up to us, then, to treasure and enjoy the gift God has given us.

But God did tell us about persecution and a time of trouble. Why? And is it wrong to be apprehensive about it?

It is only natural to be apprehensive about something difficult in the future. Even Christ had such feelings (see Matt. 26:38-43). But these feelings were not the focus of His ministry.

God did tell us about persecution. But He intended it to be a warning—not *the* gospel. However, in the telling, He mentioned very few specifics and with good reason. First, God did not want to terrify us. Second, He did not want us to prepare for the specifics because He knew we would never make it on our own. How much better for us if we don't even try. Finally, He *does* want us to prepare by trusting Him now and building our relationship with Him *now* so we will be confident we can rely on Him later.

In Matthew 10:18-20, Jesus gives rather specific instructions concerning persecution when He sent His disciples out two by two. It is my conclusion that God told us about persecution much like a doctor informs a patient about an operation—so we will not be surprised; so we will know He is still in control and can be trusted. We may be apprehensive at the thought of persecution. But we can face it without dread because “the Lord is my shepherd. . . . I will fear no evil.” “He is the king of glory” (Ps. 23:1-4; 24:10).

by Peter Chiomenti

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Lesson 3, July 14-20

Divine Retribution



“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels” (2 Thess. 1:6, 7, NIV).

Revenge and Misthrown Rocks

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Thess. 1:1-12

Ten-year-old Paul was angry. The way his older brother Glen always got in the last word irritated him so much. When they physically fought, Glen was bigger and would sit on him. Now, out in the yard arguing about something, Glen had called him a wimp. Paul was sensitive about this because he was small for his age and was forever hoping that someday he would grow.

Now he would get Glen—he would give him what he deserved. Scooping up a stone, he hurled it as far and as hard as he could. Unfortunately, he forgot that he also had to aim. He failed again because, instead of hitting his brother as he had planned, he sent the rock soaring high above his brother's head, where it landed harmlessly on the roof of their house.

At this, Glen burst into hysterical laughter. "You stupid little kid! You can't aim at all!"

So what, you ask, is my point in telling you the story? Just this: as Paul walked disgustedly away he turned to glare once more at his brother. And that was when the stone finished rolling down the roof and hit his still-laughing brother squarely on the head. All

thoughts of anger and revenge vanished from Paul's mind. Now it was his turn to laugh. For once in his life he had gotten even with Glen without even trying.

I think we have all wished that sometimes things would work out like Paul's rock. After all, the jerks who steal our girlfriends or boyfriends deserve to have something bad happen to them. And the friends who never do any of their schoolwork on time (if at all) keep getting breaks while we, the A students, miss one day of a class and fail the quiz because of it. Couldn't they get exactly what they deserve? Just once? It would make us feel better.

Then we are reminded of a text like, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord," and we feel guilty (Rom. 12:19). But are we to just let people walk all over us? Certainly we can't just sit back and be taken advantage of. This week's lesson discusses retribution from a Christian's viewpoint and will try to answer such questions as:

When do we stand up for our rights?

Why don't bad people ever "get what's coming to them"?

What is our responsibility as a church in dealing with those who are "living in sin"?

Is it ever right for Christians to seek retribution?

by Misty Conner

Misty Conner is a freshman at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, July 15

Fight or Flight

LOGOS

2 Thess. 1:1-12

What Is the Day of the Lord? (Read 2 Thess. 1:5-10.)

These verses are meat in a Pauline sandwich sent to the Thessalonians. One slice of bread is Paul's expression of gratitude for evidences of spiritual maturation (see verses 1-5). The other slice is his prayer for them to experience God's generosity (see verses 11 and 12). The meat, the heart of the sandwich, are the verses under consideration, verses 5-10.

Let's begin with verse 10. A significant phrase is: "When he comes in that Day," which is a reference to the *Day of the Lord*, found some 69 times in the Scriptures. This term denotes the time when God exercises His will without regard to human desires. On that day every person will, by divine fiat, be frozen in his relationship to God (see Rev. 22:11). The Day of the Lord is associated with the close of probation and its results.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). With equal force Paul might have written, "The things which God has prepared for those who have *not* loved Him." Our wildest imagination cannot begin to comprehend the terribleness of the day of the Lord. The bittersweetness of that

day defies full comprehension, for what is to the disobedient the bitterest of experiences is to the obedient the sweetest of experiences. The day of the Lord is at once condemnation and commendation. Which will it be for you?

How Does This Knowledge Affect Me Internally? (2 Thess. 1:7)

Paul encourages the long view. The knowledge that God will bring all to justice, that position, prestige, pomp, pride, or privilege will in no way alter His decision, gives the believer a tremendous advantage. While he may be forced to wear the rags of derision, scorn, abuse, and misuse, internally he knows losing the battle does not mean losing the war.

Paul says in verse 7 that rest is coming to those who are troubled, persecuted, prosecuted, and pursued when the Lord Jesus is revealed. Our enemies will no longer exist to externally harass us, but it must be remembered, internal peace precedes external rest. If we are internally one with God, the peace of Isaiah 26:3 is ours today! Now!

How Does the Day of the Lord Impact My Day-to-Day Contact With People? (Read 2 Thess. 1:5, 6.)

Someone was teaching the Thessalonians that Christians are supposed to have it easier. Having become Christians, life seemed to be increasingly difficult for them. Life before seemed

by D. G. Rand

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much easier. In their minds, Christianity and persecution in any form was foreign, indicative of something drastically wrong; a concept not uncommon in the twentieth century.

The cross, persecution, and Christianity are inseparable. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12, NKJV). "Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (2 Peter 4:12, 13, NKJV).

Oneness with God produces an inner peace, an acuteness of vision that allows a person to see beyond the now of time. It changes his world view, letting him see each situation as God sees it. His daily contact with people, positive or negative, is seen in the light of eternity, not of the moment. His response then is orchestrated by that eternal view. Before meeting Christ, self-preservation prompts every action. Having met Christ the response is Christocentric rather than egocentric.

How Do I Know When to Fight or Take Flight? (2 Thess. 1:5)

What would you consider the epitome of proper conduct? Would British royalty do? Can you imagine Queen Elizabeth II in a fistfight during an afternoon tea? It would seem that who she is and what she represents greatly influence her conduct. Paul says in verse 5 of 2 Thessalonians 1, "That you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God" (NKJV). Reflect on your

most recent "falling out," the disagreement that was so disagreeable. What would have been different if you had asked, Is my conduct worthy of the kingdom? Would such a question help to determine whether to fight or take flight? Whom we belong to and represent is a significant determinant of appropriate behavior.

We humans cannot of ourselves with unerring accuracy determine what action is worthy or unworthy of the kingdom. In those gray areas requiring Solomon-like wisdom, God has promised to give us direction (see Isa. 30:21).

What's in It for Me? (Rev. 21:1-7)

Paul tries to impress upon the Thessalonians that persecution in any form, borne under the aegis of God, is always beneficial. How much that really counts in this world has come without pain? Bunyan's timeless *Pilgrim's Progress*, for example, was nurtured in pain and suffering.

"Study the moral history of the world. Has hate, greed, cruelty, falsehood, impurity, or slavery ever finally triumphed? Are not Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome vivid illustrations of the truth that things are weighted on the side of love, sacrifice, sympathy, truth, peace, purity, and liberty? Fight against these and you fight against the stars in their courses. God is not mocked. His law cannot be flouted. 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.'"^{*}

What's in it for me? Just peace of mind and stability in this life, and then eternal life. That's all!

^{*}*The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), vol. 2, p. 323.

Tuesday, July 16

Righteous Indignation

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 91:1

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul encourages troubled believers by telling them of Christ's coming and of His vengeance on the wicked, when "the people of God shall rest from all their cares and perplexities."¹ Paul's letter reminds us today that vengeance is best left to the Lord. Even though we know that vengeance is God's (see Ps. 91:1), it should not be forgotten that Moses displayed righteous indignation when he saw Israel worshipping a golden calf (see Exod. 21).

What is this righteous indignation? Ellen White writes, "It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin." This is the indignation that is justifiable. And she adds this caution: "But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger or resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven."²

"Christ's indignation was directed against the hypocrisy, the gross sins, by which men were destroying their own souls, deceiving the people and

dishonoring God. . . . Keen and searching had been His denunciation of sin; but He spoke no words of retaliation. He had a holy wrath against the prince of darkness; but He manifested no irritated temper." Seeing Christ's example, "the Christian who lives in harmony with God, possessing the sweet attributes of love and mercy, will feel a righteous indignation against sin; but he will not be roused by passion to revile those who revile him. Even in meeting those who are moved by a power from beneath to maintain falsehood, in Christ he will still preserve calmness and self-possession."³

We need to have a balance. When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus, He saw people who would try to kill both Him and Lazarus, and His indignation was aroused against this hypocrisy. "Christ could have stripped from them their robe of pretended sorrow. But He restrained His righteous indignation."⁴ He did this in order to glorify His heavenly Father.

REACT

God is to carry out "vengeance." How does this relate to His character? (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 541.) If this is the way He is, how should we act?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 264.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 619, 620.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 533.

by Nels Freed

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Primitive Justice

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Thess. 1:6, 7

We live in a society that witnesses injustice every day. Hostage situations, corruption in business, and other events often leave us with feelings of anger and despair. The movie and television industries capitalize on our frustrations at injustice. Hordes of movies and television shows portray individuals taking the law into their own hands and punishing those who pervert the law, much to the satisfaction of the viewing audience.

In her book *Wild Justice*, Susan Jacoby addresses our attitudes toward revenge. She states that "it was taken for granted that human beings had a deep need—a need as sharp as hunger or sexual desire—to avenge their injuries, to restore a sense of equity when they felt their integrity had been violated."¹ We have been taught to suppress these feelings of revenge, yet it is impossible to deny that the feelings exist and must be dealt with.

Various cultures around the world long ago realized that need and structured their customs accordingly. In remote parts of Greece and Albania the Kohistani tribes quickly mete out vengeance (usually in the form of killing) personally for any sort of injustice.² In my homeland of the Philippines, the Muslims have an interesting way of handling re-

venge. If a family member is killed for any reason, the remaining relatives will plant a tree, usually a bamboo. For as long as that tree lives, they will seek out the murderer to kill him. If the tree dies, however, the family will desist in pursuing the offender.

While such methods of justice are quite effective, we in Western society consider them morally wrong (and too bothersome). Our cultured society has "risen above" such barbaric practices. We have a legal system that relieves us of the responsibility of punishing those who do wrong. But this alternative often has less satisfying results. Confirmed criminals are often set free through loopholes in the system. And many innocents must suffer in their place. Can we just let these lapses in justice slip by?

The need to see justice done is a basic need. That is why 2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7 is so comforting. In those two verses we have the assurance that an all-powerful God knows what is happening and in His own time will see that justice is done.

REACT

1. To what extent is revenge a cultural phenomenon?

2. Does this excuse or justify revenge as an acceptable behavior?

1. Susan Jacoby, *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 152.

2. Judith Stone, "I'm Okay, You're History," *Discover*, June 1988, p. 82.

by Ben Perez

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Thursday, July 18

The Forgiving and Forgetting Attitude

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 4:16, 17

Isn't it hard to be like Christ when someone offends us? Isn't it difficult to simply rely on the love God has for us when we're hurting because of what someone has done to us or to someone we love? Isn't it hard to forgive someone who hasn't even asked for forgiveness? It *isn't* easy, but let me share with you two steps through which God has helped me personally to forgive and release hard feelings.

1. *Recognize Christ's power and my weakness.* I must recognize that I have an attitude that needs to change, but I am powerless to do it myself. The scary thing is that sometimes I realize that deep down I do not want to change, that I'm angry and do not want to let go of a grudge or be near people who have wronged me, much less love them. That's when I must take a long look at Calvary. It is impossible to get up from the foot of the cross and walk away unchanged.

There I find transforming power. A Christian author writes: "No one has ever looked squarely at Jesus and remained unchanged. Demoniacs became sane. Prostitutes pure. The discouraged hopeful. The sick whole. The sinful forgiven. Just to look at Him is to expect a life-changing encounter." Jesus not only gives me

the power to change, but motivates me to change.

2. *I look at my offender in the light of the cross.* When I see the magnitude of love displayed at Calvary for my offender as well as for me, I realize that I cannot hate someone whom Jesus loves so much. If Jesus can find a reason to love that person, surely I can too. If there is any possibility that they feel I have offended them, I need to apologize, even if I did nothing wrong. Then, for my own benefit, I must forgive them. I must say out loud to myself, "_____, I forgive you. Because Jesus loves you, I love you too," repeating it until I really mean it.

Jesus did not use any power during His life on earth that is not also available to us today (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664). He commands us, "Love one another, as I have loved you." And He doesn't ask us to do anything without promising us the power to do it (see *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 38, 333). We can love those who hurt us by the same power through which on the cross Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

REACT

Is it possible to forgive *and* forget?

*Myron Widmer, "Jesus, the Beginning," *Adventist Review*, February 4, 1988, p. 5.

by Kathy Stutz

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Undercover Revenge

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 18:21, 22

Several years ago my little sister really used to irritate me. I would complain to my mother, "Mom, Ann's bothering me again!" to which my mother always answered, "She's only trying to get attention. Just ignore her, and she'll stop." I tried, but her persistence at bothering me always seemed to exceed my persistence at ignoring her. So, I would return to my mother and tell her indignantly, "I'm still ignoring her, and she still won't stop!" Then she would suggest that I go play somewhere else where Ann couldn't bother me.

But avoiding Ann and her harassment was only part of the reason I complained to my mom. Although I thought Ann should have to go away since she was bothering me, I could have left and avoided her on my own. Just getting Ann out of the way, however, wasn't enough to satisfy me. I really hoped that my sister would get punished for being such a pest. If she hadn't bothered me, I could have ignored her. But since she did bother me, I thought my parents should mete out the "justice" due and spank her.

That's the problem with revenge: too often it masquerades as justice. I wanted to see my sister punished, not because it would benefit me at all, but merely for the selfish pleasure of watching her suffer like she made

me suffer. I was counting on my mother to dispense the "justice" I thought Ann so richly deserved. But she didn't. As I look back on it now, I'm thankful my mom didn't punish my sister as I had hoped she would.

Likewise, if I expect God to inflict "justice" on my sister for me, I will be disappointed. God does not administer justice on my terms (thankfully). Paul's letter to the Thessalonians does not say, "God will get revenge for you"; it says, "God is just" (2 Thess. 1:6, NIV). At the judgment He will give all people the reward or punishment that they have chosen and deserve. He will not wreak vengeance according to our wishes—He will administer justice according to His infinite wisdom.

How do I relate to people who wrong me? God has promised that He will bring justice at the judgment. I am not to administer "justice" on my own, but to forgive those who wrong me. Peter asked Christ, "How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21, NIV). Christ replied, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:22, NIV).

REACT

1. At what times, if ever, should we as Christians stand up against unjust treatment?
2. Must we always leave justice to God?

by James Kosinski

James Kosinski is a sophomore majoring in mathematics and computer science at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 4, July 21-27

The Gospel Is More Than Words



“They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:9, 10, NIV).

Sunday, July 21

Life's Essentials (or Back to Basics)

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Thess. 1:3, 8, 9

Educators today are talking about getting back to basics. Much to their horror, students are graduating from high school unable to read, write, or perform basic mathematical calculations. Somehow they have managed to get through the system without this essential knowledge. Some have even sued the schools that graduated them for failing in their responsibility to educate, leaving the student without the essential skills necessary to life in today's society.

We also have basic physiological and emotional needs, essential to life. Air, water, food, shelter, and love are all necessary to our existence. However, even though all are obviously important, each can be prioritized. Most would agree that our need for air is more immediate and critical than our need for the others.

So how about our spiritual life? Are there some spiritual basics essential to our life in Christ, just as there are basics in other areas of our lives? Could it be that there is a need for us to get back to spiritual basics? Just as our need for air is more critical to life than food, shelter, and love, could there be some spiritual truths that are more basic, more essen-

tial, than others?

Paul says of the Thessalonians that the message of the gospel had become known everywhere because of them (see 1 Thess. 1:8). Can that be said of me and my church today? Do we have the basics of work produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (see verse 3)? Have we turned from the idols in our lives, whatever form they take, to give more than just lip service to the God who died to give us life?

The Thessalonians were real people, just like you and me, with many different desires, problems, and character flaws. They didn't lead perfect lives. They didn't have all the answers. They were not Bible scholars. They did, however, have a very real experience of the love of God in their lives, which filled them with a joy that could not be quenched even by severe suffering.

Despite their imperfections, perhaps I can learn from them that it is important to embrace others with the unconditional love and acceptance God so generously gives to me. Perhaps I can learn, also, that daily experience with the basics of the gospel—faith, love, and hope in Jesus—is critical to my life as a Christian and to creating a warm and inviting church home where others will want to gather.

by Sherri Clark

Sherri Clark is a graduate of Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts, and Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California. She graduated from LLU with a master's degree in counseling and is presently working in South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Monday, July 22

Are Those Tears Mine?

LOGOS

1 Thess. 1:6

The Truly Converted Heart

"We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:3, NIV).

Paul has no qualms in publicly exulting over his little outpost church in a heathen land. He well understands the church to be the noblest institution on earth, made so by the quality people Jesus has invited by re-creation into its membership (see Zech. 2:8).

Paul censures abruptly when necessary (see Gal. 2:11, 14), but he positively glows with affirmation toward the faithful in Thessalonica. He joyfully recounts their faith, their love, and their hope. This trio of virtues is commonly found throughout the New Testament (see Heb. 6:10-12) and most well known in 1 Cor. 13:13.

These Christian virtues, so admirably displayed in the Thessalonians, Paul associates with gritty people. True commitment to Christ means work, labor, endurance (see verse 3). However, Paul is not suggesting in any way a works-centered faith. We must recognize that no man lives on the basis of knowledge, but invariably in someone or something. "Two things there were to which Jesus set no limit—the love of God and the power of

faith. Faith to Him was not a speculative idea to be interestingly discussed but a practical idea to be acted upon. His greatest deeds were prefaced with 'If you have faith.'"¹

How do I relate to those who seem to have been merely "blowing bubbles" as they took the vows of church membership? What would cause my mouth to be full of ashes rather than the sweet praises of Christ?

Christian Thought—the Spawning Ground of Motion

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord. . . . And so you became a model" (1 Thess. 1:6, 7, NIV).

A Christian is known by those qualities that present him/her in the most attractive way possible. Though Silas and Timothy have not shared the authorship of this letter, Paul includes them as sharing the warmest of Christian greetings. Grace and peace are ingratiating terms found in all the apostle's greetings. Great care, however, must be shown that too narrow or too shallow a meaning not be attached to these terms (see verse 1, NIV).

*"Grace is the love of God, spontaneous, beautiful, unearned, at work in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men."*²

Peace. This salutation conveys much the same significance of the Hebrew "Shalom." It is sometimes restricted to convey a thought of freedom from persecution, such as Christian converts

by Robert Conrad

Robert Conrad is a senior theology student at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

in a heathen land might experience. However, this "peace, which Christ is; the peace with God which we have when we are reconciled to Him by the death of His Son; the soul-health which comes when grace makes our hearts to their very depths right with God, and frightens away care and fear; this 'perfect soundness' spiritually is all summed up in the word."³

When the Christian gospel is considered, then accepted, a metamorphosis inevitably and beautifully occurs. None more than Paul thrived on this reality and rejoiced in seeing the Holy Spirit's work in the Thessalonians. On another occasion he says, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12, NIV).

What is the significance of being without God in the world? Is it an issue being seriously considered by modern people? Are Christians today as commendable as were the courageous Thessalonians in their heathen cultural setting? What qualities do I need to possess and share that would lead others to consider Christianity? (See 1 Thess. 5:14-22.)

Evangelism

"The Lord's message rang out from you . . . your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1:8, NIV).

Paul's mission to the Gentiles in Thessalonica postured the Christian gospel as so much more desirable than the low-profile moralism of paganism. The gospel had penetrated the darkness and ultimate despair that oozes from the cracks of all that is of man's devising.

It was not Paul's intention that the Jews residing there should be ignored, but true to form, their spurning of the gospel message was comparable to encounters in Antioch and elsewhere. Paul's work among the Jews seems to have had at least a singular success in Berea, where they were accounted more noble than those in Thessalonica (see Acts 17:11). The converts from paganism seem to be much like these Bereans. These Thessalonians were definitely good soil, of those "with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (Luke 8:15, NIV).

A clear understanding of the courage of Paul's audience must take into account the horror of living and witnessing in a hostile culture.

What would be the consequences to me if I were to share my faith as prominently as did the early church? What priority should evangelism rank today?

1. Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 11 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 258.

2. W. Robertson, ed., *The Expositor's Bible*, vol. 6 (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1943), p. 317.

3. *Ibid.*

Tuesday, July 23

His Gospel, Our Hope

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 14:1-3

"The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with zeal for their Savior. . . . Through the grace of Christ, a marvelous transformation had taken place in their lives, and the word of the Lord, as spoken through them was accompanied with power. Hearts were won by the truths presented, and souls were added to the number of believers."¹

From this passage we can clearly see that the Thessalonians accepted the gospel with much joy and excitement. Many of us may be able to remember how we acted and felt when we first accepted the gospel, and the deep inner peace that may have come over us in knowing that the Saviour would return for us someday.

This wonderful assurance has the same meaning for us today as it did for the Thessalonians. Just as they were anxious to spread the gospel of Christ to others around them, so we today need to be carrying the gospel to the world. "The gospel invitation is to be given to all the world. . . . The last message of warning and mercy is to lighten the whole earth with its glory. It is to reach all classes of men, rich and poor, high and low. 'Go out into the highways and hedges,' Christ says, 'and compel them to come

in, that My house may be filled.' The world is perishing for want of the gospel."²

"The success of the gospel does not depend upon learned speeches, eloquent testimonies, or deep arguments. It depends upon the simplicity of the message and its adaptation to the souls that are hungering for the bread of life. 'What shall I do to be saved?'—this is the want of the soul."³

"The gospel message proclaimed by Christ's disciples was the announcement of His first advent to the world. It bore to men the good tidings of salvation through faith in Him. . . . This message is given to men today, and at this time there is coupled with it the announcement of Christ's second coming as at hand. The signs which He Himself gave of His coming have been fulfilled, and by the teaching of God's word we may know that the Lord is at the door."⁴

REACT

1. In what way did the Thessalonians misunderstand some portions of the gospel message?

2. What was Paul's purpose in writing the first letter to the Thessalonians?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 256.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 228-231.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 226, 227.

by Lon Mapes

Lon Mapes recently graduated from Atlantic Union College with a B.S. in business administration and is pursuing a career in management.

The Power of the Gospel

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Thess. 1:4, 5

“Brothers loved by God, we know that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thess. 1:4, 5, NIV.) It would be well for us to study the example of the Thessalonian believers so that our lives will exemplify the power of the gospel.

“If men think of the gospel only as another philosophy, as the result of the reflection of certain, admittedly profound, first-century thinkers on religious topics, they will never have the burning zeal which sent the first Christian preachers through the world to proclaim what God had done for man. It is because it is indeed ‘the word of the Lord’ that has been committed to us, that we can and must present it without apology or amendment.”¹

The source of the power of the gospel received by the Thessalonians was the Holy Spirit (see 1:51). We cannot generate this power through our own efforts. The gospel message is what Christ has done for us to save us and is accompanied by His promise to send the Holy Spirit into our lives (see Acts 1:8). If we have truly accepted the gospel, then we will deeply desire to have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than

wanting to serve God “our way.”

The Holy Spirit in the lives of the Thessalonian believers enabled them to joyfully withstand “severe suffering” (1 Thess. 1:6, NIV). “In the midst of suffering they displayed a profound joyfulness which Paul attributed to the Spirit being active in their lives.”² They were “a striking illustration of the way in which the whole of a man’s values are transformed by the power of God’s Holy Spirit when he enters into the salvation bought for him at the price of the blood of the Son.”³ The Thessalonian believers are an inspiration to all who are afraid of persecution, for we can also experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit which brings joy in the face of persecution.

As the gospel impacts our lives, we also will want to share the “good news” with others. I would suggest praying for the Holy Spirit to make the gospel real to you if you don’t have the desire to be used by God as a gospel witness.

REACT

If being a gospel witness isn’t a part of your life, think of reasons for this and then come up with ideas to counteract these reasons.

1. Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 61.

2. I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 54.

3. Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

by Michael Case

Michael Case is an electrical engineer in Hudson, Massachusetts.

Thursday, July 25

A Different Kind of Power

HOW-TO

Key Text: Acts 1:8

Does the powerful witness of Paul make your witnessing attempts seem like failures? If so, you are not alone. How can each of us make a life-changing impact on the people around us?

In 1 Thessalonians 1:4 Paul points out that it was not his skill that caused the people of Thessalonica to come to God. The key ingredient was the power of the Holy Spirit impressing and changing lives. Paul was simply the messenger! Paul says: "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction" (verse 5, NIV).

God takes our sincere but puny efforts and gives them power, causing others to see Himself reflected in us! "He [God] knows that the messengers whom He sees fit to send are weak, erring men; but to all who give themselves wholly to His service He promises divine aid."¹

1. *Ask daily for His promised power.* Keep in touch with God throughout the day. Be willing to be used by God. By choosing to be Christians we automatically become His witnesses, but He offers us power to witness more effectively. "Those only who are constantly receiving fresh supplies of grace, will have power proportionate to their daily need and their ability to use that power."²

2. *Trust that power has been given us as promised.* How hard it is to trust! So often this is our weakest point—the point where we give up hope of ever being an effective witness, a perfect reflection of Christ's character.

"God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power in their behalf."³

We are used to achieving success and power by using our own skills. The concept of reflecting Christ (witnessing) takes what we can do out of the picture. It simply asks that we allow the connection to be open between us and heaven, to allow a close friendship to develop.

3. *Use today's opportunities.* Speaking of God's people today, Ellen White says: "Instead of looking forward to some future time when, through a special endowment of spiritual power, they will receive a miraculous fitting up for soul winning, they are yielding themselves daily to God, that He may make them vessels meet for His use. Daily they are improving the opportunities for service that lie within their reach."⁴

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 56.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

3. *Patarchs and Prophets*, p. 493.

4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55.

by Joan Fortmiller

Joan Fortmiller is self-employed and a member of the Atlantic Union College Church, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Twentieth-Century Idols

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 96:5

An idol is an object of excessive devotion. Some of our idols are materialistic things such as money, cars, clothes, etc. Other people have human idols such as athletes, singers, or movie stars.

There is nothing wrong with having a strong interest in something or somebody. Our own interests are what make us unique individuals. It is when our interest becomes an obsession and competes with God for our time and loyalty that a problem arises.

I know a girl who idolizes Tom Cruise. If there is an article about him, she reads it; if a magazine portrays his picture, she has it; if his physique is printed on a poster, it adorns her wall. It's amazing how much she knows about him. My friend is not alone; most of us idolize someone.

Sometimes I have wondered what sort of world this would be if more people "idolized" Christ and took a great interest in learning everything they could about

Him. If we modeled our life like Christ's, this world would be a better place.

Although many people idolize Tom Cruise, he is not able to show special interest in each one. In contrast, the more we learn about Christ, the more we realize how much He cares for us individually. None of our worship to Him goes unnoticed.

If we spent time each day reading about Christ and were as interested in sharing Him with others as we are in sharing gossip, sports scores, and insignificant items, we would be prepared to meet Him a lot sooner.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10, NIV, we read, "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

REACT

1. What idols are standing between Christ and me?

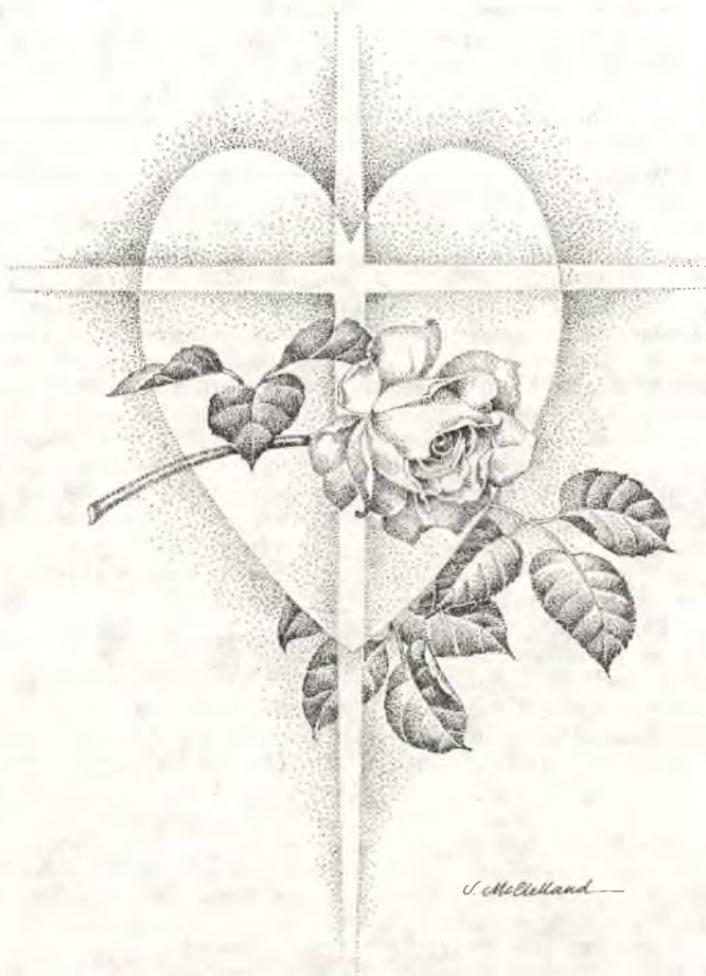
2. Am I going to let my idols stand in the way of my salvation?

by Suzanne Oddie

Suzanne Oddie is a senior accounting and business administration major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Lesson 5, July 28–August 4

The Importance of Sincere Motivation



“The appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. . . . We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:3, 4, NIV).

Why Preach?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 5:15

Before you read this, I will have completed two missionary trips, one as a short-term, and one as a task-force worker. The first one was to the Virgin Islands. The fact that the trip was to the tropics attracted some people that the "missionary elite" might have frowned at.

The second trip was to Arkansas as a task-force worker. My job was to serve as an assistant chaplain. I figured that by sitting out the school year, I could get caught up on my bill, plus get a scholarship. Wrong, wrong!

I had to do a major reworking on my motivation. Nothing went right for me as far as planning for the trip until I changed my reason for wanting to go. I realized that my reason had more to do with the story of Simon the sorcerer in Acts.

"When Simon saw that the spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'

"Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part . . . in this ministry, be-

cause your heart is not right before God' " (Acts 8:18-32, NIV).

People had questions about Paul's ministry. Paul replies that he was not "looking for praise . . . from you or anyone else" (1 Thess. 2:6, NIV). So again, if you are not looking for praise or any kind of gain, why do it?

One of my friends gets really excited about the L. A. Lakers. You rarely hear him talk about anything else, and it's hard to get him off the subject. Woe unto you if you should say something as dangerous and stupid as "I think Michael Jordan can play better than Magic Johnson." He will argue with you until he can't talk anymore (or until you can't listen anymore, whichever comes first). He gives his whole self to the praise and defense of the Lakers.

Magic Johnson has done absolutely nothing for my friend except given him a few happy moments watching a good game. Jesus did a lot for us. Jesus died for us. If Magic Johnson died for my friend, he would have an overwhelming reason to tell everyone what Mr. Johnson had done for him. Jesus *did* die for us. "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:15, NIV).

That should be enough motivation to preach the gospel.

by Herman C. Jamison II

Herman C. Jamison II is a double major in music and theology at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Monday, July 29

The Importance of Correct Motivation

LOGOS

1 Thess. 2:1-12

Throughout his ministry, Paul was relentlessly pursued by opponents who misconstrued his gospel and maligned his character. Behind 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, one catches a glimpse of his Thessalonian opponents and their charges. Let's examine Paul's response to them and try to deduce their slanderous accusations.

Possible Accusations That Were Brought Against Paul at Thessalonica.

In verses 1-2, Paul alludes to the suffering he and his companions experienced at Philippi and to their courage in declaring the gospel of God at Thessalonica "in the face of great opposition" (RSV). What was this opposition? Were they accused of being enemies of the state? In fact they were proclaiming that Jesus was Lord, and would this not have been treasonable from a Roman political perspective? (See Ralph P. Martin, *The New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], vol. 2, p. 159.) Were they accused of being criminals with police records, trying to escape justice? (See William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, The Daily Bible Study Series [Philadelphia: Westminster

Press, 1959], p. 219.)

The fact that Paul appeals to the Thessalonians' knowledge of his and his companions' suffering could indicate that some were suggesting that they had not informed the new believers of their troubles in Philippi. The mention of their fearless declaration of the gospel could also be to refute a charge of cowardice. Didn't they take flight when persecution began? This in itself is a cowardly suggestion. What do you think?

What charge do you see behind verses 3-4? Was it being suggested that their motives for preaching the gospel were impure? Do verses 5-6 imply that some were charging them with self-seeking and working for the praise of men? Furthermore, Paul's emphasis of the gentleness in their ministry could be answering a charge that they were rough, crude, coarse, and dictatorial.

In discussing the financial independence of their ministry at Thessalonica, Paul appeals to the memory of his converts. This adds credence to his defense. Surely, he is saying, you can recall how relentlessly we worked to sustain ourselves so we would not be a burden to you. Perhaps some were suggesting that he was in the ministry for financial gain or as a cloak for greed. Because several leading women in the community were converted, some may even have insinuated that he

by Bertram L. Melbourne

Bertram L. Melbourne is chairman of the Department of Religion at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

converted rich women to acquire their wealth and that he had stayed long enough in Thessalonica to achieve this cherished goal.

How should a Christian worker react when his reputation is attacked, his influence willfully destroyed, and his character maligned? What would be your response under such circumstances? Evaluate Paul's reaction. From Paul's response make a list of correct and incorrect motives for preaching the gospel.

Two Case Studies for Contemplation

Martina grew up in a Christian home and attended Christian schools. As she contemplated her career choices, she noted that teachers had an influential and respected position. She saw their role in helping to mould and shape young minds. She decided to become a teacher so she too could influence young people in decision making. What do you think of her career choice and its motivation?

Martin was fascinated by sports cars and had decided early to become a businessman, since businessmen drove sports cars. Despite the fact that his score on the spiritual gifts test indicated he had an aptitude for ministry and despite suggestions by his parents, teachers, and friends that he ought to seriously consider theology, he set his sails for business. He was fascinated by the American dream and had decided on business so that he could realize his goal of achieving his first million by age 25. Evaluate his career choice and its motivation. Is anything or anyone missing from his plans? What are your motives for your career choice?

Now compare and contrast these career choices and their motivation with the story in Acts

8:9-25. What can we learn from that experience?

Desirable and Undesirable Attributes of Church Employees

From my study of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, I have discovered the following attributes that should neither motivate nor be part of the repertoire of Christian representatives of God:

- currying favor (NEB)
- deception
- flattery
- greed
- selfishness
- working for men's praise
- guile
- men pleasing
- personal prestige
- selfish gain
- trickery

I also found the following desirable attributes.

- blameless conduct
- courage
- gentleness
- genuine affection
- selflessness
- empathy
- fatherliness
- determination
- honesty
- tenderness

Evaluate this list and make your own additions and subtractions.

Is it possible for a paid employee of the gospel to have conflicts of interest? Pastor Xlam worked in a conference where pastors received incentives for reaching their baptismal goals. That year's incentive was a trip to the Bible lands. A few days from year end as he did his final tabulations, he discovered he was two short of his goal, and also there were no candidates in his study class that were ready for baptism.

He remembered, however, that his sister who lived in an adjoining conference had two unbaptized children.

Should Pastor Xlam baptize his niece and nephew to reach his goal? If he did, would his motives be acceptable? What are the ethical implications here?

It seems to me that the best motives for proclaiming the gospel are:

1. Love for an awesome God who graciously saved us by dying on a cross.

2. Eagerness to share the best news in the world—news of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour—with those who don't know it and need to hear it.

3. Desire to assist others in living lives worthy of the One who has called us to share the splendor of His everlasting kingdom.

Nobody Will Know

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Cor. 10:31

Motives

1. *"It is an important duty for all to become familiar with the tenor of their conduct from day to day, and the motives which prompt their actions. They need to become acquainted with the particular motives which prompt particular actions. Every action of their lives is judged, not by the external appearance, but from the motive which dictates the action."*¹

This quotation came to mind the other day as I was writing in my spiritual journal. I asked myself, "Monica, what are you getting out of keeping this journal?" I came to the conclusion that I really wasn't getting too much out of it. Why? Because I didn't really want to; I was doing it to fulfill an assignment for one of my religion classes. I began to think, Are there other things I do in my Christian experience that I do because they are "required"?

2. *"Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God." Here is a principle which lies at the foundation of every act, thought, and motive; the consecration of the entire being, both physical and mental to the control of the Spirit of God.*²

"For your soul's sake, my brethren, have an eye single to the glory of God. Leave self out of

your thoughts as much as possible. We are nearing the close of time. Examine your motives in the light of eternity."³

3. *"All our works are passing in review before God. All our actions and the motives which prompted them, are to be open for the inspection of angels and God."*⁴

Keeping this in mind will keep us from thinking that if no one sees what we do, then it is OK to do it. This is a quotation I say to myself when friends are trying to convince me to do something by the old familiar lines of "You worry too much. Nobody'll know." Or, "Don't worry, the dean won't find out." Or, "Come on, I'm an Adventist too, and I'm doing it, so it can't be all that bad."

4. *"The heart in which love rules will not be filled with passion or revenge, by injuries which pride and self love would deem unbearable. Love is unsuspecting, ever placing the most favorable construction upon the motives and acts of others."*⁵

REACT

1. Why are motives just as important as the act itself?

2. What are some motives for witnessing?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 507 (italics supplied).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 84 (italics supplied).

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 97.

4. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 63 (italics supplied).

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 168, 169 (italics supplied).

by Monica Gabriella Johnson

Monica Gabriella Johnson is a sophomore psychology/education major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Wednesday, July 31

Why I Rejoice

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:14, 15

Let's assume that you have read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 by now. If not, let's stop here, pray for the Spirit to teach us, and then read. You may also want to look at 1 Corinthians 9:3-18 and 2 Corinthians 5:11-15.

This matter about motives in missions is quite straightforward. The passage in Thessalonians speaks out against impure motives, trickery, flattery, greed, and praise-seeking. All of these are quite common in our society, in our politics, and in almost every organization and institution. They are part of our fallen human nature.

However, Paul insisted that he, and by argument we, should be motivated by something very different. "Our message to you is true, our motives are pure, our conduct is absolutely aboveboard. We speak under the solemn sense of being entrusted by God with the gospel" (1 Thess. 2:3, 4, Phillips). Paul lived under the conviction that God had given him a message that he must proclaim. As he said, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16, NIV). In 2 Cor. 5:14 Paul indicated that it was his understanding of the good news that motivated him. "For Christ's love

compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (NIV). It appears that simple. The gospel and the change that it produces in our hearts provide the only holy and good motivation for Christian life and Christian mission.

The issues in the first few chapters of Thessalonians are ones that we struggle with; they are what we are about as Christians—the gospel, evangelism, the preaching of that gospel, missions, church growth. As I read these passages, I have the conviction that there is something we are missing. Somehow, the understanding and experience of the reality of the good news often evades us. Good methods and genuine motives both grow from the gospel message. It leads me to ask questions about my individual spiritual life and our corporate church life. Perhaps the most searching question would be, Have I grasped with my heart and mind the story of the sacrifice of Jesus, and has seeing the love showered on me produced such devotion that I must live for Him who died for me, and has it led me to remove every barrier and obstacle that I can share the story "free of charge"?

by David A. Dilli

David A. Dill, a recent graduate of Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland, is a youth pastor in the Chesapeake Conference.

Thursday, August 1

I'm Running for President

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 1:19-27, NIV

My fellow Americans, I have an announcement to make. In 2004, the first election year that I'll be eligible to run, I plan to seek the office of President of the United States.

I'm not running because of the substantial salary I'll receive, or because I'll receive thousands of dollars in pensions for what few years I live afterwards. I'm not campaigning because I want to live in the White House, be driven around in a big limousine, or get lots of media coverage.

So why am I running? In 2004, I am sure that, among other things, there will still be a deficit to resolve, social injustices to correct, and foreign relations to improve. I believe I have the vision to make policy that will turn this nation around. Don't forget to vote for me in 2004!

Dream on, Dave. But for the time being, let's return to the reality of today's text. We can clearly see through John the Baptist's actions his motivation to preach. Asked by the priests and Levites who he was, and why he was there, John replied, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" We see in the preceding passages that John did not seek prestige (claiming to be Elijah), power (he should have been preaching in downtown Jerusalem), or money (he wasn't friends

with the priestly purseholders). The wilderness preacher simply took joy in preparing the way for Someone greater.

So now that we've looked at my future political ambition and John's past preaching motivation, let's look at today's Christian. How can we be sure our motivation for witnessing is sincere?

1. *Put your motivation under a microscope.* Using the Bible as your guide, examine closely where your focus is when you witness. Do you seek to highlight yourself? Are you looking for power? Is getting praise your game? What kind of bucks are you in it for? Or, as Paul relates in this week's Scripture (1 Thess. 2:1-12), are you pointing to God, "encouraging, comforting, and urging" others to lead acceptable lives?

2. *Give up and begin again.* If you have been witnessing for the wrong reasons, let Christ forgive your past actions and allow Him to lead you on a new path. Keep your eye on Him alone, praying for His guidance.

3. *"Go therefore and preach [or teach, or chat with a friend]."* As long as this world lasts, there will be people out there to save. Keep your fire of faith alive . . . start another!

REACT

What are some warning signs that might indicate that our motivation to witness is wrong?

by David Potts

David Potts is a 1990 business administration graduate of Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Friday, August 2

The Gospel Watchdog Gets Bitten

OPINION

Key Text: John 13:35

"And they'll know we are Christians by our love." We've all sung the words. They belong to one of the most simple of Christian songs—simple, that is, to sing. At the same time it is perhaps one of the most difficult—difficult, that is, to live. The words of this song remind me of Christ's statement to His disciples in John 13:35: "All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (NIV). Just like the song, the message is clear and simple. But how difficult it often is to put it into practice!

Two years ago I began to understand the gospel more fully. Up to that point I had been legalistic and works-oriented in my understanding of salvation. It was a wonderful feeling finally to realize that my obedience added nothing to my salvation but was the loving and only appropriate response to the perfect work of Christ on the cross.

After learning the gospel, I made it my personal mission to be sure that everything said in sermons, lectures, and discussions was in line with the gospel. I was always ready to point out any statement or idea that I felt was inconsistent with the gospel. Quick to enter into "discussion" with those I felt needed enlightenment, I was unaware

that God was about to enlighten me.

After a sermon in which I felt that I had presented the gospel as clearly and convincingly as I could, I asked one of my professors to listen to a tape of it. A comment made by his five-year-old son opened my eyes to a dangerous blind spot in my life. At one point in the sermon he turned to his father and said, "Daddy, he's saying a lot of good things, isn't he? But he sounds like he's yelling at me."

God used that young child to show me that all too often my motive in sharing the gospel had not been love, but a desire to prove the person wrong and myself right. I came to the shocking realization that in my zeal to fight "Phariseeism" I had myself become a Pharisee—a Pharisee of the gospel. The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 came to my memory. Through these words I realized (and by the grace of God hope never to forget) that no matter how correct even our theology might be, if we don't love others, especially those who disagree with us, it means nothing.

REACT

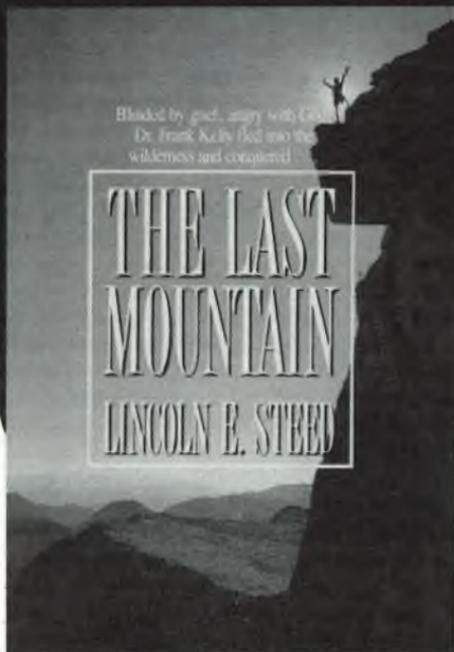
1. When discussing the gospel with others, are we more concerned with winning a point or winning a brother?

2. Am I living the gospel as much as I'm sharing it?

by John V. Normile

John V. Normile, a 1990 graduate of Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland, is an intern pastor in the Potomac Conference.

Can a person hide from God?



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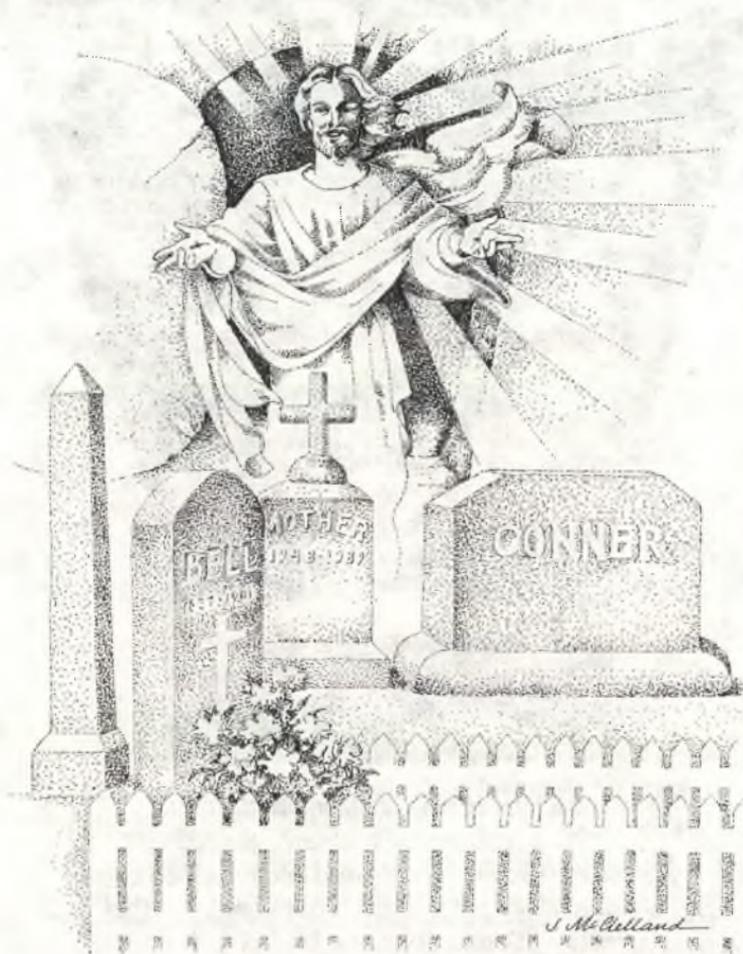
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Lesson 6, August 4-10

Death and the Delay



“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thess. 4:13, 14, NIV).

Know Him Who Makes It Come to Pass

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Thess. 4:13-18

Ralph Neall recounts in his book *How Long, O Lord?* how he and his academy roommate used to sit in their dormitory room during the year 1944 wondering how much longer the world could last. They were not sure if they could get through college, and the idea of marriage and family seemed impossible. Later Neall discovered that his father had similar thoughts during World War I. Neall writes that "four decades have passed since that day in the dormitory, and seven decades since my father's experience. Time has gone on much longer than we expected. While I still believe Jesus is coming soon, I am now wondering, How soon is soon? How near is near?"

Neall's concern is not new or unique. Many of us have experienced it at one time or another, and it crops up frequently throughout Christian history. It can involve either the time of the second coming or the events surrounding it. The Scripture passage we are studying this week touched upon the latter kind of problem, one that troubled the members of the church in Thessalonica.

Paul had previously instructed the believers there about the second coming, but in only three weeks he could not answer every

question or deal with every aspect of the teaching. Thus, either through misunderstanding or ignorance, several problems related to the return of Jesus began to trouble the Christian community. The one we will concentrate on this week concerns the fate of those who had died while waiting for the second advent.

Although it is not a question that worries many modern Christians, similar problems continue to trouble us, and the way that Paul dealt with it can help us as we struggle to understand the teaching of the second coming today. As we shall see, though the apostle does tell us more about how Jesus will return, the real key to resolving such questions is not always more knowledge about last-day events, but more understanding of the One who makes those events come to pass. Confidence in the second coming rests not on what will happen in the future, but on what Jesus has already done. The Thessalonians need not have worried about the fate of those who died looking forward to the return of Jesus because the fact that He has already, Himself, died and risen again, is the guarantee that the dead will be safe and taken care of.

*Ralph E. Neall, *How Long, O Lord?* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1988), pp. 7, 8.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, August 5

What About Those Who Died Waiting?

LOGOS

1 Thess. 4:13-18

Reading the epistles of Paul is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. We hear the answers but are not always sure of the questions. Such is the case with 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We can only partially reconstruct the issue that disturbed his readers.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul speaks of the danger of dishonoring the celebration of the communion service. He writes, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep" (verses 27-30, NIV). Sickness and even death here appear to be punishment for sin in the present lives of the believers. Leon Morris suggests that "in the light of 1 Cor. 11:30 it is possible that some of them thought of the deaths [of Thessalonian believers] as indicating that the deceased were under the wrath of God. If they were being punished for some sin it would be natural enough that they should miss the Parousia [the appearing or second coming of Jesus]. The converse, that miss-

ing the Parousia meant that they were punished for some sin, may well have seemed true also."¹ Did the fact that loved ones and friends had died mean that their lives had not been what they should have been?

Some have suggested that since Christ's followers realized that Jesus had already established His kingdom on earth, they assumed that one had to remain alive to participate in it, that death excluded one from it even if a person were a Christian.

More likely they assumed that their deceased loved ones and fellow believers would miss out of at least part of the full glory of Christ's return. They would rise later, but would miss out on participating in the great events of the Parousia itself.

Whatever the exact reason, the members of Thessalonica were discouraged and grieving. Paul first comforted them so that they could comfort one another. He did so by first removing some of the sting from death itself. He referred to it as "sleep." Although the pagans occasionally spoke of death as sleep, it was a sleep that one never woke up from.

Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers always carefully distinguish between the death of Christ and that of the believers. They use the Greek verb *koimao*, "to sleep" as well as "to die" to refer to the death of believers, but never to Christ Himself.²

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Christ died, but believers fall asleep. Only Jesus has suffered the full reality of death, what we often refer to as the second death.

“Christ in His death bore the wages of sin. He endured the worst that death can possibly be. Thereby He transformed the whole position for those who are in Him. It is because there was no mitigation of the horror of death for Him that there is no horror in death for His people. For them it is but sleep.”³

Because Jesus rose from the grave, we have the prospect of resurrection, and thus we only sleep. “The continuing life of his people depends on, and is indeed an extension of, his own risen life (see Rom. 8:11; John 14:19: ‘Because I live, you will live also’).”⁴

Paul assures the believers of Thessalonica that their dead loved ones would miss nothing. They would be raised before the living were caught up, so that both groups could join Christ together. Those who had died and those who were still alive would share equally in the joyous events of the second coming.

After assuring the members at Thessalonica that their loved ones would miss nothing, Paul then gives a brief description of what

all believers could look forward to. With a few quick strokes he paints a picture of Jesus’ return.

The second coming is a theophany far greater than even that of Sinai or the visions to the prophets. All believers will participate in it. Paul employs traditional biblical imagery to describe it. He was not interested in dwelling on its details. Surely the second coming will be even more spectacular than this terse description could possibly portray. That we can only speculate on. But we can be sure of one thing: God wants none of His children to miss anything. He loves us supremely, wants us to be forever in His presence, and Paul asks us to remind and encourage each other with that wondrous fact.

REACT

Are those living during the final events treated in any way differently from those who are asleep in Jesus? If not, why? But if they are, how?

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1. Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 136.
 2. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), p. 97.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Tuesday, August 6

Hardly Daring to Hope

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:16

The early Christians had a misunderstanding of the nature of God's kingdom and what Jesus planned to do. Each death and funeral eroded the joy from their eager anticipation of Jesus' return.

"As Paul's epistle was opened and read, great joy and consolation was brought to the church by the words revealing the true state of the dead. Paul showed that those living when Christ should come would not go to meet their Lord in advance of those who had fallen asleep in Jesus. The voice of the Archangel and the trump of God would reach the sleeping ones, and the dead in Christ should rise first, before the touch of immortality should be given to the living. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the

air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.'

"The hope and joy that this assurance brought to the young church at Thessalonica can scarcely be appreciated by us. They believed and cherished the letter sent to them by their father in the gospel, and their hearts went out in love to him. He had told them these things before; but at that time their minds were striving to grasp doctrines that seemed new and strange, and it was not surprising that the force of some points had not been vividly impressed on their minds. But they were hungering for truth, and Paul's epistle gave them new hope and strength, and a firmer faith in, and a deeper affection for, the One who through His death had brought life and immortality to light."

**The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 258, 259.*

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Wednesday, August 7

Against Such Things One Can Do Nothing

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:13

Approximately 1,800 years ago, a woman wrote to a couple of friends. Her letter on papyrus paper survived in the incredibly dry sands of Egypt. "Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I was as sorry and wept over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I did, and all mine. . . . But nevertheless against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort ye one another."*

This theme echoes through the ancient Greco-Roman world. The grave was a fearful thing where the dead somehow existed in a terrible isolation. The poet Catullus wrote, "The sun can set and rise again. / But once our brief light sets / There is one unending night to be slept through." Epitaphs declared, "I was not; I became; I am not; I care not." Theocritus said, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope." And Aeschylus summarized, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection."

About the same time as Irene wrote her letter, a Christian man named Aristides wrote to a friend, "And if any righteous man among them passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God;

and they escort the body as if he were setting out from one place to another near."

What made the difference?

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13, NIV), Paul declared to the discouraged Christians in the Thessalonian church. They had hope unlike the pagans who saw the grave as having no exit. Contrary to what Aeschylus said, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who sleep in him" (verse 14, NIV). Jesus' death had unlocked the door to the tomb. Death was not a one-way trip anymore. "Therefore encourage [comfort, RSV] each other with these words" (verse 18, NIV).

Both the unknown Irene and Paul told the recipients of their letters to comfort one another. Irene could only tell Taonnophris and Philo to try to make each other feel a little better because there was nothing else they could do. But Paul's request for the Thessalonians to comfort each other came from the joyous recognition that there was hope.

*Quoted by Leon Morris in *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), pp. 137, 138.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Thursday, August 8

A Person, Not a Doctrine

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:17

Twice Paul speaks of "we who are alive" (1 Thess. 4:15, 17). One has the distinct impression that the apostle sees himself and those to whom he is writing as still alive when Jesus returns. But his faith was not tied to an immediate second coming. It could cope with delay, could let Jesus come at His time and pace and not Paul's.

Adventists have been waiting for the return of our Saviour for over a century and a half now. It is easy to become discouraged and even bitter—if we do not have the faith that Paul had.

Paul could not wait to meet his Messiah face to face because of the wonderful encounter he had on the way to Damascus. There he had not met a doctrine, a body of knowledge, but an awe-inspiring, overwhelming Person. He had come to know the risen and glorified Christ more and more intimately, which only intensified his desire to be with Him. Paul's faith was not in a date or a particular scenario, but in Jesus Himself.

Perhaps we can derive some principles that will help us to have a faith like that of Paul.

1. *Jesus' promise to return is absolute and unconditional.* It may be delayed, but it will never be canceled because it is based on who Jesus Himself is.

2. *Our understanding of anything is always partial—and that includes all the details of His promise to return.* With the aid of the Holy Spirit our understanding will always be growing, but since we are finite creatures it must be incomplete.

3. *Seeming delay does not invalidate Jesus' promise to return.* We must ask for the Lord's help to be ready both to die at any moment and to live a full span of years. Christianity is not just an emergency or escape device.

4. *God longs to return even more than we could ever want Him to come.* Thus we can safely leave the advent up to Him.

5. *If time should last longer than our own lives, we can comfort ourselves that we do not just rest in the grave—we sleep "in Jesus."* Paul comforted the members of the church at Thessalonica that they would be reunited with their dead loved ones. Because of Jesus, it is absolutely sure.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Not to Gratify Our Curiosity

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:18

World War I raged across Europe and spilled into the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire. Some Seventh-day Adventist evangelists saw the King of the North about to begin the battle of Armageddon. They preached their hearts out that Christ was about to return. Then the two armies met, and Jesus did not return.

Sunday laws were stirring in the land, and Alonzo T. Jones, Adventist champion of religious liberty, believed that the second coming was imminent. Disobey the Sunday laws, Jones urged church members. Force the passage of the death decree. Jesus' coming was on the horizon. But the Sunday law movement gradually faded away instead.

What happened in these and other incidents we could mention? God's people ran ahead of what God had revealed. They jumped to conclusions. We must be careful in our prophetic scenarios that we do not run ahead of God's Word. We will never know beforehand all that will happen, but we can know the God and Saviour who is bringing last-day events to pass. What Scripture and Ellen

White reveal of His love and mercy will give us clues to what He might or might not do.

The Thessalonians wondered what would happen to their loved ones. But as they thought of the Source of Life, who had resurrected Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain, and the daughter of Jairus, they need not have worried.

We, too, have unanswered questions and concerns about what will happen to us in the last days, but we need not worry. The absolute certainty of Christ's resurrection guarantees our resurrection if we should be sleeping in Him when He returns.

REACT

1. Think of some of the last-day scenarios that you have recently heard proposed. From what you know of the way God relates to His children, do you consider them plausible? Why, or why not?

2. Considering how Jesus treated people during His lifetime on earth, how do you think He will care for His people before He returns?

*See George R. Knight, *Angry Saints* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1989), pp. 16-18, 116-124.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *Winner* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Lesson 7, August 11-17

When Jesus Returns



“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17, NIV).

Ultimate Reunion

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 3:2, 3

Beginning to regain consciousness, I felt that I was moving in darkness and silence. I did not know in what direction I was moving or where my final destination would be, but I knew that I was being propelled by some force. Soon, I sensed my body turning to the left, then to the right, then slowly to a halt.

Then I heard faint sounds of conversations nearby. With a little effort I partially opened my eyes and saw the ceiling and the top of a large double doorway. Then I was moving again—over the threshold and into another room. In a flash, I realized a deep pain across my abdomen. The anesthesia was fading. I recognized my sixth-floor hospital room. I felt the bandages and staples that protected a large cut. My surgery was over!

Gently, the hospital assistants lifted me from the gurney to my bed. I could now discern the whispering voices of family and friends. From the corner of my eye, I noticed, close by my bedside, an unexpected friend from my workplace. He reached out and held my hand for a moment. Reassured, I closed my eyes. Now I could rest.

I did not attempt to give advance thought to all the possible outcomes of my surgery. I had hope. Not a worried, time-setting anticipation, but a confident hope. Hope that God would rescue me from trial *in His time*, without worrying about what I wanted now *in my time*. And when my friend grasped my hand, I forgot my pain for a moment.

Today, Christ lives in our hearts through faith “through his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16, RSV). But this great gift of His Spirit from heaven was not intended to be the ultimate reunion of God and mankind. Paul affirms that “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17, RSV).

Yes, we will be “face to face” with Jesus (1 Cor. 13:12, RSV). Then, very much like my friend who grasped my hand to assure me, our greatest Friend will grasp us in His arms, and we will forget all our past trials and find rest forever. “Comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18, RSV).

by Mark C. Hamilton

Mark C. Hamilton coordinates the tutorial services in the counseling center at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Monday, August 12

The Second Advent

LOGOS

1 Thess. 4:13-18

From the beginning of the Christian movement, nearly every generation of preachers and teachers has proclaimed the immediate return of our Lord Jesus. That Christ has not come at the expected time should inspire us to rethink the doctrine, not in terms of its truthfulness, but rather in terms of the way in which we as heralds of the second advent present it.

The second advent teaching is often used by pastors and teachers, who really should know better, to frighten people, to increase their guilt, or to force a decision from them. Fear very seldom leads to true repentance. When the Advent does not occur when it is expected, those who accepted Christ because of fear usually do not stay in the church. It is the "goodness of God that leads us to repentance," not fear. Therefore, the second coming of Jesus should represent a happy thought, not a frightening one, and should bring a smile on one's face, not terror. And the reason is obvious: It is our going home together, a splendidly heartwarming thought, with Someone we know.

In order to look forward with enthusiasm rather than with fear to the second advent and yet not use the teaching as an escape mechanism from our problems, we really need to understand first the gospel message. The second advent is a necessary climax to the good news

which the cross of Christ epitomizes. You and I are of infinite worth and value, so much so that God hung on a cross for all to know and to remember. We are all sinners, yet our worth from God's viewpoint is never predicated on our behavior. Otherwise, God would not even be as loving as some of the finest human parents, who have the capacity to love and accept their children not because they perform in acceptable ways but because they simply are their children. We seem to constantly overlook the fact that "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). It would seem, then, that since we are loved and accepted by God, we need never fear a God who loves us and considers us of such worth and value.

Thus the second advent represents that moment in our history when we can finally reach out and touch the One who loves us unconditionally. Of what, then, is there to be afraid?

The real problem seems to focus on the question of being ready. Since the teaching of the second advent is sometimes used to frighten people into making a decision for God, the very words "Are you ready?" are used in both song and sermon to keep us in a state of fear. If God loves all mankind and accepts those who come to Him in response to His call, why do we tremble so? The good news is that Jesus comes back to claim His own; those who believe, as Jesus said, that "God so loved the world." When you believe that

by Madelynn Haldeman

Madelynn Haldeman is professor of New Testament theology at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Mother and Dad really love and accept you, you look forward to going home. It's when you feel you cannot ever please them by your behavior that you dread going home.

The second coming is Jesus' promise that we all will get to come home together to be with those who love us so very much.

A look at some biblical texts helps us to understand this concept of joy and delight as well as the surety of the second coming.

Probably one of my favorite chapters is John 14, in which we are told that God, like our parents, is involved in some preparation for our coming. That God is eagerly looking forward to our coming is often overlooked. God is as anxious to be with us as we are to be with Him. Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 that "we all" shall have a homecoming, and that means that our sisters and brothers who died will get to go home too. What a precious and exciting thought!

Matthew records that we can count on going home because there will be heavenly signs that will occur just before the advent, much like your writing or calling home to give your parents the good news that you are coming.

Except, in this analogy, God is writing the letter. This good news from God about the second advent will be a message to the whole world. Everyone is invited, so everyone will know.

In the meantime, the fact that you have been born into God's family of love and acceptance lets you know there is still a homecoming, so you will be most happy when the message through nature arrives telling us the time is now. We will not cry, but rejoice. We will wait with outstretched arms for this God who loves us so very much.

So then, in some sense, the song we sing about heaven being our home is true in the same way that we always call our parents' home "our home," even though we have our own home away from their home. Home is a metaphor for the parents who birthed us. Thus, when we are born into God's family, we do indeed want to go home. We live in this world without fear and dread because we are always in touch with our heavenly parent. And whenever the telephone rings to inquire, "Aren't you going to come home soon? I have everything ready and waiting for you," you and I will joyfully reply, "There is nothing that could stop us."

Tuesday, August 13

Second Thoughts About the Second Coming

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Gal. 6:9

I was a bit amazed and perplexed recently when I experienced a very strong and persistent conviction that I was to change my topic before speaking to a camp-meeting youth group. The conviction was not a welcome one, for I was being impressed to talk on the subject of the second coming and the Holy Spirit, not exactly a "barn burner" for most youth groups.

What made things even worse was that a long-time academy and college friend was making a special trip to come hear me speak. This was the same friend who sat with me through who knows how many meetings, where speakers bombarded us with emotional warnings and appeals concerning Christ's imminent coming. This was the same friend who had heard me swear that I would never be guilty of preaching such sermons if I entered the ministry. A promise that I had faithfully fulfilled up to this point in my life. Not because I don't believe in the second coming (a recent survey of the leading seminaries in the U.S. revealed that 99 percent of the seminarians did not believe in a literal second coming¹), but because my generation of Adventist ministers tends to be quite "gun-shy" about "crying wolf" with regard to the second coming.

But according to Ellen White, this present apathy and caution concerning the second coming is not unique to our generation or even to our century. More than 100 years ago she wrote: "Notwithstanding that the signs of the times are fulfilling all over the world, faith in the Lord's coming has been growing feeble. Clear, distinct, certain, the warnings are to be given. . . . It will not do for us to float along with the current, guided by tradition and presumptuous fallacies. . . . There is no time to spend in controversy. Those who have a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus must now become one in heart and purpose. The members of the church must work unitedly under the great Head of the church."²

Notice the implications of what she is saying: (1) It is God's intention that we live in a state of expectation concerning the coming. (2) We are to resist the "My Lord delayeth His coming" mentality. (3) We are to avoid being controlled by conformity or tradition—God wants radical faith. (4) We need to be unified in Christ and to avoid trivial controversies. (5) We need to restore the headship of Christ in the church so the Spirit can speak.

By the way, I did preach on the Holy Spirit and the second coming, and I was surprised by the positive response. However, after the service my friend did ask the inevitable question,

by Steven Daily

Steven Daily is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Aren't you afraid that you are going to be guilty of crying wolf like all the previous generations have done?

I think the Holy Spirit impressed me with this answer: If I do preach the second coming without experiencing it before death, I will be in good company—Jesus, Paul, Luther, Wesley, Miller, H. M. S. Richards, Sr., etc., but I would sure hate to be part of that

last generation of preachers who refused to preach out of doubt, only to have to answer directly to the Big Boss Himself when He decides to make the scene. Put that way, it's not really much of a choice.

1. Study quoted in Chuck Swindoll, *Come Before Winter* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1985), p. 113, small paper edition.

2. *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 93.

Wednesday, August 14

No More Fear

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 2:24

In John 3:13 (RSV), Jesus said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Jesus seems to be saying that eternal matters will be readily believed and understood only when one has become a member of God's family.

Trying to prove the nearness of the second advent is really an "earthly" way to treat the subject. We should share the good news of the second coming because we want others to know the security and joy of being loved and accepted by a God who desires to have them come home. It seems, therefore, that the teaching of the second advent should always be preceded by the teaching of God's love and grace.

As a young girl growing up in a community of relatively few Adventists, and often feeling somewhat persecuted by the so-called "heathen," my childish mind wanted Christ to come right away so that I would be declared "right" in my religious teachings, and they clearly would be declared "wrong." I did not really care about them but about the rightness of my teaching. It was somewhat like saying, All right, God, You just show them.

As I grew older and began to

understand that God's love for humanity is not granted on the basis of our behavior but entirely on God's character, my immature hope for the second advent developed into a desire for all to know that God loves them and wants all to come home. Just as surely as we know we have been born into God's family, we can be sure that Jesus will return again. Just as surely as we know that God loves us, we can be sure that God wants us to come home.

What we do not know is "when." And, frankly, that is probably for the best. Instead of getting to know God and enjoying being a part of His family in the present, we might pretend to belong because we are afraid of the changes Christ's coming might bring and our lives would be empty and unfulfilling. What we need to know is that we will go home, and that knowledge is ours because we believe in a God of love.

When you drive home to Dad's house in the winter in New England, no blizzard can really keep you from eventually getting there. So, let us have "good dreams and good thoughts" about the second advent. First Thessalonians 4:13 suggests that we are to comfort one another with the words of the second coming. Perhaps we should start practicing comforting one another instead of frightening one another. I intend to go home, don't you?

by Madelynn Haldeman

Madelynn Haldeman is professor of New Testament theology at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Blessed Hope—Good News or Bad News?

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Peter 3:9

"Someone will enter the pearly gates. Shall you? Shall I?" I can remember thinking with terror that it probably wouldn't be me. I was haunted by songs like "Are You Ready for Jesus to Come?" and "The Lord Is Coming, Are You Ready?"

The "blessed hope" seemed more like bad news than good news. However, as the years passed and there was no sign of Jesus, I grew cynical.

Now I am older and wiser, but it is still easy to doubt. However, here are some suggestions that have helped me keep the "blessed hope" truly "blessed."

1. *Ask God to help you see the meaning of "soon" through God's eyes.* As I reread 2 Peter 3:9, "the Lord is not slow about his promise . . . but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish" (RSV), I was suddenly touched by God's grace and truly grateful that God was willing to give us time to work things out. Seeing "soon" through God's eyes made me much more able to accept God's timing and to trust God to be a compassionate judge of "readiness."

2. *Analyze how much your focus on Jesus' second coming has*

caused you to ignore your ethical responsibility in dealing with present concerns. I had relied on "soon" as a cop-out from really living in the here and now.

3. *Spend time thinking of all the loved ones you have lost in death and imagine how wonderful it will be to see them again.* As I spent time concentrating on how each would look, what I would say in that glad reunion, and listening to their responses to me, the resurrection became a precious reality.

4. *Try to shift from "if" to "when" thinking, focusing on the reality of salvation instead of insecurities about it.* By focusing on what I would say to Jesus when we meet face to face, I was delivered from the terror of not being ready.

5. *Ask the senior citizens in your church how they have handled the delay of Jesus' second coming.* I was often touched and inspired by the richness and depth of faith of older people who had waited for Jesus to come many more years than I had. I was especially moved by how much the resurrection seemed to mean to them. Perhaps that is what Paul meant when he said, "Comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18, RSV).

by Fay Blix

Fay Blix is an attorney in Orange County, California, whose practice emphasizes the legal concerns of senior citizens.

Friday, August 16

Christ's Second Coming: Dream or Nightmare?

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:16, 17

As a youngster in the kindergarten division of Sabbath School, I would quite often daydream while the teacher used a felt board to illustrate the morning's story. I dreamed about Christ's second advent, and I imagined the frightening events that would precede Christ's coming. Often nightmares would result from my reflections on Christ's coming. The seven last plagues, living without a mediator, the close of probation, and so forth—all of these things are scary to youngsters, and I was no exception.

But when I thought of heaven, my experience was quite different. Feelings of euphoria and playful glee would envelop me, and it was as if I were in Disneyland. My imagination soared. I wondered how big the grapes would be. (Would they be as big as watermelons?) I wondered what it would be like to have wings like birds and to fly through the air. (Would my wings assist my flights through the semi-vacuum of intergalactic space?)

Today my conceptions of the second coming and heaven differ from what they were. I no longer tremble at the thought of the second coming, and the point of heaven is, for me, no longer the endless pursuit of personal pleasure. Yet both continue to have

an important place in my religious experience. Their meaning for my life may have changed, but their significance for my life has not diminished at all.

The second coming is not something to prepare for with a trembling and fearful heart. It is something we are to pray and hope for.

The second coming will be a time of celebration, for it will be the long-awaited reunion with our Creator and Saviour.

The second coming will be a time when we will literally come face to face with the One who loves us more than anyone else loves us. And, likewise, heaven will be characterized not by the personal pursuit of pleasure, but the selfless giving of ourselves.

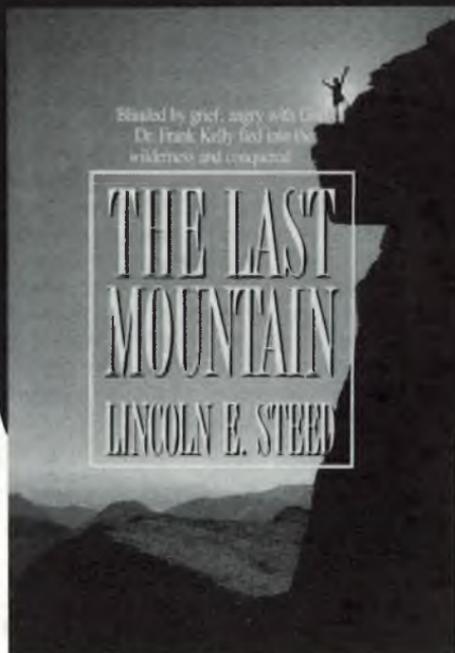
As members of the faithful, Christ's followers will not be relieved of their responsibilities as stewards; rather, they will be granted even greater opportunities to serve. The commandment to love one's neighbor will not be rescinded at the second coming; it will continue to be a requirement of God's children. The difference will be that we will at that time be able to perfectly keep that most important of all divine injunctions.

This, then, is what the second coming is all about—not fear, but joy. And heaven will be a land of pure delight, where we will forever express our love to God by loving one another.

by David A. Pendleton

David A. Pendleton is an alumnus of Loma Linda University, currently a student at the University of Southern California Law School.

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Lesson 8, August 18-24

Midnight Heist



“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. . . . But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief” (1 Thess. 5:1, 2, 4, NIV).

Sunday, August 18

It Couldn't Be Me!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Cor. 10:12

"It couldn't be me! It couldn't be me!" The terrified, almost plaintive words resounded through the darkened bedroom as the sleeping boy churned feverishly about, flinging aside his blanket and thrashing the air with his arms and legs. Sweat glazed his body, and his breath came in staccato gulps and hisses.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright and stared wildly into the ceiling, as if expecting to find the source of his trauma there. Finding nothing, he flicked on his bedside lamp. His eyes swept the room, revealing familiar objects: his bureau, crammed with Conflict of the Ages books, *Testimonies for the Church*, Susan's smiling photo, and other articles. Beneath a picture of Christ knocking for admittance into the United Nations, a basketball lay innocently on the floor. In fact, the entire house seemed wrapped in security.

But it simply couldn't be.

The dream had just not gone according to his script. When things really heated up on earth, he was not going to pull a Peter number. Whatever the obstacles, he was going to witness and live for the Saviour he had followed for the nine years since Elder Williams had baptized him as a trusting nine-year-old. God was going to use him to save his grandparents, his buddies, and

Sue of the mischievous smile and stubborn will.

But the dream, the nightmare, said differently.

He remembered a scene of great excitement. People were shouting and jabbering and shoving and laughing. Television crews were everywhere. And then he saw Him, flanked by what seemed to be dotting leaders, churchmen, and presidents.

"Jesus," someone shouted, "You've really come!"

And there were lots of hallelujahs and amens and praise-Gods. Looking benevolently over the adoring multitude, Jesus encompassed them in a gesture of embrace, saying, "My children, I've come to bring the age of peace and prosperity."

All over the throng, cries erupted. "I can see again!" "Hallelujah, I can walk!" "Thank You, Jesus, my baby is healed!" "My pains are gone!"

Then he saw himself pushing a path through the people. Jesus was looking at him with those eyes of compassion and understanding. Something magnetic seemed to be drawing him. He fell prostrate before those feet so like fine brass, affirming, "My Lord and my God!"

And then everything was black.

"It couldn't be me," the now wide-awake Tim pondered. Didn't he know the signs of Christ's coming? Could *he* be deceived? No, it couldn't be him.

Or could it . . . ?

by Derek C. Bowe

Derek C. Bowe is an English teacher at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Monday, August 19

Before He Comes

LOGOS

1 Thess. 5:1; 2 Thess. 2:5

The Second Coming as a Commonality Among the Believing Thessalonian Community

Thessalonian believers were growing old. They and their young were dying, and the Lord had not come. Paul attempts to clear up the problem in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

Assuming that this was accomplished, he exhorts the Thessalonians in verses 13-17 as a source of encouragement. And he warms their hearts by introducing 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 as a deftly sculpted, uncomplicated fireside chat.

The Source and Value of the Information Paul Gives on the Second Coming

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1, 2, Paul's "You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (NIV) echoes 4:9, where he tells the Thessalonians: "About brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other" (NIV). So also in 5:1, 2, they have no need because God has taught them concerning the coming of the Lord. Accordingly, the day of the Lord will not come upon them as a thief in the night. They are sons of the light and sons of the day (see verses 3-5).

The interlude ends on a note of praise in 5:11. Praise at this point

is the presupposition that the challenge has been accepted. This is a strategy. His imperative challenges: "What you are doing should be done. Continue doing it."

Correcting Misconceptions Concerning the Second Coming

The day of the Lord had not come. Paul makes this clear in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. The Lord will come, but not until a religiously oriented power attempts to falsify His coming. The only defense against the imposter is a functional knowledge of truth. God has taught the Thessalonians particular truth through Paul. Paul summarizes this truth in verses 1-12, and in verse five of the passage admonishes them to bring it up from their memory bank at all times.

Second Thessalonians 2:1-12 is an apocalyptic message; it is different from the other literary styles the apostle uses in his letter writing. Apocalyptic is a genre of eschatological literature that focuses on a cosmic struggle between a god of good and a god of evil. Its intention is to show that the path of evil is doomed to failure, and to point out a new and better way. Its message, while apparently mysterious, is a known quantity to those who are among the initiated.

As stated earlier, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 addresses a problem which developed because some of the people misread 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and were teach-

by James H. Melancon

James H. Melancon is a professor in the department of religion and theology at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

ing that the Lord had already come. Letters, purportedly from Paul or others of the apostles, had been circulated; letters claiming that the Lord had come. Paul counsels them not to allow any person to even begin to deceive them in this matter.

Then in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 2, he outlines certain unimpeachable events that must transpire before the Lord's coming. The day of the Lord shall not come until the rebellion comes and precipitates the revelation of the man of lawlessness (called "the son of destruction" in verse 3), who sits in God's temple proclaiming that he is God (see verse 4).

A Viable Approach to Understanding the Symbols of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

That the apocalyptic drama did not culminate in Paul's day is evident in verse 8, which informs that the Lord [Jesus] will slay the lawless one with the breath of His mouth and will bring him to a howling end (see Ezek. 28:19) by His coming. This has not happened, and therefore is assigned a prophetic, or last-day significance.

From Paul's conclusion, which he reached in verse 7, we learned that before the Lord's Parousia, the one who is restraining the lawless one is to be removed so that the lawless one may be revealed in a colossal falsification of the Lord's Parousia, or coming. This is the great counterfeit second coming.

The believers are to be confronted by two parousias: first the parousia of the lawless one (see

verse 9), which ushers in the Parousia of the Lord, which in effect destroys the lawless one. The brightness and presence of the Lord's Parousia will take away the life of the lawless one. At the same time, those who chose to embrace a lie rather than the truth are evidently destroyed by the Parousia that destroys the lawless one (see Rev. 6:15-17).

By a quantum leap of faith we can see the drama reaching its conclusion in our day, ourselves being principals in the drama. Jesus is away in heaven awaiting the moment for His return. We are here on earth awaiting that same moment. But the moment will not come until the restraining power and the restrainer who is wielding it departs out of the midst so that the lawless one can be revealed in a massive but failed *coup d'etat*. In this moment both the Lord and the end will come!

Toward a Functional Conclusion: Where Do We Fit Into the Drama?

We are here as God-ordained consignees of the ministry of reconciliation. We have that ministry on consignment (see 2 Cor. 5:18-20). Perhaps the message of the three angels which we are proclaiming—the gospel of God and His Son—holds back the winds of strife and the great lawless one until the last soul is sealed.

Remember? "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14, RSV).

Tuesday, August 20

Discerning the Signs

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Thess. 2:3, 4

"The apostle Paul warned the church not to look for the coming of Christ in his day. . . . Not till after the great apostasy, and the long period of the reign of the 'man of sin,' can we look for the advent of our Lord. The 'man of sin,' which is also styled 'the mystery of iniquity,' 'the son of perdition,' and 'that wicked,' represents the papacy, which, as foretold in prophecy, was to maintain its supremacy for 1,260 years. This period ended in 1798. The coming of Christ could not take place before that time."¹

Therefore, it was after the great "apostasy" or "a falling away first" that the message of Christ's soon return began to gain momentum. With such background, Ellen White wrote, "We are standing upon the threshold of great and solemn events. Prophecies are fulfilling. Strange, eventful history is being recorded in the books of heaven. Everything in our world is in agitation. There are wars and rumors of wars. The nations are angry. . . . Events are changing to bring about the day of God, which hasteth greatly. Only a moment of time, as it were, yet remains."²

The signs of His imminent return were given so that we can be ready and escape the destruction of the world. This fact is echoed in the following lines: "Let men be-

ware lest they neglect the lesson conveyed to them in the words of Christ. As He warned His disciples of Jerusalem's destruction, giving them a sign of the approaching ruin that they might make their escape; so He has warned the world of the day of final destruction and has given them tokens of its approach, that all who will may flee from the wrath to come. Jesus declares, 'There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations.' . . . Those who behold these harbingers of His coming are to 'know that it is near, even at the doors.' . . . 'Watch ye therefore,' are His words of admonition. . . . They that heed the warning shall not be left in darkness, that that day should overtake them unawares. But to them that will not watch, 'the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.'"³

REACT

1. In the pursuit of your personal goals, coupled with the routine of daily living, how can you as a Christian prevent them from clouding your vision of Christ's imminent return?

2. What are some of the ways we can "make ready" for the return of Christ?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 356.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 14.

3. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 37, 38.

by Morris Iheanacho

Morris Iheanacho is the catalog librarian at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Second Advent: Signs

EVIDENCE

**Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:1-11;
2 Thess. 2:1-12**

After Paul was released from prison at Philippi, he and his companions, Silas and Timothy, went to Thessalonica. In spite of opposition, they founded a church there. The unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica and Berea, filled with jealousy and hatred, forced Paul to flee to Athens. Silas and Timothy, who remained in Berea buttressing the church, later joined Paul at Athens. On receiving the news that the gospel was favorably accepted, Paul wrote the Thessalonians to encourage the brethren in the faith.

While at Thessalonica, Paul taught about the life, death, resurrection, and return of Christ. Paul was greatly concerned with the misinterpretation of the Thessalonians regarding Christ's imminent return.

Paul's second letter was in response to the belief that the hardship and persecution suffered by the Thessalonian believers were signs that the day of the Lord had already come. Paul categorically denied this, explaining that the day of the Lord would be preceded by definite signs: apostasy, rebellion, and a revelation of the antichrist, the man of lawlessness.

Wars and rumors of wars, nation rising up against nation,

famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are all signs of the time of the end. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven" (Matt. 24:29, 30).

Paul encourages the Thessalonians to be constantly vigilant and always ready and watchful for Christ's appearing.

The coming of Christ like a "thief in the night" emphasizes the unexpectedness of the event. Paul distinguishes between believers and unbelievers, admonishing the believers that they were not separated spiritually from God as were unbelievers. Being in the source of light, they would be morally and spiritually awake to usher in Christ's soon return. The emphasis here is not on the secrecy of His coming, but on the unexpectedness of His coming.

Christians cannot afford to fall asleep. They need to watch with an attitude of expectancy. The night, characterized by drunkenness, sleepiness, and lack of physical and mental awareness, increases the need for constant readiness, a hallmark of Christian behavior.

REACT

Can one watch for Christ's coming without being ready?

by John A. Blake

John A. Blake is chairman of the department of mathematics and physics at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Thursday, August 22

Breakers on the Shore of Time

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:3

"While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3, NIV).

We were told that the final movements will be rapid, and now, no one on earth can keep up with the changes that are taking place. The critical question, then, is: Are you very certain that you are interpreting the signs aright?

There we were, the pilot and I, standing on the bow of the *Captain Roberts*. The ship plowed its way through the inky darkness. Suddenly the pilot shouted to the captain: "Time to cast anchor; we are nearing land."

"Nearing land!" I retorted. "I can hardly see my hand. How do you know we are nearing land?"

"Mister, the breakers tell that the shore is near." I stood where he stood. I heard the waves breaking on the shore, but failed to discern their message.

In spite of the fact that the second coming of Christ is mentioned some 300 times in the Scriptures, our text warns that many will be caught unprepared. How, then, do we avert the destruction that will soon overwhelm the world?

1. *Respond to God's call today.*

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Ps. 95:7, 8; Heb. 3:7, 8, NIV). Come to Him just as you are, and He will supply all the power that you need to live righteously (see John 1:12). How encouraging are the following words: "Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Savior."¹

2. *Study God's Word daily (see Acts 17:11).* "Why is it that our youth, and even those of more mature years, are so easily led into temptation and sin? It is because the Bible is not studied and meditated upon as it should be. If it were made the daily study, there would be an inward rectitude, a strength of spirit, that would resist the temptations of the enemy."²

3. *Follow the prayer example of Jesus.* "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35).

4. *Whatever your work may be, dedicate your service to God and man.* Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.

2. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 442.

by Clarence Barnes

Clarence Barnes is a history professor at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Perceptions of the Second Coming

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:3

Growing up Adventist leaves some memories unlike those of non-Adventists. How many remember as children scanning the clouds for just one cloud the “size of a hand,” and worrying that they were not good enough to be included?

Ignoring the “thief in the night” metaphor Christ gave, the believer can become overwhelmed with the thought that he has read the signs correctly and knows with certainty that Christ is coming within, at most, a five-year period, about as far into the future as most people can realistically plan. Many of the Thessalonians felt this same way a few years after Christ’s death. Paul reminded them, as he reminds us, that we must not become so preoccupied by time-setting that we forget our daily responsibilities and witness.

I remember well my own five-year projections made 30 to 40 years ago. When believers yield to speculations, feeling that they have some special knowledge based on the sincerity of their convictions, they establish themselves as candidates for the second widely held belief—the belief that there is no second coming.

Several major problems arise for believers who become obsessed

with nearness projections. Initially, such people fail, as the Thessalonians did, to attend to the often-difficult and frustrating work that Christians must accomplish where God has placed them in this world. This work must be done before the second coming, although it seems unimportant to such Christians. But when the five-year periods have all gone by, and Christ has not come, then doubt comes in big doses to these believers who have neither done their full measure of Christian duty nor spiritually bolstered themselves against doubt.

The second problem, doubt, then often sets firmly into such a person’s mind and rapidly changes to disbelief. Disbelief tells the former believer that there is no need to be about Christ’s work in this world because there is no heaven and no second coming. He has arrived at this point by being more concerned about gaining a reward for himself than living a Christian life as a witness to the people of this earth. With his reward now evaporated, in his thinking, what is the point of further striving or believing?

We must strive in whatever time remains before the Lord’s return to teach and to live the principles that Christ taught and lived, touching and changing people with His love. God will take care of the second coming in His time, not in ours.

by Larry Hasse

Larry Hasse is a history professor at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 9, August 25-31

“Stand Firm”



“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15, NIV).

Sunday, August 25

Slugging Away

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Thess. 2:16, 17

In this week's lesson, Paul basically seems to be saying, "Keep your chin up, remember the things that I taught you, and don't forget what we're doing here. You have almost won it!"

I can't help but think of a boxer sitting in the corner, tired, tattered, and torn from the grueling fight. He has taken a beating so far; his eyes are swollen, black and blue. His arms are aching for rest, and his body is responding to his commands about as well as a wet rag. He is almost finished.

Have you ever been in the place of that weary boxer, wondering if you will finish before the fight does? Has Satan been throwing some tough punches in your life? Ever felt like throwing in the towel? Maybe this "Christian" thing just isn't worth the beating you're receiving. Maybe those temptations are too enticing and the road to righteousness too arduous.

Your friends want to go dancing Friday night. You know you shouldn't. Friends are challenging your beliefs, almost in a mocking way, and it seems easier just to let it go, or even give in, than to "stand firm." There's that test in chemistry that you didn't study for; if you could only take a little

help with you during the test; but that would be cheating. The pummeling reality of our lives makes the fictional pounding of Rocky seem paltry.

Those of us fighting this brawny reality need encouragement. We need all the help we can get! It's tough to fight against the standards of society and still be at ease with life. But we have some encouragement, and that is the prize that we are fighting for.

The prize isn't off in the never-never land, millenniums away—it has been given to us already. We are not fighting for a prize; rather, we are fighting to keep the prize. We are the defending champions through Jesus Christ, who won the "title belt" a long time ago. Now the champion is in our corner, on our side, coaching us on how to keep this prize of unconditional love, acceptance, and peace that transcends all understanding. He is in your corner rooting, counseling, and encouraging you on how to overcome the challenger and retain the prize. He is on your side.

"May our Lord and Champion Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement, good hope, and the 'Title Belt,' encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (2 Thess. 2:16, 17, adapted for emphasis).

by James A. Holland

James A. Holland is a theology major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Monday, August 26

Standing Firm as Christians

LOGOS

2 Thess. 2:13-3:5

Three times in our Scripture lesson Paul uses words that are derived from the same basic Greek stem, *STA*. We have this same root in English as may be noted when comparing the following words: *stand*, *understand*, *stable*, *establish*, and *constant*, to name only a few. In 2:15, after presenting the reasons for his prayers of thanksgiving, he concludes with the charge or command, "So then, brethren, stand firm." His benediction in verses 16, 17 includes the prayer that God would "establish them in every good work and word." The same word appears in 3:3, where Paul encourages his readers with the assurance that "the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen [establish] you and guard you from evil." The root meaning of this word stem is "to stand" or "to be set." The idea is being upright, steadfast, in place and immovable.

Paul's emphasis is clearly a call to the church to *stand firm* in the face of the deception and delusions perpetrated by those who are following in the footsteps of Satan, the master deceiver. His appeals may be framed in the form of three basic principles.

Christians Are to Preserve and Pass on the Good News of and About Jesus Christ

In the first exhortation Paul

urges us to stand firm by holding on to the teachings, the truths he has taught through his preaching and his letters. We might translate the phrase, "So then, brethren, stand firm, that is to say, hold on to the traditions." It is clear from his earlier remarks (see 2:14) that he was referring to the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Paul, as well as for all true Christians after him, Christian truth is judged in terms of the life and ministry of Jesus. These truths are passed from one generation to the next. If one does not maintain a firm hold on what one has received, that which is passed on will not be the same "tradition."

Is it possible that passing on the same tradition requires a change in the way the truth of the tradition is expressed?

Christians Match Their Works to Their Words

Paul's second variation on the theme (2:16, 17) is to pray that the believer's heart might be consoled and comforted through the harmony of acts and words. There is nothing that establishes one as being truly oneself more than the knowledge that one *is* what one *claims* to be. When your words are constantly in opposition to your works, the result is a divided heart and a guilt-ridden mind.

Is Paul here praying for Christian perfection in both word and deed?

by Fred Veltman

Fred Veltman is professor of religion and liberal studies at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Christians Should Not Be Overconfident in the Warfare Against Evil

The Lord “strengthens” or “establishes” the Christian by guarding the believer from evil or the evil one (see 3:3). Paul had written this letter to warn the church in Thessalonica about the “man of lawlessness,” whose power to deceive is great. Our success as Christians in this contest largely depends upon the Lord keeping our hearts and minds focused on the love of God and the steadfastness

and patient endurance of Christ. It is not difficult to understand why this letter warning the church about the activities of the evil one is literally permeated with references to prayer.

How does the Lord guard the Christian from evil or the evil one? Would prayer be of value in this regard?

* All English translations are from the Revised Standard Version.

Tuesday, August 27

No Casual Interest

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:3

"The presence of God is guaranteed to the Christian. This Rock of faith is the living presence of God. The weakest may depend upon it. Those who think themselves the strongest may become the weakest unless they depend on Christ as their efficiency, their worthiness. This is the Rock upon which we may build successfully. God is near in Christ's atoning sacrifice, in His intercession, His loving, tender ruling power over the church. Seated by the eternal throne, He watches them with intense interest. As long as the members of the church shall through faith draw sap and nourishment from Jesus Christ, and not from man's opinions and devisings, and methods; if having a conviction of the nearness of God in Christ, they put their entire trust in Him, they will have a vital connection with Christ as the branch has connection with the parent stock. The church is established not on theories of men, on long-drawn-out plans and forms. It depends upon Christ their righteousness. It is built on faith in Christ, 'and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. . . .'

"The strength of every soul is in God and not in man. Quietness and confidence is to be the strength of all who give their hearts to God. Christ has not a casual interest in us but an interest

stronger than a mother for her child. . . . Our Savior has purchased us by human suffering and sorrow, by insult, reproach, abuse, mockery, rejection and death. He is watching over you, trembling child of God. He will make you secure under His protection. . . . Our weakness in human nature will not bar our access to the heavenly Father, for He [Christ] died to make intercession for us."¹

"The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. No one who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Savior, who cast out the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?

"The rainbow of promise encircling the throne on high is an everlasting testimony that 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' John 3:16. It testifies to the universe that God will never forsake His children in the struggle with evil. It is an assurance to us of strength and protection as long as the throne itself shall endure."²

1. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 77.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 94.

by John K. McVay

John K. McVay is assistant professor of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

The Alien Invitation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:3

"When the modern pastor stands up to preach to a modern congregation, the pastor is the bridge that links the old world of scripture to the new world of modern people. In our view, the traffic has tended to move in one direction on that interpretive bridge. Modern interpreters of the faith have tended to let the 'modern world' determine the questions and therefore limit the answers. Is it true that the church's modern problem is the intellectual dilemma posed by Tillich: how to relate the ancient world of the faith to a modern world of disbelief?"¹

"The theological assumption . . . that Christianity is a system of belief must be questioned. It is the *content* of belief that concerns Scripture, not eradicating unbelief by means of a believable theological system. The Bible finds uninteresting many of our modern preoccupations with whether or not it is still possible for modern people to believe. The Bible's concern is whether or not we shall be faithful to the gospel, the truth about the way things are now that God is with us through the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth."²

"In the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, all human history must be reviewed.

The coming of Christ has cosmic implications. He has changed the course of things. So the theological task is not merely the interpretive matter of translating Jesus into modern categories but rather to translate the world to him. The theologian's job is not to make the gospel credible to the modern world, but to *make the world credible to the gospel*. . . .

"Christianity is more than a matter of a new understanding. Christianity is an invitation to be part of an alien people who make a difference because they see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ. Right living is more the challenge than right thinking. The challenge is not the intellectual one but the political one—the creation of a new people who have aligned themselves with the seismic shift that has occurred in the world since Christ."³

"The challenge of the gospel is not the intellectual dilemma of how to make an archaic system of belief compatible with modern belief systems. The challenge of Jesus is the political dilemma of how to be faithful to a strange community, which is shaped by the story of how God is with us."⁴

1. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 20.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

selected by John K. McVay

John K. McVay is assistant professor of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Thursday, August 29

Work, Knowing You Are Saved

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Thess. 2:13

1. *Live knowing you are loved and chosen by God to be saved.* You are “in” with God if you choose to be. This is good news! It gives us something to be thankful for, and thankfulness is happiness. God often sends someone into our life as a mentor to lead us to Christ Jesus. Perhaps it was father, mother, friend, pastor, or fellow worker. For the Thessalonians, it was Paul. What they learned about Jesus needed to be clung to and nurtured. It is God’s plan that we share what we learn, and share in the glory of Jesus. What God desires for His Son, He desires for you. When Jesus is given the kingdom, it is joyfully given to His saints. Choosing Him gives us this privilege.

2. *Live knowing God has a work for you to do and that He will provide the energy for you to do it.* There is nothing we can do to deserve this. God is willing to encourage us forever, to fill us with hope, and guide us in all we do and say. What an incentive to keep seeking Him. We are aware of our weak points and know we need help in what we do and say. How often an unkind thought comes to our minds and all too frequently to our lips. God is always there to give energy and guidance. He gives to us so that we can give to others.

We all desire to be surrounded

by people who will nurture us. Each of us is to *be* a caregiver. Paul nurtured the Thessalonians with the story of Jesus. He asked in return, not a handout, but prayer for his strength in spreading God’s Word. He desired to be delivered from those evil people who did not believe in God and who were out to hurt anyone who did.

3. *Live knowing you can be like Jesus.* His life here was our example. Focus, as He did, on the love that comes from God. Knowing you are weak and easily led astray, stay away from people who will take your focus off God. With a world suffering every sort of malady, does any Christian have time to gossip and tear down the character of another? Paul’s counsel is to be kind, but to stay away from anyone who is working against the cause of helping others to learn about Christ.

If you find yourself in such a situation, and you cannot redirect the conversation, give a quick, firm, loving handshake or a warm, loving hug and tell the “gossiper” you must run. You do have another appointment, and it is with those who desire to learn about God—God, who from the beginning chose each of us to be saved by the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and who desires us to help in the healing process of His children. Ask for the perseverance and patience of Jesus, and you will find strength to work for the Lord, not against Him.

by Dottie Ross

Dottie Ross is taking college classes for enrichment in the area of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Diary of Separation, or Standing Firm

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Thess. 2:15

“Stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you” (2 Thess. 2:15, NIV). Is “standing firm” merely repeating a creed to one’s self or continually facing persecution? I think not. It is the preservation of the most precious relationship I have.

The one man I love stands on the curb beside me. Tears fill my eyes as I shift into “drive.” The words “Goodbye, dear!” linger long after he says them and the engine roar and the asphalt soon erase him from my sight. And the tears keep slipping, slipping out. And I’m turning up the music and just driving.

But he still loves me, I remind myself. That will not change. I know it, from his look and the words he spoke. I know it from the fact that he washed the car for me and filled it up with gas before the trip. I know it as I remember the time I threw up on his favorite sweater, and he didn’t get angry. I can hardly wait to see him again, and my stomach aches with the pain. It has been months since I’ve seen him. Rumors about his doings drift in now and then. He is fine, but things are not going perfectly. He will be gone longer than he intended. Daily, dully, my stomach’s pain reminds me of my loss.

Jeff, the tall guy across the

street, asks me to house-sit for him on weekdays. (He commutes and is “domestic” only on weekends, although I am welcome even then.) It seems like a good way to keep busy, I guess. But what if the one I love tries to get hold of me, and I am not at home? Would he like my being at Jeff’s house?

The days are easier now, although the evenings are still quiet. I think I’ll go over and watch a video with Jeff . . . wait! The phone is ringing! Hello!

It’s him! My stomach fills with butterflies; my eyes are wet. My love for him answers as I hear him say, “Hang in there, Baby. I’ll be there as soon as I can!”

Long-distance relationships can test the limits of endurance, even between God and His people. Instead of physical persecution, today’s church faces the slow, painful death of spiritual isolation. But there is no need of this. There are ways we can survive the separation:

- (a) Spend time thinking about Him. This can mean prayer or Bible study;
- (b) keep busy doing God’s work of helping other people;
- (c) encourage yourself (and others) with the thought that this situation cannot last forever. Soon Jesus will come; He has promised it.

And when we can stop “standing firm” and just leap into His arms, that will be heaven!

by Deborah Gibson

Deborah Gibson is an English major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Lesson 10, September 1-7

God's Demand and Our Effort



“My God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24, NIV).

Sunday, September 1

Last-Minute Instructions

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Thess. 5:12-28

Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18 reminds me of my mother sending me off on a trip. There would always be those special last-minute instructions or reminders as I was going out the door. You know how it is . . . "Be safe. Don't forget to call. Remember to be good to your sister. And, oh, drive safely and don't just stop at self-service gas stations. . . ." Children, especially older ones, know that it is out of love that Mom says all these things.

It was no different with Paul. His last instructions are also rapid and heartfelt. And you are left thinking that just like Mom, Paul could have come up with even more if he had wanted to.

The instructions or counsel Paul gives can be broken down into several interesting areas. The first area has to do with leader/follower relationships. The followers are expected to respect and listen to their hard-working leaders, while the leaders are counseled not to be reluctant to warn the idle and to help those in need. A good question to ask yourself as you study this week is, "How would Paul expect us to treat an idle leader?"

The next area is that of revenge. The Evidence article in

this lesson will discuss this topic further. But it is interesting that this subject comes up in the context of leader/follower relationships. Think about your church or workplace. Is this counsel relevant?

Be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. This really sounds like Mom! This counsel makes you want to ask, "No matter what?" How many problems have been created by those who have taken this counsel too literally? When is the last time you heard someone say, "Praise the Lord!" right after they smashed their thumb with a hammer? What does it mean to give thanks in all circumstances?

Test everything and avoid evil. This last counsel has interesting implications for the church. Is Paul suggesting that we should test each other, our doctrines, leaders, church, and even Scripture itself? What should be our method of testing? And if something or someone is tested and found wanting, what should we do?

There is a lot to discuss in these few brief verses. (And we haven't even mentioned greeting one another with a holy kiss!) This week, as you study, remember that the counsel Paul is giving was practical counsel for the Thessalonians. I think it still is practical for us today.

by Victor F. Brown

Victor F. Brown is enrollment vice-president and chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Monday, September 2

I Can Do All Things Through Christ

LOGOS

1 Thess. 5:12-28

In yesterday's lesson we likened Paul's parting words to the Thessalonians to a mother giving advice to an excited, adventurous youth going out the door. "Now, be sure to keep your coat buttoned, and your scarf on, and don't let your hands get too cold, and. . . ." The youth replies, as he is headed out the door, "Yes, Mother." But these parting words of Paul's take on a completely different meaning when seen through the eyes of a Thessalonian.

Almost all of the members of the church were Greeks, rescued from the depths of spiritual darkness. Paul had, at the most, a little over a month to convert them and establish them as a church before he was forced out of town. No wonder he sent Timothy back almost immediately. Could they hold fast and make it? Paul knew what was formerly in the mind of these new converts.

In Frank W. Bear's book, *St. Paul and His Letters*, he notes an important fact that sheds light on Paul's concern. In the Greek and Roman world there was no relationship between morals and religion. A man could be very religious, in fact, attach himself to a dozen cults, without any difference in his moral conduct. The young Greeks would justify their most profligate actions on the

grounds that they were only following the example of Zeus, or Apollo, or Aphrodite. Paul was calling them to a life of honesty, purity, and love—a life worthy of a follower of God.

Paul also knew that his God was the opposite of what they had known. Rarely, if ever, do you hear of a god wanting to have a relationship with his individual followers. What they had to do before was follow the dictates or rules of these gods to appease them or divert their wrath. This God wanted a relationship, and as a result of the relationship, they would take on the characteristics of God. Because God's relationship with His children is based upon love, He never uses force. He wants their willing acceptance.

One of the greatest joys the church in Thessalonica had was over the parousia. This God is personally coming again to live forever in a new world with His followers!

One of the reasons Paul wrote this letter is that they were saying, If this is the case, why concern ourselves with things of this life? It was being used as an excuse for abandoning this life—they were just waiting for the soon coming of Christ.

The God Paul served not only wants a relationship with each follower, He wants something else that was quite foreign to the Thessalonians—His followers are to

by W. Rob Sheppard

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have a loving relationship with each other. The believer is to treat fellow believers in the same manner God treats him. This is to be the greatest sign for unbelievers (see John 13:35).

The closing verses of 1 Thesalonians are powerful. Can you imagine having to leave a group of babes in Christ and not worrying about them?

But the way Paul writes these last verses reflects great relief and a sense of pride at hearing Timothy's report. He doesn't urge them to start practicing this new behavior. It's quite the contrary. He says, in effect, Keep on doing these things. Paul found out his message was accepted, and the believers were putting it into practice.

Keep up the good work, Paul says; continue to respect your leaders and fellow believers. Keep on urging the zealous ones among you to not get too far ahead or behind. Maintain unity. Keep on tenderly caring for the small-souled or fainthearted ones, and those grieving the loss of a loved one. Keep holding fast to the weak in faith. Don't fold to

the pressure of unbelievers by returning evil for evil.

Paul knew from experience that they were under the lordship of Christ, because human beings cannot produce this kind of behavior in and of themselves. That's why he urges them to maintain the relationship with Jesus. In staccato fashion he gives the secret: Keep on rejoicing, praying, praising, and listening to the Spirit. In light of what you know about Jesus, examine all truth. If it doesn't lead you to continue this experience in Christ, throw it away. The One who began and maintains this work in you will present you complete in Christ at the day of His coming.

Rather than being some light, off-the-top-of-the-head comments, these words are powerful. They are testimonials, "sweet-smelling savor," of the evidence of Christ's presence among them. If that is what could be produced in a matter of weeks in people from the depths of heathenism, what about us?

* Frank W. Bear, *St. Paul and His Letters* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 36.

Tuesday, September 3

A Test of Authority

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:12, 26

How many times have you felt an intense dislike toward a person who is "over" you? Ellen White gives us a clue as to why Paul mentions it in 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

"The Thessalonian believers were greatly annoyed by men coming among them with fanatical ideas and doctrines. Some were 'disorderly, and working not at all, but . . . busy bodies.' The church had been properly organized, and officers had been appointed to act as ministers and deacons. But there were some, self-willed and impetuous, who refused to be subordinate to those who held positions of authority in the church. They claimed not only the right of private judgment, but that of publicly urging their views upon the church. In view of this, Paul called the attention of the Thessalonians to the respect and deference due to those who had been chosen to occupy positions of authority in the church."

We often let our personal feelings toward one another stop our progress in winning souls. Instead of arguing among ourselves, we should be praying for each other.

"The apostle felt that he was to a large extent responsible for the spiritual welfare of those converted under his labors. His desire for them was that they might increase in a knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. Often in his ministry he would meet with little companies of men and women who loved Jesus, and bow with them in prayer, asking God to teach them how to maintain a living connection with Him. . . . And often, when separated from those for whom he had thus labored, he pleaded with God to keep them from evil and help them to be earnest, active missionaries.

"One of the strongest evidences of true conversion is love to God and man. Those who accept Jesus as their Redeemer have a deep, sincere love for others of like precious faith." When we have this sincere love for others, then we can be ready for the Lord to come.

REACT

1. Is a "whistle blower" a self-willed, impetuous person?
2. How close a relationship should leaders have with those they lead?

** The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 261, 262.*

by Terry Johnson

Terry Johnson is a junior theology major and assistant chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Revenge

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:15

"The PLO Claims Responsibility for Bombing Bus."

"Israelis Bomb Refugee Camp in Retaliation for Recent Bus Bombing."

Headlines like these are repeated so often they hardly grab our attention. The cycle of revenge in the Middle East is appalling. Revenge has become part of the national policy of many Middle East governments. It also reaches down to a personal level when families seek revenge for wrongs done by other families.

Why is it that in places like the Middle East revenge or retaliation plays such a major part in the conflict? I think that part of the problem lies in the theology of the people involved. In Islam there is the idea that mercy or grace is primarily for believers.¹ Islam also lacks a theory of atonement or forgiveness of sins.² Add to this the concept of Jihad, or holy war against unbelievers, and you have a people primed for revenge. The modern state of Israel, with its eye-for-an-eye theology, is no different.

The above argument appears to break down when Lebanon or even Northern Ireland are considered. These conflicts, primarily among Christian groups, are still driven by a cycle of revenge. How can this be when the heart of the

gospel is forgiveness?

It appears that human nature needs very little to respond with an eye for an eye. Christians have also been capable of reasoning that some people just deserve retaliation and that getting even is more important than forgiveness.

Is your home, school, church, or workplace a long way from the Middle East or Northern Ireland? Paul's counsel to always try to be patient and kind to everyone while not returning evil for evil suggests that probably feelings of wanting revenge are not very far from us. How important it is for us to show mercy and grant forgiveness.

So is there ever a time to stand up and not turn the other cheek? Should we always just roll over and take whatever abuse comes our way? There is not an easy answer to this dilemma. God clearly condemns our retaliating or seeking revenge personally (see Matt. 5:38, 39). In His own good time and way, God will punish evildoers and set all wrongs right.

REACT

1. How do you decide the difference between defense and revenge?

2. Why do you think it is so easy to rationalize that sometimes getting even is right?

1. Martin Goldsmith, *Islam and Christian Witness* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 50.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

by Victor F. Brown

Victor F. Brown is enrollment vice-president and chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, September 5

The Lasting Friendship

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:14

We are fast becoming so involved with the business and the pleasures of everyday life that we don't notice the needs of others around us.

I am sure you have heard of the "SDA problem of the century," the many young people leaving the church through the back door. This problem is no joke. I can safely say that if I were to investigate the number of my childhood buddies still in the church, I would be greatly disappointed.

Why is there a problem? Is there just nothing in the church for the youth to do, or is it the lack of concern shown by Christian friends? Maybe we young people need to start implementing what the key text for today asks us to do—be helpful and encouraging.

First Thessalonians 5:14 is very clear on what needs to be done in our relationship with our friends. Here are a few ideas that might help us put this counsel into practice.

1. *Understand.* The Lord says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). In the same way, we need to understand that the way we see things is not always the way others see and understand them. Learning to see

different points of view is the first step in conquering the problem.

2. *Encourage.* There is not a better remedy for an ailing friend than to say, "Hey, I am behind you 100 percent." One needs to show some concern and then top it off with some words of encouragement. Even a simple "I know you can do it" might do the trick.

3. *Help.* Don't be afraid to ask a friend if they need some help or maybe even someone to talk to. Just sitting and listening can make a real difference.

4. *Patience.* There are times when talking to someone else is just so frustrating. The conversation is dull, or you are just sick of hearing about that person's problems. Hang in there! The Lord surely is patient with us, so try to be patient with others.

There will be times when you try everything, and you still have the same problem as before. When it seems that you have reached the last straw, turn to the One who can help. In John 14:18 it says that God will not leave us as orphans. Go to Him and ask Him what to do. Maybe the problem of the swinging back door can be solved. Show some concern for others. Ask God to help us be the kind of caring people that it takes to make Christian friendships last.

by Timo Chacon, Jr.

Timo Chacon, Jr., is a sophomore nursing major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Paul's Three-Part Plan

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:12-28

I recently saw the movie *A Cry in the Dark* and wondered how I would react if I were the father of that baby. Would I be joyful? Would I be of good cheer? Would I thank God for allowing my baby daughter to die? I don't think so. In fact, such questions seem absurd. No one in his right mind would be happy at the loss of someone he loved.

This brings up some interesting questions concerning verses 16 through 18 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Are these realistic requests? Does God really expect me to be full of joy at the funeral of my best friend? I would like to suggest that the answer to the first question is yes, and the answer to the second is no. Now you might say that by answering the questions this way, I am contradicting myself. Let me try to explain.

In these verses I think that Paul is setting up a three-part plan to help Christians deal with troubles.

(1) "Be joyful always." (2) "Pray at all times." (3) "Be thankful in all circumstances" (verses 16, 17, 18, TEV).

When Paul says to "be joyful always," does he necessarily mean to always be happy? I feel that Paul is saying that we should

maintain a joyful spirit, an inner peace, even when things happen that sadden us. It is important that we as Christians have this peace because Satan realizes that during times of sorrow a person is very vulnerable.

"Pray at all times." Paul obviously didn't mean that a person should be in constant prayer because neither Paul nor Christ practiced this. Paul is speaking of an attitude of prayer, a constant walk with God. This mind-set gives a person the assurance that Christ is close by and listening continuously throughout the day.

The third part of the plan is to "be thankful in all circumstances." Notice the verse doesn't say to be thankful for everything that happens. This means that we as Christians can always find something to be thankful for even when something terrible has happened. If we hold to the promise of Romans 8:28, we can know that no matter how bad things might seem, they will all work together for good.

This brings me back to the movie *A Cry in the Dark*. These people could easily have allowed the death of their daughter to weaken their faith and commitment to God. Instead, they applied the ideas in these three verses and turned an awful situation into a platform for witnessing to the peace that one can have only through Christ.

by John Gilley

John Gilley is a corporate communication major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Lesson 11, September 8-14

The Tough Question of Church Discipline



“If anyone does not obey our instructions in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:14, 15, NIV).

Sunday, September 8

Daring to Discipline

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Thess. 3:14-18; Matt. 18:15-20

Discipline! What overtones that word carries! There was a time when schoolteachers administered discipline through cane and strap. And before some of the more recent child guidance experts stayed their hands, parents routinely applied the switch and banished errant children to bed with no supper. Discipline carries such negative baggage.

Some years ago the media carried scenes of public justice in a Middle Eastern country. I'll never forget the stark brutality of the scene. Islamic law proscribed that the man caught stealing have his hand cut off. Raw discipline indeed!

Paul had been heavily into discipline. As a committed Pharisee he had rounded up those Christian wrongdoers and administered discipline in hopes of turning them back to Judaism. An encounter with Christ on the Damascus road radically changed his out-

look. No longer was he the sometimes violent defender of rigid man-made rules. He had caught a vision of the forgiveness of Christ. His message was now one of gospel grace and freedom in the new life dedicated to Christ.

Sadly, many misunderstood Paul. Peter wrote that many believers twisted Paul's words to their own destruction (see 2 Peter 3:16). They took Paul's proclamation of freedom from the condemnation of the law as a license to sin. Paul himself was horrified and took great pains to steer them back to godly responsibility. But it is one of the great ironies of Paul's ministry that the ex-Pharisee, the man who endured beatings and stonings to spread the good news, the man who wrote so much on holy living—is even today quoted in support of generic, do-what-you-like Christianity.

This week we will look at some of Paul's own statements regarding church discipline. We will also examine Jesus' prescription for discipline. We should expect to find a common principle to both.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Monday, September 9

Tough Love

LOGOS

2 Thess. 3:14-18; Matt. 18:15-20;
1 Cor. 5:1-5; 6:1-6

A few years ago—before our last two or three recessions and when “doing your own thing” was “cool”—society tended to wink at certain indiscretions. Sharp and shady business practices were still equated with the American dream (substitute “the good life” if you’re uncomfortable with the regional thing)! Free love seemed cute, and drugs like marijuana a fad that young people would grow out of.

Today our whole society is down on “insider trading” and other dirty, get-rich schemes. The sexual revolution is over in the reality of AIDS and the abortion dilemma—even politicians have taken to talking morality. And the war on drugs takes priority. “Tough love” is seen as the only kind way to deal with society’s ills.

Why has the Adventist Church reversed the order? Back away, discipline (not always well administered) was *de rigour*. Today we seem to be easing back into the world’s old idea of live and let live. “Let’s not be judgmental,” some of us are saying. “After all, we are a group of sinners in need of a Saviour.”

Actually Scripture makes a good case for the necessity of church discipline. And its effectiveness lies in its aims.

Shame

“If anyone refuses to obey what

we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.”
2 Thess. 3:14, RSV.

Paul was concerned that his epistle would fall on some deaf ears or, worse, its advice be opposed by those in the church at Thessalonica. He knew that what he wrote was God’s word for the believers. God had spoken these principles directly to his heart, and Paul’s ministry had revealed countless instances of divine guidance. By opposing his instructions, a doubter would actually be rising up against God.

The church had to be protected against destruction from within. “Have nothing to do with him,” instructed Paul in regard to doubters. He was not talking of anyone shunning the doubter, but he was encouraging them to show disapproval. They would not indulge that person in doubting conversation. If he started up, they were to turn away. And by their own obedience to the letter’s instructions they would answer his attacks and shame him into repentance.

A positive way to deal with a really negative situation. In a sense, doubt within is the greatest enemy. Paul puts it in perspective—yes, doubt was the enemy of truth—but believers were to see the disobedient not as an “enemy,” but as a “brother” in desperate need of warning.

Are there fellow church members that I should “warn” in a

by Lincoln E. Steed

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positive way? Is it a kindness for me to ignore a brother's denial of truth and his open sin?

In My Name

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." Matt. 18:15, RSV.

Jesus always held out the most attractive combination of gentle consideration and direct, forthright action. The two are not incompatible.

In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus moves from a concern for the welfare of God's literal children—the young—through the discourse on resolving problems among believers, and onto the telling of a parable of forgiveness. Perhaps the last part of the chapter, the parable, best tempers the outline of discipline.

Yes, we are all regularly wronged. Even by brothers in the faith. Our reaction should be guided by the sobering notion that we ourselves have been forgiven for great wrongs.

As Jesus outlined it, conflict resolution begins with *direct* and *private* discussion between principals. It is your responsibility to approach a brother who has wronged you, before you take the matter to a wider forum. If he is wronging your sensibilities by proclaiming erroneous doctrine, you should first approach him alone with your concerns.

Of course in a real and difficult world, such a private, personal approach sometimes fails. Jesus then advises another close encounter: "Take one or two others" with you and again seek to resolve the matter with that individual. Before the meeting they will advise you—perhaps even point out that *you* are wrong. At the meeting they will underscore the serious nature of the discussion and are witnesses to the re-

sponse your request receives.

Next, but not the last step, is an action by the church body. Jesus is quite firm in upholding the right of the church to make determinations on questions of discipline. If the church action follows Christ's prescription to the letter and in the spirit of concern for the welfare of all, then it is indeed definitive and underscored by heaven's authority. In no sense was Jesus giving latitude to His church to indulge personal vendettas or to victimize those with differing views.

"As a Gentile and a tax collector"—to a devout Jew these were categories beyond the place of any missionary concern. But we know that Jesus reached out to Zaccheus, and one of the great outlines of His own life was penned by converted Gentile Dr. Luke. After the church separates itself by the final act of discipline, it should then find itself turning back to the individual in the same missionary attitude it offers to all outside the fold.

How can Jesus' advice for resolving church conflict be applied toward resolving other interpersonal frictions in our daily lives?

Daring to Discipline

"And you are arrogant! Aught you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you." 1 Cor. 5:2, RSV.

Strong words from a brave church leader. Paul knew the mortal danger they were in at Corinth. Immorality was rife among believers. He names a certain incestuous relationship and calls for immediate action.

This was a very public sin, and Paul skips straight to the last resort—general church action. He demands it. "When you are assembled . . . with the power of our Lord Jesus" (RSV), he tells them—

then act to disfellowship him. But even in the recommendation of last-resort action he enjoins them to act with concern for the man's salvation.

We read Paul's words, and it sounds straightforward. But there are numerous instances in our churches today where an open sin goes unreprieved and unchallenged. I've seen leaders resign in protest at the official inaction; I've seen honest members embittered into changing church homes or giving up altogether because of the nurtured sin. And is such inaction the result of defiance by church boards? I think not. Too often it is a false sense of love. Too often it is a misguided concern to not offend the person and to love them into conformity.

True love will act out of redemptive concern: both for the erring one and for the integrity of the others who might be led astray by what amounts to a diminishing of the horror of sin. Tough love is true love, because it is willing to give, to fight, to struggle to reclaim its object.

Paul moves on from a question of church discipline to a more le-

galistic subject—litigation between church members. Quite clearly the Corinthians were rather like our modern church. They hesitated to acknowledge immorality and doctrinal error but were more than eager to sue a brother in the civil courts.

Some years ago a certain judge was moved to dismiss a case between a "liberal" and a "conservative" Adventist. He listened to their bickering, saw through the superficial excuse of a transgression of civil laws, and advised them both to leave the court and settle their differences in church. As Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, a civil suit between Christians is a rebuke to the very principles of Christ.

Love is a multifaceted word. How does love relate positively in a church discipline situation?

Is it really loving to ignore the brother who is losing the battle to hold on in faith to Christ?

Which is more hazardous to a church: a situation of immorality or doctrinal heresy? What is the aim of church discipline?

Kind but Firm

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rev. 3:19

In all her writings on the subject of church discipline, Ellen White was careful to uphold the principles Jesus outlined in Matthew chapter 18. We are called to individually discuss the matter with a brother and settle differences in a spirit of love. Beyond that, two or three should meet with an erring one and attempt to bring them back to an obedience to truth. Then the full church should be involved.

“No church officer should advise, no committee should recommend, nor should any church vote, that the name of a wrongdoer shall be removed from the church books, until the instruction given by Christ has been faithfully followed. When this instruction has been followed, the church has cleared herself before God. The evil must then be made to appear as it is, and must be removed, that it may not become more widespread.”¹

“It will require much diligence and a continual struggle to keep evil out of our churches. There must be rigid, impartial discipline exercised; for some who have a semblance of religion will seek to undermine the faith of others.”²

“On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ’s stead. It is God’s instrumentality for the preservation of order and

discipline among His people. To it the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions regarding its prosperity, purity and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their un-Christlike conduct would bring dishonor on the truth.”³

Of course law is not the end of the matter. The whole process of church discipline is redemptive.

“If the erring one repents and submits to Christ’s discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God’s servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him on the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves lest they also be tempted.”⁴

REACT

How would I act if I saw a fellow church member drifting into moral and doctrinal apostasy?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, pp. 262, 263.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 538.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 263.

4. *Ibid.*

by Lincoln E. Steed

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Wednesday, September 11

A Question of Authority

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:14

Paul makes it very clear that his words are more than the personal communications of a fellow believer. Always his words bear the authority of his apostleship, and he passed them on as indicative of the will of the Lord. "It must be obeyed: it was the duty of the church to enforce obedience. The brethren must show their concurrence with [Paul] by not keeping company with any professing Christians who may still persist in disorderly conduct. But they must be careful not to sin against the law of love. The offender is a brother still; they must admonish him for his soul's sake; they must show by their conduct their sorrow, their disapproval of his disobedience, that the disapprobation of Christians known and respected may bring him to a sense of shame and, by God's grace, to amendment to life."¹

"Paul takes the pen from his amanuensis and writes a word of greeting with his own hand. . . . He tells the Thessalonians that this writing with his own hand is a mask of identification in every letter which they may receive. . . . Paul had reason to believe that others had written

counterfeit letters in his name, and he takes care to say that they may test every letter received as from him by reference to his own handwriting, which he will put into every letter he writes."²

Of course the ultimate proof of Paul's authority is his harmony with the rest of Scripture. Paul's comments on church discipline agree perfectly with the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 18.

"As always he ends with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had prayed in his first epistle that it might rest upon them. Now he adds the significant word 'all.' He had been obliged to blame some of them, to blame them severely; but he will not end his epistle with words of censure. He prays that grace may be with them all; he longs for the restoration of those who are living in a disorderly way, for the continual progress and sanctification of the whole church. And so he prays for grace. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ can convert the erring; that same grace can comfort and confirm the faithful."³

1. *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), vol. 21, p. 75.

2. *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), vol. 11, p. 338.

3. *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), vol. 21, p. 75.

by Lincoln E. Steed

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The Kind Thing to Do

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Cor. 6:2

Paul puts it rather bluntly in our text for today. "Don't be squeamish about tackling difficult matters of church discipline. God's people will judge angels. Surely we can apply the principles of Christ in determining simple disputes down here on earth!" And my paraphrase hardly overstates his point. Discipline is not optional for the church.

Now a church is made up of sinful, culpable men and women like you and me. Held up before a perfect standard, we all fall short. Some of us hesitate to "judge" on matters of church standard and behavior because we feel unworthy. We are afraid that if we comment on a situation, others will turn on us as did the two Israelites Moses attempted to reconcile and say, "Who made you a judge over us?" (see Exodus 2:14.) Moses was indeed a sinner and worthy of rebuke, yet God did work through him to judge and order His people. And Moses was a great leader so long as his love for the people motivated his judgments. We know he cared deeply for their salvation—on one occasion he asked God to blot his own name out of the book of life in exchange for forgiveness of their sins.

Each of us should show that same selfless concern for the integrity and salvation of our church

family. With a redemptive view of discipline we will never stoop to criticizing stumbling brethren. Mere criticism will only deepen their growing alienation from the body of obedient followers. But discipline that acts redemptively and along the lines outlined by Jesus and Paul will only tend to encourage and draw back a struggling brother.

Take the hypothetical case of a young man in the church falling into bad company and drifting into a life of alcohol, drugs, and immorality. He may continue his church attendance for a time, although he is sure to be less careful about coming along each week.

What should the church do?

Acting as though nothing is wrong will surely mean his drift away will continue. He may even think no one cares and rationalize that his new course of action is justified.

Almost as bad would be the response of a well-meaning liberal-minded brother to the effect that "whatever you do, we love you just the same." It is a rather indifferent love that will allow someone to drift toward the loss of their soul.

Certainly the worst course is outright, public condemnation of the young man. Followed, no doubt, by much gossip and eventual church board action to disfellowship him.

But imagine the ideal.

Not one, but several, concerned members go to see him privately,

by Lincoln E. Steed

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individually. In an accepting, loving way, each shares their concern for his spiritual welfare. They tell him how important he is to them. How they cannot rest in the knowledge that he is compromising the stand he took as a young man at his baptism. How he is in their prayers nightly. And they pray with him that the Lord will lead him back.

Only a strong spirit of rebellion could withstand such "judgment."

But if he persisted, the next step would turn up the heat. Perhaps as a result of discussion among the elders, a group of them visit and express again their readiness to help him stand firm. They again show that each has his eternal good in mind.

There's a good chance the young man will respond positively. Perhaps acknowledging that his new habits are unsatisfying—but that he is too weak to fight them. And of course the group will rally around and offer not only their prayers but practical help in drawing him back to real fellowship with the church family.

Perhaps after all this the young man is defiant and spurns

all offers. Then it may be that an appropriate action of censure becomes necessary. And if there is no response, then a motion to disfellowship.

Even at this point the discipline is redemptive. The action shows that the standards of God's church cannot be compromised and that he is clearly no longer within their bounds. There can be no ambiguity about this. Most importantly, even as the church takes action to disfellowship, it should shift into high gear to bring every effort to bear on the missionary goal of reclaiming this young man for Christ.

Idealistic? Yes. But that's how it should be. And I am certain that caring, redemptive discipline will tend to build up the church and retain those who might otherwise have drifted away or, worse, have been chased away.

REACT

Do I tend to be judgmental in dealing with the shortcomings of fellow church members?

How can I "witness" to other young people in my church who are drifting away?

How might discipline actually communicate a caring attitude?

The Unforgivable Sin

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:14

The reformation is a good many years behind us now; yet many Adventists seem to have latched onto the idea that the last step of church discipline, that of disfellowshipping an "offender," is somehow synonymous with the old rite of excommunication. There is a clear distinction between the two actions.

A person "excommunicated" from the Catholic Church is declared separated from all hope of salvation. Such a person is banned, cast away from any contact with church members. For example, a book on the England of John Bunyan's day tells how even under the postreformation church in England, people were excommunicated. An Anne Skevington was "excommunicated because that, in widowed grief, she had been present at the burial of her own husband, who for his nonconformity had died under the ban of the church." Those who lived under the shadow of such a church system rather naturally feared its power to cut them off from society and to consign miscreants to damnation. Of course the church had no biblical basis for claiming such power.

"Disfellowshipping" as practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a totally different concept. First of all, we accept the priesthood of all believers and rec-

ognize that merely belonging to the church does not save us, and conversely, one is not damned just because he or she has not enrolled as a member.

We look to the principles so clearly outlined by Jesus and Paul in the texts studied this week as our guide for church discipline. The whole process is designed to be redemptive—to prevent a member from losing his/her faith and trust—and to preserve the integrity of the body of believers. If after continued entreaties and the due process of counseling a member is locked into a contrary course, then there is no other logical consequence than that their membership be annulled and they are "disfellowshipped" from the church.

They are not declared lost. They are declared, in the judgment of the church company as a whole, to be out of harmony with the principles of Adventism, which are, of course, Bible based. For the credibility of the church and for its spiritual integrity, such a one is "disfellowshipped." There is no injustice to any group disallowing a member who no longer subscribes to the rules of the group.

Once disfellowshipped, an ex-Adventist should be the object of a special reclamation effort. True, according to Paul's parting words in Thessalonians, we will "have nothing to do" with such people in the sense of shared Christian fellowship. By deviating from pure principles and denying the truth, such a person is a danger to the

by Lincoln E. Steed

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church if their behavior is condoned, assimilated, and imitated. But seen as wayward, separated brothers and sisters, we can do nothing else but reach out to them in a continuing plea for reconciliation.

No church can, by its own authority, "excommunicate" or cut a person off from salvation. God's true followers can and should on occasion exclude those from membership who are clearly found to be opposed to the aims of the gospel. However, if such "disfellowshipping" is ever administered precipitously and maliciously, it becomes as great a wrong as excommunication. And

the unforgivable sin in this instance must be that of unconcern toward the disfellowshipped and desperately needy ex-member.

REACT

Should church discipline be impersonal? Impartial?

What risk is there in a church ignoring even a gross case of Christian misconduct among its members?

Discuss the implications of authority and responsibility as they relate to disfellowshipping.

What is fellowship?

*John Brown, *John Bunyan: His Life, Times and Work* (London: Wm. Isbister Limited, 1885), p. 4.

LISTEN...

TO WHAT THESE TOP PERSONALITIES
HAVE TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT OF
DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.



"If your image of reality is skewed from being intoxicated by alcohol or some pharmaceutical, you can't participate fully in life."

Mae Jemison, astronaut
Listen, March 1990



"A few years ago, when I tried to talk about drugs, I'd get a few boos, but it didn't stop me. I'd tell them, 'You don't have to listen to me, you'll see it someday.' I've seen what drugs have done to some people I've known."

Henry Lee Sumner, singer
Listen, August 1990



"When you're a teenager, it's hard to realize what a precious commodity time is. With drugs you lose so much time; you're losing time getting on with reality."

Amy Grant, singer
Listen, May 1991

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Lesson 12, September 15-21

The Dignity of Work



“We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ, to settle down and earn the bread they eat” (2 Thess. 3:11, 12, NIV).

Sunday, September 15

The Collegiate Prayer

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 6:9-13

The Collegiate's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily
bread. . . .

And Lord, grant that it not be
oatmeal.

Father? Forgive my irreverence,
But may I have Crispix
instead?

And Lord, grant that I may be
exempt
From an earthly pastor's
contempt.

An attorney at law,

I think I would rather.
A new sermon each week,
Could work up a lather.

Cases in court
Could be so prestigious,
As a lawyer for God
I could still be religious.

Or could I? But, would I . . . ?

Oh Lord, grant me
understanding,
Inspire me with Your wisdom,
That I may not be blind to the
Contribution only I can make.
That I may see clearer,
As Your coming is nearer,
The true shape and color
Of my duty to You here.

For Yours is the kingdom,
And the power,
And the glory,
Forever.

Amen.

by Mark Welch

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Monday, September 16

Dealing With the Deadly Sin of Sloth

LOGOS

2 Thess. 3:10

“Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:6). Paul was apparently not referring to church members who reverted back to booze and were staggering down Main Street in a drunken and disorderly fashion to the embarrassment of the local Christians. The context suggests more of a saunter or a swagger. Since, in the view of some employment was to be radically restructured momentarily, the monetary rewards from labor were no longer needed. They could leave the potato patch undug.

While the text rebukes idleness, it is obviously directed at a misinterpretation of the timing of Christ’s return. In the previous chapter (see 2:3), Paul explained that it was a mistake to think that Christ was going to return in a matter of hours or a few days. Other events were to take place before Christ’s return. Had those who had given up their jobs been correct in their thinking that Christ was going to return immediately (let’s say within a week), it might have been more appropriate for them to refrain from secular employment.

Monetary considerations take on exaggerated importance in our age of institutional indebtedness, where a search is on for scarce

dollars to cover soaring operational costs. One might wonder how the apostle Paul would react to the modern method of touching the wallets of the wealthy through membership on boards, the naming of facilities, or other forms of personal recognition or ego enhancement.

This scriptural example also seems light-years away from the tactics and lifestyle of the preaching stars of the “electronic church.”

“If any would not work, neither should he eat” (verse 10). Elementary justice is imbedded in these words. The punishment fits the crime.

Certain considerations are necessary, however, to keep such counsel from being cruel. Not all are capable of working, if one uses a common sociological definition of work—the means by which a person earns a livelihood. There are close to 40 common definitions of work, however, and the route to appropriately understand this text is no doubt through “true theology and common sense.”

The counsel was directed toward those who normally held down jobs but now had forsaken them due to the false belief that Jesus was returning momentarily. As “busybodies” (verse 11) they were not contributing to the church fund for purchasing food, but were simply trying to attract others to their fanatical views.

Those who spend their time

by H. Ward Hill

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burdening the postman with copies of their extreme beliefs while doing little or nothing to support the organized church in its worldwide mission might well have their consciences pricked by the pejorative term *busybodies*. And those of us who are intrigued by this form of activity, and support the busybodies, may be in for the same fate.

By extension, the text reaches to one of the seven deadly sins—sloth. Self-indulgence is pleasant. Some degree of “idleness” is permissible, even necessary. Some become so obsessed with activity that they can never rest. But what may be much more common, especially in our youth, is the tendency to goof off with no sense of remorse.

In a distortion of what started as a balancing truth, many of us think that what is important is that we feel good about ourselves—rather than the goal of a respectable level of self-achievement. We are urged by some to keep uppermost in our minds the perception that God is excitedly in love with us. We are encouraged to wave our arms in Pentecostal delight because at last we see the church emerging from “legalism.”

Perhaps those people who refused to work raved about their relationship with Jesus. Their hearts were so overflowing with love that they walked off their jobs at the carpentry shop or the winepress or at the tentmakers. They practiced their songs of Zion on an instrument of 10 strings. They felt good about themselves, and their self-esteem had never been higher. They looked for people they could hug—whose brokenness they could heal. God was now fighting their battles, they said. No longer would they worry about the beast and the

devil. It was home at last. They had realized their human potential. Now they were self-actualized.

Sloth, like gluttony and lust, is what is sometimes known as a “warm” sin. Such usually begin in love; but since sin is perversion of the good, the sins of love end in lovelessness. The one who indulges himself at the expense of someone else does not really provide care and sustenance, but saps away the scarce resource and abandons and victimizes those he should benefit.

The one who worked at his job, while witnessing to his love for the Lord Jesus, was not simply a consumer, but a contributor. He did not beat his breast in despair over legalistic strivings, but thanked God for the self-actualizing feeling of a job well done at the end of the day. This was a foretaste of the greatest possible form of self-assurance, which will fall upon him from the lips of the Lord Jesus when He returns: “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21, NKJV).

REACT

Does the *timing* of Christ's return affect our motivation toward Christian living? How would the following scenarios make a difference in our behavior?

- a. The day and hour of Christ's coming has been announced. He is coming within 36 hours.
- b. He is coming within our lifetime.
- c. He is coming again, but we have no idea at all when that will be.

**Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 257.

Tuesday, September 17

Idle Busybodies

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:11

Idle busybodies? How can that be? Well, that is exactly what Paul was hearing in Thessalonica.

Ellen White wrote that there were some misleading ideas in circulation at that time. Some taught "that Christians should take no thought concerning the temporal welfare of themselves or their families, but should devote their lives wholly to spiritual things." Others taught "the attainment of true holiness carries the mind above all earthly thoughts and leads men to refrain wholly from labor."¹

Paul could have been a burden to those churches he pastored and taken undue support from them. Yet, he chose not to. Paul set an example before his church at Thessalonica. He worked all day preaching. Then, during the night hours he would stay up and work most, if not all, of the night as a tentmaker to earn his living. Notice his commitment to his ministry was primary. It dominated every aspect of his life.

Ellen White wrote, "His soul was wrapped up in the work of the ministry, and it was with feelings of pain that he withdrew from this work to toil for his own bodily necessities."²

Paul was not one who tried to keep up with the "Joneses." Rather, he was a man who said, "I have put aside all else, counting it worth less than nothing, in order that I can have Christ" (Phil. 3:8, TLB). His devotion to Christ compelled him to serve Christ first, and then he made an effort to supply his own needs secondarily.

Let's examine our own lives. How are we living? Do we follow the example set before us in the life of Paul? Does secular work become secondary? Or do we get so busy working, that we ignore the spiritual? Do we devote our best energies, our best faculties to secular things only to find ourselves fizzled out by the end of the day, too fatigued to do God's work? Are we comfortable with our idle busybody status? Or do we join Paul in putting Christ first and foremost above any other goal?

I am not advocating everyone should drop out of school and become street preachers; nor am I saying everyone should go out all day preaching and work night jobs to make a living. Yet the example of Paul is clear. Our first obligation is to Christ. Let's join Paul in his devotion to the gospel above every other interest.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 348.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 409.

by Pedro E. Perez

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Expending Spiritual Energy

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:11, 12

Worshiping is like feasting. Partaking of the proteins and carbohydrates of God, the Christian becomes equipped for every good work. However, many eat time and again of Living Bread without expending any of this energy.

John Foxe describes the activities that kept an early Christian "busy." "Theodotus, a Dalmation, kept an inn at Ancyra. Being a Christian, he devoted a great part of his time to visit the afflicted, and a great part of his property to relieve the poor."¹

To John Foxe a Christian was one who devoted his life to actions of kindness and generosity toward others. This is an accurate and mighty description of the one who has fully tasted the sweetness of God. Knowing Christ yields marvelous differences in one's life. Theodotus, as an innkeeper, no longer could keep his inn in the same manner or deal with his guests in the same way. Why? The answer is simple; knowing Christ changes life patterns.

No moment of time belongs to us alone. Every eye that catches ours as we pass and smile is a precious contact. As followers of Christ's example and possessing the knowledge of His soon coming, we see people as opportunities and as commissioned assignments.

Spurgeon describes the urgency of the hour in this way, "As workmen are moved to be more diligent in service when they hear their master's footfall, so, doubtless, saints are quickened in their devotion when they are conscious that he whom they worship is drawing near."²

We today who pray for the latter rain to fall upon us, are we ready "to settle down and earn the bread [we] eat"? Much spiritual food is consumed among Sabbath, vespers, chapels, and dorm worshipers. Where is all this energy being expended? Possibly it is being tucked away in spiritual fat reserves.

Those of us who are looking for the fulfillment of the latter rain in our generation should look to those who experienced the early rain. "Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:44-47, NIV).

1. John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1968), pp. 28, 29.

2. *Spurgeon's Sermons on the Second Coming* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1943), p. 107.

by Byard W. Parks

Byard W. Parks is a senior with a double major in business administration and theology at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Thursday, September 19

Do Not Be Idle

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:6-13

We live in a world that teaches us to just escape our problems when life gets a little tough. We see this in advertisements like Calgon's "take me away," or McDonald's "You deserve a break today," and also in the scope of the drug problem facing our country.

We Christians often buy into this "hit the panic button" mentality and lose sight of virtues such as patience, endurance, and thoroughness. These attitudes are brought "home" when we consider our long-awaited Saviour's return in relation to our present vocation.

So how are we to respond while waiting for Christ's return? May I suggest that we see Christ's second coming as fulfillment of His great plan for our lives (that is, His perfecting us), and not as a "panic button" to escape to an alternate plan. We can further implement and understand this objective by considering the following points.

1. *Consider what God has given you, and be faithful to Him with those talents.* As we read about the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-28, we see God calling us to be good stewards with whatever He has given us, whether small or large. May our desire be to hear God say to us, "Well done, good and faithful ser-

vant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

2. *Recognize our present vocation as part of God's divine plan for our lives.* As Chuck Swindoll mentions in his book *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*, each individual was called by God into a profession or work. Regardless of the employment, it is "sacred"; it is God's calling. There is no distinction supported in Scripture between sacred and secular. Titus 1:15 says: "Unto the pure, all things are pure." That means your Monday through Friday employment is pure, it's sacred.

3. *We need to balance a strong work ethic with a deep love for one another.* The idea of brotherly love is an attitude that revolutionized the early church. Acts 2:44, 45 (NIV) states, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." Through prayer we can discern how to give to the need, not the want, to treat the cause, not the symptom, and therefore help, not hurt.

REACT

1. How can we make work a service unto God?

2. In what ways can we "help" those less fortunate?

by John Odom, Jr.

John Odom, Jr., is a senior biology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Dynamic Equilibrium

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Thess. 3:11, 12, NIV

In a society pressed for time, always rushing to meet deadlines, how can we reach a dynamic equilibrium, a constantly changing yet balanced life in regard to the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects? From our current perspective as students, we can see two extremes, both spiritually dysfunctional. In the following scenarios, the stereotyped individuals are lacking in balance.

Scenario 1

The Super Student immerses himself in scholastic activities. He is a perfectionist who strives to be everything. Yet, he finds himself struggling every day to remain caught up. As he juggles classes, work, homework, organizational responsibilities, and relationships, he often finds that 24 hours in a day are not enough. At the end of the day he whispers a quick, trite prayer before going to bed exhausted, waking up to begin the same draining routine.

Scenario 2

The Mediocre Student is unconcerned about his academic standing and is indifferent to the world around him. He is disinterested in challenging his mind or broadening his horizons. He takes only the very basic classes required to get his degree. He is sure to pass those classes, but

does not attempt to study any more than absolutely necessary to pass. Why does it matter? After all, God is coming soon, isn't He? The Mediocre Student works as little as he possibly can. He feels that responsibilities toward student-loan repayment need not be taken seriously. By the time he is required to pay, the Lord will have already come. He relies on the promise of Jesus' return in the future as his escape from the responsibilities of the present.

In both scenarios the individuals are "idle."

The Super Student is very busy with his daily activities, but he is idle in his search for God. He does not place enough significance on the necessity of having God integrated into his daily routine.

The Mediocre Student is awaiting Jesus' return, but he is idle because he does not take on any responsibilities in his present reality.

Although 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 12 advocates work, the texts do not refer to idle busyness. We believe that a healthy Christian should lead a balanced life through the integration of God into his everyday activities. God-given talents should be nurtured, developed, and used to their greatest potential—not wasted.

REACT

1. How can I maintain a dynamic equilibrium?

2. Do I make time to build a strong relationship with Jesus?

by Rikki Stenbakken and Gelerie Arafiles

Rikki Stenbakken and Gelerie Arafiles are premed students attending Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Lesson 13, September 22-28

A Life That Pleases God



“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (1 Thess. 4:11, 12, NIV).

Motives Behind Morality

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 6:23

Today we are faced with the challenge of the AIDS virus and the devastating effect it has on its victims' lives. Spreading more each day, this virus continues to perplex science by its evasiveness. It respects no boundaries, its victims including homosexuals, prostitutes, IV-drug users, innocent infants, blood transfusion recipients, and many others.

Philosophers, theologians, and laypersons alike may argue for years to come as to the purpose and meaning of AIDS, and even question whether God Himself is the author (creator) of this virus.

Though I believe it erroneous to imply that all who are infected with the AIDS virus have lived immoral lives, it remains an interesting irony to me how mankind continues to depend on science for the solution to a problem that—to a large extent—can be controlled through the modification of behavior.

As was somewhat the case with syphilis and gonorrhea before the discovery of penicillin, man has once again found virtue

and solace in the practice of monogamy and the adherence to marital vows with the emergence of the AIDS virus. Argued by some to be an infallible sign of the end of time, AIDS has catalyzed a moral, spiritual, and life-preserving revolution that has been adopted by groups ranging from conservative Protestants to liberal New Agers.

But what will become of this revolution if AIDS finds its cure, or if ecology and politics reach a harmonious balance? Will we make compromises if science once again comes to our rescue by offering an immediate "medical pardon" for the effects of practicing a promiscuous lifestyle?

As you study 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, take the time to evaluate your morals and values for yourself, and ask how they might change if AIDS and other equally nasty "plagues" did not exist, or if God were not to come in your lifetime? Finally, as your quest for finding who or what governs your life continues, take to heart the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 6:23, where he writes: "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."

by Jose L. Fuentes

Jose L. Fuentes is a marriage, family, and child counselor in Miami, Florida, and an alumnus of Loma Linda University.

Monday, September 23

Expecting Responsibly

LOGOS

1 Peter 2:21

To live under the lordship of Christ means to give all of our lives completely to His control. Living under Christ's lordship will result in living sexually pure lives, experiencing fraternal human relations, and being responsible citizens of the community.

Living Under the Lordship of Christ

"For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:2).

The Thessalonian Christians were living with the expectation that the coming of Christ would be soon. Paul's major concern in this letter is on how Christians should live while waiting for the return of Christ. Among the problems found in the community of faith was idleness and irresponsibility toward others, exhibited by those who fanatically expected the return, together with compromising moral/ethical principles in the area of sexual relations. In this regard the early Christian community was not much different from contemporary Christians. Paul's words of exhortation to our modern consciousness call for a radical commitment to live under the lordship of Christ.

The basis for the apostle's "beseeching and exhorting" the "brethren" is found within the con-

text of God's lordship. By using the expression "by the Lord Jesus" twice (verses 1, 2), Paul wants to make clear the source of the "commandments" he taught. In his introductory remarks (verses 1, 2) the apostle sets the stage for the ethical teachings to follow by reminding believers of their need to abound in grace as a response to their commitment to Christ's lordship.

How can we know whether our manner of waiting is pleasing in God's eyes?

What is the importance of living "in order to please God"?

Sexual Responsibility (4:3-8)

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (verse 3).

This statement must be seen as directed to those from a society in which sexual laxness and promiscuity were the norm. To live under the lordship of Christ means, in part, maintaining sexual integrity (chastity) in the unmarried as well as in the married life. The reign of God's kingdom overturns the value structures and ideologies of "this world." It was literally revolutionary for the apostle to make such a radical demand of persons living in a society whose pagan religion legitimized sexual indulgence through cultic ceremonies and where uncontrolled passions were freely exhibited and celebrated.

by Edwin Hernandez

Edwin Hernandez is director of pastoral care and bioethics at Hialeah Hospital, Hialeah, Florida.

Within our modern-day world, the radicalism of these words can also be felt. Sexual permissiveness permeates our society. The telecommunications world and all of its subsidiary institutions have essentially constructed a view of sexuality completely opposite to God's intended will. It almost seems as if there isn't a product sold without calling attention to some sensual relationship. The result of such influence is the exploitation of persons and resultant dulling of our moral conscience.

No wonder that chastity is considered old-fashioned and outmoded; no wonder people are determined to have the physical pleasures of marriage, without the responsibilities; no wonder many engaged couples feel that sexual experimentation will enhance their compatibility; and no wonder, too, that married people indulge in adulterous relationships.

While the world around us encourages vice, God calls us to holy consecration. And this holiness is achieved only through the power of God (see 5:24). God's calling is not on the basis of our uncleanness but rather on our potential for living the Christ-filled life (see verse 7). Finally, to disregard God's invitation to "holiness" is not a rejection of any human intention, but rather a complete rejection of God's will (see verse 8). Morality, for Paul, is always firmly tied to belief in God.

How do you relate being sanctified, avoiding sexual immorality, and controlling your own body?

Why is avoiding sexual immorality important in God's eyes?

Brotherly Love (4:9, 10)

"For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (4:9).

The character of the Christian church is greatly determined by how the community lives together

in fellowship and in love. The word that Paul uses to describe brotherly love is *philadelphia*. This word was used in the Greek to denote love between actual brothers. However, in the New Testament its meaning is metaphorically applied to represent the love that exists between members of the community of faith (see Rom. 12:10; 1 John 3:4-17).

For the Christian church this sense of brotherhood moved beyond the metaphorical to the real. Believers supported one another and provided for each other's needs. Early Christian brotherly love attended the needs of the poor, widows, and outcasts. What inspired such radical loving and caring? Paul uses the word *theodidaktos* for the first time in the New Testament, to explain such love as being "taught of God to love one another." Not only does the thought encompass being taught the need to love, but also that of being taught how to love. Thus the Christian's growth in love (see 1:3) is a result of the sanctifying power of the Spirit (see 4:8).

Too often human fellowship and bonding are sacrificed on the altar of vocational attainment and material success. The invitation to mutual Christian loving calls us to reorient our priorities and to experience the full consequences of our Christian conversion. Christian conversion does not lead to a life of rugged individualism, but rather to community, where life is shared with and for others.

Why does Paul include "brotherly love" in this section? Is it logical that there be a parallel development of brotherly love and sexual purity?

Earning a Living (4:11, 12).

"That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing"

(4:12). Why study; why care about the poor; why be concerned about the environment or nuclear proliferation if everything will ultimately be destroyed? An apocalyptic community like the early Christian believers and contemporary Adventism must face these questions.

A state of idleness was precisely what some in the community of Thessalonica were advocating. It is possible that some in the community were taking advantage of the kindness of other members in the church who were known for their brotherly love. It is generally assumed that because of the expectation of the second coming many believers came to feel that they no longer needed to work or to provide for the future. They might have become a nuisance to the community—disorderly and irresponsible. The command is for them to be quiet and mind their own business.

Paul, in verse 12, provides the community two reasons for his exhortation. The first is to recognize that one's behavior affects the lives of other people and that our manner of treating people gives direct testimony to our faith in God.

Christian behavior is particularly telling among those who have not known the gospel.

The second reason Paul gives is the call for self-sufficiency. Stoic philosophy pictured the good person as one who was self-sufficient, independent of others, and bearing life's problems alone. In contrast, a Christian's self-sufficiency is always based upon a dependence on God (see Phil. 4:10-14). Moreover, the Christian is a member of a community living and working together, where no one is neglected or experiences life in isolation. Perhaps the best way to summarize the message is by saying that the believer should never become a burden to others and yet always seek to relieve the burdens of others (see Gal. 6:2, 5).

Why is it that belief in the second coming of Christ leads some to be idle and uncaring about the world's problems?

Does Paul's call to not be dependent on others mean that we don't need anybody or that we can live life in isolation?

“To Live a Holy Life”?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:7, 8

So what does it mean to be living a holy life? Does it mean a sinless life—a perfect life—a secluded life? Are we to limit our contacts and our acquaintances in the fear that we might be tempted to be “unholy”?

In fact, a holy life is dependent on whom you know, love, and follow every day of your life. If that person is Jesus Christ, then welcome to the holy life!

Think back to the day you decided to give your heart to Christ. It might have been a very emotional experience. Was it a sermon? A song? Or a tragedy? At that moment you were probably feeling God’s Spirit moving your heart as you realized your need of Christ. It was a wonderful experience, and at that moment it seemed that it would last forever. But the way gets hard, and the trials do come, and we do fall. Why is this? “But after his [man’s] sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. . . . There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness.”¹

You see, the very nature of our bodies is against living the life of Christ. The moment man moved away from God, he moved from holiness.

“None of the apostles and

prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived the nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God has honored with divine light and power, have confessed to the sinfulness of their nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ.”²

Isn’t that great? Think of it. As we claim Christ as our Saviour He becomes our righteousness, and even if we have not yet repented, we can come to Christ and ask Him for repentance. We can even ask God to make us want to be like Him.

“The way of the Lord can be learned only through most careful obedience to His word.”³

And the power for daily living is from Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God—to holiness.

REACT

1. To know God we must pray and study His Word daily. What else can I do every day to improve my relationship with Jesus Christ and my “holy life”?

2. Is Christ really my best friend, and do I ask His will to be done in every part of my life?

1. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 17, 18.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 561.

3. *Messages to Young People*, p. 391.

by Obed Cruz

Obed Cruz, a graduate of Southern College, sings with the vocal group Higher Power and serves as a nursing-home administrator in Miami, Florida.

Wednesday, September 25

A Living Testimony

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:1-12

In their book *Exploring the New Testament*, John and Denise Carmody and Gregory A. Robbins state that Paul founded a Christian church in Thessalonica, a port city of what was then known as Macedonia. Today the same area is thought of as northern Greece, and the name of the city has changed only slightly: Thessalonica. Now, as in Paul's day, the city is on a bay or inlet of the Aegean Sea. In ancient times, however, it also lay along one of the main roads of the Roman Empire, the Via Egnatia. Paul, probably traveling the Via Egnatia, had stopped in Thessalonica, where he had gathered the Thessalonians together by preaching the significance of Christ; living in the glow of Paul's message was giving the Thessalonians great joy, although they were becoming anxious at the delay of the eschaton. The Thessalonians had placed too much emphasis on Paul's promise that the resurrection of Christ meant that the end of history was very near.

According to Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Paul offered the Thessalonians, in 1 Thessalonians, the following moral and doctrinal guidance:

"1. *Abound in abstinence*, 4:1-8. After this word of introduction, Paul deals with the first specific lack in the lives of the Thes-

salonians. It should be remembered that heathen life in those days was characterized by general sexual laxity. . . .

"He begins by putting the whole subject on the highest plane—"this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (verse 3). God's will includes sanctification, and since sanctification includes holiness in body as well as in spirit, fornication nullifies it. . . .

"2. *Abound in affection*, 4:9, 10. Paul speaks in these verses not of love in general, but of brotherly love (*philadelphia*). . . . Therefore, brotherly love is that special desire to seek the glory of God in the lives of other members of the household of faith. . . .

"3. *Abound in ambition*, 4:11, 12. Following this admonition concerning love, Paul now urges his readers to have certain ambitions. First he exhorts them to be ambitious, to be distinguished in being quiet. . . . Quiet is the opposite of restlessness. It means tranquillity of mind, and this comes only when one's whole desire in life is to let Christ be magnified in his life. . . . There is evidence that some of these believers were restless because they believed that there was no need to work since the Lord would come very soon. Therefore, they may have been sponging off the other Christians in the church. . . . The great purpose of a dedicated life that tends to its own business is to have an hon-

by Manuel R. Fuentes

Manuel R. Fuentes is principal of Greater Miami Academy, Miami, Florida.

est testimony toward the un-
saved world. . . .

“Here Paul is urging the Thes-
salonians so to live that the un-
believers may see in their lives
the difference between order and
confusion, idleness and diligence,
sponging and independence.
Such a life will be independent
of the help of others, and this is

the meaning of the last phrase
in verse 12. Maintain an honor-
able independence and thus
maintain a decent testimony to
unbelievers.”*

*Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Everyman's Bible Commen-
tary: First & Second Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody
Press, 1959), pp. 54-60.

Thursday, September 26

Sanctification—God's Gift of Holiness

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 15:5

Sanctification can be a scary experience. We seem to have this inner, hidden fear that tells us that if we live a sanctified life we'll become weird. We think that this kind of life will absorb our lives so much that we won't be able to live a normal life. Somehow, we feel threatened by the word *sanctification*. Perhaps with good reasons. There are so many religious fanatics who show us what a sanctified life is not.

One misconception about sanctification that I've picked up over the years is the one that says that sanctification is something we do for God. Often we are trying to appease God, and as a result we ourselves may be miserable.

The tragedy of all this is that we strive harder and harder each day, always trying our best to be holy, to make our Lord happy and proud of us. But we fail miserably to enjoy the beauty of a holy life. Guilt kills our spirit, discouragement and depression fill our hearts.

Here are some pointers that have helped me in the Christian walk:

1. *Remember that a sanctified life is a gift of holiness from God to us.* In this gift God wants to share His life, His personhood, who He is, with us. To you and

me His life is a holy life. To Him it is the normal way of living. His gift for us is that we can experience, little by little, what it means to be a complete person. He wants us to have now the experience we'll have throughout eternity. Therefore, sanctification is not a demand of God from us. But it is His desire to share His holy life with us.

2. *A sanctified life means growth.* Some people don't want to grow. Growth is painful. Yet, there is no Christian life without growth. My English teacher in academy wrote in my yearbook in my junior year: "Keep growing—asking questions that need to be asked and searching for answers. People die spiritually and morally when they stop asking and searching." Growth occurs naturally. It cannot be forced, physically, spiritually, or emotionally. In the Christian life growth takes place only when we're in Christ.

3. *A sanctified life brings joy to God.* The same way parents find joy in the growth of their children. So God finds infinite joy in a sanctified life—growth at its best. God's joy is a result of seeing us enjoy the virtues of His own life.

REACT

Can a person grow in the Christian life without sanctification occurring?

by Sergio Torres

Sergio Torres is an associate director for youth/young adult ministries in the Department of Church Ministries for the Florida Conference.

Conquer Thyself

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 4:4-7

Webster describes it as “to gratify, or to give pleasure to.”

Roget’s Thesaurus lists these synonyms for it: “satisfy,” “yield to,” or “delight.” I am referring to the verb *to please*, as in “a life that pleases God,” our theme for this lesson. Certainly I’m no Webster, but I see an obvious relationship between pleasing God and performing His will. Possibly these two concepts are one and the same.

Paul seemed to address this issue in his first letter to the Thesalonians when he spoke to them about God’s will, saying “Each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thess. 4:4), and, “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification” (verse) 7. Apparently Paul was concerned about the Thesalonians and decided he needed to remind them of God’s will for their lives, particularly as it related to immorality. He knew these new converts well and was aware that they came from a background of people known for practicing immoral ways of life.

It seems amazing to me that Paul’s appeal for purity and holiness is still so relevant and necessary today, perhaps more necessary than it was then. I wish he had written us a letter; we really need one. Well, I’m sure he would oblige if he were aware

of the present statistics on pre/extra-marital sex, divorce, child abuse, pornography, rape, suicide, homicide, drug/alcohol abuse, and AIDS. The point is: He already has. The letter was written to the church at Thessalonica and to the world church of the 1990s. Even today God speaks to us through Paul’s letter.

For some reason, in our contemporary frame of mind we sometimes seem to think our age is totally unique, sharing little or nothing with previous eras. However, in reality many of the social dilemmas that existed then are still present today. Unfortunately, one major difference seems to be the frequency with which these problems occur today.

Despite this, and other obvious differences (such as technological advances, etc.), I see some definite similarities between us and the people of Paul’s time. I’d like to focus on one similarity in particular, one that I find both interesting and important.

Primarily, I think we share a real lack of self-control. Think about this: How much sin/immorality could be avoided if members of any society or culture exercised more control over their selfish impulses and desires? The answer for then and now is, “Plenty.”

Peter the Great exclaimed, “I have conquered an Empire, but I have not been able to conquer myself.”¹ This statement gives tremendous insight into the human struggle over self. Paul

by Lina Marrero

Lina Marrero is an elementary teacher and graduate in student counseling at St. Thomas University, Miami, Florida.

dealt with this struggle as he longed for the church members to conquer themselves and place God in control. Today we struggle to conquer college, careers, work, finances, family, and so much more, but to conquer ourselves and give God control remains most important. Personally, I feel this is a crucial part of a Christian's struggle toward holiness, sanctification, and attaining

“a life that pleases God.”

D. L. Moody summarized well the value of living such a life when he declared, “Next to the might of God, the serene beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence for good in all the world.”²

1. George Sweeting, *Great Quotes and Illustrations* (World Publishing, Dallas, Texas, 1985), p. 41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

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LISTEN....

TO WHAT THESE TOP PERSONALITIES
HAVE TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT OF
DRUGS AND ALCOHOL.



"If your image of reality is skewed from being intoxicated by alcohol or some pharmaceutical, you can't participate fully in life." Mae Jemison, astronaut
Listen, March 1990



"A few years ago, when I tried to talk about drugs, I'd get a few boos, but it didn't stop me. I'd tell them, 'You don't have to listen to me, you'll see it someday.' I've seen what drugs have done to some people I've known." Henry Lee Sumner, singer
Listen, August 1990



"When you're a teenager, it's hard to realize what a precious commodity time is. With drugs you lose so much time; you're losing time getting on with reality." Amy Grant, singer
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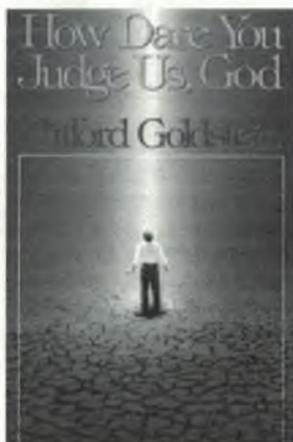
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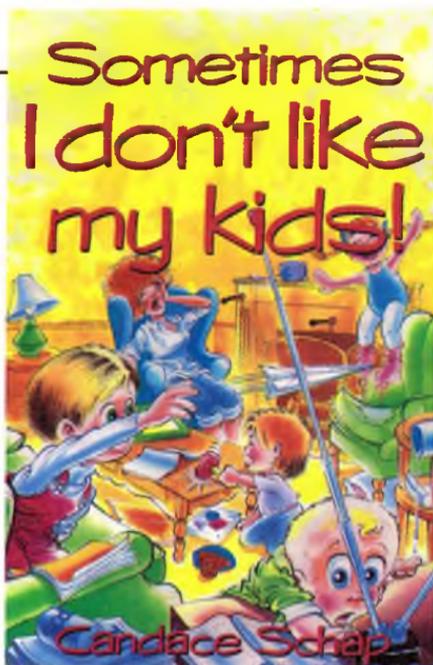
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