

JULY-SEPTEMBER 1998

CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A
**PERSONAL
APPEAL**

2 CORINTHIANS



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2 CORINTHIANS A PERSONAL APPEAL

JULY - SEPTEMBER 1998

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Sabbath
School

2 CORINTHIANS: A PERSONAL APPEAL



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Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson quarterly, more than 300 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000. It is published in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Finnish languages.

Ever think about writing a Sabbath School Quarterly?

Why not! Each year 300 young adults from around the world participate in the *Collegiate Quarterly* writing program. CQ gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our CQ formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson—and get paid for it—write us today:

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CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Illustrator



Alden J. Ho was born in Singapore and grew up in Toronto, Canada. He attended Union College as a music education major and served as a student missionary in Korea, where he developed a love for photography. Upon returning from Korea he attended Andrews University to pursue a degree in Media Technology, photography emphasis. After successfully using his skills in the professional photographic field, God lead him into the ministry where he completed a master's degree in youth ministry.

He now lives in North Carolina with his wife and their son, where he is the youth pastor of the Hendersonville SDA Church.

Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

Facts You Should Know

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than three hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000.

Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

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

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

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

"**Introduction**" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest 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.

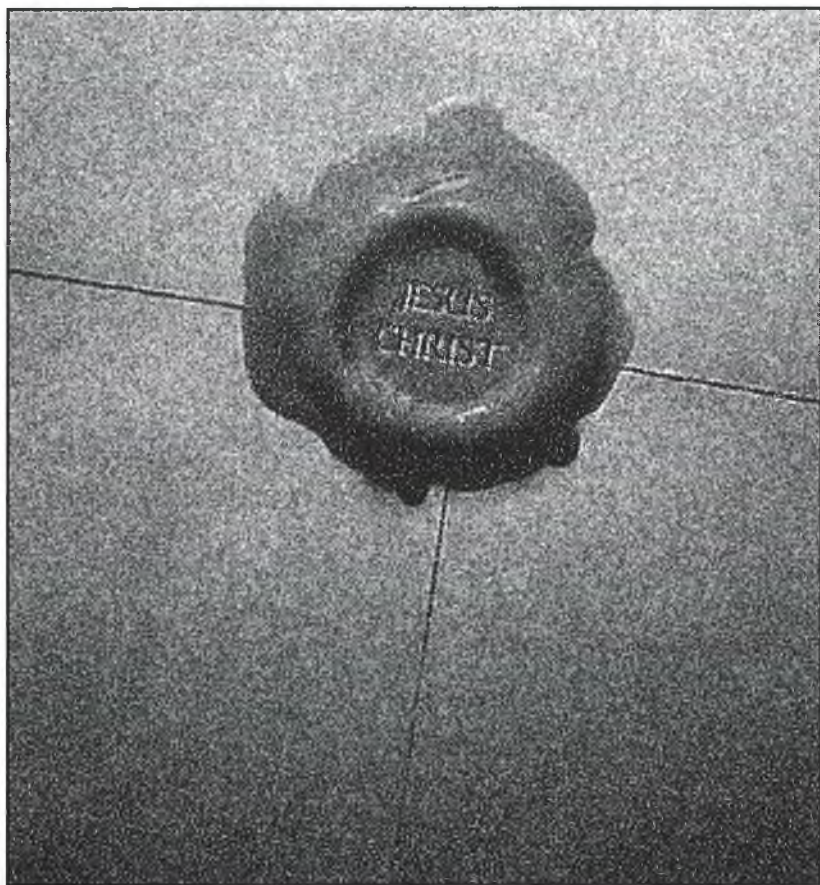
"**How-To**" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

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

CQ and the Church

CQ 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.*

GIVING AID AND COMFORT



“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, NIV).

Making Life Better

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 1:5

Mario's neighbor has no income while her assets are tied up in court. Mario can relate—he lost his job once. He drops by his neighbor's place regularly with food and a prayer.

Heidi once felt her prayers went nowhere. When she found the solution, she began teaching other students how to have better prayer lives.

Ruth never felt loved as a child, but she was able to accept the love of Jesus. It satisfied her longing and continues to. When she learned of a church without a children's department, she volunteered and now has a large group of children in each of three divisions. They know Ruth loves them, so they believe Jesus does too. A number have been baptized.

Glenn lost his mother in the mission field, so he understands childhood suffering. On his frequent international trips, he always takes clothing and toys for the poor and goodies for missionary kids.

Amy faced illness and intense loneliness as a teenager. When she tried to express how she felt, no one listened. Now she senses when others need to talk. People feel relieved after dialoging with her and being understood. These conversations give her opportunities to speak of God and to pray with others. She's seen lives changed—conversions and baptisms.

Only a selfish human heart lives for itself.

These Christians don't think about the fact that they're ministering. They just care about people. God made life better for them; they relish the sensation of making life better for others. Each does it uniquely; the common link is Jesus.

Each one is anointed by God. His "seal of ownership" (2 Cor. 1:22, NIV), His Spirit in their hearts, incites each to serve, as God originally planned. They understand that only a selfish human heart lives for itself. They know that angels find their joy in giving and "it is the glory of our God to give."

They love what they do, finding satisfaction in it. In fact, they often feel they are the ones most blessed by what they do. Jesus, however, who is distressed in all human distress (Isa. 63:9) is also comforted as Christians comfort. Soon each ministering Christian will hear Him say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matt. 25:34-36, NIV).

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.

By Pam Baumgartner, a graduate student at Montemorelos University, Nuevo León, Mexico.

A Ministry of Comfort

LOGOS

2 Cor. 1:1–2:4

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, NIV).

Have you ever been in a situation in which you felt so distressed you thought that if your friends or family didn’t help, you would just give up? Paul was in a similar situation. He had sent letters to the people of Corinth in what is recorded in the Bible as his first epistle to the Corinthians. For a long time, however, he did not receive a reply. Because of this, he did not know their opinions of his very strong appeals.

No true ministry can be developed without intercessory prayer. In church leadership, who is more exposed to experiencing distress about the brethren? In what situations can this distress be increased? In such situations how can you be of comfort?

Working in the Spirit of Christ

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:3, NIV).

No true ministry can be developed without intercessory prayer.

Paul could finally rejoice! Titus arrived, bringing with him the good news of the revival that occurred among the brethren of Corinth. This was a positive response to Paul’s letters. Paul did not take the glory for this new awakening experienced in Corinth but instead gave the glory to the Lord. He understood what God meant in Isaiah: “I will not give my glory to another” (Isa. 42:8, NIV).

With his reaction to the good news, Paul emphasized the fact that he was not working alone but that he worked through the Spirit of Christ who comforted him in all his sufferings. This experience empowered him to develop a strong ministry of comfort for the Corinthians.

Assurance in Ministry

“He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:10, 11, NIV).

Paul’s experience is an assurance that amid all the discouraging moments that we can and will have as we develop our different talents in ministries, we can receive this special legacy of comfort from God. When we individually accept and receive God’s comfort, we will be able to comfort others inside and outside our spiritual communities.

No true ministry can be developed without intercessory prayer. A life of prayer will bring personal revival. This is the first step to a collective spiritual revival. When we collectively experience this new awakening, if there is anything to

rejoice in, it should be that we live in and through the Spirit of Christ. In this way everyone can see and know that through Him the depth of our love is great.

REACT

1. How can you as an individual begin a ministry of comfort in your church? Make a list of the steps to follow.

2. What can your class do to awaken desire for revival?

3. Why are the titles by which Paul describes God in 2 Corinthians 1:3 especially appealing?

4. How can we best use our sufferings to become closer to God?

5. What can be done to make a prayer list more effective?

6. How does the counsel in 2 Corinthians 1:22 apply to church discipline and the modern-day restoration of fallen leaders?

7. What qualities should a Christian young person develop to be able to transform a stumbling block into a steppingstone?

8. In what sense is a college student, studying in his own country, a missionary?

Steppingstone or Stumbling Block

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 1:9, 10

The famous Latin poet, Ruben Dario, once described youthfulness as a “divine treasure.” Youth is indeed the time in our lives when our bodies flourish. We not only possess physical strength and beauty but, as a result of this physical awakening, we tend to feel invincible emotionally. The feeling of being unbeatable causes us to react in unexpected ways whenever we face complications in life’s simple challenges. It is during these occasions when we usually experience depression, frustration, discouragement, and we tend to give up—we stumble.

In his first epistle, Peter defines a stumbling block as a “stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (1 Pet. 2:8, NIV). Ellen White says of life’s challenges: “every mistake, every fault, every difficulty, conquered, becomes a stepping-stone to better and higher things. It is through such experiences that all who have ever made life worth the living have achieved success.”

Ruben Dario once described youthfulness as a “divine treasure.”

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

We rise by things that are under our feet;
By what we have mastered of good and gain;
By the pride deposed and the passion slain,
And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet.

All common things, each day’s events,
That with the hour begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents,
Are rounds by which we may ascend.*

During their many travels, Paul and Timothy endured many difficulties. Nevertheless, these challenges taught them to rely on God. We cannot remove or avoid—as we sometimes try to do—life’s tests. We can, however, transform them into steppingstones that will lead us to stronger spiritual relationships, higher intellectual capacities, and healthier emotional states.

**Education*, p. 296.

By Norka Blackman-Richards, coordinator of the English department at Universidad Adventista de Centro America, Alajuela, Costa Rica.

A True Apostle of Jesus

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 1:1, 3, 4

In 2 Corinthians, Paul presents evidence of his apostleship in order to sustain the believers' confidence in his teachings and his efforts to preserve church unity. The hypothesis of his thesis is, "I am an apostle of Jesus (and so are you)." On this he builds a manual to genuine apostleship.

The church had categorized apostles: (a) The elite, who had seen, walked with, and been appointed by Jesus. These were granted great authority. (b) Those elected by the church. These received less authority.

Paul was mistakenly classified in the second group. His doctrines—the Bible truths he presented—were in the balance. This explains his ardent effort to argue the case (2 Corinthians).

"Dear Friends," he writes, "This letter is from me, Paul, appointed by God to be Jesus Christ's messenger" (1:1, TLB).

The Corinthian church was Paul's success after his failure to establish Christianity in Athens. Dear to his heart though far from him, his Corinthian children in the faith were continually in his thoughts. In Paul's absence, these Gentile converts had fallen into dissension, immorality, and disorder. Paul's detractors, questioning his apostleship, also disturbed him. They "accused him of profiting materially from his preaching, laughed at his visions, and renewed the demand that all Christians should obey the Jewish Law."

Paul stated that he had authority equal to the Twelve.

The Greek word *ἀπόστολος*, meaning "one sent forth," is used 82 times, including derivatives. Paul uses it 39 of those times, stating that he:

- received his commission directly from Jesus so was chosen by God, not humanity (Acts 26:16, 17; Gal. 1:11, 12; Rom. 1:1)
- represented Christ as ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20)
- had authority equal to the Twelve, having been instructed by Christ Himself (1 Cor. 9:1)
- held remarkable credentials of experience (2 Cor. 11:22-28)

Yes, Paul possessed an outstanding trait of apostleship—willingness to go where sent, to speak that which had been revealed, and to share what he'd learned by experience. The reward he looked forward to will be his soon—a great crowd accompanying him to live with Jesus, there through the apostle's influence.

*Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 585.

By Miguel Adonia, president of the Nicaragua Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Managua.

Are You Ministering for God?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 25:37-39, 44

Once I attended a branch Sabbath School with many problems. This small church depended on a larger church. However, folk at the main church only reminded the small group of their sins—following biblical procedures, of course—but no positive changes came of their efforts. Something was missing. Soon they grew tired of this little group and criticized them for being stubborn.

One day a simple, new brother began attending the small church. He saw the problems and wanted to correct them as had the parent church; and he did but in a different way. This man spoke to those in the small church about their sins but in love. He showed caring love by visiting the members, eating with them, becoming involved in their daily lives, praying with them, and inviting them back to church. He got what he wanted: folk came back to church.

Now, this man was not an Adventist from the cradle as were most members of the parent church. In fact, only a year and a half earlier he had been in jail for robbery. At the prison Jesus called him in love, and now he, with the help of Jesus Christ, called the members back in love.

Are you ministering for God? If not, you need to:

- Hear and heed His call (Isa. 41:9; Heb. 4:7)

Only a year and a half earlier he had been in jail for robbery.

- Be filled with His love (Ps. 23:5, 6)
- Talk of Him often (Deut. 6:7)
- Share His love, calling others (Matt. 10:8)

Are the people sharing your bench every Sabbath in sin? Think twice before criticizing them. Maybe Jesus put them close to you so your strength could help them in their weaknesses. If you fail to take this opportunity, when Jesus comes you may say to Him, “Lord, Lord.”

But He’ll answer, “Get away from me, you sinner, because when I had a problem and needed you, you turned your face way.”

You will ask, “When did I do that to You?”

He’ll reply, “When you did it to the person who sat on your bench every Sabbath, you did it to Me.”

Jesus saved us through love. The only way to minister for Him is by giving that same love. Paul shows this love all through 2 Corinthians. In Jesus he loved that church so much he always talked to them with love. This made him a true minister.

It is time not only to read and talk about Christian ministry. It’s time to do it—at home, in class, and at work. There’s an entire world of people who need to know God loves and cares about them.

By Ruth Oré de Pryce, executive secretary for ADRA Nicaragua, Managua.

Christian Ministry: The Misunderstood Art

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 7:22, 23

“Brothers and sisters,” said the pastor, “we must enter the highways and byways preaching the Good News to all who will listen. Let us remember that if we are not willing to take the gospel into all the world, the rocks will cry out!” As the pastor droned on, I envisioned myself beating a little religion into someone.

Sound familiar? It seems we are forgetting in our churches what *true* ministry is about. We put the cart before the horse. Jesus clearly shows us that those who enter the kingdom show a disinterested interest in their neighbor—they serve others without self-interest. They are the young boy who chops wood for his elderly neighbor, the group who rakes the lawn for the widow down the street.

Many will say when Jesus comes, “Why, Lord, I gave 10 Bible studies a week. I was the great Sunday-night evangelist. Why, Lord, I handed out *Steps to Christ* on the street corners.”

Jesus will answer, “Depart from me. I don’t know you.”

To another group He will say, “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was in jail and you visited me. Enter into my house.” These have truly ministered—helping those with physical and emotional needs. “Meeting” spiritual needs without meeting these others is impossible (see James 2:15, 16). It doesn’t work.

I envisioned myself beating a little religion into someone.

Once at Christmastime we heard of a neighbor family that didn’t have much food. My sister and I took them some. The joy on their faces can’t be expressed on paper. I know that day I gained a greater blessing than they did.

I want to challenge the reader of this lesson to put into practice the misunderstood art of true ministry—the art mentioned in 2 Corinthians and Matthew. If you’re like me, you have probably read over 3,588 Sabbath School lessons so have been challenged before to help those around you. I invite you to make this challenge different.

Instead of going to that video party, why not get a group of friends together and clean the house of that poor widow you know? Instead of going skiing Sunday, why don’t you drive the blind man to the store and help with his shopping? On the way to the store you just might have a chance to share the love of Jesus with him. This is true ministry. This is the misunderstood art.

REACT

1. Identify at least one thing you can do to help someone else during this week.
2. As a Sabbath School class, make a list of unique ministries that you can do together to help meet the physical needs of others.

By Anthony Stahl, finance director for ADRA Nicaragua, Managua.

WHEN YOUR TOES ARE STEPPED ON



“If indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:10, 11, NKJV).

My Sister's Amazing Forgiveness

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Luke 17:3

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother [or sister] trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

My sister pranced through the front door, her pigtails bobbing. I watched enviously as she opened the packages she had saved her allowance to buy. In one package was a new Barbie doll, with flowing hair and a flashy outfit. The other package contained a jumbo tube of Bonnie Bell’s purple plum lip gloss.

My sister showed me Barbie’s red-sequined blouse and uncapped the lip gloss. She smoothed the wonderful smelling goo over her lips until they were as shiny as Barbie’s. I could smell the fruity flavor, and I ached to smear just a little on my lips. But I was too proud to admit my weaknesses. My big sister had a knack for saving her allowance. I spent my money on cheap toys or candy.

I wanted to wreak havoc on her new purchases. I decided to maim Barbie and make her ugly so my sister wouldn’t want to play with her. So I bit off all of Barbie’s toes. As my teeth sank into the plastic appendages, I smiled wickedly. After Barbie was severely handicapped, I opened the lip gloss and decided to have a bite of the delicious-smelling gloss. One bite turned into two, and pretty soon I had eaten the whole tube.

I decided to maim Barbie and make her ugly.

That evening when my sister found my destructive handiwork, I was in big trouble. Tears came to her eyes as she looked at Barbie’s feet, now chewed up into unrecognizable blobs. I watched as she opened her lip gloss only to find remnants stuck to the side of the tube—my leftovers.

I was expecting to be walloped over the head. Instead, she asked me why I did this to her things. I blubbered out my envious explanation of her thrifty abilities and my jealousy.

I’ll never forget what she said next. “Oh, well, it is not as if Barbie actually can walk. She doesn’t need toes.” With that she sat down and began to put on a pair of heels to cover up what was left of Barbie’s feet. I uttered a humble apology. My sister managed a smile and handed me her Barbie and told me to put on her new cowgirl outfit.

I saved my next allowance and bought her a new tube of lip gloss and a new Barbie. I wanted to correct my wrongdoing because she had so graciously forgiven me.

Even though we no longer play with Barbies, I still have a box of them stored away in a trunk. My favorite is the one without any toes that reminds me of my sister’s choice to forgive.

By Melanee Grondahl, a senior English major working on her secondary education certification at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Do Unto Others . . .

LOGOS

2 Cor. 2:5-17

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” When I hear this quotation, images of adolescent confrontations immediately come to mind: “But I don’t want to accept his apology.” It was at this point that my mother would say, “Wouldn’t you want him to forgive you?” This week’s lesson is taken from 2 Corinthians 2:5-17. It deals with the act of forgiveness and the process that goes along with it.

“Forgiveness” was just a word until my pastor addressed the issue at church. I was in the fifth grade and had been having some problems with a classmate. He had done some things to me that caused me great distress—stole my erasers and pens. This is a big deal in the fifth grade. The last thing I wanted to do was forgive him, even though he had asked for my forgiveness.

Paul deals with a similar situation in Corinth. One of the believers has committed a wrong against the church body, and they continue to remind him or her of it. Sound familiar? Paul then goes on to state (verse 6) that the knowledge of the wrong is punishment enough. Sometimes when we have done wrong, just the fact that we realize that we have done wrong is punishment enough, without having to deal with all the persecution that comes from people.

“Forgiveness” was just a word until my pastor addressed the issue at church.

Forgiveness seems to be important to Paul, but what about when it is really hard to forgive? I forgave my classmate for stealing my pens and erasers, but what about when those things come up that seem too hard to forgive? Paul was no super-human. He faced these things the same as you and I. He addresses this very thing in verse 10: “If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake” (NIV).

Did you catch the ending, the part about Christ? Paul himself had struggles with forgiveness. It was only through the person of Christ that he was able to forgive. It can become so easy for us to hold a grudge against others because of what they have done to us. We may even think that we have valid reasons for holding the grudge, but put that attitude next to the character of Christ. Look what we as a people have done to Him. He still forgives us. Look what you have done to Him as an individual. He still forgives you. He then asks us to do something crazy—to treat others as He treats you, to forgive them. It is only through His help that we are able to do this.

When we don’t deal with our problems, they build up. We begin to treat people differently; we stop attending church because he or she will be there. Paul realized the division that can come about in the church, and that is why he encourages members to deal with their problems, to forgive others (verse 11). His bottom line is not to let problems build up between members and divide the body.

Satan will use any means he can to split the people of God. We should not give him a stronghold in our lack of forgiveness. The same advice is still applicable centuries later: we must stick together as a family and deal with our problems. We must learn to forgive.

REACT

1. Why is forgiveness really so important?
2. Why is it so difficult?
3. When is the right time to forgive? Do we have to wait for certain signs?

Explain your answer.

4. What is the greatest example of forgiveness you have ever observed in another human being?

5. Both Judas and Peter betrayed Christ, but their outcomes were quite different. What made the difference between these two?

6. Someone once said that our enemies have not defeated us unless they have succeeded in making us hate them. Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

7. Are there any relationships in your life in which you are not extending forgiveness to others?

8. Are you still punishing yourself for anything in your past, even though you have already asked God's forgiveness?

But I Don't Want to Forgive

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Mark 11:25

So, how many people can you think of whom you need to forgive? Tender subject? It can be very hard to forgive someone who has hurt you so badly. Maybe someone has betrayed you, stolen from you, lied about you, maliciously attempted to hurt you, broken up your family, violated your privacy, or perhaps even taken the life of a loved one? It may be that you want revenge.

I have learned that God has something else in mind: "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25, NIV). Ellen White illuminates this beautifully: "Christ declares that this is the rule by which the Lord will deal with us. 'If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' Wonderful terms! but how little are they understood or heeded."¹

No matter how hard it may be to forgive others, God wants us to realize that we must. God is waiting anxiously to forgive a forgiving heart, but an unforgiving heart is not anxious for God's forgiveness. Don't give Satan the victory by being unforgiving today.

As we become more and more like Christ in character and come to appreciate

An unforgiving heart is not anxious for God's forgiveness.

His awesome forgiveness for us, we will take joy in forgiving others! Here are a few things to keep in mind if you are having a hard time forgiving someone:

- **Give up bitterness.** "We are dependent upon the pardoning mercy of God every day and every hour; how then can we cherish bitterness and malice toward our fellow sinners!"²

- **Keep praying sincerely.** Don't beat around the bush with the Lord. He knows you're upset. Tell Him honestly that you are upset and ask for His help.

- **Abide in Christ.** (Read John 15:4, 5.) Apart from Christ we are nothing! Seek Christ, His strength and forgiveness for yourself so that you may forgive others. We can find Christ by searching *His Word*, the Bible.

Based on the authority of the Bible as well as the enlightenment of Ellen White, we see that in order to be forgiven we must also forgive. Even this we are incapable of doing by ourselves. But by depending on the Lord for our strength, we can forgive and be forgiven!

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 170.

2. *Ibid.*

By Ryan L. Van Hook, a junior in the ministerial program at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

VCR Technician Needed!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 18:21-35

Forgiving rarely happens spontaneously. It takes time. And sometimes it never takes place at all.

What will happen if I forgive? What if I'm taken advantage of? Will my forgiving send the wrong message? These are questions we ask, and they often prevent forgiveness. More often than not we want to get even. As a consequence, we spend enormous energy mentally replaying the scenes of hurt in our mind and devising means of getting back.

Lewis B. Smede says that revenge is like a "videotape planted in your soul that cannot be turned off." It plays forever. "It hooks you into instant replays. And each time it replays, you feel the clap of pain again." He insightfully explains that we cannot escape, change, or undo our past. Only one thing can release us from its grip: forgiveness.

In the parable of the wicked servant, the word used for forgiveness is the Greek *afemi*, "to release," "to set in motion." "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go" (Matt. 18:27, NIV).

In this parable, we see illustrated the liberating effect of forgiveness and the oppression of unforgiveness. Forgiveness sets the servant loose with the promise

Revenge is like a videotape that hooks you into instant replays.

of new life. Unforgiveness moved the wicked servant to choke his fellow servant and have him thrown in jail.

Depending on our choice, we can release others from the grip of their past and become like the King, or we can become like the wicked servant and have our fellowmen thrown back into the cells of their oppressive pasts. We also decide whether we ourselves become free or prisoners of our own anger.

A survivor of Auschwitz, Edith Eger recently shared with Pacific Union College students her journey from victim to survivor. She overcame the tormenting experience of the Holocaust when she decided to forgive. Her captors, she considered, were more imprisoned than she was. She said, "If I'd continue to hate, I would still be in Auschwitz."

REACT

What do you think Edith Eger meant by saying, "If I'd continue to hate, I would still be in Auschwitz?"

*Lewis B. Smede, "Forgiveness: The Power to Change the Past," *Christianity Today*, Jan. 7, 1983.

By Angel Hernandez, associate professor of New Testament, Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Freedom Through Forgiveness

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 1:9, 10

Forgiveness is not merely a theological term or just a necessary component of the redemption story, but a revelation. It should change everything about your existence from the time you experience it onward.

Forgiveness frees you. It is the bridge to freedom. Live each day of your life filled with the enlightening feeling that comes with a fresh start.

1. As a Christian, remind yourself daily of your forgiven status. Ask God to forgive your past failures, and then you enter each new day as a beautiful, pure, deeply loved child of the living God who's erased all traces of earthly contamination, past failings, fallenness, and regret. He penetrates through to exalt and lift your perfect soul, to give it wings that it may soar.

2. Beware of the devil's tricks. He looks for the perfect time, when you're feeling downtrodden and the most vulnerable, and he throws his darts of guilt and self-condemnation into your most sensitive spots. At this moment, cry out to your Saviour, "Forgive me, Lord!" You *can* let go of it, move past it. Christ's forgiving grace allows you to stop beating yourself up and prevents the devil from beating up on you. He redeems you. That's the amazing gift you've been given, at infinite cost to Jesus, and your greatest weapon against the deceiver. Use it!

Forgiveness is the bridge to freedom.

3. You may feel as though you keep falling and begin to think God must be tiring of your mistakes and constant "I'm sorry's." When you feel this way, remind yourself that He is more willing to forgive us than we are to forgive ourselves.

4. Forgiving others is an essential part of the formula. Through experiencing God's forgiveness and grace in our own lives, we can gain the strength to extend it to others. Hatred, revenge, and grudges toward others are destructive to your inner well-being. They separate you from God and His forgiving grace. We must learn to forgive others as our Father in heaven forgives us. This may be the hardest part of grace for some of us, but it is essential in order for us to experience the freedom that comes from the grace given to us. One cannot fully repent, accept grace, and feel that freedom without learning to forgive others. Dr. Edith Eva Eger, a childhood survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, puts it this way: "Forgiveness is the ultimate spiritual freedom."

5. Everyone you encounter should see in you something dramatically different from the surrounding world. In drastic contrast to the burdensome, harsh, condemning realities of this earth, let the gift that has been given you shine out to all those around you, like a flame that penetrates the darkness of this world.

**Shabbat Shalom*, Dec. 1996, p. 14.

By Lisa Mitchell, a junior social work major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Christian Forgiveness Is Not a Reflex

OPINION

Key Texts: 2 Cor. 2:11, 12; Mark 3:24, 25

As Christians, we have always been taught to forgive those who mistreat us and others. Sometimes we do so blindly and without giving the act of forgiveness much thought. Forgiveness, however, is one of the major tools Jesus has given Christians in order that we might form a close-knit, unified army. To take such a major weapon for granted is a terrible error.

If someone does something wrong and asks for pardon, many times we will offer our words of forgiveness as a matter of reflex and without much thought, because that is what we have been trained to do. The forgiveness that Paul wrote about, however, consists of much more than a few well-rehearsed words. The act of forgiving must include a sincere change in attitude about the person who needs forgiving and the actions that prompted the need for forgiveness. It is so easy to do the right thing and say "Sure, I forgive you. Don't worry about it. It's no big deal." But if we dwell on that person's actions, have we really offered a Christlike forgiveness?

As Christians, we are all to be models of Jesus. We are not just to act as Christ did; we are to be as He was. This is what Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 2. We are

Have we really offered a Christlike forgiveness?

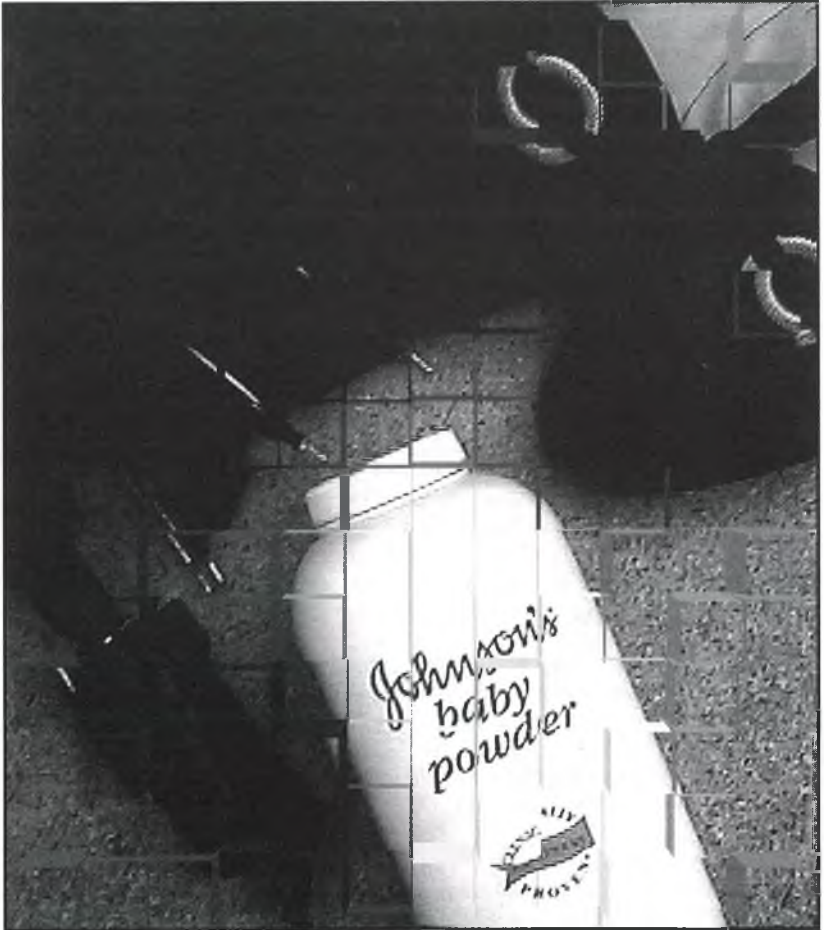
not to peddle the teachings of Jesus; we are to live them. To speak words of forgiveness without forgetting the misdeeds of the person forgiven is to be as hypocritical as the Pharisees that Jesus called "whited sepulchres."

Jesus needs an army of Christian believers to live as He did and teach as He taught. If we teach forgiveness and extend our forgiveness to others with words but without thought, we create divisions in that army. Forgiveness is a powerful tool for cohesion, yet when misused it is an equally powerful tool for causing separation. Satan uses everything in his arsenal to exploit any weakness he can find. It seems that he would especially enjoy using one of Jesus' best weapons to divide Christ's army.

Paul states: "We are not unaware of [Satan's] schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11, NIV). Jesus knows just how much Satan would love to create divisions in the Christian army. That is why Christ spoke of the tremendous need for unity among the believers. There is no way that the Christian army can stand against the minions of Satan if Christian soldiers harbor grudges against fellow troops. Forgiveness must be complete, with word accompanying thought, or it fails to serve the good purpose that Christ intended and can become a tool in Satan's sinister plan.

By Tony Boody, a senior biology/premed major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

THE FREEDOM OF SERVANTHOOD



“We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18, KJV).

May I Carry Your Shoes?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 3:6

“Maram [‘Miss’ in pidgin English], may I carry an umbrella over your head?” asked one of her students.

“Maram, may I carry a spare pair of shoes for you?” asked another.

“Maram, may I . . .” began another student. Before she could continue, Maram said, “No, I’m your teacher. You’re my students, not my servants.”

Why was it that the students at the school felt an obligation to earn the favor of their teacher by offering to act as servants? This thought puzzled Frances, the new teacher in Papua New Guinea. At just 21 years of age, Frances was beginning her first year of missionary work in the islands. Everything was new to her—a new culture, a new school, a new language, and new pupils. To them, Maram was their example. Everything she did, the girls copied. The Western ways were appealing to the young girls; they wanted to improve themselves; they wanted to be like the young teacher from New Zealand.

One morning Frances arrived at school with talcum powder on her neck that she had not rubbed in completely. The next day 120 girls wore white talcum powder around their necks; such were their attempts to win the approval of their teacher. Whatever had happened in their past, things were now going to change.

They did not have to earn their right for respect and equality.

These young Adventist girls were to live in complete freedom. No longer were they to serve, but they were to live with their teacher as an equal and as a friend. They would learn from one another, and together they would grow. They would learn that they did not have to earn their right for respect and equality.

Second Corinthians 3:6 tells us about another kind of freedom. It’s the Spirit that gives us a new life. There is nothing that we can do to earn His favor; trying to be saved by keeping the Old Testament law will end in death. “When we trust Christ to save us he removes our heavy burden of trying to please him and our guilt for failing to do so. By trusting Christ we are loved, accepted, forgiven, and freed to live for him. Where the Spirit of the Law is, there is freedom.”*

**Life Application Bible Commentary*, p. 2097.

God Unveiled

LOGOS

2 Corinthians 3

The spray of the sea again meets his unflinching, bearded face. A deeply furrowed brow funnels salty tears down his weather-beaten features while unconscious eyes betray a melancholic state. The pregnant, brooding sky echoes his anxieties; the sea beneath, his sorrows. God alone knows the depth of his unrest. It is the year A.D. 57, and Paul is crossing the Aegean Sea to Philippi.

Just a couple of weeks earlier, after two years of ministry in the city of Ephesus, the citizens rioted against him, prompting his trip to Corinth earlier than planned. The great heart of Paul is battered and bruised. What lies ahead, however, only serves to tighten his brow. In Corinth, the giving of offerings was being neglected, disputes had created opposing factions, and some had begun to undermine his leadership. How he yearned that they would love Jesus more than anything.

In Philippi now, a golden glow hits the walls as the flame tastes the air. The smell of burning olive oil quickly fills the room. So does the Holy Spirit. This is to be the place where God will inspire Paul with words of advice and comfort for the Corinthian Christians. Alive with the Spirit, Paul paces up and down, dictating to his secretary.

By the third chapter of this letter to the Corinthians, we find it has a different

In this we find a vulnerable Paul.

flavor to the first he wrote. We see a Paul revealing the concerns of his heart. In this we find a vulnerable Paul. As if he had not been hurt enough by the rejection in Ephesus, the first six verses of chapter 3, continuing on from chapter 2, are a justification of his ministry. "Do we need . . . letters of recommendation to you or from you?" (verse 1). "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts" (verse 2). Just as Jesus stated that "by their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt. 7:16), so Paul calls on the church to look to themselves as living testimony of his divine appointment as an apostle (cf 1 Cor. 9:2). Considering the implications of the spirit's beautiful analogy, he continues, "You are a letter from Christ, . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3:3; cf Exod. 24:12; Ezek. 11:19). Essentially, Paul names his readers as being the justification of his ministry and that any competence on his part and that of his co-workers does not result from any Jewish heritage but from the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:4-6).

Paul reflects now more directly on the plight of the Corinthian Christians. Perhaps in the realities of life and the distractions in Corinth, a new Christian might have found the going tough. After all, there was much strife within the church, and the popular pastimes propagandized a more carefree lifestyle. Paul stops pacing and strokes his beard. The scribe looks up from the papyrus scroll to see Paul's eyes somewhere else, misty with God's voice. Paul, seeing the immensity of God's grace as poured out and as rejected in Jewish history, is dumbstruck. Maybe the Corinthians lacked the theological and historical heritage any Jew received, he surely wondered, but didn't they see how much greater the privilege of a Christian is?

He spoke. “Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory . . . will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?” (verses 7, 8, cf Exodus 34). For a whole paragraph Paul labors with the Corinthians that their heritage is everything to be proud of. For “how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!” (verse 9). That is to say, if the Jewish sacrificial system was glorious, how much more glorious is the sacrifice of Christ and the life to which He has called us?

To push the point home further, Paul continues to speak of something from his own heritage: veils. In the Bible, these have always symbolized the separation of the glory of God from the sinful. In the Jewish temple, the Most Holy Place was separated from the Holy Place by a curtain that shielded the priests from God’s glory. Likewise, the veil Moses used, as Paul pointed out, was to shield the people from seeing the glory of God as was reflected in Moses’ face. (See verses 7, 13, 14.) Paul makes his point. “Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (verse 16). In saying this, he asserts two things. First, Christ came in order to take away the separation between God and humankind. Second, a Christian has a greater spiritual heritage than a non-Christian Jew because it is only in Christ that God may now be approached and seen.

Though Paul’s point is made at the expense of those who would continue to mask the person of God in their lives by rejecting Christ (verses 14, 15), it has positive implications for those who have accepted Christ and live by His power. We are Christ’s love letters to a dying world.

Paul is calling for God to be unveiled in the lives of all who read his letter. Because of Christ, we are to be bold about the way we live our Christianity (verse 12). And understanding the yearning of the Spirit for every reader of his letter, Paul challenges us by summing up: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with every-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the spirit” (verse 18).

REACT

1. In what ways can Christ be reflected in you more than He already is?
2. What parts of this third chapter apply directly to you?
3. If you were to summarize 2 Corinthians 3 in a title of five words or less, what would it be?
4. If you were the only “Bible” someone had to read, how complete would it be? Explain your answer.
5. Explain what is meant by the quotation: “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6, NIV).
6. How does Paul contrast the old and new covenants? (verses 3, 6).
7. What do you think are the reasons that we have difficulty being authentic Christians?
8. What kind of life-giving ministries does your community need, and what can you and your church do about it?

By Wesley Tolhurst, a minister to the Timaru, Oamaru, and Moeraki Seventh-day Adventist churches in South New Zealand.

Open Your Eyes

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 3:17, 18

“Paul said that the Jewish people of his day were still wearing veils, not over their faces, but over their minds whenever they read the scriptures about the law. They were like cameras trying to take a picture with the lens cap still on. . . .

“They thought that they were strong enough to stand against Satan and to keep God’s law perfectly. It’s easy to see that they couldn’t, because they fell flat at the first test. And they kept falling flat every time after that. . . .

“In fact, they added hundreds of laws of their own and tried to keep them, too. The lens cap was over their minds. They failed to see that Christ was the only One who could make the sacrifice and pay their penalty. Christ was the only One who could keep the law perfectly, because He is perfect.”¹

“We sought to lead the people to reach forward to the things that are before us, seeking earnestly to attain the highest elevation of Christian character. In this we must rely simply on the merits and righteousness of our Surety. We must have awakened in us a holy jealousy of ourselves, and cultivate a spirit of vigilant prayer. We want the spirit of earnest, longing desire that Moses had when he prayed, ‘I beseech thee, shew me thy glory’ (Exod. 33:18). And his petition was not presumptuous. God did not rebuke His servant as being bold and irreverent.

They added hundreds of laws of their own and tried to keep them, too.

“The Lord would have us day by day [become] more like Christ, keeping His words, conforming to His precepts and example, entering more and more deeply every day into the spirit and meaning of God’s requirements and gracious promises. . . . In God will we trust. Be of good courage in the Lord. Lean heavily upon Jesus’ all-sustaining arm.”²

“The Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the mind, and faith takes hold of Him. If you accept Christ as your personal Saviour, you will know by experience the value of the great sacrifice made in your behalf upon the cross of Calvary. The Spirit of Christ working upon the heart conforms it to His image, for Christ is the model upon which the Spirit works. By the ministry of His Word, by His providences, by His inward working, God stamps the likeness of Christ upon the soul.

“To possess Christ is your first work, and to reveal Him as One who is able to save to the uttermost all who come to Him is your next work.”³

1. Jeanne Larson and Ruth McLin, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), p. 221.

2. *The Upward Look*, p. 193.

3. *That I May Know Him*, p. 94.

By Helen Barton, a year 13 student at Christchurch Girls’ High School, New Zealand.

A Mature Ministry

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Cor. 13:11

Paul is on a binge of using contrasts: tablets of stone versus tablets of human hearts; a ministry of death and condemnation versus a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness; timidity versus confidence, boldness, and freedom. By the end of it, you would get the strong impression that he intensely dislikes that old Mosaic system, because of all the negative words he uses to describe it, and he was in an excellent position to comment on the contrast—he had been in the thick of the ministry of the Law of Moses and all the attachments and amendments that the Pharisees had made.

But Paul is doing more than painting a contrast—he is also pointing to a development that had occurred between these periods, a development that is very similar to the way we grow up as individuals. Psychologists have noted that a child will go through several stages of growth in understanding morals and personal responsibility.

Initially, when we are very young, our understanding of right and wrong is superficial and physical—we will be rewarded if we do good things, and we will be punished if we do bad things. As a result, what we decide to do is related to what will happen to us physically. Later, we develop a more mature approach to

Paul is doing more than painting a contrast.

morality, and our decisions reflect the underlying meaning behind the morals. We do right because it is right, and we do things based on how they will affect others as well as ourselves.

Similarly, Paul is saying that the ministry that God asked Moses to set up was an immature ministry, one that focused on the superficial and physical because of the spiritual condition of the Israelites leaving Egypt. The reason for morality, in their eyes, was to avoid punishment (like stoning), and spiritual concepts were related in physical, visible ways through ceremonies, sacrifices, and so on.

With the outpouring of the Spirit, however, God has initiated an incredibly mature spiritual ministry, one of freedom and confidence, one that can have life-changing impact on other people in which the whole drive of the ministry is to reach out to others and share the gospel with them. This is similar to the maturity we achieve when we become adults. We have the freedom to make our own choices, confidence in what we do, and we can change the lives of the people around us through our work, our outreach, and relationships like marriage.

REACT

What aspects of your local church do you feel could grow from immature legalism or liberalism into being a mature spiritual ministry?

By Sven Östring, a postgraduate student in the department of electrical and electronic engineering, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

How to Have a Life-giving Ministry

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 3:3

Michael Long was addressing his putt on the 15th hole in the final round of the Hope Island Golf Classic in Australia when he noticed that his ball had moved 2mm. No one else noticed, however. Without hesitation he called a stroke against himself. That shot denied him the chance to play off for the title and cost him a possible \$120,000. Ernie Els won, but Michael Long walked away the hero because of the honesty he displayed when no one was looking.

Who are we when no one is looking? It is easy to say or do the right things, but what is our Christianity like when no one is looking? The key to a life-giving ministry is for us to be transformed by His Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3, 18). Here are two suggestions:

1. We must be authentic Christians. The greatest need for this world is for authentic Christians. Second Corinthians 3:3 states that “you are manifestly an epistle of Christ . . . written not with ink but by the Spirit” (NKJV). The Law was given on tablets of stone, but as we know, it does not have the power to change lives. What we need is the internal power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes us into the very image of God. Almost a cliché; so what does this mean? It means we

Who are we when no one is looking?

are changed into authentic Christians. Mrs. White well expressed what authentic Christianity is: “Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. What is needed is the love of Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously. The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within.”¹

2. We must have authentic courage. It takes courage to admit we are sinners and to confess our sins to Christ. It also takes courage to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7) and follow God because often we don’t know where it is going to lead us—as in Abraham’s case. Every day we are constantly bombarded by choices of whether to give in to our cravings or to go with the flow. It takes courage to stick with our convictions.² When we have that sort of courage, we can—with the Lord’s strength—contribute mightily with a life-giving ministry.

1. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 384.

2. Bill Hybels, *Who You Are When No One’s Looking* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987), pp. 13-33.

By Mark Falconer, pastor of the Dunedin and South Otago Seventh-day Adventist Churches, New Zealand.

What I Can and Can't Do

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 3:1-6

When it takes more than the fingers on my two hands to count the number of my close friends who smoke marijuana, I wonder: What does having a life-giving ministry really mean? When my friends know more lyrics by The Smashing Pumpkins or The Doors than Bible texts, what does a life-giving ministry mean to them? When most of my friends believe in God but deny Him “any right to rule their lives,” what does having a life-giving ministry mean to me?

I have a passion to reach my friends. I have been entrusted with a ministry that has the potential to transform broken lives. But what does that mean when the principles of this ministry are so at odds with all the values of my friends? How can I possibly try to sell it to them?

And this is exactly when the Holy Spirit cuts through my misconceptions with His ever-clear voice. It is not my job to sell this ministry to them. It is not my job to try to scrub them up and get them clean enough to be in a position ready for the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the salesperson, Jesus Christ is the selling point, and God is the supplier of the lifetime guarantee. My job isn't to worry about that at all. My job is simply to be a friend. To be Christlike is all that is required of me. God will take my friends exactly where they are. I think that sometimes I forget that. God is still God to my friends, no matter who they are. His life-giving ministry is as

God is still God to my friends, no matter who they are.

relevant to my friends as it is to me. God is the same God to the drug user, to the drunkard, to the smoker, to the atheist, and to the fan of The Smashing Pumpkins.

Such a realization really throws this life-giving ministry into perspective. It's not about what I can do. It's about what God can do and has done. His life-giving ministry is all about Him and has little to do with me—and that's what makes it so wonderful. I can be a great friend to my friends. God can be a great God to my friends. God knows this. It's the way He wants it. And when I fully understand His power, grace, and gospel, it's also the way I want it.

So, what does a life-giving ministry really mean? It means loving others as Christ loved. It means understanding the source and power behind the “new covenant” ministry we have studied this week. It also means surrendering your will to God.

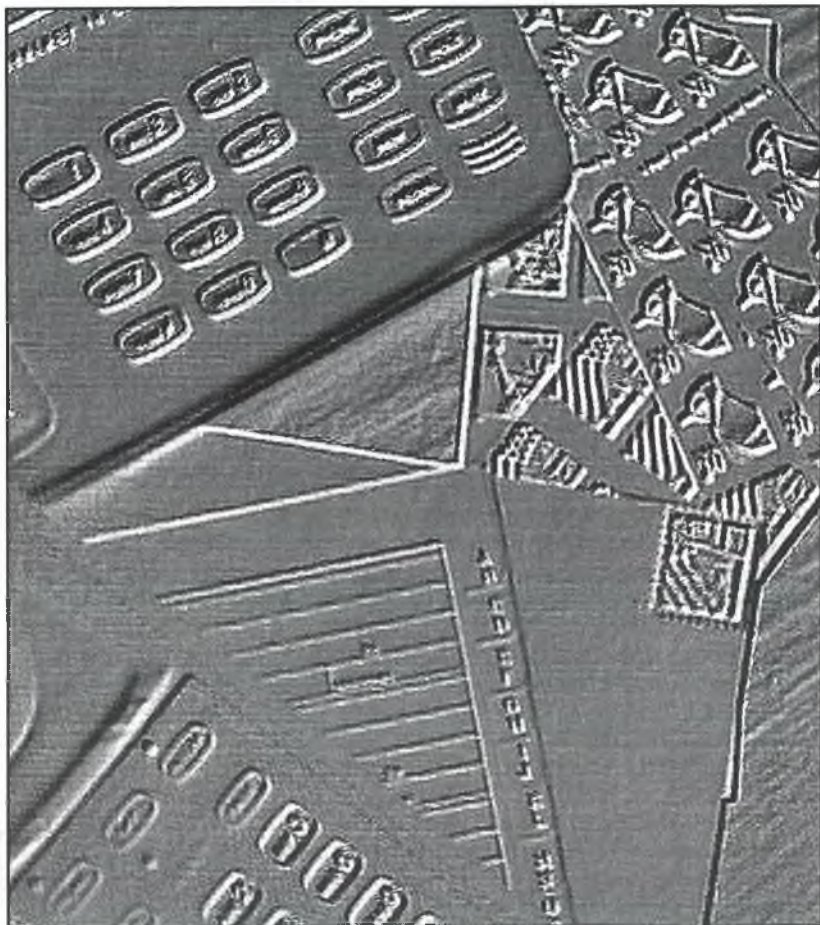
And what does a life-giving ministry mean to my friends? Nothing . . . yet.
And to me? Everything.

REACT

Why is it easier to bring friends rather than strangers to God?

By Lance Bolton, assistant youth director for South New Zealand Conference, Christ-church.

MINISTRY IN A JAR



“It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6, NKJV).

Don't Lose Heart

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 4:1

Amber had a dream. She lived within half an hour of six Adventist churches and thought it would be great to organize an activities network so young adults from each church could get to know one another. Amber visited all six churches to present her idea and to get feedback from the various young adult leaders. They seemed excited, too, so she invited all 132 young adults on the master list to a planning picnic.

Only four people showed up. Amber didn't want to give up after just one bad experience, so she tried twice more to pull the network together. Each time her plans fizzled.

I talked to Amber several weeks later, and I could see that she was deeply discouraged. She'd spent nearly \$500 on postage or phone calls and had absolutely nothing to show for all her hard work. Not even one "Thank you" or "I'm sorry" from any of the other leaders.

It's tempting to blame God when our efforts in ministry seem to flop. After all, we did our best, and we did it for Him! Why didn't He step in and make sure the program was a success? Was all that pain and suffering really necessary?

I've learned to view experiences like these as spiritual workouts. They seem to

I've learned to view experiences like these as spiritual workouts.

serve no other purpose than to help us exercise our faith muscles. Will we take God at His Word when He says that "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28, KJV)? Or will we give in to satanic suggestions of doubt and despair?

For me, it's helpful to remember that as a Christian I have given God permission to do anything necessary to save me or to save others through me. I've voluntarily chosen to place my life under His complete control because I believe that He can make wiser and better decisions than I can.

Sometimes God, in His mercy, pulls back the curtains and lets us catch a glimpse of His grand plan. We then see how God kept us from being reelected to one church position because He needed us to be available when something better opened up a few months later. Or perhaps we were shown what it feels like to be deserted by all our helpers so that we could later comfort and assist a fellow Christian in the same predicament (see 2 Cor. 1:3-5).

But at other times, we have to endure suffering or temporary failure without the benefit of knowing exactly why it had to happen. That's when we must just sit back and trust that God knows what He is doing (Isa. 55:8, 9).

By Debra J. Hicks, managing editor for Amazing Facts, Rocklin, California.

An Ordinary Clay Jar: Simply Precious

LOGOS

2 Cor. 4:1-18

“Blessed are the meek” (Matt 5:3-12).

One of my friends at the seminary told me a story about a young man named Nick who participated in the prison ministries program on Sabbath afternoons. Nick was not your normal kind of person. He always wore the same blue suit to the prison; his shirt was not neatly pressed; his shoes didn't radiate anything but scuff marks; his dark, thick glasses were held together with a bandage of white tape; and his hair looked shabby. He met the ministry team forever clutching his Bible in his left arm up close to his heart.

The team wondered about Nick's effectiveness in the prison talking to the inmates, because he rarely spoke much to the group. For the most part, he kept to himself. Then one Sabbath at the prison my friend saw Nick talking to one of the inmates, a tall and hardened man, whose face had a big scar on his left cheek. He was known to have a tough reputation. My friend watched as Nick poured out his heart to this man, telling him of things that Jesus did in his life. After some time, the man behind the bars began to weep, his eyes a reservoir of tears over the emotional testimony Nick had shared.

We often view one's ability to witness to others by what is on the outside.

Our message is not about ourselves but about Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 2:5).

Who are we really? Is the message that we attempt to proclaim one that should place us in the spotlight? Although God made us in His likeness, we are not what the message is about. The proclamation that we articulate to those who have not heard the message is about the good news. It is to point them toward Christ, rather than our meager efforts. As the old saying goes, “Never judge a book by its cover.” We often view one's ability to witness to others by what is on the outside, for that is what we are able to see. But God looks on the heart. In these last days, I believe that God does not want mighty people to finish His work but ordinary people who are dedicated to Him and are willing to put self aside.

Paul, the author of 2 Corinthians, suggests that we are to trust the power of God to change the lives of humanity. In this text he is informing us that we should not put our confidence in human strength (Jer. 17:7). It is not by our efforts or will that anyone is led closer to the Lord but only through the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

It is easy for us to take the credit, especially when the opportunity to witness looks as though it was only because of us that people gave their hearts to the Lord. Let us not so quickly underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit in convicting them, in softening their hearts to the message that He would have us communicate to them.

Where your heart is, so are you (Matt. 6:19-21).

When you were in, say, a class or a business meeting, have you ever felt you wanted to be somewhere else? Here you are cooped up in a stuffy room when outside it is a beautiful spring day. You can't concentrate, for your mind is wandering. Physically you are still sitting there, but mentally you've checked out. That's what verse 21 of Matthew 6 is talking about.

The heart cannot lie, for where we place our treasure is where we want to be. Having this treasure can skew our ability to proclaim the message, and in so doing it can distort the perception of those on the receiving end of it. God wants us to be pure in heart so that the message is not clouded over but made as clear as a sunny day, full of warmth.

These verses in a sense interconnect. The call to simplicity has meaning for us as Christians not to draw attention to ourselves but to focus the listener to the One who has given us life more abundantly. The message is simple yet it can be lost to the motives in our hearts. Heaven is ours. The price has been paid at Calvary. Christ asks us to proclaim His message to others by not distracting their attention to us but rather to Him. There is much worth in the value of being simply ordinary.

REACT

1. What are the things that stand in your way of proclaiming Christ? (see 2 Cor. 4:7).
2. How can we effectively proclaim Christ without putting the focus on ourselves but on Him?
3. As we become more highly educated, how do we maintain the simplicity of the gospel in our presentation?
4. How can we be sure that our musical performances and evangelistic presentations give glory to God and not to ourselves?

By Alden J. Ho, associate pastor for youth ministries, Hendersonville (North Carolina) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Jars of Clay

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:7

We live in a success-conscious world. A results-driven world. Sports championships, Dove awards, Ingatherer-of-the-year presentations. . . . Each of these rewards results. In the middle of the drive for results, it's often easy to lose focus on the One who is truly responsible for success in bringing individuals to Christ. Ellen White clearly amplifies the message that the power of our ministry comes not from us but from Jesus Christ. We are merely God's earthen vessels, His jars of clay.

"All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ. Since they owe all to God, the glory of whatever they are or do belongs to Him alone; they are but instruments in His hands."¹

"The life of Paul, to its very latest hour, testified to the truth of his words in the second Epistle to the Corinthians: 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.' . . . His sufficiency was not in himself, but in the presence and agency of the divine Spirit

There is danger in a self-congratulatory attitude in ministry.

that filled his soul, and brought every thought into subjection to the will of Christ. The fact that his own life exemplified the truth he proclaimed, gave convincing power to both his preaching and his deportment."²

There is danger in a self-congratulatory attitude in ministry. God can use an attitude of humble service to reach people with His love. "The ambassador is not to congratulate himself and take to himself the honor of success, or even to divide the honor with God, as if by his own power he had accomplished the work. Elaborate reasoning or argumentative demonstrations of doctrines seldom impress upon the hearer the sense of his need and his peril."³

Simple statements, spoken with the conviction that comes from living the gospel of Jesus Christ, will be far more effective in moving the hearts of the unconverted, and allowing the power of the gospel to flow unhindered through these earthen vessels.

1. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 336.

2. *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 438.

3. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 154.

By David Jeffrey, a lecturer in business at Caribbean Union College, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, West Indies.

A Philosophy of Pain

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:7-12

I've always thought pain to be an enemy—until I read Paul Brand's *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*. In this book Brand, a renowned surgeon who has worked with patients unable to sense pain, describes such people.

The author describes Tanya, a girl brought to his office with a bandaged, dislocated ankle. The doctor rotates her foot freely back and forth. He winces at this “unnatural movement,” but Tanya doesn't seem to notice. He unwraps the bandages and finds her feet grossly infected with ulcers on the soles of both feet. Again he examines her feet, this time probing the wounds—all the way to the bone! The doctor looks for any reaction from Tanya, but she seems bored.

Her mother then tells the doctor a story about when she left her 2-year-old daughter in a room to play. “A few minutes later I went into Tanya's room and found her sitting on the floor of the playpen, finger painting red swirls on the white plastic sheet. I didn't grasp the situation at first, but when I got closer I screamed. It was horrible. The tip of Tanya's finger was mangled and bleeding, and it was her own blood she was using to make those designs on those sheets. I yelled, ‘Tanya, what happened?’ She grinned at me, and that's when I saw the streaks of blood on her teeth. She had bitten off the tip of her finger and was playing in the blood.”

“She had bitten off the tip of her finger.”

Over the next several months Tanya's parents tried to get her to stop biting her fingers. But one by one she bit all of them off. Her father called her “the monster.” Dr. Brand writes: “Tanya was not a monster, only an extreme example—a human metaphor, really—of life without pain.” The physician offers this simple philosophical statement: “Life without pain could really hurt you.”

Christians so often see pain as the enemy. After all, won't heaven be pain-free? I anticipate that we will—praise God—live without pain someday. But our pain-free life will be accompanied by a sin-free life. A sinless world operates well without pain. A sinful world does not.

Sin is disease and disease kills. Pain tells us that we are diseased and need a cure. Without a cure our sin disease will kill us. Paul says, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed” (2 Cor. 4:8, NRSV). It seems this is the way God would have us view pain. It is there to remind us that sin is serious business. Affliction is our constant wake-up call to our terminal condition. But an eternal cure is available to pain-bearers who desire a life without sin *and* pain.

*Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993).

By Alex Bryan, pastor of The New Community Seventh-day Adventist Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

Help! They Won't Listen!

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 4

I remember preaching at a church one Sabbath morning when I began wondering whether the congregation was dead or alive. In my 20-minute sermon I had no response at all from the congregation. What went wrong? I had preached that sermon before with success. At times like that I reconsider my call to the ministry! But what can I do when I feel I am witnessing to deaf ears? Here are some suggestions that I found in 2 Corinthians 4.

1. Remember who sent you. Paul says it is through God's mercy that we have this ministry of preaching and witnessing of Christ. Christ sent you; He is responsible for the outcome! (verse 1).

2. It may be difficult, but don't become discouraged. You are not an effective witness when you worry about the outcome. Leave that to God (verses 1, 8, 9, 16).

3. Remember what Christ went through in order to save you. Christ's sufferings were many times more than yours—and He died for you. Just give a little bit back to him. You will not have bigger problems than you can handle (verses 10-12).

4. It is God's responsibility and business to convert people—not yours! Remember, it is never your fault if people deny God, if only you preach the simple

In my 20-minute sermon I had no response at all from the congregation.

gospel. God's business is saving—your business is witnessing (verses 3-6).

5. Try to find comfort in the way that this will strengthen your faith in God. This one is difficult. It is never easy to look ahead when you're experiencing trouble but try to look at the experience from the bright side. When you get through it all, your faith in God has grown stronger (verse 16; 1:9, 10).

6. The reward is worth it all. Paul says that what is to come is so exceptional that it cannot be compared to our struggles here on earth (2 Cor. 4:18).

REACT

1. Why are suffering and discouragement a part of witnessing and preaching?
2. Does it have to be that way? Explain your answer.
3. If a person is not feeling persecuted, is there something wrong with his or her ministry? Explain your answer.
4. If you have ever felt persecuted or discouraged when witnessing, what did you do about it?
5. Does friendship and fellowship with Christ mean that you have to share both His rejection and His resurrection? Why or why not?

By Anne-May Muller, director of youth ministries, Danish Union of Churches, Nærum, Denmark.

Christian Responsibility

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:18

Recognition and rewards. We all want to be recognized and acknowledged. We all need that. But to do good works with recognition as the primary motive is somehow, in my opinion, misleading. Especially as Christians, to do good because it's our responsibility to God, to others, and to ourselves is a privileged responsibility that we must do without ulterior motives.

With how some people carry on, you would think that Christian responsibility means numbers—baptism numbers after an evangelistic meeting or church roster memberships. Or going to far-off lands to build a church or hospital then returning to our privileged lives and treating those around us in hurtful ways. I'm not saying we should overlook these valuable works. I just don't think it should be the primary focus of what is considered important.

These are usually the situations in which the doers want to be recognized and rewarded. Christianity is really much more basic than that. It is "letting our light shine," which may be sending a bouquet of flowers, offering a kind word, or sharing the heartbreak of a friend—but allowing God to be the one who is illuminated. We're in a time in which creativity, innovation, and risk-taking are well sought-out commodities. So why not try applying those to Christianity?

You would think that Christian responsibility means numbers.

If someone asks why you don't drink or smoke, why you go to church on Saturdays, or why you "don't swear as much as the rest of us" (actual question to a friend of mine), it's your actions that are showing. Keep it up, and sooner or later these why questions most likely will lead to what, where, when, how, and who questions: "What do you believe in?" "Where do you go to church, and would you mind if I came along?" "How do I learn more?" "Who is God?"

Now, isn't that recognition and reward enough?

REACT

1. In what respects, if any, does the work of an effective Christian involve numbers?
2. In what specific ways can your local congregation move its witness to focus more on quality than quantity?

By Crister DelaCruz, manager of communications and public relations for the North American Division youth department and the Adventist Youth Service Network in Silver Spring, Maryland.

SEEING THE INVISIBLE



“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17, 18, NKJV).

Our Dream House

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 5:1

We recognized our dream house from the moment we first stepped into it. It boasted gleaming hardwood floors, a working fireplace, a broad staircase—all the design details of the era in which it was built. After months of negotiations with the present owner and the bank, it was finally ours.

We were to move in together right after our wedding, but our belongings moved in three weeks earlier, on August 1. As we struggled boxes and furniture through the doors and up the stairs, as we unpacked books and hung shelves, we exulted that this beautiful home was ours. While my husband-to-be studied for his exams, my best friend and I painted the downstairs rooms, transforming dingy white walls to glowing rose. Two nights before our wedding, more than 50 guests poured through our new house at the rehearsal dinner. Almost every one of them said, “What a beautiful home!”

Soon we were actually living there. And as we bought new items for the house, as we cleaned it and decorated it, as we sat quietly together in the evenings looking at the light reflected in our hardwood floors, we often said to each other, “We’re so blessed to have this house!”

One afternoon I was at work when a knock came on the door. I stepped out of

We recognized our dream house from the moment we first stepped into it.

my classroom to find my husband in the hall, looking very serious. “Our house has been broken into,” he said.

Our perfect house! Visions of broken windows, wrecked furniture, and stolen belongings flooded my head. For a moment, I was devastated.

Fortunately, our thief was in a hurry and not very thorough, and we had insurance. We lost little in the robbery except wasted time and inconvenience as we straightened everything out. But what I gained was a reminder of how transitory our “dream house” was. Like all our cherished earthly possessions—even our very lives—it could disappear in a moment, at the whim of a thief, a fire, a flood.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul reminds us that our earthly dwelling—this human body—can at any moment be folded and put away like a tent, but our heavenly dwelling is permanent and eternal. We often focus so much on the details of everyday life that we fail to look at the big picture. But our life in God and our work for Him cannot come into focus until we step back, look at that big picture, and learn to distinguish between what is temporary and what is eternal.

By Trudy Cole, a teacher and freelance writer from St. John’s, Newfoundland.

Keeping “Things” in Perspective

LOGOS

2 Cor. 4:16–5:21

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians around A.D. 55. He wrote this epistle because that particular congregation was experiencing conflict. With all its dissension within, how would the gospel be seen from without? So Paul wrote to quash the internal struggles and to bring unity to the church for the gospel's sake. His strategy was to solve the present challenges by speaking of the future, to take their focus off the material and instead to look to the spiritual, away from the temporal and rather to the eternal.

We see this future-oriented or other-worldly theme woven throughout the passage for this week. In 4:16 Paul urges his readers not to lose heart, for in the end an everlasting glory will be experienced. Beginning with 5:1, Paul writes of a tent, a building, a house, and the heavenly dwelling to come. Beginning with verse 11, Paul writes of the divine work of reconciliation and how we can be wholly at one with Him who was our atoning sacrifice.

Keeping this week's theme in mind—putting one's ministry in focus—let us explore some of the key verses in this selection of Scripture.

“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (4:16, NIV).

A soul is composed of matter animated by the life-giving spirit breathed into a human being.

How is it that we are wasting away? Paul is here waxing poetic, yet substance is not being sacrificed to form. It is patent that he is not so much concerned with the present physical or corporeal existence as he is with the spiritual life. The wasting away of which he speaks has little to do with loss of hair, wrinkled skin, or weakened eyesight. It has everything to do, however, with strife, disunity, discouragement, spiritual depression, or moral decay. He wants to focus the attention of Corinthian Christians (and of us today) on that which really matters: one's spiritual life. This is evident when Paul says that “as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord” (5:6).

But before we get ahead of ourselves, how is it that we are being renewed? We are renewed by the hardships of today (4:17). As one song goes, “I thank you Lord, for the trials that come my way. In that way I might grow each day.” The trials and hardships convey the lesson that what is of greatest importance is the inner life, not the outer. This theme continues in Paul's discussion of the tent, the building, and the house.

“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (5:1).

Paul is here once again concerned with where we place our values. Do we hold most precious that which is of this world, made with human hands? In many ways

the tent depicts the transitory nature of earthly existence. Tents were the dwellings of nomads, not highly sophisticated or civilized peoples. Houses were by their very nature permanent, stationary. Likewise, our present existence is merely transitory. Heaven awaits us. We may suffer or undergo trials today, but an eternity of peace with God is just around the corner. As Tony Campolo says in one of his videos, “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s a’coming.”

One might point to Paul’s talk of “whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (verse 9) and use such language as grounds to incorporate into this text the Greek notion of a conscious soul separate from the physical body. But here Paul is not as concerned with the state of the dead as he is the state of the living and whether one is spiritually alive or dead. This is clear because elsewhere he writes as one who adheres to the Hebrew notion of humankind as animated dust. That is, a soul is composed of matter animated by the life-giving spirit breathed into a human being. Accordingly, without matter there is no soul and there is no such thing as a disembodied person.

What Paul means to convey with the imagery of the body and the dwelling is that the spiritual is ultimately of greater consequence than the physical and that the end is of more importance than the present. Whatever we may be going through, Paul urges us to make it our goal to please God (verse 9).

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer” (5:16).

Paul is here referring to the fact that the first-century Jews had anticipated a Messiah who would be a great military leader to cast off the scourge of Rome. They anticipated a warrior, not a peacemaker. They wanted a messiah who would live to fight another day—not one crucified.

The first-century Jews rejected Jesus as messiah because He did not embody their preconceived ideas. Just as the Jews were gravely mistaken about Jesus, so, too, will we be gravely mistaken about the realities around and in us if we continue to see through worldly eyes or to understand with a worldly point of view.

In verse 18 God commits us to the message of reconciliation (again Paul desires unity), and reconciliation can come about only where one views life through new eyes, the eyes of one who has been reconciled to God. Only then will we be able to visualize that which is most important and see the invisible.

REACT

1. How do your priorities in life measure up when compared to Jesus’ priorities while doing His work on earth?
2. How often do you feel honored to face pain or trouble? How often do you question or doubt God during those times?
3. If God is so strong and so loving, how can He let pain exist?

By David A. Pendleton, a practicing attorney and member of the house of representatives for the State of Hawaii, Honolulu.

Honored to Suffer

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:16-18

On Mount Nebo where he is to die, Moses is permitted to see the future. He watches the children of Israel, the people he has fought to lead, establishing homes in their new land. He gasps with joy as Baby Jesus is born in a barn in Bethlehem. Then his gleaming eyes melt into disbelief as he follows Jesus to Gethsemane.

“Grief, indignation, and horror filled the heart of Moses as he viewed the hypocrisy and satanic hatred manifested by the Jewish nation against their Redeemer, the mighty Angel who had gone before their fathers. He heard Christ’s agonizing cry, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ Mark 15:34. He saw Him lying in Joseph’s new tomb. The darkness of hopeless despair seemed to enshroud the world. But he looked again, and beheld Him coming forth a conqueror, and ascending to heaven escorted by adoring angels and leading a multitude of captives. He saw the shining gates open to receive Him, and the host of heaven with songs of triumph welcoming their Commander. And it was there revealed to him that he himself would be one who should attend the Saviour, and open to Him the everlasting gates. As he looked upon the scene, his countenance shone with a holy radiance. How small appeared the trials and sacrifices of his life when compared with those of the Son of God! how light in contrast with the ‘far more exceeding

As he struggled through his pain, he didn’t know any more than we know as we fight through ours.

and eternal weight of glory!’ 2 Corinthians 4:17. He rejoiced that he had been permitted, even in a small measure, to be a partaker in the sufferings of Christ.”¹

We know the ending of Moses’ story. As he struggled through his pain, he didn’t know any more than we know as we fight through ours. But Moses clutched to what he couldn’t see instead of what he could see. He gave up his ideas in exchange for God’s. “Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations? Who will accept new duties and enter untried fields, doing God’s work with firm and willing heart, for Christ’s sake counting his losses gain? He who will do this has the faith of Abraham, and will share with him that ‘far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,’ with which ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared.’ ”²

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 476.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

By Jeff Scoggins, communication coordinator of Philanthropic Services, Inc., Silver Spring, Maryland.

Tents in Space

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:1

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, Paul takes the position that Christians are camping out on earth. Jesus came to show that the Sears Towers and suburbs that nonbelievers see as permanent amount to a refugee camp.

The tents we live in are not homes and churches and stores but our bodies. They can be moved easily. They let in the sounds and stinks of the world. They blow over in storms and rot with age. There's no warranty on them. In fact, says Paul the tentmaker, they are simply not up to the job of meeting the rigors of life. Our tents are a burden to us.

So why put up with refugee status? Paul says we are "longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling" (verse 2, NIV). We face the promise of living in an indestructible "eternal house." This is why we are here. God made us to show what will happen when "what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (verse 4). We'll trade in a tent for a temple.

So the ministry to which we are called is not only the transmission of crucial information. The very transient, fragile nature of our bodies is the first point of our message, that human beings on earth are not what they should be. Our nasty, brutish, cold, short lives preach that mortal life is not the ideal.

Our nasty, brutish, cold, short lives preach that mortal life is not the ideal.

And where is the guarantee of an ideal? In the gift of the Holy Spirit (see verse 5). We groan under the strains on our tent, but we prove the presence of the Spirit by the power He exercises in our behalf when we call on Him. This is why we proceed in faith but not blindness. The Spirit intercedes with mighty power in our weakest, flattest moments, and the unseen becomes the absolute certainty.

"As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord," Paul says (verse 6). Does he mean that we feel at home in the tent, and that is keeping us from God? No. Our life in this tent is mutually exclusive of life with God. We are not home yet.

Unbelievers might pitch their tents out of the wind, in the sun and away from the noise. But every tent folds and decays. And the day of judgment is coming.

REACT

1. Paul says we want to replace our tent with a heavenly dwelling so that we will not be "found naked" (verse 3). What does he mean by naked in this context?

2. Do the words "we make it our goal to please him" (verse 9) suggest that our actions influence the judgment? Is Paul pointing to the judgment or beyond it?

By Tim Lale, editor of Guide magazine, the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Focus, Please!

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:16–5:21

Have you ever watched a slide show that is slightly out of focus? At first you may not notice the problem. Then your eyes begin to water. Finally, you must act or suffer the inevitable headache. In desperation, you shout: “Focus, please!” When at last the blurry image comes into sharp focus, you ease back into your chair with a sigh of relief. How much more pleasant life is when it is in focus. This week’s lesson is about valuing those things God values and seeing life as God sees it. Though there are no easy answers, no cookbook recipes to getting your life in order or, as we have termed it this week, focusing your ministry, I offer these suggestions:

Think of life in terms of a tent and a house. If you close your eyes and think of life in terms of a tent and a house, where have you placed your house? Is earth your temporary place of residence? Or is your permanent address here on earth? If you find yourself so settled in and so attached to this world, then you have built your house here and you might want to think about exchanging it for a tent. Remember that we are to be in the world but not of it. I have found that spending more time in Bible reading or family worship helps to trade in the house for a tent.

Many people want government to be better, yet they don’t even bother to vote.

Think in terms of regeneration and reconciliation. If you want a new heart, then you need to act as though you want a new heart. Many people claim to want to make friends, yet they never invite others over for dinner. Many people want government to be better, yet they don’t even bother to vote, let alone contact and educate an elected official. If we genuinely want new hearts, then we need to do those things that will create new hearts. Ignatius de Loyola wrote *The Spiritual Exercises*. The book was filled with Scripture and guidance on how to meditate upon Scripture. Regardless of one’s religious denomination, Loyola was onto something. If you want a new heart, you need to act as though you want a new heart.

The same goes for reconciliation. The Bible not only describes the reality of reconciliation effected by Christ’s death; it also requires us to seek reconciliation. It is descriptive and prescriptive. Seeking reconciliation means spending quality time with God, whether through prayer, Bible study, or singing. If you want a relationship, you have to act as though you want a relationship.

REACT

1. What have I done lately to create a new heart in me?
2. What have I done to spend quality time with God?

By Noemi Lynn Pendleton, an elected member of the Board of Education, State of Hawaii.

So This Is Marriage!

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:16-19

One day you're happily living your life, not bothering anyone, doing your own thing. Then a bunch of people show up at a church. You see a woman smiling at you while a preacher rattles on about home, commitment, and death. Someone sings a song, strangers throw birdseed at you, and you're married.

From then on you're just not yourself anymore. "Look at this," you gasp inwardly. "I've mutated into some type of domestic humanoid who gets a kick out of staying home on Saturday nights playing Upwards with the woman who smiled so sweetly at the wedding."

That's just the beginning. For some unexplainable reason, you happily throw money at this new live-in houseguest, buying stuff like lacy curtains, nonstick frying pans, and fresh produce. You bring your bank account to its knees purchasing mysterious, exotic items from Wal-Marts and Home Depots.

You dress differently, eat differently, and even think differently. Why? Because you've allowed yourself to become a new person. You're married.

A cynic once observed: "All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes the trouble." The guy had a point.

Coming to know Jesus can be sweet. Living for Jesus afterward takes work. Getting married is a hoot. *Staying* married is another story. Right? Maybe not.

Someone sings a song, strangers throw birdseed at you, and you're married.

I remember the first time I realized just how changed I'd become. Soon after our wedding, I had to be away from my wife for a few days. I'd been sent to ferry an airplane back to our hometown for my aircraft broker employer. Sitting in that cockpit, spinner pointed south, I urged that little Cessna through the skies, trying to eke out all the speed the engine could offer. I wanted to get back to my wife, back to that new life, back to our little rented house by the woods. I didn't like being alone, doing my own thing. Allures of the past had lost their pull on my heart forever. My life now revolved around someone else.

This week's lesson heralds a similar discovery in the Christian experience. We do what we do not because we're forcing ourselves to live a certain way. No. From the moment we truly allow Jesus into our hearts, we act, dress, and entertain ourselves differently because our spiritual life revolves around the Someone who has saved us. Ministry flows naturally from that realization.

Paul's descriptions aren't a standard for which to shoot. They're an outline of our reaction to what God has done in our lives. Marriage and Christianity can't help but grow in the nutritious atmosphere of shared love and mutual respect.

By Charles Mills, a freelance writer from Berkeley Springs, West Virginia.

NEVER TOO FAR GONE



“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV).

The End of Paradise?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Genesis 3

The scene, as I can only imagine, was beautiful and serene. The birds must have sung a melodious tune as the first couple tilled the soil. Heaven and earth were in complete harmony. The angels offered constant guidance and support to the couple. God's light certainly shone on this pair created in His likeness, and they basked in His goodness.

Occasionally God would stroll in the Garden, and when He did, the birds hushed their singing, the flowers gently leaned toward His light, and all creatures—great or small—bowed at His wondrous sight. Everyone was content because the Maker of heaven and earth and everything in it was there. But all this came to an end after the forbidden fruit was consumed. Humanity was cursed and separated from its Maker.

God: My children, where are you? What have you done!

Adam: Father, we felt afraid when we heard a sound, so we hid.

God: Why were you afraid? Did you eat from the tree I told you not to eat from?

Adam: The woman you gave to me gave me the fruit and I ate. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't stand to be separated from her.

All this came to an end after the forbidden fruit was consumed.

God: Eve, is this true?

Eve: The beautiful serpent spoke such convincing words to me, and I believed and ate of the forbidden fruit. After we ate the fruit, we felt such a terrible chill that we made a covering for ourselves.

God: I provided you every good thing so that you would not fall into temptation. Since you did not believe My words, neither did you heed my warnings, I have no choice but to expel you from the Garden. This has brought Me great sadness that you have chosen to listen to the serpent. Now you must experience great toils and troubles, but humankind will not go on like this forever. Sin must run its course before our plan of salvation is revealed.

God allowed Adam to live 930 years to see the repercussions of his decision and the true nature of sin. Adam and the prophets of old knew of the promise of a Messiah. These men studied and waited diligently for such a Saviour. In God's perfect time, the Word took on flesh and was born in Bethlehem. For in Christ we are reconciled to God.

By Angella Johnson, a process engineer with DuPont, Wilmington, Delaware.

A Diplomatic Mission

LOGOS

2 Cor. 5:18–6:13

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19, 20, NIV).

If we are to understand this passage, we must first glance at verse 17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” In this sentence Paul returns again to his by-now-familiar “in Christ” theme. What Christ does for the sinner when he or she accepts the all-sufficient sacrifice is something totally new! There is no revision of the old—not at all! This is no cosmic makeover! This is something completely new; the old is gone.

Paul then goes on to say, in verse 18, that *all this*—this amazing newness that comes as a result of being *in Christ*—“is from God.” God is behind this! The plan of salvation, this reconciliation that we are focusing on in this passage, is not something Christ does at cross purposes with God. Absolutely not! The new creation that results from being in Christ is from God. God is in the business of reconciliation. God and Christ were partners in this venture to save humanity

This is no cosmic makeover!

from the death grip of sin.

Not only was God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself but He also “gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (verse 18). How are sinful humans supposed to be a part of God’s plan of reconciliation? How could those in need of reconciliation take up the ministry of reconciling others? Paul tells us in the next verse how we can cooperate with God and Christ in this ministry.

First he tells us how Christ went about reconciling people. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (verse 19). The first thing we know about Christ’s reconciling ministry is that it involved pardoning people’s sins. His was a mission of mercy and grace. Mary understood this when she heard Jesus’ healing words, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11, NIV). The only way God can reconcile sinners to Himself is by somehow getting past their sin. So He and His Son set up a way to do just that, which Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:21.

After restating the fact that we have been called to the ministry of reconciliation, Paul explains more about how we can participate in Christ’s reconciling ministry. “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (verse 20). While not missing the fact that Paul is making a direct appeal to the Corinthian believers to be reconciled to God, we can’t help noticing that this is the key to being a part of Christ’s reconciling ministry. Be an ambassador! The work of reconciling has all been done in Christ. There is nothing more we can add to the righteousness of Christ or the power of the Cross. The part we are called to

play is that of an ambassador. The symbolism here is rich and worthy of hours of discussion. We are here, on earth, on a diplomatic mission, to represent King Jesus and implore lost people to be reconciled to God through the work of Jesus on the cross.

The strength of our reconciling ministry rests in the work of Jesus Christ. Paul makes this abundantly clear in verse 21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Put another way, Jesus took our sin, in which He did not participate, so that we could take His righteousness, in which we did not participate. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul states as eloquently as humanly possible the plan of salvation in one sentence. The righteousness of Christ, which He offers to us freely, is no more ours because of what we have done than is the sin that Christ took because of what He has done! The righteousness we receive from Christ is as undeserved as the sin Christ receives from us. This is the power of the gospel! It is this gospel to which we are called to be ambassadors. This is our message, our calling, our reason for existence! Be reconciled to God; then be an ambassador!

REACT

1. How does “not counting people’s sins against them” contribute to your role as a heavenly ambassador?

2. What are the qualities of a good foreign ambassador?

3. What would you describe as the primary purpose of an ambassador?

4. How do these qualities and responsibilities shed light on our calling as heavenly ambassadors?

5. An ambassador from a world government must have a clear vision of what the core principles of his or her government are. What are the core principles of the government of heaven that we are called to represent to the world? What principles did Jesus come to earth to represent?

6. Second Corinthians 6:3-10 describes Paul’s hardships. Then in verses 11-13 Paul makes an appeal for reconciliation between himself and his brothers and sisters in Corinth. How does understanding God’s plan of reconciliation aid us in our daily relationships?

7. As you delve into your life this week, list three practical ways you can be an ambassador in your corner of the world.

8. Discuss how two individuals with vastly different backgrounds can share a close relationship in which both are blessed.

9. List three action steps a person should take to reconcile one’s differences with an estranged friend.

10. How does Christ’s reconciliation of this sinful world to the Father affect you personally?

11. Why do you think Christians are given this ministry of reconciliation?

By Ryan Bell, pastor of the Havertown and West Chester (Pennsylvania) Seventh-day Adventist Churches.

Reconciliation in Jesus

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 5:23, 24

Reconciliation in the Bible has a twofold theme. First, there is reconciliation between God and humanity. "Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him. But man was deceived; his mind was darkened by Satan's sophistry. The height and depth of the love of God he did not know. For him there was hope in a knowledge of God's love. By beholding His character he might be drawn back to God.

"Through Jesus, God's mercy was manifested to men; but mercy does not set aside justice. The law reveals the attributes of God's character, and not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man's redemption. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' 2 Cor. 5:19."¹

Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice to reconcile sinful humanity to the Father. It is a price that only He could pay, and we as Christians are ever mindful of this fact.

The second aspect of the theme of reconciliation in the Bible affects one's relationships with other human beings. As we reflect on the redemption plan, we are encouraged to engage in active reconciliation with our fellow human beings. This includes everyone for whom Christ died.

God requires them to do all in their power to restore harmony.

"The Jews cultivated a spirit of retaliation. In their hatred of the Romans they gave utterance to hard denunciations, and pleased the wicked one by manifesting his attributes. Thus they were training themselves to do the terrible deeds to which he led them on. In the religious life of the Pharisees there was nothing to recommend piety to the Gentiles. Jesus bade them not to deceive themselves with the thought that they could in heart rise up against their oppressors, and cherish the longing to avenge their wrongs. . . .

"The Saviour goes farther than this. He says, 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' Many are zealous in religious services, while between them and their brethren are unhappy differences which they might reconcile. God requires them to do all in their power to restore harmony. Until they do this, He cannot accept their services. The Christian's duty in this matter is clearly pointed out."²

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 310, 311.

By Angella Johnson, a physics graduate of Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Changing Paradigms

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Acts 15:35-41

Although the prevalent view has been that conflict is bad, the opposite may be true. That conflict is good is an emerging area of conflict resolution in organizational management. It can be good if we understand, manage, and resolve it. In understanding our differences, expressing our feelings with love, and working toward a resolution, we can channel conflict positively.

Geoffrey White has discussed a process of disentanglement in a Solomon Island Society. In contrast to Western-style courts and laws, the people of Santa Isabel participate in a process in which people discuss interpersonal conflicts in a community setting. This process is conducted to dispel bad luck prior to a community venture or to remove misfortune from an illness. The former, preventive disentanglement takes the form of a town meeting in which a narrative account is presented from both sides and resolution is a community endeavor. In the latter, conflict is viewed as the cause of illness or misfortune, and disentanglement is a means by which the psychosocial causes may be addressed.¹ Resolution involves direct communication among all parties involved. Narrative form is used to express thoughts and feelings, in contrast to Western society, in which one's opinion involves the destruction of another's. Airing differences is viewed as vital for physical well-being and community success.

That conflict is good is an emerging area of conflict resolution.

In the early Christian church, a serious conflict arose between Paul and Barnabas over the inclusion of John Mark in a forthcoming missionary venture. The disagreement was strong enough to warrant a parting between two friends and the formation of two new evangelistic teams, Barnabas with John Mark and Paul with Silas. As a result of new teams, the gospel spread twice as fast and God blessed. As followers of Christ, we are called to be diplomats of the highest order and to focus on conflict management with our families, colleagues, fellow believers, and God.

"Whether African or Irish, rich or poor, successful or unsuccessful, artisan or community leader, we all have conflicts and we can all be more effective to the extent that we manage them constructively. There is no realistic alternative to managing conflict. Learning to manage conflict is potentially a common goal that people everywhere can share."²

1. K. A. Avruch, P. W. Black, and J. A. Scimecca, *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 244.

2. Dean Tjosvold, "Caplan's Understanding Disputes: The Politics of Argument," *Human Relations*, vol. 49, number 9, pp. 1203-1211.

By Rita P. Francis, a research scientist and graduate student in management, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Building Bridges, Not Barriers

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:18-21

We must do three things to apply 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 to our lives.

First, we must reconcile with God. Jesus has already accomplished this for us on the cross. God sent Jesus His Son to take our sins upon Himself so that they no longer count against us. “God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ” (verse 19, NIV). All we must do is accept this.

What does reconciliation really mean? Essentially it means to bring together in unity. Have you heard the saying “to reconcile our differences”? That doesn’t mean that two individuals have to agree completely with one another. “God was reconciling the world to Himself” (verse 19). Does this mean that God removed every difference between us and Himself? No! To reconcile us to Himself, through Christ, He removed the sin barrier that was between us and Him. By removing sin, we can relate to God. So to reconcile us with God, the one barrier between us was removed. He did not change our nature—we are still sinful. He simply built a bridge between us, a bridge of reconciliation.

Second, we humans must reconcile our differences. That doesn’t mean we always have to agree with one another, but our differences should not be a barrier between us. For example, the racial tension in some of our churches is very high.

Reconciliation doesn’t mean that two individuals have to agree completely with one another.

Certain people always see issues in racial terms. They pass judgment upon others based solely upon their ethnic origin. These people use skin color as a barrier to healthy relationships. On the other hand, there are other people who use their differences to build bridges. It can be a wonderful experience to learn from other cultures once we have reconciled our differences. This does not mean we have to agree all the time. It doesn’t mean we all have to be the same. We must not use our differences as barriers but rather as bridges.

Third, we are to be ambassadors. What are the qualities of a political ambassador, and why are they sent? Because they represent their country to other nations, they must have the highest standards of integrity. They are sent to build good relations between the two countries. As ambassadors of Jesus, we represent Christianity to the world. We are to bring the news of reconciliation with God. He has given His Son to take away our sins. There is a bridge between God and us.

By Elysabeth G. Bell, a freelance wallpaper designer and artist in Paoli, Pennsylvania.

God's Greatest Gift

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 15:11-32

This week we have analyzed reconciliation in the Bible. In today's portion of the lesson, I will concentrate on how reconciliation affects Christians personally. Reconciliation is easier to discuss than to put into action. It is much easier to hold a grudge than to open channels of communication. I am currently experiencing that difficulty. I have a neighbor who refuses to come to an amiable agreement. Every attempt I make seems to be in vain.

At first I was content with trying to find some common ground; but, as I reflect on the topic of reconciliation, I have come to the conclusion that reconciliation can come about only when both parties want to reconcile. So how do I apply this to my current situation? I will pray and wait for an opportunity for us to come to some agreement.

I hold to the belief that reconciliation brings peace, and I am always eager to reconcile with a friend or family member. Reconciliation can bring a breath of fresh air to a stagnant relationship. Whenever I read the story of the prodigal son, I can rejoice with the father and the sons. In this story there are grave misunderstandings between all parties. As the channels of communication are opened, I can almost visualize the walls of misconception tumbling down.

At first I was content with trying to find some common ground.

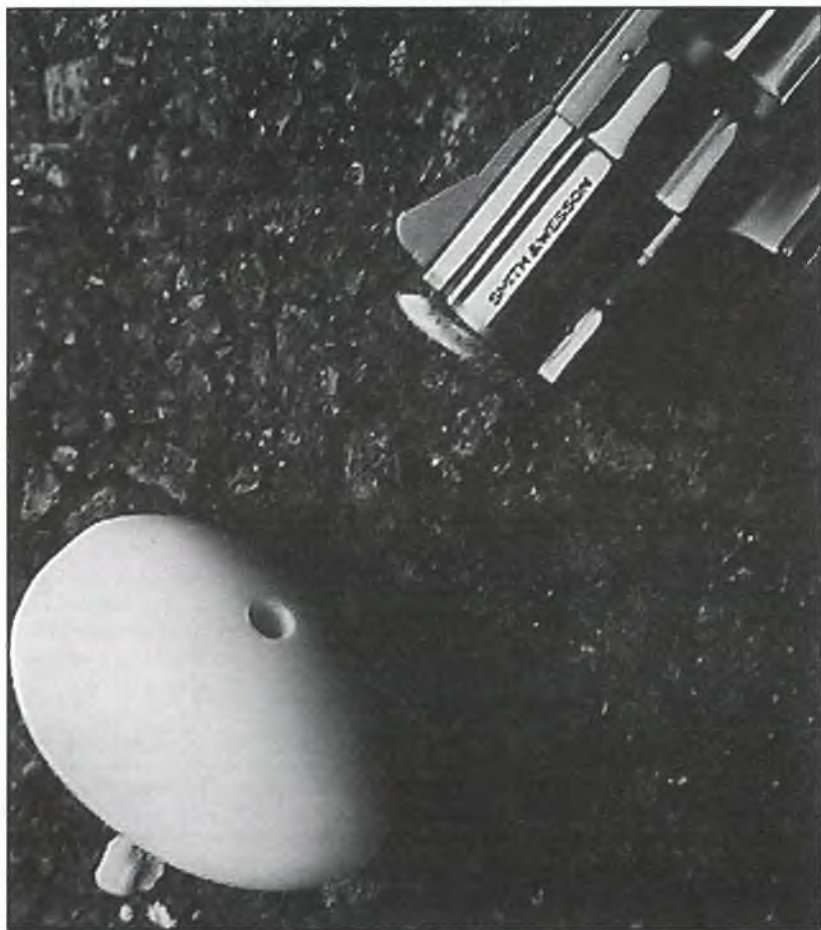
We all know how the story ends. The father explains to the older son that his younger brother was lost and is now found. The story is told in such a compassionate way that the father in the parable is easily identified as God. The words of the father in the parable are a constant reminder of a God who loves this world lost in sin so much that He would go to any length to reconcile with us. Have you ever thought about that? I cannot explain it, but I am glad that God sent His only Son to this world to reconcile us to Him.

Because God has done such a beautiful thing, the task of reconciling with others should be easier than we make it out to be. Surely most of us can attest to the fact that reconciliation and forgiveness is one of the hardest human burdens we struggle with every day. If we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, we will be directed in the way of righteousness.

Let us not cease in thanking and praising Him for the gracious and merciful love which He has bestowed on us.

By Faith G. Johnson, a recreational therapist at Temple University Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

DANGEROUS LIAISONS



“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14, NKJV).

Tyrone's Yoke

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 6:14

Let's imagine a young man in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who has friends who are not godly people. Let's call him Tyrone. Tyrone tries to witness to them. He gives them texts to help them understand who God is and how He loves them. He invites them to church on Sabbaths. But somehow the friends do not change. Eventually they talk him into hanging out with them on the streets. He agrees, claiming it is all for the sake of winning them to Christ.

One day Tyrone gets into a car with his ungodly friends to go to the store. Another car pulls up beside it and unloads gunfire on everyone in the car. Tyrone dies instantly. Was it God's will for Tyrone to die that day from the bullets that were meant for his ungodly friends? Tyrone was just doing his Christian duty of witnessing, right? Well, maybe Tyrone did not understand the meaning of being "yoked" to unbelievers.

We all have understood Paul's use of this term to prohibit marriage with unbelievers. We have always interpreted this text to talk only about Seventh-day Adventists marrying only Seventh-day Adventists. Though it may be wise counsel not to marry those of other faiths, however, this text is within the context of 2 Corinthians, which speaks about commitment to ministry. Tyrone was definitely

Maybe Tyrone became a little too close to his friends.

committed to witnessing to his ungodly friends, but he may have become too close for comfort.

After we have studied this week's lesson, we will understand the broader relevance of this term "unequally yoked" and what it means to be "yoked" to someone. Our commitment to ministry should drive us close enough to reach people and distant enough to be affected by their actions. We are to be influential in this world and not influenced by this world.

This week's lesson will discuss marital relationships and other relationships like that of Tyrone and his friends. We will discover what God has intended for us to do with those whom we care about who are not fellow believers. Maybe Tyrone became a little too close to his friends. Paul definitely wants us to be committed to ministry but to what extent? How can we be isolated from the world and win it to Christ at the same time? How will Christ be represented if we stay to ourselves? Our relationship to the lost can probably be summed up in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King: "If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show someone he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain."

By C. Wesley Knight, a senior theology major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

“Show Me Your Company . . .”

LOGOS

2 Cor. 6:14–7:16

“I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18, RSV).

The sentiment of the lesson for this week is reflected in the proverb: “Show me your company, and I’ll show you who you are.” As Christians, we profess to be children of God. Membership in God’s family, however, is not merely characterized by group affiliation but is demonstrated by our choice of relationships. A sincere Christian will choose relationships that positively influence the Christian life. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, Paul suggests that those who are serious about their Christianity will avoid forming dangerous liaisons. For Paul, it is simply a matter of common sense. Why should a Christian want to be associated with iniquity, darkness, Belial (Satan), or idols? Wouldn’t he or she be more comfortable with righteousness, light, Christ, and the temple of God?

Paul uses the image of the “temple of God” in two ways (verse 16). The first relates to the church community, which is inhabited by God. However, the most basic application of the “temple of God” is the individual Christian who is a brick in the temple. A person cannot function as a brick in the temple if he or she is affiliated with Belial. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:11 as he invites nominal Christians to

A sincere Christian will choose relationships that positively influence the Christian life.

break away from their dangerous liaisons and commit fully to the temple of God: “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17, NIV).

Notice that God’s hospitality is determined by the response to the invitation. Many people believe that God’s acceptance is unconditional. Others want God to accept them on their own terms. But God expects us to show that we are serious about being His children before He allows us to call Him Father. He expects us to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (7:1, RSV). He wants us to divorce ourselves from our dangerous liaisons.

I am sure Paul realized that separation from Belial is often easier said than done. He would especially understand the difficulty in this age of instant gratification. With unbridled access to easy credit, few are acquainted with the discipline it takes to save for something they really want. Few know how to say No to the impromptu pizza or CD so that they can save for a necessity. Nonetheless, in spite of societal pressure, membership in God’s family involves the denial of wants. It calls for joyful sacrifice in the present as we anticipate future rewards.

Not only does commitment to ministry call for self-denial, but it also places the Christian in a vulnerable position. Belial does not like it when his agents defect and tries everything to get them back. It is not unusual for the opposition to come from some of the very people with whom you have stopped associating. Accord-

ing to 2 Corinthians 7:2-7, both Paul and the Corinthians suffered for the sake of the gospel. Paul admits that sometimes he was even fearful in the face of opposition (verse 5). We can be comforted, however, by knowing that there is always someone who understands what we are going through. As we see with Titus's ministry to Paul, God always has others to minister to us as we stand firm for Him.

Oftimes, the ministry of others will take the form of correction. We can't always see when our own lives have become contaminated by ungodly influences. We don't always know how to determine when we are involved in a dangerous liaison. Indeed, it is precisely at these times that we need others to remove the blinders from our eyes. Sometimes when others correct us, we are quick to judge their motives. It is so easy to react negatively when corrected. When the other is right, however, we can't allow pride to obstruct our allegiance to God. The Corinthians' penitent response to Paul's correction led him to write, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting (verse 9, RSV).

When the decision is made to break away from dangerous liaisons, everyone is pleased. As we see in 2 Corinthians 7:14-16, Paul is overjoyed that the Corinthians have responded positively to his admonition. They could have rejected his counsel in favor of the attractive teaching of the false teacher. They could have dismissed Paul as one who was out of touch—a hindrance to progress. Instead, they realized that Paul did not wish to stifle their independence. He was merely concerned about their eternal life. Everyone is pleased. But the One who is most pleased is God Himself, who has promised to those who avoid dangerous liaisons, "I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters" (6:18, RSV).

REACT

1. How does 2 Cor. 6:14–7:16 relate to our choice in CDs or movies?
2. How can we determine whether the correction given to us by a Christian brother or sister is personally or spiritually motivated?
3. How do you respond when someone confronts you with your wrongdoing?
4. How does one know when to ignore another's wrongdoing and when to confront it?
5. How can Christians maintain holiness and yet maintain a healthy relationship with unbelievers?

By Keith A. Burton, assistant professor of religion, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Gospel Warriors

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 6:1

In these closing days of earth's history, there is a clamoring for religion among the unsaved. Those who were once hopeless are anxiously seeking the peace that only a relationship with God affords. As a result, an army of spiritual warriors has strapped on the whole armor of God and are infiltrating Satan's camps.

It was a challenge for Paul and his associates to be an effective witness and to truly love those to whom he preached. He was not always received with a warm and welcoming spirit; consequently, he was mistreated both physically and emotionally. Despite these obstacles, he found a great sense of strength in total reliance on God for deliverance, comfort, and guidance. So it should be with us when Satan attempts to discourage and distract us. This is when we ought to draw nigh to God, for He has promised to draw nigh unto us.

The battle for souls can be fought only by committed men and women whose love for Christ is the motivating force. This love for God is made manifest through the power that He provides, enabling me to do His will. The Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly identify these principles. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col. 3:23, NIV).

"A constant effort should be put forth to enlist new workers. Talent should be

The battle for souls can be fought only by committed men and women.

discerned and recognized. . . . All who are competent to do so should be led to engage in some branch of the work according to their capabilities."¹ It is vital that workers know their own strengths and weaknesses prior to committing to serve. "God has appointed to every man his work according to his ability. It is by education and practice that persons are to be qualified to meet any emergency which may arise, . . . that he may obtain an experience which will fit him to bear responsibility."²

It is the Father's desire that we equip ourselves with His Word and His character as we accept the challenge for a life of sacred ministry. None of us is perfect; however, if we yield our hearts to His work, He has promised to sustain us. All in all, we must pursue the gospel ministry with the enthusiasm of heavenly heralds. The results of such powerful witnessing will be rewarded with the fulfillment of God's promise of an eternity with Him.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 722.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 724.

By Sonia E. Paul, assessment counselor in the adult and continuing education program at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Attention to Details

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 7:1

“Attention!” In unison we positioned our feet at a 45-degree angle with our heels touching together, shoulders high and straight, and hands along our sides. Then two men dressed in highly decorated uniforms moved through our ranks. The closer they moved toward me, the more I perspired.

Finally, one of the two men approached me. He greeted me, and I returned his greetings. He examined my uniform from top to bottom and acknowledged that I looked admirable in my navy uniform. Before departing, he asked me to unbutton my shirt pocket. I did. He placed his hands inside and found a small piece of paper with the inscription “Inspector 12.” Just then I remembered the words of my company commander, “Pay attention to details.” At this point the inspector told me that I was no longer properly dressed as a sailor.

Navy regulation requires the removal of all tags from the uniform, even the manufacturer’s tag “Inspector 12.” My inability to “pay attention to details” caused me to fail inspection. My uniform looked good on the outside, but the inside pocket contained a small piece of paper that caused my failure.

The removal of everything that contaminates is vital. Speaking to the church at Corinth, Paul admonishes the believers to perfect holiness. God desires holi-

Two men dressed in highly decorated uniforms moved through our ranks.

ness of His people. Holiness means to “set apart” or “separate.” The realization that we serve a holy God should be the impetus for purity and holiness. Perfecting holiness is the process of sanctification. “Sanctification is a lifetime work, something not accomplished by any single act or at any point of time in this life.”

Every day we experience different forms of inspection. The various jobs that we perform demand no mistakes. The journalist cannot allow submitted articles to contain misspelled words, comma splices, or run-on sentences. The dentist must treat decayed teeth properly before applying filling materials. If not, the decay will continue to spread throughout the mouth, and eventually the patient will lose teeth. Paying attention to detail is necessary in many areas of life. Therefore, there must be a relentless effort made to strive for perfection.

Paul’s admonition to the church of Corinth is still relevant for us today, “perfecting holiness.” Only by totally submitting to Christ, paying attention to everything as outlined in the Word of God, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and removing everything that contaminates our lives can holiness be achieved.

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 880.

By Harold Thomas III, a senior theology and dietetics major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

A Dog's Life

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 6:24

A certain man owned a beautiful purebred dog named Christi, which he loved dearly and cared for faithfully. The dog was friendly, gentle, and extremely devoted. One day a limping, scrawny mongrel shyly wandered into the man's backyard. The man, feeling sorry for the stray dog, took Christi's bowl, filled it with dog food, and attempted to present it to the begging hound. Christi began barking wildly, trying to prevent her master from going near the dog. The man gently scolded Christi. But when she wouldn't stop barking, the man hit her several times—something he had never done before.

Christi's owner decided to keep the stray, which he later named Natassti. He brought the dog into the house and tried to make the mutt comfortable by allowing him to sleep on Christi's bedding. Christi voiced her disapproval with a growl.

Weeks passed, and the deadly rivalry between Christi and Natassti grew. Fierce battles ensued as both dogs vied for the man's attention and favor. Initially the man tried to divide his time equally between the two dogs, but his interest slowly shifted to Natassti. By now the dog had grown very large, very aggressive, and somewhat vicious. It occasionally snapped at the man's hand but would immediately perform cute tricks to regain his favor.

Christi's owner decided to keep the stray.

Eventually Natassti received choice portions from the man's own plate, something that had once been reserved for Christi. The man began thinking that Natassti was smarter and better looking than Christi. He devoted the majority of his time to this new companion, whom he let stay inside the house, while Christi stayed tied to a stake in the backyard. The man, who now rarely paid any attention to the dog he once loved, would frequently go long periods of time without feeding Christi. Christi eventually became quiet and withdrawn, and then one day she was dead.

Several days later, the man came home to find his house in shambles. Natassti was on a rampage, ripping apart everything in his path. The man, loudly reprimanding his "best friend," attempted to put the dog out. The frenzied Natassti turned on his benefactor and mauled him to death.

Daily, as free moral agents, we consciously or unconsciously decide whether we'll feed and nurture a relationship with Christ or one with Satan. We *must* be careful how we choose, for one will give us eternal life and the other eternal death.

How do you know which one you're choosing?

By Anthonye Perkins, a freelance writer from Madison, Alabama.

With Whom Then Shall We Associate?

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 6:14, 15

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Cor. 6:14, 15, NIV).

We are told that we are to go into the world and evangelize, but our text tells us not to be associated with unbelievers. How then are we to reach them? Are we to be so cold and unfriendly? This generation is looking for more than words. Are our friendships in jeopardy? What are we to do? As I travel around the country, no longer are the collegiate-age youth sitting at home on the farm or in a protected community in the cities. Our youth are in the mix.

How can Christ and Satan be partners? Our friends are those who have likes and dislikes as we do. How can we turn our backs on them and quote 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15? Our friends make us laugh; they care and support how we feel. Our friends give us encouragement and affirmation. And when they begin to understand and trust us, we know at that point we have a friend.

How can Christ and Satan be partners?

These friendships outside the church lead to so many opportunities. This text is used so much to back up the fears that many Adventists have about people outside the faith. If we follow this text to the letter, then what kind of Christians would we be? Scared and timid, living in a sheltered world, not having a grip on reality.

Who then can we associate with? God has created all and even showed Peter in Acts 1:1 that all people are to be considered fit to receive the gospel. How can we do this without associating with all people?

REACT

1. How are your friendships with non-Christians affecting you spiritually and socially?
2. Is it important to have non-Christian friends? Why?

By Roger Wade, a senior theology student at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

NATURALLY GENEROUS



“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9, NKJV).

“I Shall Not Pass This Way Again!”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 8:1-15

What a great gift God gave us! Jesus, His only Son! These are phrases that we are used to hearing, but do we really understand their full meaning? Are we able to imagine their greatness?

When God told His Son about His plan for the salvation of humanity, Jesus accepted because of His immeasurable love for us. Everything He did was done because He had and still has a genuine and pure motivation: His love for us.

Can we understand it? I like to compare things from the spiritual life with the ordinary life. If we like someone and feel good being with them, sharing things with them, doing a favor for them is easy, isn't it? We do not wait till they come to ask us for it. What happens, however, if we do not sympathize with them? Exactly the contrary. So what is it that compels us to do something for someone? Of course, it is our feelings for him or her. We do not wonder whether we can or not, if we have or not, we just do it!

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, Paul speaks about this very subject. It is advice to us showing how we should act toward our neighbor.

Being generous should be an action that we perform naturally, because it is a reflection of our love for Jesus. It does not matter what it is—perhaps a few words

Being generous should be an action that we perform naturally.

of encouragement to someone who is anxious or upset, a help to a neighbor who is moving away. Whatever it is, the point is to do it with kindness and love. This is the commandment, and we will see the results.

“I expect to pass through the world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”*

May God bless us that we may understand and develop generosity in our lives as His children.

*Stephen Grellet, in Bergen Evans, ed. *Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968), p. 282.

Christian Generosity

LOGOS

2 Cor. 8:1-15

Ten years had passed since a famine had ravaged Palestine. In such a situation the churches in the Greek world had sent their help through Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:27-30; 12:25). Nevertheless, maybe because of heavy taxes and persecution, the churches in Judea were still needing help, and Paul began to organize another collection (1 Cor. 16:1-4). The Corinthian church answered heartily; but, probably because of the internal problems referred to in 1 Corinthians, their wish didn't materialize. Now, when Paul writes the book of 2 Corinthians, their problems have been solved and the time has come to open themselves to the others, realizing their previous intentions.

In the passage we are studying, the word for generosity, used five times, is *ôcharisô*, possibly "charis," grace (verses 1, 4, 6, 7, 9; but see also 8:16, 19; 9:8, 11, 12, 14, 15). This is a very important word in Christian theology. Grace is the generous act of God for the salvation of humanity. But grace, our text teaches, doesn't pertain only to the gift of salvation in relation to the future life. It also becomes a model for the present Christian life, even in relation to the administration of our material goods.

Grace doesn't pertain only to the gift of salvation in relation to the future life.

From *ôcharisô* comes the English word *charity* (present also in many other languages). Many times this word has acquired a limited and even negative meaning (giving alms). But Christian charity doesn't result from a sense of superiority, in which one gives of his surplus without sacrifice.

The Pauline vision of Christian generosity is characterized by the following facts:

1. A *diaconia* following Christ's example. Its origin is in the example of Christ, who didn't give of His surplus; but He gave Himself, becoming poor.

2. A sign of God's grace. The only glory for the Christian giver derives from the privilege of partaking of Christ's generous attitude. This is why the Macedonian believers considered the ability to express grace toward the poor brothers of Judea (verses 1-4) a sign of God's grace. Christians do not give to obtain grace, but the giving itself is lived as a grace received. Only the one who has already received (and everything we have comes from God) is able to give. Nothing belongs to us, not even ourselves. Everything is from God, and we are only His administrators to His glory and for the benefit of our neighbor.

3. A sign of love for God. The Macedonian churches had understood very well: they first gave their own selves to the Lord (verse 5); then, as a consequence, they were able to share generously of their earthly goods with the needing brothers. An important gospel teaching is that loving God means loving people (Matt. 25:40, 45; 1 John 4:20, 21).

4. A *koinonia*. The most beautiful aspect of Christian generosity is possibly

the fact that before connecting money with people it connects people with one another. It derives, in fact, from the awareness to be part of a unique whole in which all of us live an experience of solidarity and reciprocity. This fact alludes to another word Paul uses in verse 4: *koinonia*, meaning “fellowship,” “partnership,” “communion.” In the *koinonia*, Christians share what they are and what they have, placing on the same level the spiritual and material goods (verses 13, 14).

5. A sign of humility in view of the uncertainty of life. In verse 14 Paul seems to allude to another cause for which we must be generous. He speaks about the fact that the wealth of the rich nourishes the poor. Circumstances, however varied: “To every thing there is a season . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (Eccl. 3:1-8, Amplified Bible), a time to give and a time to ask. It’s also because of this reality that we must “cast [our] bread upon the waters: for [we] will find it after many days” (Eccl. 11:1, 2, Amplified Bible).

REACT

1. Why does Paul think that to be able to help others is a sign of divine grace?
2. In a world already become a “global village,” how and toward whom must we manifest the generosity Paul encourages us to? Who is our neighbor?
3. What difference, if any, exists between solidarity and giving alms? How, as Christians, must we live both?
4. The members of the Corinthian church (the givers) and those living in Judea (the beneficiaries) differed because of geographic location, language, and culture. Despite a common faith, these factors—as many contemporaneous issues (see, e.g., Rwanda)—continue to be the cause of division. What should we learn from the first-century church?
5. In our world, helping poor countries often becomes an exercise of political and economic power. How can the church be free from this temptation?

By Giovanni Leonardi, a theology teacher at the Istituto Avventista Villa Aurora Scuola Media e Liceo Scientifico Seminario di Teologia, Florence, Italy.

God's Legacy

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 3:16

“The gift of God would be a wonder to all worlds, to all created intelligences, ever enlarging their ideas of what God’s love was in its infinity and greatness. Contemplation of this love would uproot from the heart all selfishness, and so transform the soul that men would cherish generosity, practice self-denial, and imitate the example of God. God so loved the world that He gave heaven’s best gift, in order that the most guilty transgressor should not be deferred from coming to Christ, however great his sin, and be enabled to ask for pardon at a throne of mercy.”¹

“God’s character is expressed in His law, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ He has expressed this love in giving his only begotten Son to a life of humiliation, of poverty, of shame, of denial, of rejection, mockery, and anguish. He expressed this love when he permitted Christ to be brought before the priests and the rulers and before the maddened multitudes, and placed beside Barabbas. . . . But the sacrifice that God made to redeem the fallen sons of Adam will one day appear in its true significance before those who have refused the Son of God. . . . God proved that he loved his neighbor as himself by giving his only begotten Son to die for the world. We also are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves.

“Contemplation of this love would uproot from the heart all selfishness.”

Some may ask, as did the lawyer, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ The Lord Jesus has made it plain that every one who is in temporal or spiritual need is our neighbor. . . . But the poor are never to cease out of the land. The poor are God’s legacy to those who are more favorably situated. ‘He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker.’ The Lord has left the poor to the mercy of his church, not to be neglected, not to be despised and scorned, but to be treated as the Lord’s inheritance. There will always be those who will need to be ministered unto. How inconsistent it is for the professed followers of Christ to furnish their own tables with everything that appetite shall dictate, while they neglect to consider the poor as the Lord has bidden them to do.”²

1. “God’s Love Unmeasured,” *The Signs of the Times*, Feb. 5, 1894, p. 6.

2. “Character Tested by Small Occurrences,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 15, 1895, p. 6.

By Manuela Casti, who teaches biblical languages at the Istituto Adventista Villa Aurora and is also editor of the Italian Adventist Youth Magazine, L’Opinione, Florence, Italy.

The Solution to Spiritual Stagnation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 8:1-15

In the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul presents the feelings, desires, and ambitions that determine his service in the church. Everywhere he went, enemies brought accusations against him. In this respect, the letter is an answer not just to the community of Corinth.

The controversy begun in Galatia provoked the formation of a group supporting Jewish traditions who used every method to discredit Paul. The apostle had to fight not only against the typical behavior of pagan religious culture but also against the prejudices of envious leaders who called themselves Christians.

It seems that the accusers were actually Jews who entered the church founded by Paul by means of letters of recommendation. But the problem denounced by Paul was not that of their ethnic origins but rather that of their prideful and controlling characters (11:19, 20). In short, they were not people ready to suffer for Christ (verse 23).

This description, taken from the letter of Paul, shows how the international church had to face—since the first century—the sin that acted from the inside.

Paul defends the Christian's mission, speaking not only to the accusers but to all the church. His answer becomes a positive guideline that makes this epistle

In short, they were not people ready to suffer for Christ.

important for Christians who must respond to human criticism. This epistle is the only book that:

- describes the apostolic mission
- exalts Christ as the model of sacrifice
- teaches generosity

Titus's arrival in Macedonia with the good news regarding the actions of the Corinthian church caused Paul's promise to go, for the last time, to Corinth without financial support. Luke tells us that the apostle stayed three months in Acaia, the province of Corinth. In A.D. 56 Paul left Corinth for Jerusalem, taking with him help gained from the Corinthians, a sign of the generosity and responsibility of those who understood that the work of God advances through human commitment. From Jerusalem, Paul went to the city from where, once having heard the gospel, Christ would be preached to all the world: Rome.

Can you imagine the problems that Paul faced in his time? The lack of rapid communication and travel, for example. How much do you depend on modern technology to communicate your faith?

By Alexander Angheluta, a theology student at the Istituto Avventista Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy.

Love?

HOW-TO

Key Texts: 1 John 3:18; Acts 20:35

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18, KJV).

Every day we hear people saying the word *love*. In the newspapers, magazines, films, it is referred to hundreds of times. It is said, in the TV, that 95 percent of songs, old or modern, are about love. At school, the teacher says that love is a serious issue about which we must speak carefully. If it is such a serious issue, why are we not more accurate about it?

My father never talked about love. I have never heard the word *love* mentioned in my house. I remember, though, that Sabbath mornings were the happiest time for my brothers and me. We used to run, as soon as we woke up, to our parents' bed, jump up, smile, and play until our father would play his part; he used to take out his singlet and then inflate his stomach, little by little, till it became like a ball. At home we didn't talk about love: We were practical; we lived love.

“Love is not only something that we feel, but it is also something we make” (David Wilkerson). With this quotation, many people might see a sexual implication. However, this is not what Wilkerson meant. Love is not love if it doesn't change itself into unselfish action toward the lover. So love is practiced and it is passed on by generosity, by hospitality, by being concerned. If not for this, love

At home we didn't talk about love.

is meaningless.

“When we give what we have, we predispose ourselves to receive what we need” (D. Lawson). Being generous, being active toward our neighbor, allows us to help ourselves. I used to be frightened to visit hospitalized people. Confronted with suffering, I always feel helpless, and the only thing I could offer in those moments was my presence and maybe my smile. But whenever I have visited the sick, I have come home richer.

The question we have to ask ourselves every day is this: What will grant us happiness? When we have answered this, we need to pass on to others exactly what makes us happy. Even though this method might seem trivial, in its simplicity it is wonderful. How many people could we make happy by sharing our happiness? This question will always remain without answer as long as we continue to speak of “making love.”

REACT

1. In your own words, what does 2 Corinthians 8:11 mean?
2. What are our possibilities (2 Cor. 8:11)?

By Davide Mozzato, a theology student at the Istituto Avventista Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy.

The Alternatives

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 12:15

When we talk about generosity, we usually overlook two important things.

First, when we think about generous people, we usually refer to a special attitude toward “things.” Of course, it *is* important to help a friend in trouble, to finance a needy student, to support Adventist institutions at home and abroad. Yet these are secondary things when we consider what people really need: our time and attention.

Sometimes it’s easier to give money rather than time to those who live close to us. Money can be important, but it can’t replace a human heart, and this holds true whether we consider family life (how many children are being spoiled but not looked after!) or our attitude toward strangers. As a matter of fact, even the poor need respect and serious attention more than money. The two things must go together or else generosity is just an excuse to sweep problems under the carpet.

Second, we tend to imply that we *possess* things, and through a sort of noble act we give up what belongs to us. Well, this is wrong, very wrong. We don’t own anything in the strict sense of the word. We don’t possess money; we are merely administrators of things that God has loaned to us for a while. We don’t possess even our own time, since our lives depend on God at any moment. In this we share the original sin of Adam and Eve. They thought that they had obtained immortality

Either we grow together or we die alone.

by possessing the forbidden fruit. Ironically, though we like to regard ourselves as rational beings, we still become a prey to this delusion: Objects make us immortal, and we project onto them the meaning of our lives: we *are* because we *have* (but read Luke 12:15).

Of course, we know this is a way to cover our spiritual emptiness by attaching spiritual dignity to objects (how many couples stay together just because they don’t want to lose objects—a house, a position, status, and so on?). So the issue is not about generosity but about faithfulness. It’s about faithfulness to God and to His plan for human life.

Consider these questions: What am I doing with what God has given to me in terms of health, time, opportunities, money? Am I working just to have more and more objects? Do I use them to enrich the spiritual dimension of my life or is my life *used* by them? In other words, do I feel that I am making the most of material things to enrich my spiritual life?

Human beings are social beings: Are we aware that either we grow together or we die alone, even among mountains of objects?

By Roberto Vacca, who teaches English as a foreign language at the Istituto Adventista Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy.

LETTING GO



“God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8, NKJV).

Grasping Pennies

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 9:2-5

“Don’t touch anything!” said Mother to her six-year-old son, Eric, as they entered the boutique lined with shelves of expensive china and crystal. Eric carefully followed Mom down the aisles and did his best not even to let his coat brush up against the sparkling stemware. Mother engaged herself in a discussion with the sales clerk regarding the price of a place setting. Suddenly she heard a panicked cry from behind her, and to her horror, found that Eric had shoved his hand inside an expensive vase and couldn’t pull it out again.

Mother tried gently to dislodge the child’s hand from the vase, but it wouldn’t budge. The sales clerk came over to give some assistance, but little Eric just screamed in pain. A security guard showed up with some oil to try to lubricate the hand so it could slide out.

Mother tried gently to dislodge the child’s hand from the vase.

After 20 minutes of trying various solutions for removing the vase from Eric’s hand, the only thing left was to break the vase. As that expensive vase was reduced to shards, it became clear why Eric had been so hopelessly stuck. Clenched within his fist was a penny he had spied in the bottom of the vase and of which he, in his childish ignorance, would not let go.

Though we may not sacrifice a vase for a penny, many will give up eternity for a hundred dollars, a thousand dollars, or some other figure. No matter how much, it’s still a poor trade, yet millions line up to put their hand in the jar.

By Grant Misseghers, pastor of the Fairview (Alberta) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Don't Be Cheap With the Seed!

LOGOS

2 Cor. 8:16–9:15

“If you’re going to be cheap, don’t be cheap with the seed!” My first few years of pastoral ministry were in a large farming community in Alberta. Farms varied in size, with some of the larger ones approaching 3,000 acres of land. Within that spectrum one could find farmers who were using the latest, high-tech farming machinery to those whose equipment bordered on the antique. Farmers are an innovative people. Since profit margins tend to be slim, you make do with what you have. If it breaks down, you either fix it yourself or you improvise.

There is one area, however, in which farmers do not compromise—the quality of the seed. “If you’re ever going to be cheap, don’t be cheap with the seed!” I was told. One bushel of seed yields 30 bushels of grain harvested in a good year. Thirty to one: not a bad return.

Paul wrote, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Cor. 9:10, NRSV). What a promise! Even though farmers have no guarantee for the coming year, they willingly put the best seed into the ground in hopes of a return. “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good

If it breaks down, you either fix it yourself or you improvise.

work” (verse 8). If a farmer can give the best he has with no guarantee of a return, how can we waiver on the sure promise of God?

A story tells of how a church member was having trouble with the concept of tithing. One day he revealed his doubts to his minister. “Pastor, I just don’t see how I can give 10 percent of my income to the church when I can’t even keep on top of our bills.”

The pastor replied, “John, if I promise to make up the difference in your bills if you fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?”

After a moment’s pause, John responded, “Sure, if you promise to make up any shortage, I guess I could try tithing for one month.”

“Now what do you think of that,” mused the pastor. “You say you’d be willing to put your trust in a mere man like myself, who possesses so little materially, but you couldn’t trust your heavenly Father who owns the whole universe!”

It’s not that God needs our money. God claims ownership over the whole creation (Ps. 50:10–12). But our generosity (or lack of it) does reveal the nature of the heart. Twice Paul stated that through this ministry, God would be glorified and love would be shown to fellow believers (2 Cor. 8:19; 9:13). This is the embodiment of the great commandments given by Jesus in Matthew 22:37–40—to love God with all your soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself.

REACT

1. Why is it so difficult to trust God with our physical needs?
2. In what ways do our giving habits reflect our perception of God?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between missionary giving and a sense of family in God's church?
4. What would you say are some keys to developing cheerful giving rather than grudging giving?

*James S. Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), pp. 461, 462.

By Grant Misseghers, pastor of the Fairview (Alberta) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“Hardened by Prosperity”

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 10:8

If God owns the universe, why does He need my little offering? Can't God feed the starving of the world as He did the 5,000 and let me go shopping at the mall with the few dollars I have left over after paying the bills? The answer is obviously Yes, but the point that is missed is that God owns everything—even your money. Can we turn our lives over to God, without including our resources? Or is there some kind of heavenly prenuptial agreement that we can sign?

“There are many whose hearts have been so hardened by prosperity that they forget God, and forget the wants of their fellow man. . . . Men and women who claim redemption through a Saviour's blood will squander the means intrusted to them for the saving of other souls, and then grudgingly dole out their offerings for religion, giving liberally only when it will bring honor to themselves. These are idolaters.”¹

“It were better not to give at all than to give grudgingly; for if we impart of our means when we have not the spirit to give freely, we mock God. Let us bear in mind that we are dealing with One upon whom we depend for every blessing, One who reads every thought of the heart, every purpose of the mind.”² Apparently the gift is not as important as the spirit in which it is given.

Is there some kind of heavenly prenuptial agreement that we can sign?

Returning tithes and offerings to God is not a matter of laying up more treasures in heaven for ourselves. What would be the purpose of hoarding treasure in a place where greed does not exist? Neither can we buy our way into heaven with our earthly riches, although it is conceivable that hoarding these riches could keep us out of heaven (Matt. 19:16-22). No, the giving of our tithes and offerings is based on the friendship and love that we have for our Saviour. As a Friend, He asked that we return money to Him to assist in His work. And being asked this by a Friend, who has given everything to us, even died for our sins, how can we in good conscience give grudgingly? How can we assume that our Saviour would, without thinking, demand gifts from us that would put us in jeopardy?

Let us symbolize our resources as a lush apple tree. The Lord asks for an apple. Does He expect us to chop the tree down to harvest a single piece of fruit? Or is it acceptable for us to pick a bunch of the best looking apples we can find for the Lord—and leave the tree intact?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1012.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 1105.

By Darcy Allen, warehouse manager at Canadian Tire Company, Grand Prairie, Alberta.

What Are We Supposed to Do?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 10:8

The Macedonian church was materially poor but spiritually rich. Its members were excited about their new relationship with Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. This had been manifest in their lives, and they had seen it in others. Each was able to bear witness to this personally.

This meant so much to them that they looked for ways that they could become involved with the Good News of their salvation. In 2 Corinthians they decided to express their newfound gratitude for Jesus by giving some of their material goods even though they were not at all wealthy.

In this week's study, think about why the Macedonians were so caught up in the cause that they felt compelled to give. Have you ever watched television programs by organizations such as Foster Parents' Plan? Have you felt the tremendous need and maybe responded? What were the things that made you want to give?

Giving, in the context of today's church experience, can be a very different thing. For many churchgoers today, there is a feeling of detachment or simply of not identifying with the goals or methods of the General Conference.

Conversely, sometimes responding to an emotional appeal can lead to giving

Does the Lord call us to embrace a vow of poverty?

for the wrong reasons or to excessive levels of giving which cause financial hardship to the giver or to other family members. Keeping in mind that everything we have is a gift from God, how is the contemporary Christian to decide what to do? How can we make our giving an act of participation in spreading the Good News that is brought about by our joy and thankfulness to our Saviour?

Yet another aspect, perhaps, is our level of faith. A friend once said, "If I really believed that Jesus were coming soon and all that it implies, I would sell my home and vacation timeshare and give the money to the poor." Does the Lord call us to embrace a vow of poverty? Is Mother Teresa the modern-day example that everyone should be emulating? After all, Jesus Himself said, "The poor are always with you." Is this a handy cop-out when the plate comes around? Is it a reality check that you can't do it all, or is it a reminder that the need is so great that everyone must get involved?

The issue of giving is not an easy one, and it is highly personal. The finances of today's family are already stretched. The cost of obtaining (or providing for your children) a Christian education is significant. At the same time, giving is down, so church coffers are depleted, and the need is still great—with many worthy causes having to wait because of a lack of funds.

By Randy Cameron, vice president of the Calgary (Alberta) Region of Lehndorff Tandem Management, Inc.

Money and Salvation

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 9:7

Jesus Christ said more about money than about any other single thing because when it comes to a humanity's real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact index to a person's true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of one's character and how he or she handles money.

Money or money management principles are mentioned in Scripture over 2,600 times. Of all the parables of Christ, 16 deal with money.

There are three types of giving:

1. Systematic (1 Corinthians 16). Systematic giving is intentionally setting aside money for offerings. It includes tithes and offerings for other ministries, missions, or needs. Calculating tithe, deciding on the amount and what other offerings to give is best done at the time money is received, or ahead of time in a budget. This is the first thing to do before any bills or other commitments are met.

2. Spontaneous (1 Chronicles 29). Spontaneous giving is money given in response to a need that arises unexpectedly. It isn't planned for, but the giver is impressed to help out as he or she can.

Money is an exact index to a person's true character.

3. Sacrificial (Mark 12:41-44). Sacrificial giving is giving "until it hurts." This means going without so that God's work may be furthered and/or a need met.

God has promised blessings for those faithful in tithes and offerings (Prov. 3:9, 10; 2 Cor. 9:6-12). " 'Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it' " (Mal. 3:10, NIV).

REACT

1. Is there a connection between money and salvation? Explain your answer.
2. Why is money so important to God?

By Wendy Johnson, senior clerk for the town of Grimshaw, Alberta.

What Kind of Giver Are You?

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 6:19-21

There are three kinds of givers—the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of the flint, you must hammer it. And then you only get chips and sparks. To get anything out of a sponge, you must squeeze it, and the more pressure you use, the more you get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness.*

Paul outlined a way to give offerings that is very rewarding. We not only receive an outward blessing by helping others but also an inward blessing.

For those whose treasure is in heaven, their thoughts and affections will also be there (Matt. 6:19-21, paraphrased). If we use money to further God's kingdom and not to satisfy our own indulgence and need for power, it will show in our work what we have set our hearts upon. So let us put aside on the first day of the week,

**There are three kinds of givers—the flint,
the sponge, and the honeycomb.**

as it says in 1 Corinthians 16:2, what we can afford to give to help in the Lord's work. And may we all gain a great blessing.

REACT

1. How can one prosper by giving money to the Lord?
2. How may others prosper by what one offers to the Lord?

*James S. Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), p. 237.

ARE WE WINNING OR LOSING?



“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4, NKJV).

Victorious Disciples or Disposable Pawns?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 10:1-18

When the walls of Jericho come crashing down, when Gideon and his 300 men defeat the innumerable Midianites, when David fells Goliath of Gath, our mind rejoices and surges just imagining such a display of power. Our spiritual chest sticks out and our righteous chin is held high—victory is ours!—with the help of God.

Our spiritual egos may deflate and our backbone of faith may sag, however, when we see the head of the one of which Jesus lovingly says: “Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11, KJV) dripping blood, presented on a silver platter to the lusting Herod. Or when stones hurled by an angry mob snuff out the young and dedicated life of Stephen, while the onlooking Saul scratches another name off his list. Or when we see the body of Jesus finally caving in under the burden of our sin. At these times, the sense of victory may evaporate and vanish into thin air.

Why doesn't spiritual power ensure a victorious outcome all the time? What good does such power do if it can't keep me out of harm's way? Were John the Baptist, Stephen, Jesus, and all the other martyrs just mere cannon fodder for the enemy? Are we merely disposable pawns in God's big struggle to defeat evil? Is this “divine power, which demolishes strongholds,” as Paul puts it, something real? Is it for me?

Were the martyrs just mere cannon fodder for the enemy?

Like it or not you are inextricably stuck (unable to be removed) between the battle lines in the ultimate intergalactic fight between good and evil. The outcome is certain: The Victor is Jesus! His power is available to all of us and sufficient to win all battles. This frequently remains obscure to us, because many times: “You are looking only on the surface of things” we are told by Paul (2 Cor. 10:7, NIV).

What may look like an unbelievable victory of good over evil is the eternal loss of the people of Jericho, the Midianites, or Goliath. On the other hand, what may look like a crushing defeat inflicted on a struggling Christian may be, in fact, the stunning victory of a steadfast disciple over the devil. As John the Baptist's light was turned off, hundreds of others were turned on. As Stephen's candle was snuffed, Paul's bright light began to glow. When Jesus succumbed on the cross, He assured the salvation of the world.

Spiritual eye salve, anyone?

By Norbert Schwer, a general surgeon with Central Minnesota Surgeons, Saint Cloud.

Christ Our All

LOGOS

2 Cor. 10:1-18

Too often I have listened to sermons that give the impression that it was fun or somehow glamorous to be Paul. He saw a vision from God on the road; people followed him from town to town as he shared Christ's ministry. When we reflect on Paul's life, however, it is clear that it was not glamorous. He was continually faced with challenges to his ministry. His critics called him a coward. He was charged with personal weakness. It was said of Paul, "He walks according to flesh."

At many points in our lives, we may feel as though we can relate to Paul's challenges. Oftentimes we feel as though everyone is persecuting us. It seems as though our lives are being scrutinized in every way. Welcome to the Royal family. The life of a Christian is a life of royalty. Because we are royalty, everyone seems to be carrying a yardstick, measuring everything we do. Whether the scrutiny we receive bothers us or not, we can learn from Paul's example, learn how he found the yardstick of Christ to measure his life.

In the midst of all his challenges, Paul knew that the best defense for his ministry was the spirit of Him who said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19, NIV).

The life of a Christian is a life of royalty.

The Charge of Cowardice

When you are faced with a challenge, on whom do you call? Paul put Christ first: "By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you" (2 Cor 10:1, NIV). Paul knew and understood his responsibilities as a spiritual guardian of his time. In her book *Evangelism*, Ellen White says it well: "Unless the ministers are converted men, the churches will be sickly and ready to die" (p. 643). Paul had no doubt about his conversion. He realized that his accusers were using the wrong tool to measure him. The yardstick his accusers used was a yardstick of this world. "I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world" (verse 2).

The Charge of Walking in the Flesh

When he was accused of walking according to the flesh, Paul responded, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (verse 4). When Paul said we "are more than conquerors" he knew what he was saying, knew from experience, for he had been conquered by Christ. Like Paul, we should not be apologetic about our calling and our ministry. Paul affirms this conviction when he argues that he will not be ashamed of the authority the Lord gave him.

The Charge of Personal Weakness

Imagine this conversation between Paul's critics. "Hey, Paul writes well, but

in person he is ‘unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing’” (verse 10). “I have heard good speakers, and Paul is not among them.” Too often we can get into the trap of comparing ourselves with someone else—our neighbors, our co-workers. Paul advises us that this is not wise. We must look to Christ.

As Christians, we have battles to fight like any other humans on this planet. We become sick, we experience the loss of a loved one, we cry and feel pain like anyone else. We find ourselves tempted every day. The devil uses our friends and family members to attack us. We find solace, though, in the presence of Christ, who makes it possible for us to walk in the Spirit. It is easy to lose self-esteem, trip and fall, and lose faith in God when listening to those who put us down. When we put Christ first, he will help us see that the yardstick these people are using needs to be changed. As Paul teaches us, Christ’s example should be our yardstick, the standard by which we live our lives.

When we look at ourselves and become discouraged, we must remember to look to Christ, who is all we need. When you have Christ in your life, you have a sincere Friend who loves us so much that He gave His life to save us from eternal condemnation.

- In Jesus we have an advocate who pleads our case before His father in the heavenly sanctuary (1 John 2:1).

- In Jesus we have the Truth, the Way, and the Life (John 14:6).

- In Jesus we have unity (17:20, 21).

- In Jesus we have the model of humility (Phil. 2:5-11).

- In Jesus we have eternal life (John 3:16).

Just when you feel as though everyone is against you, remember Christ’s inspiring words: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

REACT

1. How would it be fun to be Paul?

2. What are the advantages of being a Christian if we must suffer like everyone else?

3. How can we encourage those who have been discouraged by unfair criticism?

4. How can Paul’s style of dealing with criticism encourage us?

5. How would you deal with a disgruntled church member obsessed with destroying your personal reputation?

To Doubt or Not to Doubt

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: 2 Cor. 10:5, 6; Rom. 12:1, 2

Is it Christian to ask questions? Hard questions? The kind that make older members squirm or perhaps induce a defensive response?

“Why” questions—doubt, skepticism, disillusionment with leadership. What do we do with these? Is there a good kind of doubt and a bad kind of doubt? Or is it all bad?

In 2 Corinthians 10–13, Paul is dealing with overt, open doubt. No behind-the-scene insults anymore. It was out-and-out, in-your-face accusations. Though in previous dealings Paul had entreated carefully, even gently, now he meets criticism with severity, open defensiveness, and a contrast of his own purity versus others’ lasciviousness (12:21). Obviously, questions and doubt can lead to incredible consequences in the lives and characters of those who follow such a path.

So, what *do* we do with our questions and doubts?

“This was the method of Christ’s teaching. As He spoke to the people, they would question as to His meaning. To those who were humbly seeking for light, He was always ready to explain His words. But Christ did not encourage criticism or caviling, nor should we.”¹

“Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ. . . . He felt that he could retain his own judgment and opinions, and he cultivated a

Is there a good kind of doubt and a bad kind of doubt?

disposition to criticize and accuse.”²

“It is your duty to control your thoughts. . . . You may think that there can be no sin in permitting your thoughts to run as they naturally would without restraint. But this is not so. . . . Govern your thoughts, and it will then be much easier to govern your actions. Your thoughts need to be sanctified. Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.’ ”³

REACT

1. What are the motives behind my questions?
2. God can handle my doubts. Have I tried presenting them to Him instead of to those who may be weaker than myself?
3. Is there a mature Christian to whom I can direct my difficult questions?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 69.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 717.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 82, 83.

By Michelle R. Morrison, a homemaker from Saint Cloud, Minnesota.

Who Is Paul?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 10

How difficult it must have been for Paul as a humble servant of Jesus Christ to go through the exercise of proving his credentials and authority. The comparison could be drawn to writing a résumé today. Though our experience might be diverse and strong, the task of drawing it out is sometimes very difficult. When we see our accomplishments, or sometimes lack thereof, listed for public consumption, an emotion sometimes surfaces that humbles us as humans.

Consider then, how Paul's résumé based on 2 Corinthians might have looked.

RÉSUMÉ

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ

Macedonia

Objective: To respond to the attacks on my character and authority

Credentials:

Commissioned by God

By the will of God (1:1)

Rooted in Christ (1:21)

Given God's Holy Spirit

God has placed His Holy Spirit in my heart (1:22)

Love for the believers in Corinth

My love is very deep (2:4)

God knows how much I love you (11:11)

Live as an example to the believers

Don't want to be a stumbling block to anyone (6:3, 4)

Living a godly life, being patient and kind (6:6)

Have endured hardships

Perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned (4:8, 9)

Beaten, imprisoned, hungry, whipped (6:4-8)

Use God's weapons

Have divine power to demolish strongholds (10:4)

The Lord performs miracles by me

Have the marks of being an apostle—signs, wonders, and miracles (12:12)

Have passed the test

Examined myself to determine my faithfulness and passed the test (13:5)

Unwilling to quit

We do not lose heart (4:1, 16)

References

The only true reference is my God in heaven

Speaking the Truth in Love

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 25:11

Paul is under siege. How does one act under stress? If one tries to deal with it from a human standpoint or a knee-jerk reaction, it is very difficult. A person or group needs the weapons of God to do daily battle with the opposition.

How do you speak the truth in love? The orientation in dealing with people no matter what the situation should always be merciful. If you have not experienced attacks, you will. When the criticism mounts, how will you handle it? When the gossip escalates, the verbal assaults become overwhelming and the clouds of darkness threaten. Without God's help, it will be overwhelming. With His strength there is always hope.

As our brother Paul states, love demands that the cacophony of distraction be dealt with effectively. The church body has to be taken care of. A prescription can be found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. It was written as a guideline for us in these situations. Love is the focal point from which all of the weapons for spiritual warfare are deployed. Paul clearly enumerates that list in Ephesians 6:10-20.

When dealing with God's children who are difficult to handle, several pointers can be of benefit.

1. Counsel with others (Prov. 11:14). It is extremely important to seek out

How do you speak the truth in love?

a number of people when confronting difficult issues. It is important to seek guidance from pastors, leaders, and others who have been involved in similar situations. History is replete with examples of failure resulting from someone trying to tackle an issue without help or without experience.

2. Avoid playing the world's games. Power, control, manipulation, and putting blame on others are devices of Satan. Many churches are small or completely disintegrated because these destructive weapons have been used to attempt to solve a problem. When we use the weapons the great apostle employed, we will have solutions to conflict.

3. Let the Holy Spirit be your guide. When the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) is present in dealing with trying issues and people, heaven pours out opportunities for peaceful reconciliation. A gentleness in the way words are spoken and an attitude to seek the best in someone else will go a long way in smoothing out strained relationships.

4. Pray without ceasing. We have all seen how prayer and meditation can change people and affect challenging situations. In addition, we have seen how prayer can soften our stony hearts, dispelling our preconceived ideas and stereotypes. Prayerfully cultivating these behaviors will go a long way in establishing healthy relationships.

By Kim Rodacker, a rehabilitation counselor living in Saint Cloud, Minnesota.

Accidentally on Purpose

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 10:7, 8

There's almost nothing worse than being misrepresented, especially when it occurs behind your back and particularly when it comes from those you have focused so much of your energy on or spent untold hours laboring for their needs and nurturing their love. But that is how it was for Paul. Come to think of it, that is how it is for all of us.

It wouldn't be so bad if all you had to do to combat the problem was to deny their accusations, make bigger claims, or to talk louder and longer and with more syllables than the person misrepresenting you, but to avoid being misrepresented as a Christian doesn't come that easy. Before 2 Corinthians 10 came 1 Corinthians 13: "love is patient . . . love is kind . . . love doesn't focus on itself . . . it doesn't behave unbecoming."

Paul's situation identifies and reflects God's dilemma in dealing with the sin problem from the beginning. Falsely accused and misrepresented as having selfish motives for his actions, God had to deal with his accuser by allowing the universe to see for itself the truth about Him and lies about the accuser (i.e., the last 6,000 years). Like Paul, I now realize why I can't stamp out the sin problem with an articulate line or a claim of "I'm not really like that" or "It's not as it

There's almost nothing worse than being misrepresented.

looks" or "They're not telling the truth"!

The truth about Paul, the truth about me, and, yes, even the truth about God is demonstrated, not verbalized, not during good times but in times of crisis.

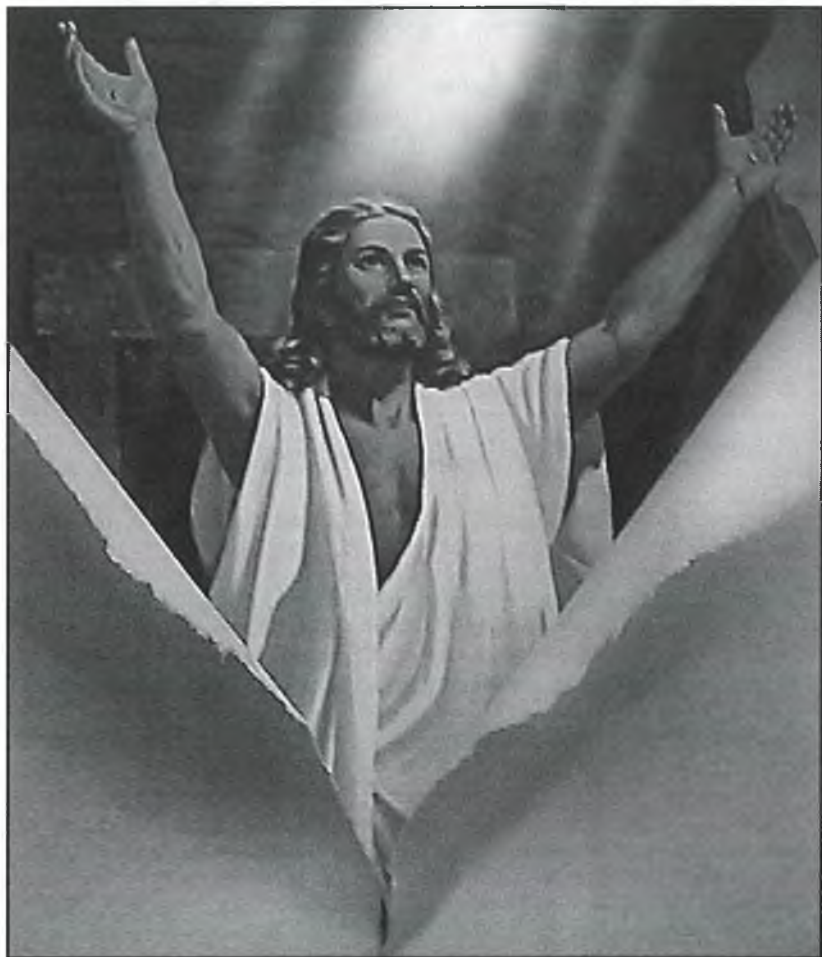
How I respond then reveals not only the truth about me but unwittingly about the God I claim to know. Maybe the only thing worse than being misrepresented is to misrepresent—the One who spent untold hours loving us more than we'll ever know.

REACT

1. How do I attempt to defend my life and example around my co-workers?
2. Does God ask us to defend Him, or can He defend Himself? Explain your answer.
3. What kind of an attitude is required in order to correct misunderstandings and misrepresentations?

By Eric Emerson, a private practice physical therapist in Saint Cloud, Minnesota.

LIKE SUPER GLUE



“I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2, NKJV).

Can't Tear Them Apart

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 11:2

It was hot and uncomfortable even in the first-class compartment of the train. As the missionary sweated it out, he prayed that the train would soon start. It would then be much cooler.

It was the sobbing that took him to the window. There was a young, newly married girl clinging to her mother, while others tried to drag her to the train. They would bring her to the door and then she would rush back to her family. This went on until it was almost time for the train to leave. Finally the husband, holding her hand, managed to pull her onto the train.

In India a girl stays with her parents until she becomes married. Especially just before the wedding, she does not get out of the house. Therefore, when the time comes for her to leave her home for her husband's, the experience is traumatic.

It takes years to build a relationship. When we are required to break it, we find it very difficult. Most often the girl would have seen her husband only once before the wedding. But now they are brought together in what is to be a lifelong relationship. It is often frightening. "Will it work?" "Will the marriage last?" These are thoughts that keep going through their minds. "Oh, that you would bear with me" (2 Cor. 11:1, NKJV).

It was the sobbing that took him to the window.

All those who had come to see them off at the railway station were anxious that a strong relationship develop between them—a relationship that is lasting, sacred, close, and tender. "But I fear . . ." (verse 3).

It took so many anxious months to bring these two together. There were many who worked to keep them apart, "as the serpent (verse 3); false apostles, deceitful workers (verse 13)."

If they have to live happily together, it is necessary for them to love each other. Their love should be so strong that at no time through the coming years they would have to ask "Why? Because I do not love you?" They should always be able, like Paul, to answer "God knows I do!" (verse 11, NIV).

Leaving people who were dear to you, people with whom you had grown up is very, very painful. This is what marriage does. But it brings us together in a pure and lasting relationship just as our "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (verse 3).

Paul went through untold hardships (verses 23-27), but his devotion to and love for Christ was unshakable. Christ would like us to build such a relationship with Him. Nothing should be able to tear us apart from our love to Jesus Christ.

By Edwin Charles, youth director, Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India.

Metaphors of Ministry

LOGOS

2 Cor. 11:1-33

As we read Paul's epistles, we become aware of our role as believers in Christ. We humans are instruments in and through whom God must fulfill His will for the world (2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Phil. 1:6).

To be engaged in ministry would mean to become an instrument of God for God. In the study of 2 Corinthians 11, verse 2 must be taken as the theme. In the ministry of Paul three parties were involved:

- the party who is betrothed (the Corinthians)
- the party who betroths (Paul)
- the party to whom is betrothed (Jesus Christ)

The interrelation between these parties in the context of ministry can be understood by employing three metaphors:

- the metaphor of marriage (engaged *to* ministry)
- the metaphor of father (engaged *in* ministry)
- the metaphor of slave (engaged *for* ministry)

The Metaphor of Marriage (Engaged *to* Ministry)

Gospel for Paul was not merely passing on information about Jesus Christ but rather a divine act initiated in and through Jesus and now operative in the human

Before we can participate in the gospel (become ministers for the gospel) we must become a part of the gospel.

realm (Rom 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20). The believers are called upon to participate in the gospel for "we are ambassadors for Christ" (verse 20), and, also, gospel is that power of God that transforms people into believers.

Before we can participate in the gospel (become ministers for the gospel) we must become a part of the gospel. To be a part of the gospel means to be espoused to Jesus Christ (betrothed to Christ); and to be espoused to Jesus Christ means to be brought into relationship with Him and to be reconciled to Him. In this relationship, we come to know Christ, and this knowing is not mental acceptance but being open and totally submissive (Rev. 3:20). This knowing leads to transformation of one's self. Just as in a marriage alliance proper information is necessary, so also right knowledge and information would lead us to transformation, thus binding us to the gospel of Christ. To participate in the gospel, then, means to believe in Jesus Christ.

The Metaphor of Father (Engaged *in* Ministry)

Paul was deeply committed to his ministry, and he not only brought souls to Christ but carefully nurtured them. His concern for the Corinthians can be seen in this chapter (2 Corinthians 11) in the form of a father who not only kept his children as "a pure bride" (verse 2) but also kept himself pure. Paul had to undergo the pangs of fatherhood before he could father the believers in Corinth. He fought

against false apostles and deceitful workers and was reproached, apprehended, beaten, and stoned. In all his sufferings Paul's love for his flock deepened. His love for the Gentile believers came forth from his right attitude to the gospel and his right relationship with Christ.

Paul could justify any accusation against him by the manner of life he lived. As a good father, he always wanted the best for his children (verses 7-11). He was honest to the gospel entrusted to him and suffered for the same (verses 21-33). As a caring father, he counseled with the flock and made them aware of all the dangers of false gospel. Through all his nurturing, Paul was able to keep the believers pure and presentable to Jesus Christ.

Having been engaged *to* the ministry, we must gradually mature to be engaged *in* ministry. This maturing process is often painful and agonizing and also a struggle between right and wrong, difficult and easy. Only in our right relation with Christ can this maturing process become bearable and eventually prepare us to father the waiting flock. Preparation for fatherhood is just as painful as fathering, and this is what is involved in being engaged in ministry.

The Metaphor of Slave (Engaged for Ministry)

The word *ministry* suggests "to minister," "to serve," or "to wait upon." This was the essence of Jesus' ministry, and it is clearly mentioned in His words, "The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45, RSV). Jesus accomplished His ministry by fulfilling the will of His Father in His life (John 6:38, 39) by laying down His life for the world.

Paul often called himself a *doulos*, "slave" (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). The word *slave*, as used by Paul, implies a willing and a totally committed person who submits his or her will to fulfill the will of his or her master. It is in this sense that we must understand "engaged for ministry," because the ministry can be fulfilled only in total submission of our will.

Now we as believers in Christ are called upon to fulfill the will of God in and through our lives. We have to become slaves for God by submitting our will to God's will. Our will must be to fulfill God's will. This is the essence of becoming ministers for God. Hence, to be espoused to Christ means to be united with Christ in a relationship that demands fulfillment of God's will (Col. 1:24, 25). The only way God's will can be accomplished in humanity is in and through us and for us. Thus "engaged in ministry" implies first a relationship with Jesus Christ (engaged *to* ministry) and, second, submission to Jesus Christ (engaged *for* ministry). When these three dimensions of ministry (implied by the prepositions "to" and "for") are unified in us, then our ministry will become meaningful.

REACT

1. To be a part of the gospel, we have to be espoused to Christ. What are the implications of this aspect of our relationship to Christ?

2. We also must gradually mature to be engaged in ministry. How mature am I in ministry?

3. To be engaged for ministry we have to be totally submissive to Him. How submissive am I to the Father's will?

4. How would you defend yourself if you were in Paul's predicament?

By Nishikant Borge, assistant professor in religion and head of biblical languages, Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.

Life of Unselfish Ministry

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 11:7, 8

Where do I begin? This has always been difficult for us to decide. We dream of going as missionaries to far-off places like Paul to begin our ministry. We must realize that “the world is full of those who need our ministry. The poor, the helpless, the ignorant, are on every hand. Those who have communed with Christ in the upper chamber will go forth to minister as He did.”¹

We need to see our calling as Paul did and work unselfishly. “Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you?” (2 Cor. 11:7, NIV). “Jesus, the served of all, came to be the servant of all. And because He ministered to all, He will again be served and honored by all. And those who would partake of His divine attributes, and share with Him the joy of seeing souls redeemed, must follow His example of unselfish ministry.”²

For Paul, Christ was always first in his life. “For me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21) and this was manifest in his ministry. “The love of Christ, manifested in unselfish ministry, will be more effective in reforming the evildoer than will the sword or the court of justice. These are necessary to strike terror to the lawbreaker, but the loving missionary can do more than this. Often the heart that hardens under

This has always been difficult for us to decide.

reproof will melt under the love of Christ.”³

Wherever we may be or whatsoever we may be doing, if we are filled with the Spirit, we will be unmatched by anyone. God will be with us, and we need fear nothing.

REACT

1. Jesus was a servant to all. What does this mean to me in everyday terms?
2. To what extent am I serving as Jesus served?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 651.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 106.

By Mervin Joshua, a senior student in the department of management, Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.

What a Defense!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 11:16

Paul was often harassed by the Judaizing elements who had infiltrated the church at Corinth. They attacked Paul on various counts, and he had to defend himself to keep the Corinthians firmly grounded in their faith.

Opponents Identified and Corinthians Admonished

Paul begins this passage by pleading for tolerance. The Jewish Christians had portrayed him as a fool. Hence, it becomes imperative for Paul to begin with foolishness, argue out his concern for the church, and conclude with defense of his apostleship.

Paul stated his concern for the church; i.e., to keep the church of Corinth pure. Evidently, the Corinthians had accepted the message of the Jewish Christians, and Paul's remark is scathing: "You submit to it readily enough" (verse 4, RSV), referring to "another Jesus" and "different gospel" (verse 4). The Jewish Christians "believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but also that [we] must keep the ceremonial law in order to be saved. Paul's gospel, however, consisted of simple

True ministers of Christ can express their faithfulness only through their lives.

and true faith in Jesus as humanity's complete Saviour from sin, that the ceremonial law was no longer binding."

Paul's Defense in His Trial

Having exposed the opponents and admonished the Corinthians, Paul gives an account of his sufferings for Christ. By their boastings the opponents had shown Paul in bad light, and now Paul uses the opponents' method of boasting (implied in verses 17, 18) to prove to the Corinthians the true test of apostleship.

True ministers of Christ can express their faithfulness to the gospel only through their lives. This Paul does with eloquence and narrates the hardship borne by him. Paul does this, however, with the intention of helping the Corinthians to overcome their weakness of becoming slave to the people who boast (verses 15-28). Paul speaks "as a fool" (verse 21) to avoid boasting so that what he narrates will be accepted in good faith.

In the questions that Paul asks in verse 29, he indicates that to be a minister for Christ involves trials and sufferings. Ministry is a vocation in which one is called to give up his life and live only for Christ. Paul has no regrets for his sufferings and trials but only expresses love toward his flock.

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 910.

By Ronald Marjee, senior student in the religion department, Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.

Experience + Expression = Ministry

HOW-TO

Key Text: Gal. 5:25

As a Sabbath School teacher and a third-generation Adventist, I boarded a crowded bus for a 20-minute ride to town. I was offered a seat by a pleasant-looking man who definitely was a Hindu Brahmin, for he had the holy ash smeared on his forehead. I sat next to him and to my utter astonishment, he pulled out a Christian tract for me and started to introduce me to Christ, his newfound *masiha* (Saviour) who had given his life a new direction altogether. I turned to him and said, "You look like a Hindu, but you certainly talk like a Christian. Tell me what you are." He said, "I am a believer." He didn't say he was a convert or a Christian or a Hindu who also believed in Christ. He simply exposed the core of his being—his belief.

Spirituality is experiencing and expressing the fruits of the spirit. This is ministry. Without experience our ministry will lack credibility, and without expression our ministry will be incomplete.

I was offered a seat by a pleasant-looking man who definitely was a Hindu Brahmin.

We experience the Spirit by:

being loved	John 3:16
being forgiven	John 2:12
receiving kindness	Isaiah 54:10
receiving goodness	Isaiah 63:17
receiving gentleness	Psalm 18:35
receiving faithfulness	Psalm 119:90
being dealt with patiently	2 Peter 3:9

Once we experience the spirit, we must be engaged *to* ministry.

Steps

1. Being introduced to the gospel
2. Looking for opportunity to interact with the gospel
3. Building an interdependence with the gospel
4. Confessing commitment and vowing fidelity

We express the Spirit by:

loving	Matthew 2:39
forgiving	Luke 17:4
being kind	Ephesians 4:32
being good	Matthew 12:35
being gentle	Titus 3:12
being faithful	Revelation 2:10
exercising patience	Psalm 37:7

Expressing the spirit is possible by being engaged *in* ministry.

Steps

1. Introducing others to the gospel
2. Creating opportunity for others to interact with the gospel
3. Helping others to build an interdependence on the gospel
4. Leading others and committing them to Christ

By Kenneth Pradeep Swansi, head of the department of business administration, Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.

“I” Am the Problem

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 11:13-15

Is Christ first in my life? If not, how can I make Him the center of my ministry? “If someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than a Jesus we preached” (2 Cor. 11:4, NIV), how would you react?

Paul exposes the characters of the deceivers: “false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (verse 13, RSV). These so-called apostles were interested only in themselves. They even went to the extent of falsifying the truth so that they could lure away the faithful to falsehood.

The focus of Paul’s gospel was Christ-centered. He established his credibility by recounting the hardships he underwent. He went through all these things so that the Lord’s name would be glorified.

Sometimes we are engaged in ministry for self-glory. If there is no way in which we ourselves can be glorified, we are willing to give up. There is always a conflict between the interest of self and the demands of the gospel. To fulfill the demands of the gospel or to be engaged in the ministry would mean denying self and carrying the cross.

A person dealing in animals was looking for a snake charmer who could unwind a 15-foot python. It was so bad tempered that no one could approach the box

Very often we are engaged in ministry for self-glory.

in which it was coiled. “It is because the snake was coiled in the box the wrong way. I am trying to find someone who can rewind it the right way,” the man said.

When we are coiled around self as the center, then we are coiled the wrong way. When the inner life is coiled around God as the center, then we will live a life as revealed by Christ. Anyone who makes himself the center of his world is lost, even though he may be cultured or learned. When you shift the basis of life from God to yourself, when you make yourself the center of your loyalty, you’re lost.

The resources of the Lord are there for the asking. Only when we are truly converted will we put Christ at the center. Our conversion should change us from *I*-centered to *God*-centered!

REACT

1. How can a person evaluate whether he or she is in ministry for the sake of the ministry or for the sake of self-glorification?

2. How should someone react to those who talk of the souls they have won to Christ rather than the souls the Spirit has led to Christ?

By Sam Charles, registrar and director of the computer science department, Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.

ONLY THE WEAK SURVIVE



“Though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (2 Cor. 13:4, NKJV).

In Praise of Weakness

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 13:4

Weak was never one of the adjectives my parents used to praise me. In fact, most people associate weakness with negative things. Feminists object to being called the weaker sex. Carpenters are concerned when a table has a weak leg. Lawyers and rhetoricians scoff at weak arguments, and usually patients aren't happy when doctors say their pulse and heartbeat are weak.

Despite all this, in Paul's discourse throughout 2 Corinthians 12 and 13, weakness seems to be a positive quality. Is it that the apostle wanted to confuse us with high-tech semantic verbiage, or is strength to be found in weakness? The answer came to me in the experience of my friend's grandfather.

It may have been then that he made his decision. Fear and weakness enclosed him like the night. His family lay sick in the hospital: his son scarred for life, his grandchild stiff with shock, and his wife with a stump in the place of her hand. The men had entered in the dark with machetes, knives, and a thirst for blood. Vengeance darkened their eyes. Then, in a house stained with blood and his heart weakened, he made a life-changing choice that he had contemplated for many years. Today he serves as an elder in a Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It seems that Paul was right. Most of us must be weak before we are strong.

Lawyers and rhetoricians scoff at weak arguments.

Our weakness is God's strength. When we surrender our lives to Jesus and stop attempting to go it alone, a power from above enables us to overcome.

By Sennen Theodore, a carpenter; and Kezia Page, a graduate student in English at the University of Miami, Florida.

Amazing Grace, Yes!

LOGOS

2 Cor. 12:1–13:14

Father and Son have just created a world. They look around and are pleased with their accomplishment. But they are privy to a gnawing realization—their perfect creation will be marred by an archenemy, and one of them will have to die. The Son decides, “I’ll do it!” Christ’s mission, the all-encompassing ministry of His life, was to save us (John 3:16). For 33 years Christ would be without the continuing fellowship with His Father. He would leave angels, an excellent support system, home, and family in order to save the ones He loved.

So He came! So He loved! So He ministered preaching, teaching, healing, correcting. But His enemy had infiltrated the camps and had sown a field of lies, which the people purchased, believed, and cherished. After the loving Christ had worked hard for three long years to convince His people of the truth, some of them still yielded to Satan and plotted to crucify Christ on the cross.

He knew it was coming, so He went to one of His favorite places, Gethsemane, to petition His Father. The burden was wearisome. Christ still loved His people, but how could they make this cruel plan after infinite demonstrations of His love to them? He was emotionally and physically drained and sought release from His task.

After several voyages, Newton’s heart was stricken by the inhumanity of this process.

“O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39, KJV). Yet if it is your plan that I bear it, let your will be done. Three times he prayed. But His Father’s grace became sufficient for Him, for the burden was not relieved. God gave Him strength to complete His mission. Christ died on a cross, relying completely on the strength of His Father. “Though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:4).

God gave power also to Paul for the accomplishment of his mission. Paul had been specifically called by God to minister to Gentiles. Therefore, Paul had gone to Corinth, had worked hard, and had set up a fruitful church in that difficult city. A group of Judaizers had come in with false teachings and had confused and persuaded some of the church members that their new teachings were right and that Paul had been wrong and, in fact, questioned his authority and claim to be an apostle. Paul writes 2 Corinthians 12 in defense of his authority.

Paul put together his impressive résumé, his curriculum vitae, to convince the Corinthians that he was indeed qualified for the job he had done among them. Here Paul recounts the special favor bestowed upon him by God, who had taken him in vision to Paradise and displayed things of a wonderful and unspeakable nature. Few had been given this opportunity, and Paul was indeed privileged to have experienced this. But even one who was so esteemed by God was also subject to life’s vicissitudes, so God had allowed Satan to send him a humbling agent, a thorn in the flesh. Like Jesus in Gethsemane, Paul prayed three times to be relieved

of it, but God's answer was "my grace is sufficient" (verse 9). When God sends someone to do a job, God provides strength for the task.

God's grace also covers the person whose life is not currently in tune with His will but whose heart is desirous to serve God (Eph. 2:1-10). John Newton, a Christian, was such a man, having commanded a slave ship that would provide the means of passage from Africa to America for many of the six million African slaves brought to our shores in the eighteenth century.

Newton's ship, filled with liquor, weapons, and trinkets from Britain would exchange these items for the finest specimens of African men and women. Once aboard a typical slave ship, the Africans "were chained below decks to prevent suicides, laid side by side to save space, row after row, one after another, until the vessel was laden with as many as 600 units of human cargo. . . . When an outbreak of smallpox or dysentery occurred, the stricken were cast overboard."¹ Upon arrival in America, the Africans would be separated from their families, sold at common auction into abject slavery to plantation owners, to be whipped, cut, bruised, and broken into subjection.

After several voyages, Newton's heart was stricken by the inhumanity of this process, and he cried out to his God. In thankfulness for God's merciful delivery, Newton became a minister of the gospel. He later penned the words of our beloved song, "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!"²

When feelings of the wretchedness of your life begin to discourage you, cry out to God. Since humanity's standards are not higher than God's, when He forgives you, you *must* forgive yourself. "We also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you" (2 Cor. 13:4, NKJV). Christ's mission is fulfilled when you allow His grace to be sufficient for your salvation.

Grace. Amazing, isn't it?

REACT

1. Paul's consuming passion was to share his love of Christ with others. What consumes me?

2. If God has prepared each individual's life to be somebody and to do something, what is the individual's role in this discovery?

3. We've observed that God's grace can cover physical defects. But what emotions, thoughts, and feelings do you have—those secret areas of your life—that also need to be committed to God? How will you make it possible for God to change you?

1. "Amazing Grace," <http://www.wilsonweb.com/archive>

2. Ibid.

Naked I Stand!

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 13:4, 5

Self-examination requires you to assess the state of your life, because “faith . . . if it is not accompanied by action, is dead!” (James 2:17, NIV).

“A mere profession of faith in Christ, a boastful knowledge of the truth, does not make a man a Christian. A religion that seeks only to gratify the eye, the ear, and the taste, or that sanctions self-indulgence, is not the religion of Christ.”¹

Self-examination helps determine the quality of your relationship with Christ. “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5, NIV).

Self-examination is accomplished by the mirror of Christ reflected toward you. The focus is only on you, not others. It is amazing what self-examination will disclose. Before self-examination, Laodicea was boasting of its works. But the picture that Christ saw was far different. Laodicea was found to be “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Rev. 3:17). Refinement by fire was needed in order for Laodicea to obtain “the right to sit with me on my throne” (Rev. 3:21). Wonderful prospect, just through self-examination.

Church members at Sardis thought they were alive, until their true state was revealed: dead! They were admonished to “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God” (Rev. 3:2).

Self-examination is accomplished by the mirror of Christ reflected toward you.

The same admonition is appropriate today. Incomplete deeds may include less than total involvement in church activities. The parents’ room may need to be cleaned by you. Yes, you! Newcomers may be expecting the warmth of your smile and friendship. A sick member may be languishing for your company. Youth may be seeking your respect and guidance. Faith with action is full of life!

Incomplete deeds may be evidenced in your household: your need to worship together, to take time off to speak to a younger brother or sister, to focus on your children, to prepare a “show and tell” of God’s love. Ellen White reminds us: “You are dealing with a reproduction of yourself. Therefore be sure to examine yourselves, to see whether you are indeed transformed in word and spirit.”² Are you praising God, talking to Him regularly, actively working in His vineyard and developing a close relationship with Him? “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”³

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 317.

2. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 75.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 267.

By Eldridge Julmisse, a dental hygiene student at Miami-Dade Community College, Florida.

Your Pain, Your Gain

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 12:10

The process of immunization that we have developed today stems from the work of two men, Edward Jenner and Louis Pasteur. Jenner was the first scientist, in 1796, to observe that individuals who had contracted cowpox became immune to the disease. Pasteur, in 1881, went on to further the work of Jenner by conducting scientific studies in which he experimented with the injection of specific microbes into the body to create a natural resistance. The results of these important studies revealed that it is possible to develop an immunity to a disease through careful administration of the disease in a weakened or dead form.

A vaccine is created from an antigen. The production stems from the attenuated disease-causing microorganism. An injection of the vaccine into the blood stream produces antibodies in response to the antigens present. The antibodies then bind themselves to the antigens in order to neutralize them, that is, to make them inactive. Memory cells are produced that prepare the body to respond quickly to a subsequent encounter with the disease.

Tolerance occurs when the body's immune system is no longer stimulated to respond to an introduction of the disease-causing agent into the body.

When the immune system is working adequately, the "Four Rs" are in place.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was a vaccination.

- **Recognize:** The body realizes that a foreign object is present.
- **Respond:** The body prepares to attack the foreign object.
- **Remember:** The body quickly recognizes that this type of foreign object has been present before.
- **Regulate:** The body modulates the correct amount of force needed to fight this foreign object.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was a vaccination. Vaccination presupposes exposure to "the real thing."

Introduction of the vaccine produces mild symptoms of the disease, such as pain or fever. Paul asked for removal of his antigen, but the Lord in his wisdom denied it. He wanted to save Paul's soul.

Operating in your Christian experience are the Four Rs of the spiritual immune system.

- **Recognize:** The body realizes that you are being tempted.
- **Respond:** The body prepares a resistance to the temptation.
- **Remember:** The body remembers the last encounter with that sin and the awful results.
- **Regulate:** The body relies on God to produce the correct amount of force needed to fight the sin successfully.

God wants you saved for His kingdom!

By Marci Julmisse, a nursing student at Miami-Dade Community College, Florida.

Unequipped?

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 16:33

Those who pass off involvement in Christian ministry as something left to “greats” like Peter, Paul, and other apostles would do well to invest time in obtaining more than a glimpse of Paul’s travails as accounted in 2 Corinthians 12, 13. Too often we concentrate on the capabilities of God’s servants of yesteryear without coming to grips with the reality of their ominous struggles and the implications that these revelations provide for our endeavors today. As stated in the Scriptures, “All that will live godly . . . shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12, KJV).

Ministry brings in its wake the opposition of those who fail to understand its purpose and importance, and paradoxically others who through understanding hope for its demise. Ministry can be the most exciting, enlightening, enriching, and enthralling experience, while at the same time tempered by calamity and misrepresentation. It brings the glorious and illuminating silver lining to life with provisions as well for dark clouds. God carries us through the vacillations of ministry, but we can aid in the establishment of our own sense of purpose and togetherness by girding our minds with several all-encompassing truths.

1. In ministry the greatest struggle may be with the very individuals you desire to aid. Their indifference and hostility are weakening, a struggle upstream, a fight

Too often we concentrate on the capabilities of God’s servants of yesteryear.

against the tide. Their lack of support and encouragement leads to increased frustration. However, consistency overcomes this obstacle.

2. Individuals with good intentions are often “impressed” with the proper direction for your life of ministry. While remembering that you are to be a servant to others, remember that you have only one Master.

3. Not every appointment or position is in the will of God for you. He does not intend for our lives to be encumbered with so many projects or creative expressions that we lack time for thought and balance.

4. If you feel unequipped for ministry, good. You are on the path to aligning yourself with a greater share of divine strength. In our weakness we give God the space and ability to accomplish creative exploits on our behalf to His glory.

REACT

1. What activities are you engaged in that cause you to feel too busy?
2. Do you seek the will of God before accepting a responsibility?
3. What have you given up because of constraints? Do you feel that you gave up too soon?

By Stacey Antoine, a senior English and political science major at the University of Miami, Florida.

I Feel Like Dancing

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 150:4

I took my car in to the mechanic for a routine oil change and as customary, the mechanic did a thorough examination of the car—looking for any problematic conditions. At the end of the examination, he found that my brakes were worn and desperately needed replacing. I went to the mechanic thinking that all was well, only to discover that each time I got into my car I had been placing myself in a potentially dangerous situation that could have resulted in my death or possibly the death of another. Many of us are also assuming that we are living in harmony with the will of God. What would our findings be if we were to examine ourselves?

For example, as part of a recent Adventist youth program, a small group of individuals choreographed a spiritual song in which the artist sang about a period of darkness, confusion, and weakness in her life. In the song, she was waiting on the Lord for an answer and resting in His strength. Many of the church members objected to the movements and criticized the group. It was the intention of the group to praise God for what He had accomplished in their own lives and to minister to others through a different channel: dancing, even as David danced before the Lord with all his might (2 Sam. 6:14-23). As Michal misunderstood David's motives and reproached him, so the group was reproached. Yet the Lord

I went to the mechanic thinking that all was well.

accepted David's praise, and Michal was made barren. Could it be that we need to identify and remove the spirits of criticism and misunderstanding that might destroy the ministry of others? (See Matt. 7:3, 4.)

What are the risk factors involved when Christians do not examine themselves in the faith? What are we in danger of losing? We may be judging the lives of others by our own notions and ideas. Self-examination in the light of God's Word will permit the living oracles to reveal to us where are our deficiencies and defects in faith. And then our faith can be vibrant as we allow others to worship God in a way that pleases God even if we are uncomfortable with it. Prove yourselves that you are in the faith, for living faith is essential for our salvation—lest we are disqualified.

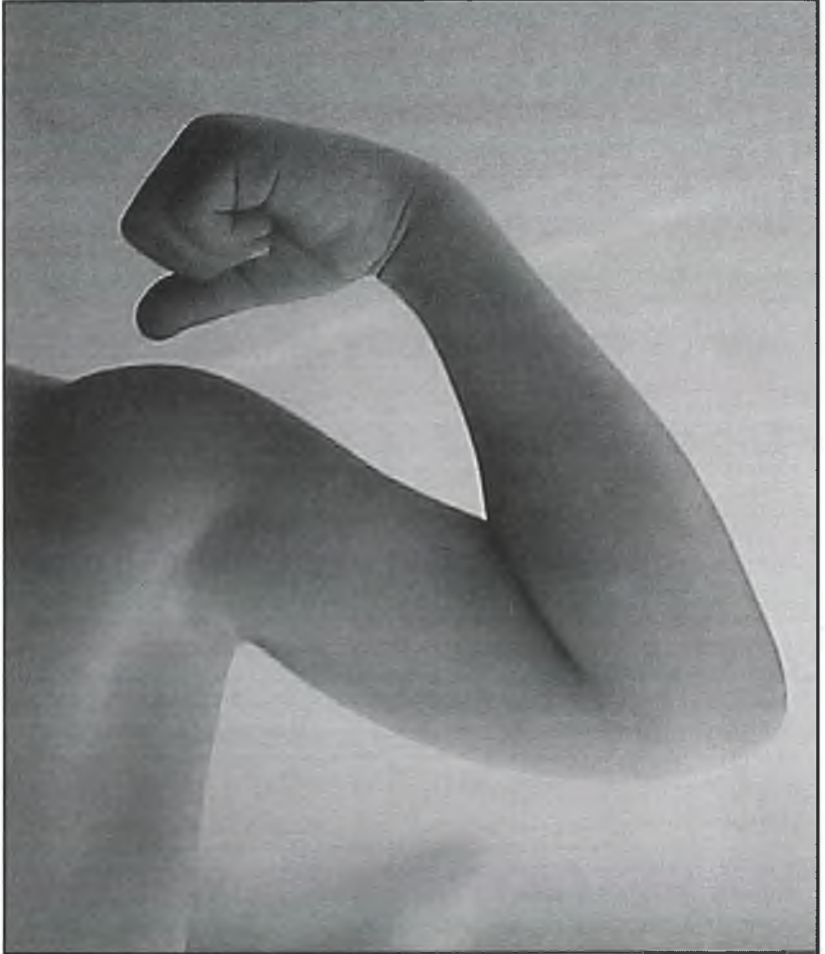
REACT

1. If David came to your church, how might he be treated? What criticisms and misunderstandings might his visit generate?

2. What event might cause you to feel like dancing? Passing a difficult exam? Money? Deliverance from a dark period in your life? Explain your answer.

By Joanne Labossiere, a social work student at Florida International University, Miami, Florida.

PROMISES FOR MINISTRY



“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1, NKJV).

How Weak Are You?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Cor. 12:9

Everyone was excited because of what they'd just discovered they could do for God—except me! I was at a youth evangelism weekend, and I couldn't fathom how I could possibly do anything to minister for God. I'm just an average student, with average skills and with what I considered to be an average spiritual life—I could help God? Seriously perturbed, I approached the guest speaker with my uncertainty, and he told me of an incident that happened to him, in his youth, when he began ministering for God:

He and two of his friends wanted to witness. They had no program in their local church in which they thought they could minister, so they went to a street corner where they knew everyone would be—directly opposite a nightclub—and they preached. They had no idea what would happen and had no real experience in street witnessing or ministering, but they had faith in God and had studied His Word in preparing for their ministry. It wasn't long before they had a large audience—so large the club owner called the police because he was losing customers!

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that in times of need we have *all* of God's promises to give us power and inspiration, a God who always says Yes when we ask in Christ (1:19, 20). Paul tells of times when he had to rely on God's promises for strength and hope, and God opened doors for him.

To each problem, excuse, or reason that we have for not doing God's work, God

They went to a street corner where they knew everyone would be—directly opposite a nightclub.

has a solving-promise for us. He has promised the diligent minister success: "Whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (9:6, NIV); He will lead us in our ministry; God will give us competence and renew us day by day.

We have many weaknesses. Some of us aren't caring enough; some of us aren't faithful enough or loving enough; some of us claim we aren't confident enough to minister God's Word. None of this matters. Through Christ, all of God's promises for ministry are made Yes to us, and in Him we are made new—no matter how weak we are or how many things we see wrong with ourselves.

Paul realizes this. He almost revels in his weakness: "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV). And like the youths in the above account, if we accept that God can and will help us in our shortcomings, through prayer and the study of His Word, we will achieve true and effective ministry. So, how weak are you?

By Jai Cedenio, a law student at Middlesex University, London, England.

God: Our Promise Keeper

LOGOS

2 Cor. 1:19, 20; 3:17; 5:17; 7:1; 9:6; 12:8, 9

Broken Promises

"No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 1:20, NIV).

Have you ever had people make promises to you then break them? Do you remember how you felt? Perhaps let down, disappointed and upset. You really expected them to be true to their word and to keep their promises; you trusted them. Promises are broken by people every day in all walks of life, in school, at work, and even in the church. Unfortunately, our word is no longer our bond. Human beings, fallible as we are, are prone to break promises. Our promises are like ropes of sand that cannot be relied upon to provide any means of support.

The dictionary definition of *promise* is an explicit undertaking to do or not to do something. Therefore, the validity of the promise is based upon the execution of the expressed intention to do or not to do. Furthermore, its reliability is contingent upon the dependability and credibility of the person who has made the promise.

Had they kept their promises, had they been true to their word, had they been reliable and dependable, had they listened to Paul and accepted his authority as an apostle of Christ, then perhaps Paul would not have felt let down, disappointed,

There are times in our lives when we feel the same way as Paul did.

upset, and moved to tears (2:3, 4). There are times in our lives and in our ministries when we feel the same way as Paul did; we are challenged, our faith is tested, and we feel like giving up and giving in. No matter how we feel, however, we can hang our hopes upon the reassuring promises of God and find freedom in the spirit of the Lord (3:17).

Permanent Promises

We may fail, but God never fails. We may change, but God never changes.

- God is credible.
- God is reliable.
- God is dependable.
- God keeps His promises.
- God is our promise keeper.

The promises of God are as permanent as He Himself. They are anchored in His divine personality and backed up by His power. He will do whatever He says He will do, for all of His promises are " 'Yes' in Christ" (1:20, NIV). Christ is the affirmation of all of God's promises, from the end to the beginning. All of God's promises find fulfillment and perfection in Him. This affirmation provides for us a sure foundation from which to build a successful ministry. If all else fails, our God will never fail, for God would not be God if He did not keep His word. His word is His bond: Yes means Yes!

Power Promises

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:9, 10).

For the apostle Paul, the promises of God are backed up by His power to do whatever He had said He would do. The power and authority behind Paul was God the promise-keeper, the power-provider, and His Christ, the fulfillment of all of His promises. Paul needed to draw upon that power to sustain him in his ministry. To Paul and to us, God's promises are a stable staff to lean upon, a foundation to build upon, and a fountain to drink from. Whenever we are weak, He will make us strong, for our deficiency is His opportunity.

Purifying Promises

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (7:1).

The promises of God are forfeited, and our privileges are postponed when we allow unholiness and impurity to enter into our lives. Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (5:17). God's promises should propel us to purity, to perfection, and into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. God, our promise keeper, will never ever let us down. His promises are permanent. They are filled with His energizing, transforming, and purifying power for ministry. Just think, they are waiting to be claimed by you. Why not ask? The answer can only be Yes.

REACT

1. Why do you think it important for us to keep our promises? What damage do we cause to ourselves and others when we do not live up to our word?

2. When was the last time you took God at His word and claimed one of His many affirmative promises?

Misjudging

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:17

You would have thought that if you'd gone to college with somebody for two years, you would get to know him well. He was captain of the football team and had a reputation for going out with the lads. He had long blond hair and a nice car, and he always had a beautiful girl on his arm. Life carried on with me being nice to him and him being genuinely friendly back to me. All I really wanted from him was a bit of credibility in his circles. None of this ever happened. When college finished, we went our separate ways.

I became more active in church as the years went by, and I visited a local youth church that was doing really well. I was seeking the secret of its success. There I met a girl who had associated with the football captain. This shocked me a little. She told me that she had been going to church only for the past couple years and that someone from college had introduced her to the church. As she said this, the guy who introduced her walked through the doors. I could not believe it. It was my football captain friend from college. He was a Christian?

Then it all began to fall into place. When I thought that he was just going out with the lads, he was actually witnessing. Instead of waiting for the public to come to him, he went to them. I began to see a lot of others around the church who had

He was captain of the football team and had a reputation for going out with the lads.

used to hang around him. He had been witnessing to them also. I felt as though I had misjudged him completely. What was more shocking to me, though, was that he was more surprised to see me there than I was him. He just couldn't believe I was a Christian. That was an important day for me.

"There is work, solid work, to be done for every soul that shall stand in the great day of the Lord." "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV). I realized that I had to change my attitude to my Christianity as a whole so that people actually recognized I was a Christian.

REACT

1. Why is it important to let your friends know that you are a Christian?
2. Is it possible to be a Christian without others realizing it? Explain your answer.

*"Surface Religion"—Will It Stand the Test? *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8.

By Daniel Sabatier, a student of English and art at West Hertsford College, Watford, England.

Liberty Within Natural and Spiritual Laws

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 3:17

A little boy throws a ball up and down blissfully unaware of the equations of Newtonian mechanics, but he unknowingly anticipates their solutions in directing his throws. He knows from experience that he has to use greater force if he wants to throw the ball farther. With education, he will become aware that the equation $\text{force} = \text{mass} \times \text{acceleration}$ confirms his playful experiences with the ball. At an advanced level of scientific understanding, Newtonian mechanics cannot fully describe the behavior of the child's ball. In the physical world, there are mysteries that science has yet to come to terms with. There is a beauty and symmetry, however, in the physical laws that govern the universe, which we are just beginning to understand. Thankfully, spiritual laws (i.e., the Ten Commandments) are not shrouded in mystery, waiting to be understood. They are stated plainly in the Bible.

The "Spirit" in today's text refers to the unity and purpose of the Trinity, which is evident in the clause "the Spirit of the Lord." The Holy Spirit in the New Testament is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). Paul means that the indwelling of Christ is equivalent to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is Christ's redemptive agent on earth (John 7:37-39); the fellowship of Christ is the fellowship of the Spirit (John 14:17, 18).

Thankfully, spiritual laws are not shrouded in mystery, waiting to be understood.

"Where the Spirit" is, which is in our minds, enables us to keep God's moral law; it becomes our ethos, i.e., custom. We obey by choice, not through compulsion. Just as obedience to the physical laws of nature allows us to go about our daily lives (e.g., our little boy does not worry whether his ball will come down). So obedience to God's law through the power of the Spirit should leave us free to live fulfilled Christian lives, not shackled by the cares of this world. Hence, let us take comfort from knowing that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17, KJV).

REACT

1. What is meant by the term *liberty* as used in today's text?
2. How is the Christian conception of liberty different from that of the world?

By Christopher C. Perry, a graduate student at the Surface Science Research Centre, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom.

Hard Times

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:8, 9

When something goes wrong, have you ever asked, “Why is God letting this happen to me?” People everywhere are hurting because this is a world of sin. Nobody can escape from suffering, and those who love God often suffer for their faith (1 Pet. 4:12-16). Paul, who was not himself a stranger to pain, wrote words of encouragement that apply just as much to us today as they did to the Corinthians: “We have troubles all around us, but we are not defeated. We do not know what to do, but we do not give up the hope of living. We are persecuted, but God does not leave us. We are hurt sometimes, but we are not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8, 9, New Century Version).

It sometimes seems that there is no solution to our problems, but if we stay close to Jesus we will have peace, hope, and an ever-present Friend who always understands and will never let us down (Deut. 31:6; Ps. 46:1). As Christians, we have the assurance that Jesus will soon return and sin and suffering will end (1 Pet. 5:10).

When we find ourselves in an apparently desperate situation, what can we do?

1. Pray. It is an obvious suggestion, but too often we don't include God in the situation until difficulties arise. Make Him the focus of every aspect of your life.

“We are hurt sometimes, but we are not destroyed.”

When hard times come, surrender your troubles to God and rely on Him to carry you through and show you what to do (1 Pet. 5:6, 7). It is often through difficulties that people develop a deeper relationship with Jesus, who experienced the ultimate suffering.

2. Search your Bible for stories and texts relating to your particular situation, knowing that there will always be something to help you. Allow God to speak to you and comfort you through His Word. Consider writing your favorite Bible promises in a book. You will be able to refer to them easily when you or a friend need encouragement.

Yes, we will all experience problems, whether they be related to work, money, friends, health, family, or our relationship with God. I believe that blessings can come from troubles. Use your experiences to grow and to comfort others who are suffering. Paul's letter gives hope: We will not ultimately be defeated. The victory belongs to Jesus and all who stand with Him.

By Vivienne James, an English and education student, Cambridge University, England.

Asking for Stuff

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Cor. 9:6

“Dear Jesus, please help me to get my new bike . . . don’t forget, it’s the one with the red handlebars!” When we were young, phrases such as these used to fill our prayers. The sentiment was the same: “please help me to get . . .” We look back on those days thanking God that we are not that self-centered anymore. But realistically, are our prayers any more adult than bikes with red handlebars?

In many cases our prayers are little more than just a shopping list followed by a hurried sentence of acknowledgments. At the end of the day, we run through the well-rehearsed, badly prepared, prayer that we have developed since the training days at the foot of our beds. “Simple and to the point” we remind ourselves each night in an attempt to silence the echoing voice pleading with us actually to speak with God. The echoing voice is there for a reason. God wants us to listen and talk with Him.

This listening thing isn’t just because God is bored of our never ending list of requirements. It is more because we always ask for stuff, then never listen for an answer. It seems that the human race becomes too accustomed to leaving messages on answering machines. God’s care, concern, and more importantly His guidance cannot be given through hurriedly delivered Yes or No answers. So we have to make time to listen to His responses.

Are our prayers any more adult than bikes with red handlebars?

This week in our study we have been looking at witnessing, and prayer is an important part of this. Without prayer we can find ourselves going into the world without the protection or guidance of the Person we are working for—God. We need to make sure that we ask for the essential care and understanding needed in our witnessing, but before we rush off into the big, bad world, we need to listen for His response, which is given to help make our work a success.

So whether it is a bike with red handlebars or care for a dying friend, we *need* to talk to God. If we learn to speak with Him and then take the time to listen to His response, we will find that the relationship grows so that God is our supreme Leader and our ultimate Companion.

REACT

1. How can you move on from childish prayer patterns?
2. Why is it important to listen to God?
3. In practical, everyday terms, how can a person listen to God?

By Bob Kitchen, a business and computer student at Stanborough School, Watford, England.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Our Wonderful God

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 1998, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Our Ancient of Days

Scriptures: 1 Chron. 16:24, 25; Ps. 90:1, 2, 4; 139:7-10; Isa. 44:6-8; 14:26, 27; Jer. 10:10, 11.

Theme: It is important to have a clear conception of God. It is important to know how He relates to evil and how we should relate to Him.

Lesson 2: Our Lord Most High

Scriptures: Gen. 18:25; Ps. 147:5; Jer. 31:34; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 1:19-21; Col. 1:16, 17; Rev. 5:13.

Theme: As Creator, Judge, and Benefactor of His created beings, God is sovereign over all the universe.

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Begin With Yourself and . . .

Heal the World

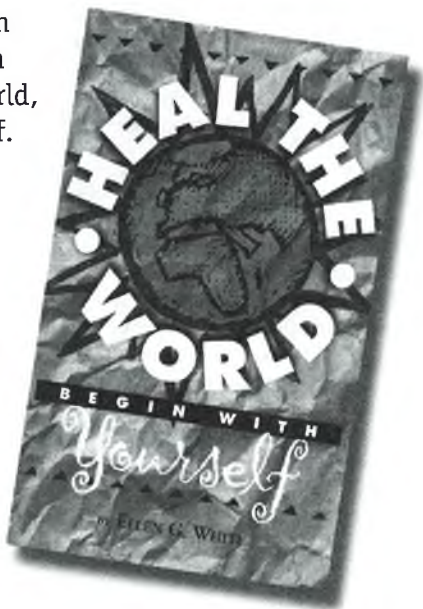
Ellen White

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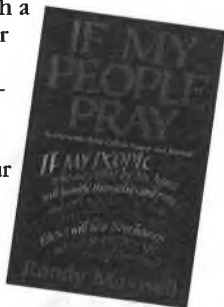
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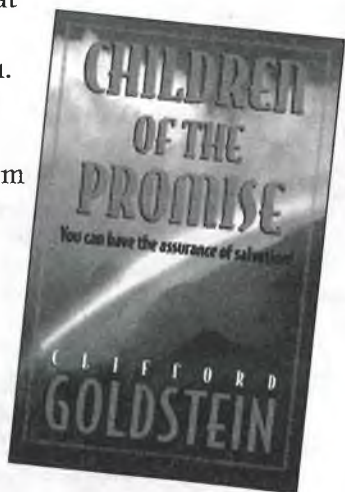


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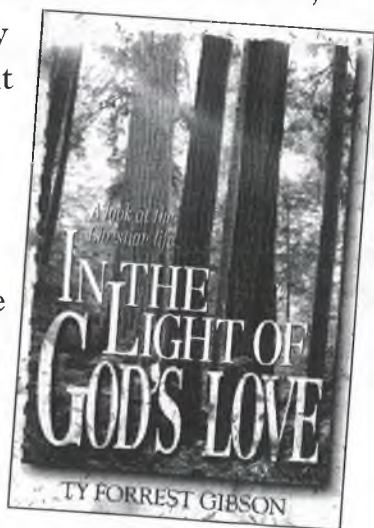
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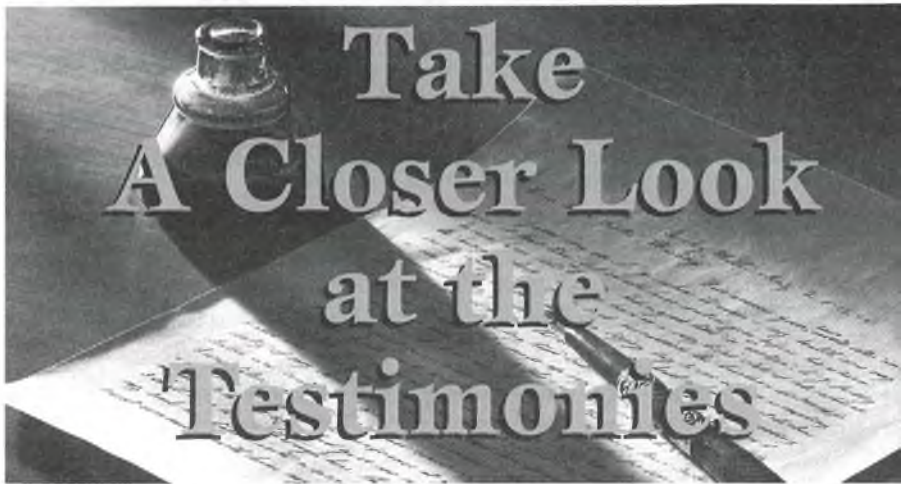
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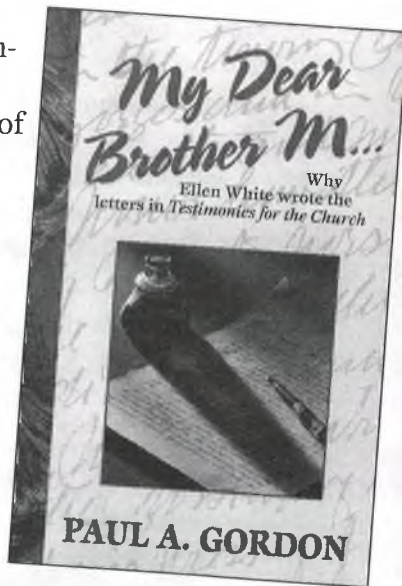
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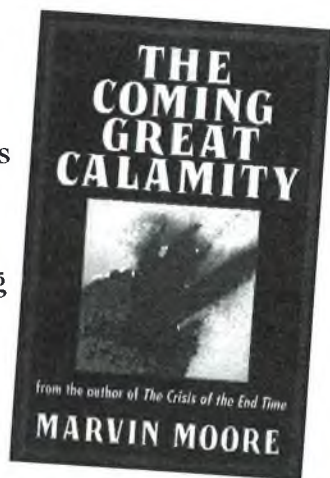
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MISSION PROFILE



NAME:

Alex Dantas, age 17, from French Guiana, plans to be an architectural engineer.

BACKGROUND:

Alex did not know about his Jewish heritage until he came to live with his father when he was about 14. When an Adventist began Bible studies with their family, Alex's father became very interested and liked the similarities between Judaism and Christianity. Alex came to realize that it is Jesus that completes the plan of God in the Bible story and was the first in his family to be baptized.

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