

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A North American Youth Ministries Publication

October-December 1985

## CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH



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Three Sabbath School members representative of the three major areas of the Solomon Islands. The boy is from Eastern Solomons, the girl in the center from Malaita and the girl on the right from Western Solomons. Photo credit: R.V. Moe.

This quarter the South Pacific Division (formerly Australasian Division) presents some exciting and important special projects:

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- A new elementary school and an evangelistic youth center (Vanuatu—formerly New Hebrides).
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The "lamb" shown here have no Sabbath School room. This is all right on sunny days. But rain falls heavily and unexpectedly in the Solomon Islands.

Please give generously this **Thirteenth Sabbath** and all quarter long so that all of these important projects can be achieved.



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# CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

## Studies in 2 Peter and Jude

1. Provisions for Power .....	6
2. Way to Grow .....	16
3. Lest We Forget .....	26
4. Truth From an Eyewitness .....	36
5. The Light Made More Certain .....	44
6. The Need for Discernment .....	54
7. Facing the Consequences .....	62
8. Springs Without Water .....	74
9. A Response to Skeptics—I .....	84
10. A Response to Skeptics—II .....	92
11. Living in View of Christ's Return .....	100
12. Contending for the Faith .....	108
13. Parting Words .....	118

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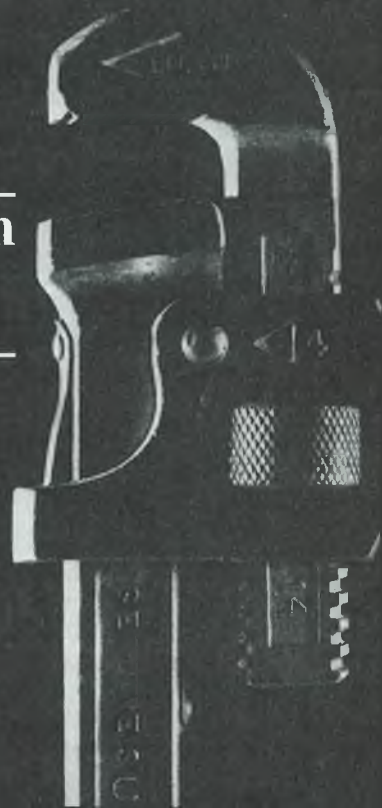
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# Provisions for Power

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3, NIV).





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# Of Pilgrims and Postage

by Beverly Matiko Tetz

## This Week's Scripture:

2 Peter 1:1-4

When I lived in England it happened at 10:30 a.m. At my parent's home in Toronto I had to wait until eleven. And in College Heights where I live now I have to hold on until 4:30 p.m. That's when the mail arrives. That's also the moment the rest of my day revolves around.

Most of us like to get letters. Fewer of us like to write them. But I'm one of the rare ones who is passionate about all parts of the process. Sometimes I even fantasize about packing in teaching and presenting myself to the post office: "Here, take me. Pay me if you must, but just let me plunge my arms up to the elbows in those bulging sacks of mail."

Perhaps my obsession with mail comes from living so much of my life so far from the people I love most. John's in Maine. Meredith's in Michigan. Ron's in Seattle and Beverley's in Kettering. Memories link us but they're not enough. We've found we need something more tangible. And so we write.

Some of the most significant moments of my life have been marked by letters. I remember addressing 250 envelopes not long ago, each one bearing the same message inside borrowed from Shakespeare, "But here's the joy: my friend and I are one." That is how Jack and I chose to announce our decision to marry.

I remember another letter.

This one carried a different announcement. It was addressed to my husband. The stationery bore an unfamiliar crest. Inside, the letter stated that Jack had been accepted as a member of the Edmonton Police Force. That letter changed my life. I see my husband differently now because of it. I read the papers with more interest. I listen to the news more carefully. I'm more acutely aware of the present moment because of that letter and the choice it represented.

Some letters I receive contain money. More ask for it. Some announce the birth of Sara, Ryan, or Jessica. Others announce that the other edge of life is being approached—that my 98-year-old great aunt has been hospitalized, or that my grandmother can no longer manage the stairs.

Letters continue to be a source of joy and sorrow for me. Some propel me to the stereo and my recording of Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons." Others cause me to lock the door, take the phone off the hook, and sit silently in a darkened room with my eyes closed.

But whatever letters may contain, I always look forward to them. They remind me that others care. They remind me that I am loved and that I love. They encourage me. They strengthen me. They may scold me. They may praise me. But always they say one thing. As I open that postal box, every letter addressed to me proclaims, "You matter."

## INTRODUCTION

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Beverly Matiko Tetz teaches English and speech at Canadian Union College when she's not writing letters to her friends.

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# An All-Sufficient Power

**LOGOS**    **Theme:** Through the knowledge of Christ, we have access to an all-sufficient divine power, which enables us to live according to divine characteristics.

## 1. Introduction (read 2 Peter 1:1)

*"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ . . ." (2 Peter 1:1, NIV).*

The letter begins with the writer identifying himself as Simon Peter—Simon referring to the fisherman of the past and Peter the Christian apostle at present. Second Peter had an extremely difficult passage into the canon of Scripture. Some early church fathers raised questions as to whether it was actually written by Peter. Luther considered the letter as a second-class scripture and it was totally rejected by Erasmus.<sup>1</sup>

Authorship of the letter by Peter himself is questioned by many modern scholars on a number of grounds including:

a) the slowness and reluctance of the church, especially at Rome, to accept it as genuine;

b) the recognition of Paul's letters as "scripture" in 2 Peter 3:15 reflects a development in church history that took place well after Peter's death;

c) if 1 Peter was written by Peter the marked difference in language and style between it and 2 Peter would preclude their having been written by the same author.

On the other hand, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* defends the authenticity of 2 Peter. It states that the author claims to have been an eyewitness to Christ's transfiguration, which would be falsification if not actually written by Peter. The vast literary differences between 1 and 2 Peter could be accounted for if Peter used two different secretaries to compose the two letters. It further maintains that there is no proof that Paul's letters couldn't have been placed on the level of inspired scripture while Peter was still alive.<sup>2</sup>

Another possibility is that a disciple of Peter's edited and filled out one of Peter's writings and sent it out to the church in the name of the late apostle.

Though the issue may be difficult to resolve with certainty, this quarterly will assume Peter to be the source of the letter, since it is clearly represented as the work of the apostle. Certainly, the ambiguities regarding authorship should not cause us to doubt the scriptural authority of the letter. That authority is not based on absolute certainty that Peter himself wrote every word, but on the fact that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has recognized in the letter the authentic voice of apostolic teaching.<sup>3</sup>

The letter's purpose is to promote Christian growth by reassuring readers of the certainty of Christ's second coming, and warning them against false teachers, who displayed some traits of the heresy that came to be known as Gnosticism (see Evidence and Lesson 6). The latter fact is a clue that the letter may have originally been

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directed to a church in Asia Minor, which contained some hotbeds of this type of heresy.

*How can one be, as Peter was, both a servant and leader at the same time? Can these labels be synonymous in today's society? What are the distinguishing qualities of leadership and servanthood that make them compatible or incompatible?*

## 2. The Privileges of a Christian (read 2 Peter 1:2-4)

*"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3, NIV).*

In v. 2 the author prays for grace and peace for recipients of the letter. This grace and peace comes through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. With this statement the author reaffirms the New Testament belief that eternal life relies on knowing God through the life of Jesus Christ. This knowledge is much deeper than intellectual perception. It is the experimental knowledge that comes from an ongoing relationship with a person. As we know God in this way, v. 3 points out that we will receive his power for anything we need. Disappointment many times comes when we do not receive everything we might *like*—a real difference from need.

We are attracted to Christ through his "glory and goodness." The perfection of moral character in Jesus Christ attracts us, yet it also repels us when we contrast it with our own defective characters. The precious promises mentioned in v. 4 enable us to respond to God's call of godliness. The call to "participate in the divine nature" made some early Christian fathers uncomfortable. The idea of becoming absorbed into deity had a very distinct Hellenistic flavor. Peter, however, was speaking of a real union with Christ that is also mentioned in Rom. 8:9 and Gal. 2:20. To be absorbed by God would take away one's personal identity and take away the possibility of experiencing a personal encounter between the individual and God. By using a term well-known in the popular religious thinking of the day and infusing it with a different, Christian nuance of meaning, Peter was perhaps making a bold, if somewhat risky attempt to communicate truth to his original readers in a powerful way.

1. *Is participation in the divine nature the starting point or the goal of Christian living? Why?*

2. *Does sharing in the divine nature mean that we*

- a) *in some mysterious sense have deity, and thus eternal life, planted within us?*
- b) *develop the attributes of God's character in our own lives?*
- c) *are given a nature like that of Jesus, so that we no longer have the same natural inclination to sin?*
- d) *other? . . .*

1. See *2 Peter Reconsidered* (Tyndale Press 1961) for a complete discussion on the author of 2 Peter.

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 5, pp. 185, 186.

3. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Revised Standard Version), p. 1480.

P.H.H./D.F.M.

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# The Good News About Sanctification

by Wendell Buck

## TESTIMONY

Key Text:  
Nehemiah 8:10

Sanctification. I don't know how that word strikes you, but frankly, I'd rather talk about the joy of forgiveness. The topic of sanctification at best seems to spark long and heated arguments. At worst it provides the occasion some people are looking for to deflate new Christians whom they see as too full of the good news of God's love. To hear some people talk, sanctification is a grinding struggle, extending over a lifetime. They see it as a process to somehow make oneself lovable to a perfect God.

So I approached Peter's second letter with a certain lack of enthusiasm. Peter, it seems, can't wait to talk about sanctification. He can't even get the greetings out of the way before he informs us that we can be "partakers of the divine nature". That almost seems to sound like the sort of text the salvation-by-works crowd likes to fling at people who are already painfully aware of how short of the glory of God they've come.

Ellen White devotes chapter 52 of *The Acts of the Apostles* to discussing 2 Peter, and I think I've learned something from that chapter. I've gotten a fresh perspective on sanctification, more from her attitude toward the subject than from any new ideas she presents. Listen to these statements:

"It is the glory of God to give His virtue to His children."<sup>1</sup>

"It is the glory  
of God  
to give virtue  
to His  
children."

"No good gift is withheld from him who sincerely desires to obtain the righteousness of God."<sup>2</sup>

"Our Saviour is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the contrite heart, and grace and peace are multiplied to His faithful ones. Gladly He grants them the blessings they need in their struggle against the evils that beset them."<sup>3</sup>

This whole chapter gives a different picture of sanctification than that of dreary toil and grinding battle to measure up to God's unrelenting standard. Ellen White's concept of sanctification seems to be one of a glorious adventure in the company of a loving, understanding God, rather than one of a grim, hopeless struggle toward an aloof, exacting God. Now that I think of it, that is also Peter's attitude: in verse three of chapter one he couples the word "glory" with virtue. That's good news!

In fact, that's the only way sanctification can work. Joy is a necessary ingredient in virtue. Until I catch a vision of the glory of God and the joy of his love for me, I am powerless to overcome temptation. I am left to battle fruitlessly with my own weakness and sinfulness. Nehemiah was right when he said "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

## REACT

Does sanctification involve any struggle on our part?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 530  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 531  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 532

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Wendell Buck spends a lot of time struggling with unsanctified VCRs as the audio-visual supervisor at Canadian Union College.



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# Sharing in the Divine Nature

by Keith Clouten

Within the short introductory passage of 2 Peter assigned for our study this week is a statement crucial for understanding the entire epistle. In vv. 3, 4 of the first chapter the writer sets out the object of his letter—to escape the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires, and become partakers of the divine nature. This achievement is possible, the writer says, because of the “very great and precious promises” (v. 4, NIV) which God has given us in Christ. The writer does not immediately identify these promises, but they become clear as we study the epistle and understand the background of the late first and perhaps early second century A.D.

Certainly one promise the author has in mind is the assurance of salvation from sin through the work of the Holy Spirit. “False prophets” were making their appearance in the early Christian church, some propagating the philosophy that all of creation, including the body, is evil. It does not matter, they said, what you do to the body: personal morality is not important (see 2:10). Faced with an erosion of moral behavior, the writer urges his readers to shun sin in all its forms, and adopt a godly lifestyle by becoming “partakers of the divine nature.” This particular expression is unique to this epistle, and must be interpreted by looking at other New Testament passages which describe a similar concept. How is it possible to participate in the divine nature?

Nicodemus, troubled in mind, may have been asking that question when he sought Jesus by night. “Unless a man is born again,” Christ told him, “he can not see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, NIV). A complete change of attitude and behavior occurs when a person expresses commitment to God. The change is so metamorphic that it is like starting life over again, like being born again as a new person.

Paul develops the same idea, but with a new twist. The reborn individual enjoys a vastly different status: he or she becomes a child of God. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God. . . . And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:14, 17). This is surely an intimate sharing of the divine nature.

A second “great and precious promise” is that of the return of Christ in glory. The author of 2 Peter warns of those who were spreading doubt concerning the nearness and reality of the second coming (see 3:4). Those who accepted this teaching became lax in their moral behavior. But Christ has pledged that he will indeed return, imminently, to save us from the corruption of evil. When that happens the believer becomes a “partaker of the divine nature” in the fullest sense possible.

## REACT

How can we claim the promises of God with assurance without, in effect, trying to manipulate him?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts:**  
John 3:3;  
Romans 8:14-19

“A complete change of attitude and behavior occurs when a person expresses commitment to God.”

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Keith Clouten is the library services director at Canadian Union College.

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# Amazing Grace: Pardon

by Lewis B. Smedes

## HOW TO

*Grace, power and promise are three key words in 2 Peter 1:1-4. Since Lewis Smedes discusses these terms and ties them together in the following excerpt from a recent book, we felt it appropriate to depart from our usual format and devote both the How To and Opinion sections to this excerpt.*

### Grace is Pardon

The bedrock of grace is the amazing gift of knowing that it is all right with us personally when we know that a lot of things are wrong with us.

Do any of our lives match our early dreams? Do our characters live up to the fine visions that filtered through our fantasies in brighter, more innocent days? Once, when we still dreamed dreams, we thought we had a chance at that elusive blend, that ideal mix, happiness and goodness; we would be both rich *and* generous, sexy *and* virtuous. But, God help us, look at us now.

If we do not match our own dreams, what about the dreams God has for us? God's dream for human life came true in Jesus Christ. He is the profile of God's sort of person. Forget now about his eternal deity; concentrate on the human person—working with fierce honesty through a hypocritical culture, with fine compassion through a heartless religious system, risking everything that ordinary people want out of life so he could minister to lost and hurt human beings, freely led by sacrificial love into the most untimely death in human history. What a person! And he is God's image for us. The word is: be like Jesus if you want to be God's kind of human being.

**"Grace says,  
'It's all right  
even if you  
are wrong.'"**

But what can we do when we have not come close to letting God's dream of goodness come true in us? Is religion our refuge? Let me warn you. A religion without grace will wallop you with God's image of the perfect human life; it will condemn you for not matching it in your own life. Religion clobbers you for your failures, and sends you groveling in the sawdust of defeat. I spoke with a middle-aged woman recently who had just come hurting and shamed through a divorce and felt condemned by a religion without grace; she said to me, "I know that I will never be able to forgive myself." What? Never? Never forgive yourself? Never smile again and say, "It's all right even though I may have been all wrong"? Religion sometimes does this to us; it tells us that we're forever wrong unless we measure up to God's ideal.

Grace to you, dear woman, and grace to all of us when we fall short of God's perfect image of human life! May grace break through to you in your real and in your false guilt, your serious guilt and your petty guilt. May grace come to convince you at the depths of your soul that it's all right even though a lot is wrong with you. It will happen to you, you will know it, feel it, live it, when God persuades you that, as far as he is concerned, in spite of everything, all is right with you.

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Lewis B. Smedes is professor of theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary in southern California.

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This is one amazing thing about grace, its surprising contradiction of the tender conscience. Conscience condemns; grace contradicts its condemnation. Conscience says, It's all wrong because you are wrong. Grace says, It's all right even if you are wrong. Grace is always a surprise. It is not surprising that God wants us to be good; it is not surprising that God wants us to be honest, fair, decent, and kind. Every deity conceived in the pious imaginations of religious folk wants these things. But the surprising word of the amazing God of Jesus Christ, the word coming from the cross where he died to make it right, the good word to a sinful soul, is this word: it is all right, at the very core of life, all right, precisely when we are in the wrong. This is pardon, the first face of the grace that embraces us.

Excerpted from Lewis B Smedes, *How Can It Be Right When Everything Is All Wrong*. Copyright 1982 by Lewis B. Smedes. Used with permission from Harper and Row Publishers Inc., pp 4, 5.

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# Amazing Grace: Power and Promise

by Lewis B. Smedes

## OPINION Grace is Power

Grace, in its second face, is the power to lead you close to his image and make you a better person today than you were yesterday. But we will not sense how amazing this power is unless we see that it is unlike any energy we manipulate through our technology. Grace is a power totally unlike any we create in nuclear reactors; it is different from all physical force. But it is different, too, from moral force; grace does not make us better people by bullying us into moral improvement. The power to make us better works when God freely persuades us that it is all right with us the way we are. The power of grace is paradoxical.

When you are freed by pardoning grace, you are most powerful. When you feel sure that you can never be condemned for what you are, that no judgment, no catastrophic guilt can hurt you, the power begins to work! When grace persuades you it is all right with you even when you are wrong, then the power begins to work to make you right.

Don Quixote, that ridiculous knight who came riding on his silly donkey to conquer his crazy world, is a splendid secular parable of amazing grace. Quixote ended up tilting at windmills, but he had one powerful ability. He was able to make life better for someone by persuading her it was all right when things were really all wrong. He met this tawdry woman in a tawdry tavern in a tawdry little town. She was not a fine woman; in fact, everyone in town knew she was a bad woman. Since they all knew she was bad, they all treated her like a hopelessly dirty sinner. And, since everyone treated her like a bad woman, she felt she must *be* a bad woman. So she acted the part. Then the amazing Don Quixote rode into town. He looked at her through the spectacles of his grace. What he saw was a splendid woman. He broke through the icy judgment of the moral majority and declared her to be a fine and noble person. He said to her: "It's all right even though everyone says you're all wrong." And when she was sure that Don Quixote really meant it, when she embraced the grace with which he embraced her, she began to *feel* the power of grace. She became what Don Quixote saw.

But now back to the reality of God's grace. We are not dealing with a fictional knight who jousts with windmill blades. We are dealing with a holy and an honest God who expects us to be holy and knows we are not. But God works with us, too, on the premise that we are all right when we know a lot is wrong with us. . . . Peter denied Jesus, to save face in front of a chambermaid, said he never knew the man and when he faced up to his cowardliness he cried, "I am a Christ-denier!" (Luke 22:54-62, author's own paraphrase). At the moment he confessed, he heard God say: "It's all right, even now, when you are so terribly wrong." At *that* moment, the moment of his most contemptible weakness, when he embraced the grace that embraced him, he received the power to be an apostle of Christ instead of a denier of Christ. . . .

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Lewis B. Smedes is professor of theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary in southern California.

"When he embraced the grace that embraced him, he received power."



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And so it goes. The moment we know it's all right even though we are grotesquely in the wrong, we are liberated from our private burden of failures and given power to become the sort of person God wants us to be. To put it theologically, the moment we feel our justification, we are on the way to sanctification. The straitjacket of self-hatred is off; the shackles of self-judgment are ripped away; the liberating power is set loose, and we are on the way to becoming the person we are meant to be. This surprising power of grace is the second face of grace.

### **Grace is Promise**

Grace is the power to live now as if things are going to be all right tomorrow—the third face of grace. The power, mind you, is not born from a desperate gambler's hunch, against long odds, that things are bound to get better. It is a power generated by the Spirit of Jesus, who has convincing evidence that God has a way of leading us through disaster into victory, and making promises come true.

A lot of us desperately need the power to live by promise. Some of us have the feeling that we are locked in a car going full steam down a steep hill—with steering wheel locked and no brakes. We seem in route to cosmic catastrophe. But these are only the global fears, the sense that we are caught in a system that ultimately delivers disaster.

Our smaller fears hurt us even worse. They are puny by comparison, but they pin us down on all fours more quickly than the world terrors do. I make no defense for our nearsightedness. I only report that most of us feel more anxious if we suspect one of our kids is on drugs than if we hear that fifty thousand children are hungry. So we need a promise with power to give us hope that drives out fear. . . .

When common sense says that life is frozen in a black block of despair, when the pundits say there is no answer, when even theologians tell you that God has abandoned us to our fate . . . may grace be to you, as the amazing promise that your future is open to God's surprising will for your good.

Why do we call grace amazing? Grace is amazing because it works against the grain of common sense. Hard-nosed common sense will tell you that you are too wrong to meet the standards of a holy God; pardoning grace tells you that it's all right in spite of so much in you that is wrong. Realistic common sense tells you that you are too weak, too harrassed, too human to change for the better; grace gives you power to send you on the way to being a better person. Plain common sense may tell you that you are caught in a rut of fate or futility; grace promises that you can trust God to have a better tomorrow for you than the day you have made for yourself.

### **REACT**

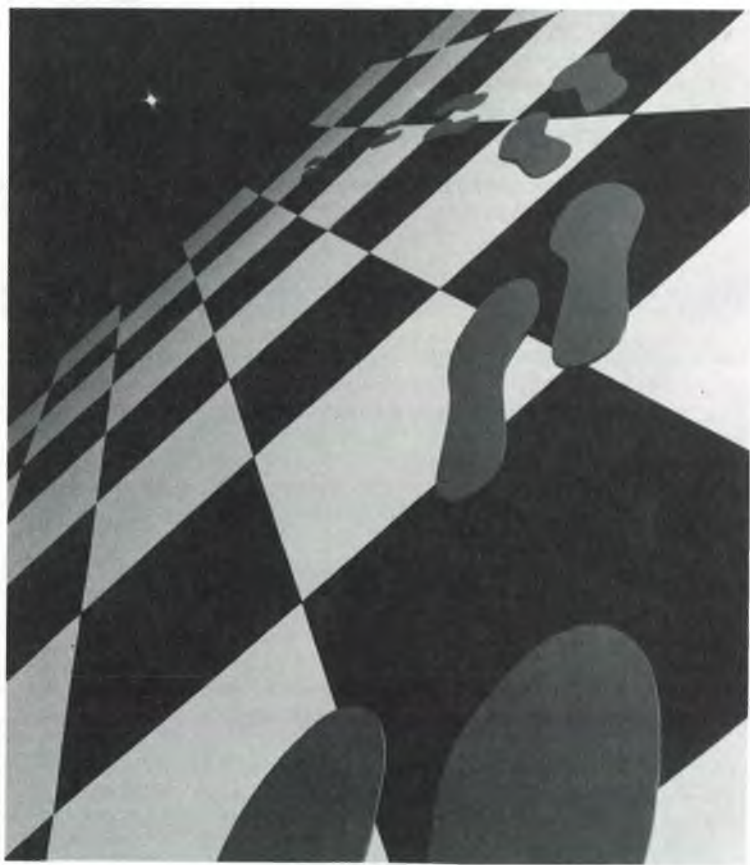
1. Is recognition of grace all that we need to transform our lives?
2. Does the promise of faith guarantee us tangible improvements in our lives, or are we left only with nebulous hopes for the future that defy common sense?

**"Grace is amazing because it works against the grain of common sense."**

Excerpted from Lewis B Smedes, *How Can It Be Right When Everything Is All Wrong*. Copyright © 1982 by Lewis B. Smedes. Used with permission from Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., pp 5-11.

# Way to Grow

"My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love" (Psalm 17:5-7, NIV).



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# A Success Story

## This Week's Scripture:

### 2 Peter 1:5-11

Today Arthur and Lewis Tappan would be in the same league as the Rockefellers or the Bass brothers of Texas. The Tappans were among the "super-rich" of New York during the early and middle portions of the 19th century. While making their fortune primarily through Arthur's silk company, the largest in the country at the time, they pioneered concepts that would have a lasting impact on American business. They were among the first to establish fixed prices for all customers, rather than using the old system of haggling and dealing. Their high-volume and low mark-up system was enormously successful, grossing over a million dollars a year. In 1841, Lewis brought a needed innovation to the business community by founding the Mercantile Agency, a credit rating firm that is the antecedent of today's Dun and Bradstreet.

We expect those with megabucks to part with a few of them to fund philanthropic and charitable endeavors. But in the Tappan brothers we find something unexpected—a consistent commitment to change social *structures* that caused oppression and poverty.

When the radical abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison was imprisoned for libel, Arthur Tappan bailed him out. When the Chatham St. Chapel, progressive as it was,

refused to eliminate racially segregated seating, Lewis Tappan left the church in protest. When an anti-abolitionist mob ransacked Lewis' home and burnt his furniture on the streets, Mrs. Tappan found a bright spot in the event: "the mob had destroyed some expensive-looking items that Lewis had always felt were too ostentatious for the frequent prayer meeting held in the home." When the South boycotted the Tappans' enterprises, threatening to do the same to anyone who did business with them, and New York business leaders pled with the Tappans to cease their abolitionist efforts, Arthur responded, "You demand that I shall cease my anti-slavery labors. . . . *I will be hung first.*" When fifty rebel slaves took over a ship in the Caribbean and were apprehended by the U.S. Navy, Lewis formed a committee for the defense of the blacks and took personal responsibility for their spiritual and physical welfare. He took the case all the way to the Supreme Court, finally winning the blacks' release and sending them to their homes in Africa at his expense.<sup>1</sup>

I think Peter would have been proud of the Tappans. For them it was not enough just to believe, go on with business as usual, and enjoy their wealth. They added to their faith goodness . . . perseverance . . . brotherly kindness . . . love.

D. F. M.

## INTRODUCTION

1. Donald W. Dayton tells the story of the Tappan brothers in *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976 pp. 63-71.

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# Excellence in Christ

**LOGOS**     **Theme:** In view of God's great provision, we should establish ourselves in the faith through growth in the essential characteristics of the Christian way of life.

## 1. The Faith Ladder (read 2 Peter 1:5-7)

*"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith" (1:5, NIV).*

Peter, like Paul in Romans 5:1-5, gives a list of different levels to be reached in the Christian experience. Many similar lists existed in the Hellenistic world. The Christian lists were different from the others by their unique inspiration, setting and the idea that one attribute develops from another.<sup>1</sup>

Peter exhorts the reader to "make every effort." Unfortunately, it is all too often true that, as a cynic quoted by Moffat puts it, our effort to live as Christians can accurately be characterized as, "An initial spasm followed by a chronic inertia."<sup>2</sup> In fact, this will almost inevitably be the case if we are relying on our own power. The human contribution is indispensable, but of itself it is worthless. It is in cooperation with God that one produces the characteristics of a Christian life.

The first step on Peter's ladder is faith, which underlies all the following virtues. To faith, Peter adds the virtue of goodness. The word goodness is not often used in biblical Greek. It was however quite common in non-Christian literature. The fuller meaning of the word is "excellence," such as in the accomplishment of any task. By referring to the usage of the same word in v. 3, we might conclude that the excellence Peter is talking about is a resemblance of Christ in character and behavior.

Goodness or moral "excellence," can only be exercised in connection with knowledge, the next step on the ladder. Knowledge here "doubtless refers to a practical understanding of God's ways and plans for the individual rather than merely intellectual knowledge"<sup>3</sup> (cf. v. 3). As we grow in knowledge the next level we confront is that of self-control. This virtue was mentioned extensively in Greek moral philosophy. It applies not only to the appetite for food and drink but to every facet of human life. A Christian's self-control comes from allowing the Spirit of Christ to control the passions and desires. This virtue opposed the claims of the false teachers that knowledge releases one from the need of self-control.

Next, Peter adds the virtue of perseverance or endurance. Aristotle contrasted self-control and endurance this way: "Self-control is concerned with pleasures . . . and endurance with sorrows; for the man who can endure and put up with hardships, he is the real example of endurance."<sup>4</sup> The Christian can bear the hardships of the present since he has the future in view and knows that God is ultimately in control.

To perseverance is added godliness or reverence. Greek and Latin usages of godliness refer to a religious person who has deep respect

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for others and the gods. Peter puts brotherly kindness as an outgrowth of godliness. A Christian must transcend prejudice and hatred toward others, even in a small degree, and accept as family each person that is in Christ. The last and greatest of virtues on Peter's ladder is that of love (*agape*). It is often defined as a "deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for that person's good."<sup>5</sup>

*Can one possess parts or varying degrees of these virtues simultaneously or is there a certain stage of maturity one first must have before he goes on to the next virtue?*

*How important is human effort in achieving the virtues in Peter's ladder?*

## **2. Barren and Fruitful Christians (read 2 Peter 1:8, 9)**

*"For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8, NIV).*

Peter encourages the believer to take hold of these virtues and to grow with them. Lack of continual growth is a sure sign of spiritual death. The word "knowledge" appears again as the means by which growth can take place. Unless the virtues in vv. 5-7 are "fulfilled" in connection with a full knowledge of Jesus Christ . . . they will fail to produce their true fruitage, but if they function in continual connection with the Savior, their fruitfulness need know no limit."<sup>6</sup>

## **3. A Worthy Goal (read 2 Peter 1:10, 11)**

*"For if you do these things, you will never fall" (1:10, NIV).*

Peter encourages the reader to make his "calling and election sure." We must confirm our calling with behavior that reflects that calling. Peter's promise that we will never fall does not mean we will never experience stumbles and failures at times but that we will not come to a disastrous ruin. And the one who thus takes the grace of God seriously, as Peter urges, is promised a final destiny in "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 11).

*What does it mean to make one's "calling and election sure"?*

P. H. H.

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1. Michael Green, *Second Epistle of Peter, Jude* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 18), p. 66.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 597.

4. Green, p. 69.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

6. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 598.

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# The Ladder of Christian Progress

by James M. Campbell

## TESTIMONY

The old spray-soaked ladder that clung to the shiny wet surface of a steep rock face offered an almost irresistible challenge to the juniors hiking near a spectacular waterfall. But they were met with frustration and dismay when at the ladder's base they were confronted by a cautious counselor standing guard. His experience and maturity warned of possible disaster.

**The keynote of victory.** In contrast, Peter, the mature apostle, striking "the keynote of victory . . . presents before the believers the ladder of Christian progress, every step of which represents advancement in the knowledge of God."<sup>1</sup> Those whom Peter addresses have already begun the ascent. They "have obtained like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1).

**There is to be no standstill.** The juniors smelled adventure, the dizzy thrill of height. To the Christian stirred by Christ's love and sacrifice, "there is to be no standstill."<sup>2</sup>

"The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one."<sup>3</sup>

**The wonderful possibility.** "Before the believer is held out the wonderful possibility of being like Christ, obedient to all the principles of the law. But of himself, man is utterly unable to reach this condition."

**"Before the believer is held out the wonderful possibility of being like Christ."**

**Divine fragrance.** "Man's obedience can be made perfect only by the incense of Christ's righteousness, which fills with divine fragrance every act of obedience. The part of the Christian is to persevere in overcoming every fault."

**The plan of multiplication.** "Day by day, God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication."<sup>4</sup>

**They grow up together.** Does progress up the ladder toward fitness for the heavenly kingdom require that each virtue be fully matured before ascending another round? "You are not to think that you must wait until you have perfected one grace before cultivating another. No; they are to grow up together, fed continually from the fountain of charity; . . ."<sup>5</sup>

**No possibility of failure.** "The apostle Peter had had a long experience in the things of God. His faith in God's power to save had strengthened with the years, until he had proved beyond question that there is no possibility of failure before the one who, advancing by faith, ascends round by round, ever upward and onward, to the topmost round of the ladder that reaches even to the portals of heaven."<sup>6</sup>

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 530.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 532.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 943.

6. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 533.

## REACT

Are we able, through the righteousness of Christ, to attain perfection in this life?

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James M. Campbell is director of college relations at Canadian Union College.

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# Spiritual Development

by Bruce Buttler

## EVIDENCE

Biologists are more interested in development than they are in growth. Whereas growth means only an increase in mass, development can mean, in addition, creating a new part or repairing defects.<sup>1</sup>

Using development as a metaphor we can view Peter's "ladder" (1:5-7) as a process of adding new spiritual qualities. Starting with faith we make effort to add moral excellence, then knowledge, self-control, endurance, reverence, affection for one's spiritual relatives, and finally love. Such development is possible only as we are fed by the Holy Spirit.

As we continue through life defects may occur which cripple the functioning of one or more of our spiritual qualities. The repair capabilities that development involves can then be pressed into service. Just as an organism uses its instruction (DNA) to repair a loss, so the Christian will turn to the Bible and the Creator it reveals to receive the guidance and strength needed to restore or replenish the damaged characteristics.

Some biologists believe that dying and death result from a gradual breakdown in the developmental process. Perhaps spiritual lukewarmness and apostasy result from failure to employ the repair capabilities available to the developing Christian.

At least two more lessons can be derived from a consideration of development. First, an organism needs to avail itself of the environment's resources in order to ensure that the programmed sequences will be able to continue. Thus the Christian should take advantage of the earthly agencies God has provided—the church, Christian education, service organizations, and so on—in order to enhance maturity.

Second, despite the qualms we sometimes have during our teenage years, physical maturity does come. Likewise, though it may seem difficult to believe as we struggle through spiritual childhood and adolescence, Christian maturity also comes. "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

The metaphor of biological development can, of course, break down. For example in the development of an insect egg into a butterfly, completion of each stage initiates the beginning of its successor. But in the Christian life, we certainly should not wait until we have the fruits of moral excellence, knowledge, and so on, before being concerned about love.

Clearly, the main point of this passage is that a Christian is to continually seek an increasing measure (see v. 8) of each of the qualities mentioned.

## REACT

There are eight characteristics listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7, which can be paired in a total of 28 different combinations. Look at some of these pairings, and discuss ways in which each partner in the pair might improve the other.

**"Love without truth is directionless."**

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1. Nelson T. Spratt, Jr., *Developmental Biology*, p. 5.

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**Bruce Buttler is the chairperson of the division of natural and physical sciences at Canadian Union College.**

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# How To Use the Catalog of Virtue

by Warren C. Trenchard

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**2 Corinthians**  
**8:7**

The focus of our study this week has been the catalog of virtues found in 2 Peter 1:5-7. This type of list was anciently called a "sorites." Each item in the list was understood to be the means of producing the next item. In our sorites the first quality is faith. To faith is added virtue, suggesting that if a person has faith he has the means of producing virtue. The list continues in the same way by adding other positive qualities. The climax of the catalog is love.

Our author does not include this catalog of virtues for trivial reasons. He considers it indispensable that his Christian readers possess these qualities. In vv. 8, 9 he notes respectively the positive and negative results of having or not having these virtues. His conclusion to the section in vv. 10, 11 calls for his readers to be more diligent in confirming their standing with God, presumably by their coming to possess the virtues in the list.

Since our text presents these qualities as being very important for Christians, we should consider how we can obtain them. Given the nature of this literary form, it would seem at first glance that the process is simple. The sorites device, understood literally, presents each virtue as originating in the one preceding it. Therefore, if we possess the first quality in the list, we will eventually obtain all the others automatically.

**"We should not  
be content to  
live our  
Christianity  
as merely  
an internal  
experience."**

However, such a literal reading of the sorites nature of this list of virtues presents us with several problems. Do we have to reach the last item in the list in order to qualify for the benefits described in the text? Must we come to experience all of the virtues? What about the different qualities listed in the many other catalogs of virtues in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 8:7; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 6:11)? How can we progress from one virtue to the next when they do not always seem to be logically related? For example, how would virtue logically produce knowledge? It seems that a literal understanding of this list of linked qualities is not particularly useful.

Instead of reading this list literally, we might better recognize it as a conventional literary form. Catalogs of qualities, both positive and negative, were very common among the Hellenistic philosophical writers. In fact, most of the virtues mentioned in our text were found in such catalogs. The qualities in these lists were not to be considered as exclusive, but as representative. If any items in the list were to be featured they would have been the first and the last.

Thus, our author seems to be giving us a general picture of the kind of virtuous life we should live. This life is to proceed from our Christian faith and lead to love for others. We should not be content to live our Christianity as merely the internal experience of contemplating what we believe. Rather, we must externalize our beliefs into tangible acts of love for others. Theology must lead to ethics.

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Warren C. Trenchard is the chairman of the division of humanities and a professor of religion at Canadian Union College.



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# Getting Started: What Faith Is All About

by Helmut Thielicke

## "Where Is the Proof?"

The person who asks such a question is the typical spectator who sees everything from the outside. He observes and analyzes the course of events and concludes: God is hard and unjust. He is merely the personification of fickle fate. God wants to reap where he has not sown—for example, he wants to reap *faith*. But what does he give me in order that something like faith can possibly grow in me? When I look at life that way, thinks the "spectator," it is difficult to believe that "higher thoughts" are being thought over us and that there is supposed to be a God of love. When four little children lose their mother because of a drunken driver, how can there be talk of a controlling Power? How can the note of love be sounded in even the softest tones? And how about history in the broad sense? Isn't it governed by crass interest groups or even by autonomous processes such as, say, technological development? Or the church—do its human ambiguities and its powerless pronouncements strengthen faith in any way? How can God expect to reap faith when he sows so precious little ground for it?

"Well, why take and not steal?" says the holy Johanna of the slaughterhouse in Bertolt Brecht's play. "Gentlemen," she says, "there is also a moral purchasing power. Raise the moral purchasing power and then you also have morality."

The Christian "spectator" agrees and waves resignedly: "The Lord should raise our religious purchasing power first. He should provide us with proofs of the Spirit and of his power. Then he would get all the religion he wanted, and our faith as well!"

## Taking Him at His Word

One thing is sure. It is impossible to try to discover God by means of observing life, analyzing history, or the like, with the thought in mind that, should we be able to find him in that way, we would then acknowledge his existence, join his cause, and make him the norm of our life. Rather it is just the other way around: Only those who take God seriously discover him at all. There is no other way.

But how are we supposed to take God seriously if we know nothing about him? I would suggest that we deal with God exactly the way the master dealt with his servant in the parable of the talents (Luke 19:11-27). The master said to him, "I will judge you out of your own mouth." By that he means, "I encounter you and discuss with you on your own level." In exactly the same way we should say to God, "I will judge you out of your own mouth. By your own words shall you either convince me or get caught in absurdity. These words of yours tell me 'Cast all your care upon me, for I care for you' (1 Peter 5:7). Good, I'll just do that and see if it works. I indeed have cares; I worry about tomorrow, and about next week. But for once I'm going to give up reading my daily and weekly horoscope, and instead I'll lay out these worries before you. I'm going to try you out, God. You should be worth an experiment to me. I want to see if you

**OPINION  
PART 1**  
Key Text:  
John 6:37

**"When four little children lose their mother because of a drunken driver how can there be talk of a controlling Power?"**

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Helmut Thielicke is professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

Friday, October 11 23

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really get me through tomorrow and next week. I want to test out whether you really make a path for me when the way gets rough; whether you put a rod and staff in my hand when I pass through the valley of the shadow; and whether in the darkest moments, when I discern neither road nor bridges, neither shepherd nor staff, I do not lose my confidence in your guiding hand."

Taking God seriously means to take him at his word, giving him the chance to act as he has promised. When our fists are clenched or our hands hang down we can receive nothing. We must reach out our hands in request and "spread our beggar's mantle" as Luther says.

It is impossible  
to try to  
discover God  
by means of  
observing life,  
analyzing  
history,  
or the like."

### The Great Silence Broken

Maybe we need to ask, "Lord God (in case you exist), on the basis of your word (in case you said it), I ask you (in case you can hear me) to forgive my sins, be with me in my anxiety, comfort me in my loneliness, show me my neighbor, and kindle love in my heart. Let me discover that, in all good times and bad, in all the high points and frustrating times of my life, it is your hand that reaches out to me, shepherds me along, bears my burdens, strokes my brow in time of trouble, and makes death easier by cradling my head. I will get up tomorrow, making the most of my opportunities for you and serving my neighbor 'as though' you existed. Then you will break out of the great silence surrounding you and you will suddenly be with me."

That's the way it is with God. When we listen, God speaks; when we obey, God acts. "He who comes to me I will not cast out," says Jesus Christ (John 6:37). He died for those words. He took us that seriously. He deserves our giving him a chance.

### REACT

Doesn't God give us adequate evidence to make an informed choice for him *prior* to us making a personal commitment? Or is Thielicke right in suggesting that faith means committing *first*, and hoping the evidence will come?

Excerpted from Helmut Thielicke, *Being a Christian When the Chips are Down*, tr. by H. George Anderson. Copyright © 1979 by Fortress Press and William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., London. Used by permission, pp. 56-58.

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# Coming To Faith: A Testimony

by Sheldon Vanauken

*Written by Vanauken, soon after his coming to faith, in a letter to C. S. Lewis.*

I choose to believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in Christ, my Lord and my God. Christianity has the ring, the feel, of unique truth. Of essential truth. By it, life is made full instead of empty, meaningful instead of meaningless. Cosmos becomes beautiful at the Centre, instead of chillingly ugly beneath the lovely pathos of spring. But the emptiness, the meaninglessness, and the ugliness can only be seen, I think, when one has glimpsed the fullness, the meaning, and the beauty. It is when heaven and hell have both been glimpsed that going back is impossible. But to go on seemed impossible, also. A glimpse is not a vision. A choice was necessary: and there is no certainty. One can only choose a side. So I—I now choose my side: I choose beauty; I choose what I love. But choosing to believe is believing. It's all I can do: choose. I confess my doubts and ask my Lord Christ to enter my life. I do not know God is, I do but say: Be it unto me according to Thy will. I do not affirm that I am without doubt, I do but ask for help, having chosen, to overcome it. I do but say: Lord, I believe—help Thou mine unbelief.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE GAP

Did Jesus live? And did he really say  
The burning words that banish mortal fear?  
And are they true? Just this is central, here  
The Church must stand or fall. It's Christ we weigh.

All else is off the point: the Flood, the Day  
Of Eden, or the Virgin Birth—Have done!  
The Question is, did God send us the Son  
Incarnate crying Love! Love is the Way!

Between the probable and proved there yawns  
A gap. Afraid to jump, we stand absurd,  
Then see behind us sink the ground and, worse,  
Our very standpoint crumbling. Desperate dawns  
Our only hope: to leap into the Word  
That opens up the shuttered universe.

**OPINION  
PART 2**  
**Key Text:**  
**Mark 9:24**

Excerpted from Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severa Mercy*. Copyright © 1977 by Sheldon Vanauken. Used with permission from Harpe and Row Publishers, Inc., pp. 96, 97.

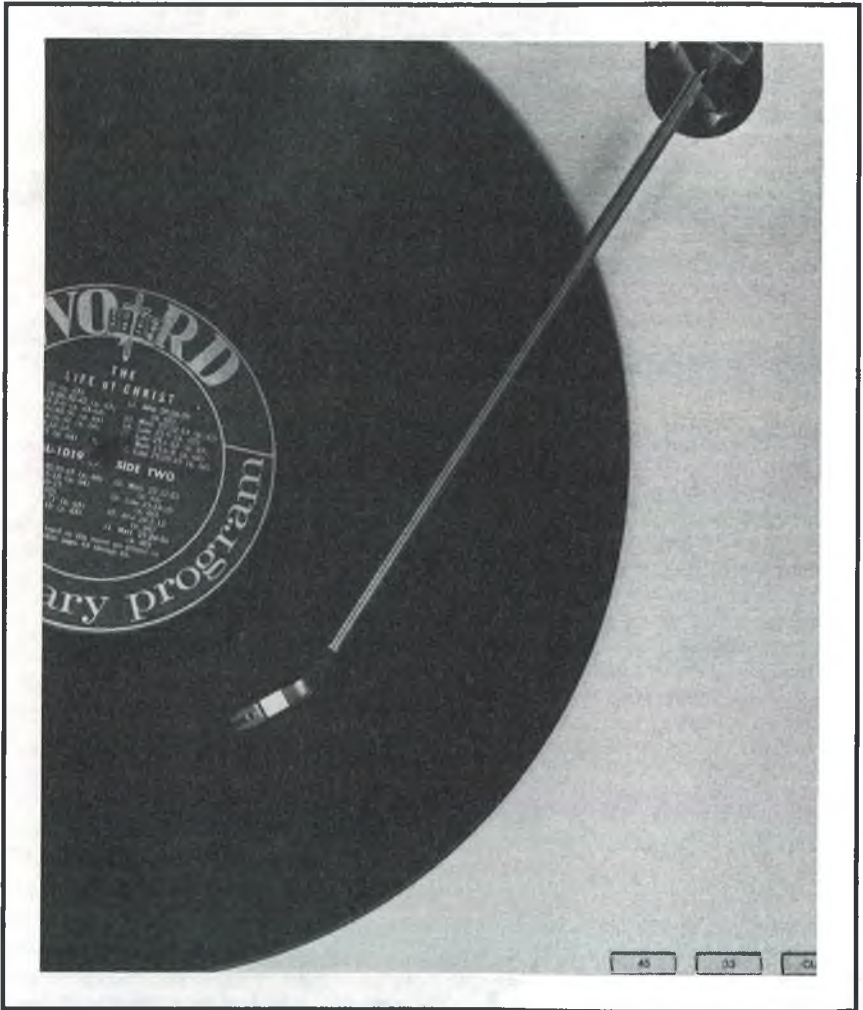
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An award-winning writer, Sheldon Vanauken teaches Greek civilization and English history at Lynchburg College in Virginia.

Friday, October 11 25

# Lest We Forget . . .

“I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have” (2 Peter 1:12, NIV).





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# Help For Each New Challenge

by Edward Earl Cleveland

## INTRO- DUCTION

**This Week's Scripture:**

**2 Peter 1:12-15**

Security against skepticism and the erosion of faith is of primary importance to the Christian. In the wisdom of God, we are not shielded from the recurrence of heretical teachings. Traumatic as these experiences are, they are a necessary testing of the Christian's mettle. Turbulence, both doctrinal and otherwise, has plagued the body of Christ from its inception. The preservation of our hope in Christ and faith in his way is, therefore, of the highest priority.

Some complain when the principles of Christianity are presented over and over again. They are constantly searching for something new and startling. But what Christianity offers is not a new formula for every day, but fresh meaning and help for each new challenge. For instance, the story of the three Hebrew worthies (Daniel 3) offers a strong statement on the separation of church and state. It also makes a powerful statement on the sufficiency of conviction. An endless variety of life-sustaining conclusions can be drawn from all portions of Scripture.

And we are, of course, fortunate that the literature that feeds the human spirit comes to us firsthand. Men who had contact with Christ "in the flesh," who were "eye witnesses" of his glory, have spoken to us of his grace. The dramatic changes in their lives testify to the effectiveness of Christ's ministry. Peter, Thomas, Paul, James, and John enjoyed fundamental changes in life-style through contact with him.

There are those who seem to get "gospel-hardened" by continual exposure to Christian teaching. But the apostle's excitement is contagious. He speaks of "stirring you up" and "putting you in remembrance" (2 Peter 1:13). Oft repeated truth has not desensitized him. Rather, it has alerted him to reality.

That false teachers would arise is no surprise when one considers the importance of the messages given by the apostles. The devil has always managed to counterfeit the genuine. That documents are available to us provided by the Holy Ghost through holy men of God staggers the mind. And to them we have unlimited access!

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Edward Earl Cleveland is the director of the department of church missions and an instructor in religion at Oakwood College.

Sunday, October 13 27

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# Keeping Fresh the Memory of Faith

**LOGOS** Theme: We need frequent re-presentations of the truths of Christianity in order to maintain and strengthen our grasp of the faith.

## 1. Established in the Truth

*"So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me" (2 Peter 1:12-14, NIV).*

Close human relationships cannot thrive without memory. Knowledge, trust, and love can be built up in relationships only as the memory of each person about the interaction that has taken place in the past and about the characteristics of the other is kept strong and vivid. Memory is likewise essential in a relationship with Christ. The relationship stays vital and progressive only as our memory about the truth we have learned about Christ and the interaction we've had with him in the past is kept fresh through reminders.

A primary purpose of Christian preaching is thus memory activation. We are called to act on the basis of what we already know—that which may have lain dormant, or have been suppressed, or the significance of which we had not fully seen.

For Peter, reminder was central to the pastoral mission Jesus had given him prior to his denial of the Lord: "When you have come to yourself, you must lend strength to your brothers" (Luke 22:32, NEB). Peter had carried out that mission. His readers were already "established" (v. 12; the same Greek root word is used here as in the Luke passage). But they could only stay established, and progress, by continual reminder.

Jesus had foretold that Peter would die a violent death (John 21:18, 19), and as he wrote Peter apparently sensed the imminence of that death, declaring that he would soon "put aside" the "tent of this body" (vv. 13, 14). This figure of speech for death "comes from the journeyings of the patriarchs in the Old Testament. They had no abiding residence, but lived in tents because they knew they were on the way to the Promised Land. The Christian knows well that his life in this world is not a permanent residence but a journey towards the world beyond. We get the same idea in v. 15. There Peter speaks of his approaching death as his *exodos*, his departure. *Exodos* is, of course, the word which is used for the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, and their setting out to the Promised Land. Peter sees death, not as the end but as the going out in the Promised Land of God."<sup>1</sup> There is no suggestion here of an immortal soul leaving the mortal tent of the body, as a second century Christian writer puts it. Rather Peter looks forward to exchanging an imperfect, mortal body for a perfect, immortal one at the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50-53).

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*Is it ever desirable to "purge" part of one's spiritual "memory"? Is it even possible to do that?*

## **2. Memory Insurance**

*"And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things" (1:15, NIV).*

Peter wanted to insure that the work he had given his life to did not come to nothing after his death, because of a lack of resources for keeping fresh the spiritual memory of the Christian community. Some commentators speculate that Peter might be referring here to the Gospel of Mark, which according to tradition is based on Peter's firsthand witness to Jesus' life.<sup>2</sup> Others, pointing out that this is an uncertain tradition, and that the "these things" of v. 15 refers to what has gone before in 2 Peter, maintain that it is 2 Peter itself which is Peter's effort to keep memory alive.<sup>3</sup> Others believe that Peter is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit who, Jesus said, "will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26, NIV).<sup>4</sup>

*It is the natural human tendency to become bored by hearing the same thing over and over. How can this be avoided when it comes to continual reminders of gospel truth?*

D.F.M.

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1. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 308.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 308, 309.

3. J.N.D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 314, 315.

4. Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude*, p. 155.

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# An Invitation to Remember

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
1 Corinthians  
10:11, 12

Forgetting runs high risks. Missed term-paper deadlines, forgotten interviews and appointments, names or figures that have slipped ones' mind are minute examples of this. But broaden the scale to include forgetting or ignoring how the attitudes, actions, and social currents in the past have shaped history, and the results can be devastating. So from the minute to the large scale remembering is important. Recognizing this, Peter writes to remind of the importance of living godly lives so as "you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom" (2 Peter 1:10, 11, RSV).

It is in the same attitude that Ellen White writes,

"All who profess to be children of God I would invite to consider the history of the Israelites, as recorded in the one hundred and fifth, the one hundred and sixth, and the one hundred and seventh psalms. By carefully studying these scriptures, we may be able to appreciate more fully the goodness, mercy, and love of our God. . . .

"Remember His marvelous works that He hath done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.' (Psalm 105:5, A.R.V.). . . .

"We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt;' (Psalm 106:6, 7, A.R.V.). . . .

"They soon forgot His words; They waited not for His counsel, (Psalm 106:13, A.R.V.). . . .

"Why did ancient Israel so easily forget God's dealings? The people did not retain in their memory His works of greatness and power or His words of warning. Had they remembered His wondrous dealings with them they would not have received the reproof: . . .

"Therefore as the tongue of fire devoureth the stubble, and as the dry grass sinketh down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 5:24, A.R.V.).

"Cannot we who are living in the time of the end realize the importance of the apostle's words: 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God?' (Hebrews 3:12).

"Upon us is shining the accumulated light of past ages. The record of Israel's forgetfulness has been preserved for our enlightenment. In this age God has set His hand to gather unto Himself a people from every nation, kindred, and tongue. In the advent movement He has wrought for His heritage, even as He wrought for the Israelites in leading them from Egypt. In the great disappointment of 1844 the faith of His people was tested as was that of the Hebrews at the Red Sea. Had the Adventists in the early days still trusted to the guiding Hand that had been with them, they would have seen the Salvation of God. If all who had labored unitedly in the work of 1844 had received the third angel's message and proclaimed it in the power of the Holy Spirit the Lord would have wrought mightily with

"The record of Israel's forgetfulness has been preserved for our enlightenment."



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their efforts. A flood of light would have been shed upon the world. Years ago the inhabitants of the earth would have been warned, the closing work would have been completed, and Christ would have come for the redemption of His people.”<sup>1</sup>

“In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.

“We are debtors to God to use every advantage He has entrusted to us to beautify the truth by holiness of character, and to send the messages of warning, and of comfort, of hope and love, to those who are in the darkness of error and sin.”<sup>2</sup>

### **REACT**

What particular evidences of God’s leading in the past are most significant to you?

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1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 107, 109, 110, 113-116.  
2. *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196.

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# A Renewable Gospel

by Clifford S. Pitt

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 17:21

Learning research demonstrates that repetition aids recall. It has been shown that we rarely forget what we have experienced and that the right stimuli will trigger memories from earliest childhood. It is possible that we never actually forget anything in the sense that nothing is ever erased from the mind. What we call our loss of memory is, instead, an inability to recall. This is why we may remember something tomorrow, that we just cannot recall today. Recall may be triggered through association with what we see, hear or discern through any of the other senses. But as research shows, the power of recall is always greatest when the learned experiences of data have been repeated frequently.

It was his awareness of this fact that prompted the apostle Peter to tell the believers that he was repeating facts to them that they already knew (2 Peter 1:12) and that he was going to ensure that they had this repetition even after his death.

It is human nature to be bored with constant repetition of the same facts. Paul found this to be so among the people of Athens, "For all the Athenians, and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21). There is potency in novelty. It grabs the attention, excites the imagination and elicits action, but when the "honeymoon" is over interest lags and people move on in search of new excitement. Peter was doing battle with this quirk of human nature.

His motive was "to stir you up by putting you in remembrance" (2 Peter 1:13). The believers were "established in the present truth" (v. 12), but if they were not to be "barren or unfruitful" (v. 8) they had to be reminded of the "exceeding great and precious promises" in God's Word. Without reminders, a Christian could forget "that he was purged from his old sins" (v. 9) and settle into Laodicean blindness while maintaining that he was "rich and increased with goods."

It is of the genius of the gospel that it can apply itself with newness to every age. The gospel has never been out of date because it answers to a problem which has existed since the beginning of time—the problem of sin and guilt. As long as sin remains and guilt oppresses the conscience, so long will the good news of salvation be welcome news to sin-sick souls and so long will it stand in need of repetition.

## REACT

What are the implications of 2 Peter 1:12-15 for Christian preaching and teaching?

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Clifford S. Pitt is an assistant professor of theology at Oakwood College.

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# Exercising Faith

by John A. Blake

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**Hebrews 10:25**

When we exercise faith in practical ways, we experience the blessings of God more fully and as a result our faith is continued, we grow spiritually, and we become more steadfast in Christ. On the other hand, when we fail to exercise faith, we miss out on many of the marvelous blessings God offers, and consequently the desire for continued growth and trust becomes almost nonexistent. Some Christian duties which can strengthen our faith and make our grasp on Christ firm are:

1. **Tithe-paying.** Malachi 3:10 reminds us to bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food enough in God's Temple. If we do so, the Lord has promised to pour out blessings on us so great that we would not have room enough to take it in. All we need to do is try him. Not only is the practice of tithe-paying the right thing to do, but the returns are so great, both spiritually and materially, that we dare not doubt the promises of God.

2. **Sabbath Observance.** The Sabbath, when properly observed, allows us rest and time to acquaint ourselves with God and establish trust in him. Nature reveals the power of God's word; "For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at His command!" (Ps. 33:9, Living Bible). In the quietude of the Sabbath we can observe the mystery of life: the growing beanstalk as it winds its way upward to the light; the tender roots as they penetrate the rocky soil; the varied and unique forms of flowers. These things do not just happen. All these and more help us to reaffirm our faith in a God in control.

3. **Reading the Bible.** Studying the lives of great people of Bible times reinforces the righteous character of God in us. People like David who communed with God through nature and gained strength of mind and firmness of principle, Daniel whose allegiance to God was steadfast through every circumstance, and Moses who seemed always to stand in God's presence, are a few examples of men whose lives were formed under divine direction. Their experiences and accomplishments are a source of strength and encouragement for us to strive to perfect our characters.

4. **Church Attendance.** Note the following exhortation to steadfastness: "Let us not neglect our church meetings as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of His coming back again is drawing near" (Heb. 10:25, Living Bible). By regular interaction with others of like persuasion each Sabbath we help strengthen each other's faith in Christ. However, when we merely attend church and do not engage in the organized activities, we can become complacent and lose our hold on Christ.

## REACT

1. In view of Malachi 3:10, 11 is it proper to view tithe-paying as an investment that cannot fail? Can church attendance and Sabbath-keeping also be viewed as investments?

2. In what other ways other than the ones listed above might we exercise faith in practical ways?

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John A. Blake is the chairman of the department of mathematics at Oakwood College.

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# Remembering Through Scripture

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## OPINION

Key text:  
1 Chronicles  
16:7-12

Because the Scripture is a *corpus*, a living whole, the so-called *lectio continua* or consecutive reading must be adopted for Scripture reading in the family fellowship. Historical books, prophets, Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation are read and heard as God's Word in their context. They set the listening fellowship in the midst of the wonderful world of revelation of the people of Israel with its prophets, judges, kings, and priests, its wars, festivals, sacrifices, and sufferings. The fellowship of believers is woven into the Christmas story, the baptism, the miracles and teaching, the suffering, dying, and rising again of Jesus Christ. It participates in the very events that occurred on this earth for the salvation of the world, and in doing so receives salvation in Jesus Christ.

Consecutive reading of Biblical books forces everyone who wants to hear to put himself, or to allow himself to be found, where God has acted once and for all for the salvation of men. We become a part of what once took place for our salvation. Forgetting and losing ourselves, we too, pass through the Red Sea, through the desert, across the Jordan into the promised land. With Israel we fall into doubt and unbelief and through punishment and repentance experience again God's help and faithfulness. All this is not mere reverie but holy, godly reality. We are torn out of our own existence and set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth. There God dealt with us, and there He still deals with us, our needs and our sins, in judgment and grace. It is not that God is the spectator and sharer of our present life, howsoever important that is; but rather that we are the reverent listeners and participants in God's action in the sacred story, the history of the Christ on earth. And only in so far as we are *there*, is God with us today also.

A complete reversal occurs. It is not in our life that God's help and presence must still be proved, but rather God's presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, to His son Jesus Christ, than to seek what God intends for us today. The fact that I shall die, and the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, shall be raised on the Last Day. Our salvation is "external to ourselves." I find no salvation in my life history, but only in the history of Jesus Christ. Only he who allows himself to be found in Jesus Christ, in his incarnation, his Cross, and resurrection, is with God and God with him.

In this light the whole devotional reading of the Scriptures becomes daily more meaningful and salutary. What we call our life, our troubles, our guilt, is by no means all of reality; there in the Scriptures is our life, our need, our guilt, and our salvation. Because it pleased God to act for us there, it is only there that we shall be saved. Only in the Holy Scriptures do we learn to know our own history. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God and Father of Jesus Christ and our Father.

We must learn to know the Scriptures again, as the Reformers

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed in a Nazi prison camp in 1945, was one of this century's leading Protestant theologians.

"I find no salvation in my life history, but only in the history of Jesus Christ."



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and our fathers knew them. We must not grudge the time and the work that it takes. We must know the Scriptures first and foremost for the sake of our salvation. But besides this, there are ample reasons that make this requirement exceedingly urgent. How, for example, shall we ever attain certainty and confidence in our personal and church activity if we do not stand on solid Biblical ground? It is not our heart that determines our course, but God's Word. But who in this day has any proper understanding of the need for scriptural proof? How often we hear innumerable arguments "from life" and "from experience" put forward as the basis for most crucial decisions, but the argument of Scripture is missing. And this authority would perhaps point in exactly the opposite direction. It is not surprising, of course, that the person who attempts to cast discredit upon their wisdom should be the one who himself does not seriously read, know, and study the Scriptures. But one who will not learn to handle the Bible for himself is not an evangelical Christian.

**"How shall we ever attain certainty and confidence if we do not stand on solid Biblical ground?"**

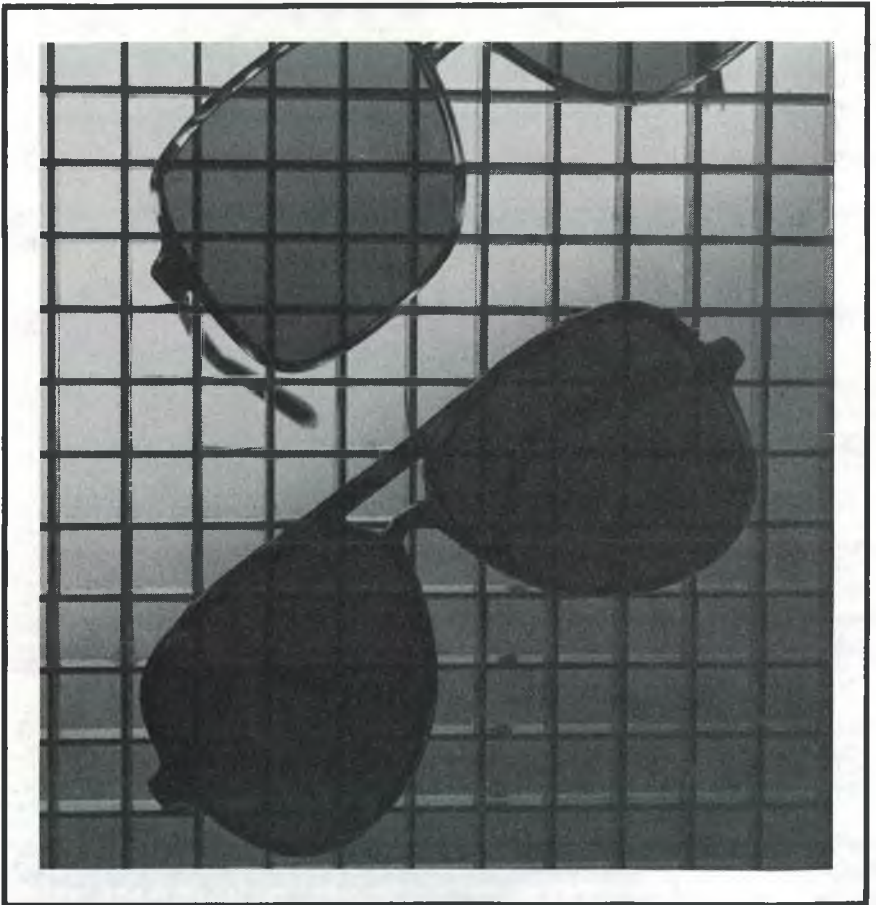
### **REACT**

Is there a distinction between the way God has acted in biblical history and the way he has acted in our own lives and the history of our church? Do you agree with Bonhoeffer that the former is more important than the latter?

Excerpted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, copyright © 1954 by Harper and Row Publishers, Inc. Used with permission from Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., pp. 53-55.

# Truth From an Eyewitness

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, NIV).



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# The Word of a Witness

by Benjamin Reaves

**This Week's Scripture:**  
**2 Peter 1:16-18**

The voice of the announcer, herself a gymnast, bubbled with excitement as she described what had taken place. How the slight body—five feet, 86 pounds—like a supple sliver of steel reeled off thrilling flips and twists with apparent ease. Even if the commentary had been in a foreign language, there would have been no mistaking the excitement and enthusiasm in the announcer's voice. Breathlessly she described the incomparable feat of the 14-year-old Romanian gymnast who dazzled the 1976 Summer Olympic games in Montreal, Canada—winning three gold medals as well as a silver and a bronze and, more incredible, scoring perfect "10's" in seven exercises, a feat previously unheard of in Olympic gymnastic competition. The commentator's statement that Nadia Comaneci was the greatest female gymnast in the world conveyed unmistakable conviction, an irresistible enthusiasm and an undeniable authority that impressed the hearer. An authority, enthusiasm and conviction grounded on what the commentator had just personally witnessed. A spectacle so thrilling

she couldn't stop talking about it.

The apostle Peter was keenly conscious of the need to stir the dying embers of belief about the second coming of Christ in the experiences of his hearers. Victims of materialistic idolatry and the errant philosophies of false teachers, they needed encouragement. He provided that encouragement by reference to his own personal experience. He sought to convince them anew of the promised second coming, pointing out to them that he was an eyewitness as well as an eyewitness to the majesty of Christ. He lifted up his ultimate authority and proof that Jesus would return with the words, "We were eyewitnesses. . . . We heard. . . . We were with him." Even in the written words overlaid with the dust of time and translation there filters through to us the incredible excitement that gripped the apostles as they witnessed the unbelievable event of the transfiguration. And event that established the majesty of the Master. A spectacle so thrilling they could not stop talking about it. The power, authority and enthusiasm of their eyewitness testimony could not be denied.

## INTRO- DUCTION

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Benjamin Reaves is chairman of the department of theology at Oakwood College.

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# The Majestic Witness

**LOGOS** **Theme:** The apostles' proclamation of the power and coming of Jesus Christ was based on their personal, concrete experience with him in history. A dramatic high point of this experience was their eyewitness to his transfiguration.

## 1. Not a Product of the Imagination

*"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . ." (2 Peter 1:16a, NIV).*

"Christianity according to Peter is a real and genuine religion. Lofty as may be its claims it does not rest upon the creations of men's imaginations but upon something solid and substantial. It is not the product of such arbitrary and wishful speculation as characterized so much of the religious mythology of Peter's day or of ours. Nor is it a fanciful embellishment of a simple historical fact into a mountain of fabulous theories about the future."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Attested by an Anticipatory Sign

*"But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain" (2 Peter 1:16b-18, NIV).*

"The message of Christ's return in power . . . is . . . a revealed truth, attested for the reader by Peter's own experience with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8 and parallels). At that time God himself expressly declared Jesus to be his Son, his Beloved One, vs. 17. By attributing to Jesus these well-known messianic titles [Psalm 2:7; Isa. 5:1; 42:1] God has affirmed that Jesus is the possessor of the greatest power and glory. When Peter, James, and John were with Jesus on the mount and witnessed the master's transfiguration, vs. 18, they themselves heard the heavenly voice delivering this message from God. Jesus' transfiguration must in turn be understood as an anticipatory sign of his coming glory. So the belief in Jesus' return in power and glory rests on attested historical events."<sup>2</sup>

*Why do you think Peter chose the transfiguration rather than the resurrection as his primary evidence for the truth of the gospel's claims about Christ? Does Matthew 16:28 suggest anything in this regard?*

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The Interpreter's Bible,  
vol. XII, pp. 183, 184.  
Bo Reicke, *The Epistles  
of James, Peter, and  
Jude*, (Anchor Bible), pp.  
156, 157.



# They Saw Jesus Only

by Philip Nixon

## TESTIMONY

Key Text:  
Matthew 17:18

Peter had lived with Jesus for years. He had observed the Master during the best of times, when receiving praises from the multitude, and the worst of times, when ridicule and doubt were cast on his mission. Peter saw the Saviour heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils and calm a stormy sea. But in writing 2 Peter, the apostle chose the transfiguration as the main support for his belief in the power and coming of Jesus Christ.

It was Christ's prayer on the mount of transfiguration, that his disciples might see him in his glory; that they might witness his transfiguration and thus be strengthened. "The burden of His [Jesus'] prayer is that . . . His kingdom may be revealed to human eyes, and that His disciples may be strengthened to behold it. He pleads that they may witness a manifestation of His divinity that will comfort them in the hour of His supreme agony with the knowledge that He is of a surety the Son of God and that His shameful death is a part of the plan of redemption."<sup>1</sup>

Though unable to understand the full significance of the transfiguration at the time, Peter had been given a glimpse of the kingdom of God. "Upon the mount the future kingdom of glory was represented in miniature—Christ the King, Moses a representative of the risen saints, and Elijah of the translated ones."<sup>2</sup>

The event of the transfiguration did much to change the attitude of Peter and the other disciples. "They were given a clearer insight into the work of the Redeemer. They saw with their eyes and heard with their ears things that were beyond the comprehension of man. They were 'eyewitnesses of His majesty' (2 Peter 1:16), and they realized that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, to whom patriarchs and prophets had witnessed, and that He was recognized as such by the heavenly universe."<sup>3</sup>

The people of God today can experience the same transforming power as did the disciples centuries ago. "Of the disciples after the transfiguration of Christ, it is written that at the close of that wonderful scene, 'they saw no man, save Jesus only' (Matt. 17:8). 'Jesus only'—in these words is contained the secret of the life and power that marked the history of the early church."<sup>4</sup> May the message of 2 Peter 1:16-18 lead us, also, to see "no man save Jesus only."

" 'Jesus only'—  
the secret of the  
life and power  
that marked the  
early church."

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 420, 421.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 422.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 425.  
4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 64.

Philip Nixon is a 1984 graduate of Oakwood College with a B.A. degree in English and religion.

# The Testimony of Two Witnesses

by Emerson A. Cooper

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
1 John 1:1, 2

Alarmed by emerging heresies, the apostle Peter had a burning desire for his fellow believers not only to remember the truth which they believed and loved, but also to be certain about its validity. No doubt Peter was aware of some of the various mythologies that were prevalent in his day and wanted to reassure his flock that the gospel wasn't just another religious fable. As an eyewitness of the transfiguration, he could speak with absolute certainty about the eternal verities of the gospel of Christ.

There is nothing more convincing than the testimony of an eyewitness that can be supported by the testimony of another eyewitness. Here is the basis for the certainty that is one of the hallmarks of the Christian faith. In fact, it is this element of certainty that is one of the principle differences between science and religion. As Andrade puts it: "Science has proof but no certainty; religion has certainty but no proof."<sup>1</sup>

A classic example of uncertainty in science is the Principle of Uncertainty which asserts that "it is absolutely and forever impossible to determine the position and the velocity of an electron at the same time—to state confidently that an electron is 'right here at this spot' and is moving at 'such and such a speed.'"<sup>2</sup>

"Science has proof but no certainty; religion has certainty but no proof."

Virtually every measurement in science is accompanied by an error or degree of uncertainty. To emphasize this fact, the last digit in a measurement is often referred to as the digit of uncertainty.

In contrast to the uncertainty in science, the affirmations of the apostle Peter in this week's passage are bold, unequivocal, and have the ring of surety. This same attitude can be seen in his earlier statements recorded in the gospels, such as the following: ". . . Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68, 69).

The apostle John, who was also an eyewitness of the transfiguration (Matt. 16:28-17:9), is just as bold and unequivocal in affirming the eternal Lordship and Sonship of Jesus Christ. Notice how in addition to visual and aural evidence, he adds tactile evidence: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)" (1 John 1:1-2). Here we have convincing truth—the testimony of one eyewitness being corroborated by the testimony of another eyewitness.

## REACT

Which of the following terms best describes to you what the eyewitness reports of the apostles constitute in regard to establishing the truth of Christianity: proof, certainty, evidence, testimony, theological explanation?

1. John Read, "Science, Literature, and Human Thought", *Journal of Chemical Education* (March 1960), p. 116.  
2. Lincoln Barnett, *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, p. 27.

Emerson A. Cooper is a professor of chemistry at Oakwood College.

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# The Significance of a Spectacular Event

by Ursula Benn

The transfiguration was certainly one of the most spectacular events in the lives of Peter, James and John. But what is the significance of this ancient happening for us?

**1. It is an important part of the basis for our hope in Christ's second coming.** Just preceding the gospel account of the transfiguration we find Jesus' prediction that "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1, NIV). Peter, James and John were then granted a view of the "kingdom of God in miniature" to bolster their assurance that one day the kingdom would come in its fullness, with Jesus of Nazareth at its center as the reigning sovereign.

As Adventists, we too hold to the hope that we will see the kingdom of God coming with "power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). This hope is not vague, sentimental, wishful thinking. It is based on the inspired witness of those who were given a tangible preview of the kingdom at the transfiguration.

**2. It strengthens our confidence that we can be included in the kingdom.** If Moses and Elijah had been paragons of perfection, we might conclude that the kingdom pictured in the transfiguration is out of reach for the ordinary person struggling with sin. But we remember that Moses rashly took the life of another, put up long resistance to the call of God, and finally, near the end of a long life of being sanctified, flew off the handle in public and appropriated to himself the credit that rightly belonged to God for bringing water out of the rock. And we remember that Elijah, immediately after his heroic stand for God on Mt. Carmel, somehow lost all faith when confronted with the wrath of Jezebel.

If these men who stood with Jesus representing those who would be saved in the kingdom were flawed and inconsistent, then there is hope for us too.

**3. It challenges us to be sensitive to the voice of God.** The transfiguration reminds us that God sometimes communicates with us in unexpected ways. He drew both Moses and Elijah to Mt. Horeb in the desert, there speaking to Moses through a burning bush and to Elijah through a still small voice. He drew Peter, James and John to another mountain and spoke to them in a voice from heaven. But would any of them have been able to recognize that voice had they not been attuned to it through an ongoing relationship with God? After all, it might have just been the whisper of the wind or a clap of thunder. We need regular periods of concentration on God away from the cacophony with which the world surrounds us, in order to cultivate the ability to discern his communication to us.

## REACT

Few of us receive dramatic audio-visual revelations from God like the disciples did at the transfiguration. Does God speak directly to modern Christians? If so, how?

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Ursula Benn is an assistant professor of Spanish at Oakwood College.

**HOW TO**

**Key Text:**

**1 Kings 19:11-13**

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# The Invisible Gardener

## OPINION

Key Text:  
John 1:14

Finding an adequate basis for belief in the God of the Bible is a continual challenge for thoughtful believers and honest searchers for truth. The difficulty in establishing a basis for belief that is convincing to all or even most observers is illustrated in the following well-known parable by the philosophers John Wisdom and Anthony Flew.

"Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, 'Some gardener must tend this plot.' The other disagrees, 'There is no gardener.' So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. 'But perhaps he is an invisible gardener.' So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. 'But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves.' At last the Skeptic despairs, 'But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?'<sup>1</sup>

"Have the arguments of David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, etc., really been irrefutably answered?"

On what can we base our belief in a cosmic gardener? If we turn to nature, we find incredible design and beauty that suggest a good, powerful and wise Creator. But what does the fact that suffering, death, predation and parasitism are intrinsic to the planet's life systems suggest?

If we turn to philosophy, we find impressive support from the likes of Anselm, William Paley, and C. S. Lewis. These thinkers with faith see logical proof for the Gardener. But have the contrary arguments of David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, etc., really been irrefutably answered?

If we turn to human experience, we do find transformed lives and answered prayer. But what about those for whom God is silent? What about the victims of cancer, child abuse and drunk drivers? What about Auschwitz, the Gulag and Ethiopia?

For me, the arguments from nature, reason and experience, while helpful, do not form a satisfying basis for belief because they are subject to so many objections. Rather, I think the strongest basis for belief is the astounding witness of the New Testament writers that the Gardener has in fact entered the garden and has been seen, heard and touched. This concrete, historical entrance was made in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The witness itself is not proof. But for me it is the starting point



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for faith, because as C. S. Lewis has argued in a somewhat different way, it compels one to choose from one of three options.

a) The apostles were lying—the witness, despite Peter's denial, is in fact a "cleverly invented story" and the apostles knew it.

b) the apostles were deluded—they really thought they were telling the truth but they were deceived or insane.

c) The apostles were telling the truth.

I choose "c."

D. F. M.

### REACT

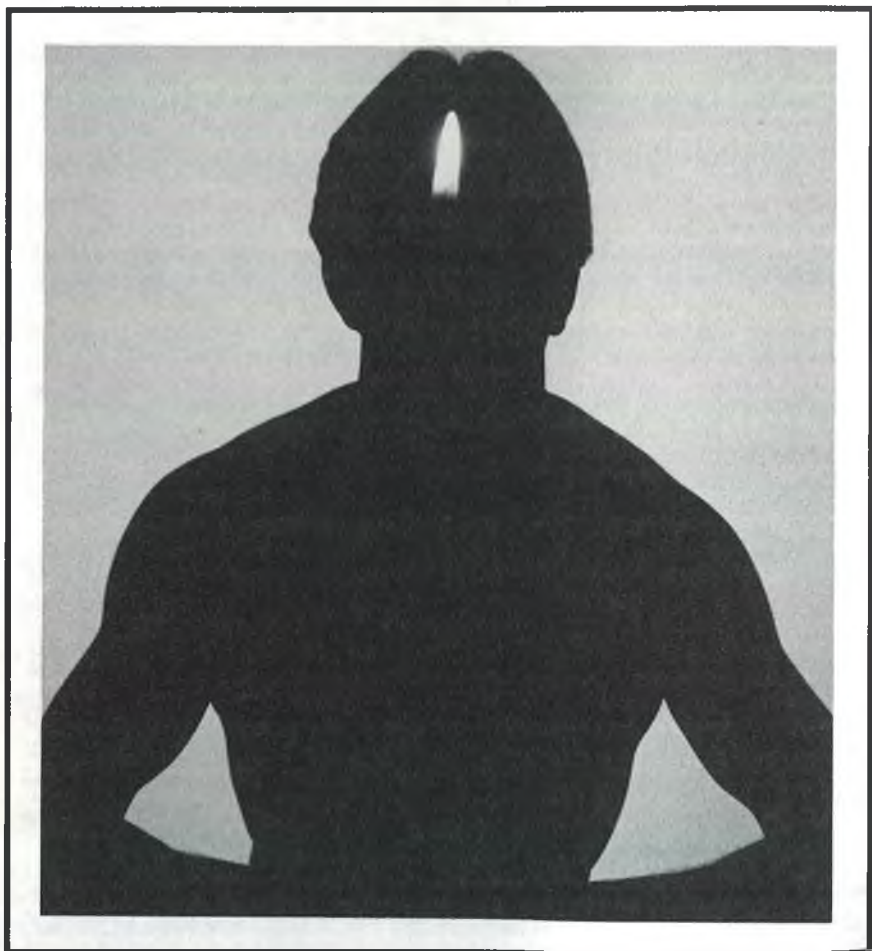
Does philosophical and/or historical evidence provide an adequate basis for belief in God? Or is evidence in one's personal experience valid? (See Opinion, Part I in Lesson 2.)

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1. Cited in John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *Christianity for the Tough-minded*, p. 30.

# The Light Made More Certain

“It was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God” (2 Peter 1:21, NEB).



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# Emotion of Discovery

by Douglas Jones

## This Week's Scripture:

2 Peter 1:19-21

As a child, I spent three or four days early each May in a little-travelled corner of Oregon—the Malheur bird refuge south of the town of Burns. While my family always counted on seeing 30 or 40 species of birds in the valley's marshes and rimrocks, I spent my time at Malheur looking for Indian arrowheads—finely honed points of obsidian. I spent hours with my head down, shuffling along edges of dry alkali flats that had once been filled with waterfowl. I imagined Nez Perce boys crouching in the sagebrush pulling their rawhide bows taut, arrows poised, bufflehead ducks blinking into a silvery dawn.

I'd move on, slapping my leather-laced hiking boots into the dust, looking for arrowheads—the biggest point, the most perfect, the shiniest.

One grey morning I'd just about given up, but where the sandy alkali began to slope up toward the edge of the flat I saw a promising-looking piece of obsidian. It didn't

glint in the sun; it was rubbly, dust-covered, and gritty. It looked like just another chip-ping, but I reached for it any way.

And that's when the cold feeling hit the back of my neck. My breath stopped as my stomach roiled in discovery. I couldn't get my fingers around the obsidian fast enough. An Indian spear point! I felt its rough-sharp edges as the black obsidian filled my fist. My senses churned with discovery, and I stroked the point, rubbing away the dry alkali mud from its tiny, glassy facets. "I don't believe it. I don't believe it," I breathed. Then I called, into the wind, "Hey, Mom, hey, Dad, you're not going to believe what I just found!"

Imagine the overwhelming force of discovering for the first time one of God's special messages to his people on earth. Put yourself in the shoes of the men and women ages ago who were entrusted with glistening truths from heaven. Feel the roil of emotion as the day star rises in your heart.

## INTRO- DUCTION

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Douglas Jones is an assistant professor of English at Andrews University.

Sunday, October 27 45

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# The Prophetic Light

**LOGOS**     **Theme:** The prophetic message found in Scripture came through inspiration from God. It is confirmed in Jesus Christ and gives us reliable guidance until his return.

## 1. The Word of the Prophets

*"And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it . . ." (2 Peter 1:19, NIV).*

Peter, after relating his eyewitness account of the transfiguration now goes to the Old Testament to further validate the teachings he expressed in vv. 3-11. This verse has been understood in two different ways. "Does it mean that the scriptures confirm the apostolic witness. . . Or does it mean that the apostolic witness fulfills, and thus authenticates, scriptures. . . ?"<sup>1</sup> The KJV translation of the verse, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy," would favor the first understanding. It suggests that we should see prophecy as an even more reliable basis for belief than the eyewitness account of the transfiguration. However, most commentators prefer the second alternative, saying that the voice at the transfiguration makes the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus Christ even more certain. This view is reflected in most modern translations.

We are urged to "pay attention" to Scripture which Peter compares to a light, that shows us our way in the dark sinful world so that we can walk safely. We are encouraged to follow this light "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

The dawning day is "Christ's Parousia [second coming] which will dissipate the darkness of the present age just as the dawning day banishes night."<sup>2</sup> The morning star doubtless refers to Christ (see Rev. 2:28; 22:16) who through his Spirit "arises in our hearts," giving us inner confirmation of our hope, just as the morning star assures us that the dawn is soon to come. This text could also be understood in a different way. Since the rising in our hearts seems to be placed in the future, at the time when the day itself dawns, it could be that J. N. D. Kelly is correct in seeing this phrase as "a pictorial description of the way which, at His Coming, Christ will dissipate the doubt and uncertainty by which their [Christians'] hearts are meanwhile beclouded and fill them with marvelous illumination."<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Inspiration for Scripture (read 2 Peter 1:20, 21)

*" . . . men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1:21, NIV).*

There are two main ways of understanding this passage. The first understanding, suggested by the NIV translation, is that no prophecy arises from a prophet's own interpretation, but is given by God. The second, reflected in the New English Bible and Jerusalem Bible translations, is that no prophecy is to be understood by private interpretation but as the church interprets it as a body. The first view sees the issue as that of the prophet's understanding of his prophecy.

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The second views the issue as our interpretation of the words of the prophets.

The second view is prevalent among most commentators. False teachers are living proof of how Scripture can be misrepresented. The passage however shows that Scripture is neither given nor interpreted by man. The Spirit performs both functions. Only a Spirit-filled church can accurately interpret the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. However, there are some difficulties attached to this view. Grammatically this particular clause goes with the preceding paragraph not with the one following it. Peter in the preceding paragraph is discussing the authentication, not interpretation, of Scriptures. He is concerned with the origin and reliability of the Christian teachings which are discussed in v. 3-11. The argument in v. 20, 21 is a necessary conclusion to this preceding topic and paragraph. Peter is saying we can rely on Scripture because behind the human author is God. Men wrote as they were moved or "carried along" by the Holy Spirit. They did not create what they wrote but they were given thoughts by God.

So it seems that Peter is discussing the divine origin of Scripture not the nature of its proper interpretation. If interpretation was the subject under discussion, then v. 21 would be totally irrelevant. What Peter is interested in is that the authors were the tools used by God to bring the world his message.

The term "carried along" in v. 21 is a maritime metaphor, referring to a ship carried along by the wind. The Holy Spirit was the "wind" that filled the "sails" of these men, directing them in whatever way necessary. God did not override the different personalities, but cooperated with them while revealing himself through them. The writers were "moved" since their spirit was one of obedience to the guidance of the Spirit in writing down what he impressed upon them.<sup>4</sup>

1. *What does this passage mean for our understanding of how inspiration operates?*

2. *What are the implications of the two interpretations of verse 20:*

- a) *that prophets did not intrude their own interpretations into messages given them from God or*
- b) *that a community of believers are needed to accurately interpret prophecy rather than just an individual.*

P. H. H.

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1. Michael Green, *Second Epistle of Peter, Jude* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 18, p. 86).

2. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, p. 321.

3. Green, p. 323

4. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

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# Inspired Men, Inspiring Words

selected by Ellen Barbour

**TESTIMONY**  
**Key Text:**  
**2 Timothy 3:16**

The Scriptures were given to man, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations, as God in His providence saw fit to impress man at sundry times and diverse places. Men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. There is "first the bud, then the blossom, and next the fruit," "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." This is exactly what the Bible utterances are to us. . . .

The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of man. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes. . . .

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say that such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers. . . .

**"The writers of  
the Bible were  
God's penmen,  
not His pen."**

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human will; thus the utterances of the man are the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

God committed the preparation of his divinely inspired Word to finite man. The Word, arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them that, by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is our guide in the safe paths that lead to eternal life. God has inspired men to write that which will present the truth to us, which will attract, and which, if practiced, will enable the receiver to obtain moral power to rank among the most highly educated minds. The minds of all who make the Word of God their study will enlarge.<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

If the Bible is written in imperfect language and we read it with imperfect minds, is there any hope for interpreting God's message with certainty? What are the principles to guide us in this process?

1. Manuscript 24, 1886  
(*Selected Messages*,  
Book One, pp. 19-21).

2. Manuscript 16, 1888  
(*Selected Messages*,  
Book One, p. 16).

3. Youth's Instructor,  
October 13, 1898 (*Sons  
and Daughters of God*,  
p. 70).

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Ellen Barbour is a graduate student in English at Andrews University.

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# The Church Needs the Bible

by John R. W. Stott

The church's dependence on the Bible is manifold. Let me give you a number of examples.

**1. The Bible created the church.** Put this baldly, this statement could be misleading. It could even be dismissed as inaccurate. For it is true that the Old Testament church as the people of God existed for centuries before the Bible was complete. Furthermore, the New Testament church also existed for a long time before the New Testament canon was finalized, and longer still before the first Bible was printed for publication. Moreover, you may rightly say, the first-century church "shaped" the New Testament in the sense that the Christian community shared in determining in what form the words and works of Jesus would be preserved for posterity. The church was thus the milieu within which the Bible came to be written and treasured. I agree with all these qualifications. Nevertheless, I repeat, the Bible may be said to have created the church. Or, more accurately, the Word of God, which is now written in the Bible, created the church. For how did the Christian church come into being? Answer: By the preaching of the apostles, who spoke not in the name of the church, but in the name of Christ. . . .

God's Word (the combined witness of prophets and apostles), proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, created the church. It still does. The church is built on that foundation. And when the canon of the New Testament came to be determined, the church did not confer authority on these documents, but simply acknowledged the authority they already possessed. Why? Because they were "apostolic" and contained the teaching of the Lord's apostles. For these reasons, we may truthfully say that the Bible, that is, the Word of God now written in the Bible, created and creates the church.

**2. The Bible sustains the church.** The Creator always sustains what he has created, and since he has brought the church into being, he keeps it in being. Moreover, having created it by his Word, he sustains and nourishes it by his Word. If it is true, as Jesus said quoting Deuteronomy (Matt. 4:4; compare Deut. 8:3), that human beings live "not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," it is also true of churches. They cannot flourish without it. The church needs constantly to hear God's Word. Hence the central place of preaching in public worship. Preaching is not an intrusion into it, but rather indispensable to it. For the worship of God is always a response to the Word of God. . . .

**3. The Bible directs the church.** The Christian community is a pilgrim people on its way to an eternal home. It is traveling through territory that is barren, pathless, hostile and dark. It needs guidance for the way, and God has provided it. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105, NIV). I agree, of course, that what is called the hermeneutical task, that is, the task of interpreting the Scriptures, is difficult. We have to wrestle with the text, with both its meaning and its application, and do so in prayer, study and fellowship with each other.

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
2 Peter  
1:20, 21

"The worship of God is always a response to the Word of God."

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John R. W. Stott is the rector emeritus of All Souls Church in London and has written many books.

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Nevertheless, the principles we need to guide us are there in the Bible—theological and ethical principles—and together we can discover through the illumination of the Holy Spirit how to apply them to our lives in the contemporary world.

**4. The Bible reforms the church.** In every century, including our own, I am sorry to say, the church has deviated to some degree from God's truth and from his ethical standards. As Max Warren, the former missionary statesman, wrote in his book *I Believe in the Great Commission*, church history is "a bitter-sweet story" in which the most outstanding fact is the infinite patience of God with his people. If then the church is constantly deviant, how can it be reformed? Only by the Word of God. The greatest church renewal there has ever been in the history of the world was the sixteenth-century Reformation, and it was due, more than anything else, to a recovery of the Bible.

**5. The Bible unites the church.** Every Christian conscience should be troubled by the disunity of the church. I hope we have not grown accustomed to it or begun to acquiesce to it. The visible unity of the church, although we may not all agree what precise form it should take, is surely a proper goal of Christian endeavor.

What then is the basic reason for our continuing disunity? It is the lack of an agreed authority. So long as churches follow their own traditions and speculations, the universal church will continue to splinter. . . . Once churches confess the supreme authority of Scripture, however, and its sole sufficiency for salvation, and are determined to judge their traditions by its teaching, then at once the way is opened for them to find unity in truth. The Bible unites the church when the church submits to it.

**6. The Bible revives the church.** We long for revival, for that special, unusual, supernatural visitation by God, as a result of which the whole community becomes aware of his living and holy presence. Sinners are convicted, penitents converted, backsliders restored, enemies reconciled, believers transformed, and dead churches revived. But how does revival happen? Only, it is true, by a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit of God. But what means does the Holy Spirit use? He uses the Word. The Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" which he wields in his work in the world (Eph. 6:17; compare Heb. 4:12). Never separate the Spirit of God from the Word of God, for when the Holy Spirit uses this weapon in his sovereign power, he pricks the conscience, cuts out cancerous growths from the body of Christ and puts the devil to flight. It is the Bible that revives the church.

Are you convinced? I hope so. The church needs the Bible. The church depends on the Bible. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The Bible is indispensable to the church's life, growth, nature, direction, reformation, unity and renewal. The church cannot exist without the Bible.

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# The Morning Star

by Bob Goudzwaard

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**2 Peter 1:19**

Many Christians have lost hope and simply do not understand the essence of Christian hope. For many of us, hope comes only by the grace of a few tiny cracks in the wall which throw slivers of light on our bleak situation. That hope is then extinguished as one by one the cracks disappear and the darkness envelops us. But this is the opposite of Christian hope! Christian hope is a hope of contrast: it revives in the *middle of the night*, just when the darkness seems to overpower us.

The biblical image of hope is the morning star. The morning star often appears between two and three at night, when the darkness is complete and the faintest sign of morning is not yet visible. So small that it threatens to vanish, the star seems unable to vanquish the overpowering darkness. Yet when you see the morning star, you know that the night has been defeated. For the morning star pulls the morning in behind it, just as certainly as Jesus pulls the kingdom in behind him. "I am the morning star." These were Jesus' last words to us. They appear on the last page of every Bible.

How do we act on this image of hope? The example of Esther can help us here. F. Weinreb, a vilified Jewish scholar, has written an impressive book on the story of Esther under the title *I Who Am Hidden* (Friedrich Weinreb, *Ik Die Verborgen Ben*). The I who is hidden is the Lord of the Covenant. His name never appears in the book of Esther. Fate, not the Lord, seems to be center stage. The decision to eliminate the people of Israel was written in the unbreakable laws of the Medes and Persians and sealed by the emperor. The Lord seemed absent. But Esther's name means "morning star"! "Who knows," Esther's stepfather Mordecai said to her, "but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). So late on Passover morning, after the Jewish feasts had finished, and trembling with fear, Esther went to the king, who raised his scepter to her.

Esther's simple walk to the king was the turning point in Israel's story of fate. Miracles did not save Israel, at least not miracles as we understand them. But as a Father who works hiddenly, God linked his saving acts to the act of Esther, who in obedience put her own life in jeopardy. *That* act God blessed. That was the act which he, the Doer, waited for in hiding. "When Esther appears," writes Weinreb, "when Esther is seen in the darkness of exile, that is the sign of daybreak. Where God in his hiddenness can be delineated, there is the sign that the defeat of the night has come." (Weinreb, *Ik Die Verborgen Ben*, p. 89).

Living out of messianic hope is therefore different from just waiting passively. It requires that we leave our protective shelters behind and put our future, our prosperity, and if necessary our whole life in jeopardy for the sake of truth and justice. We must do this not because we ourselves are somehow able to dismantle today's demonic spirals and deified powers. Rather, we must do it because the Torah tells us that our acts of undistorted justice and

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unperverted love in the midst of powerful ideologies can be a sign to the living God to unite his saving acts to ours. Our acts can be a call for the mobilization of the forces of God's kingdom in a time of doom, just as Esther's act was centuries ago. Who knows whether the God who is hidden waits for just that? We do not need to know precisely how to take the first risky step or what the exact outcome of the spiritual battle will be. "Who knows?"—Mordecai said that too. Like us, he did not have a corner on wisdom. But we must take that first step.

Christian hope connects rather than disconnects us from the contemporary situation. Though the appeal to abandon our idols and deceitful ideologies is addressed to all of us, the nature and difficulty of the first step will differ according to our situation. . . . For one the cost of obeying the appeal will be his reputation, for another her political party or church, for a third his community, and for a fourth his or her life. But risking a first step is the only option for those who answer to the hope which lives within us.

Excerpted from *Idols of Our Time*, by Bob Goudzwaard, pp. 98-100. English translation © 1984 by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the USA and used by permission of InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 60515.

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# Tuned to Hear

by Roger Allison

## OPINION

Key Text:  
Isaiah 30:21

I remember reading, though I couldn't tell you where, of a story of an Indian and his urbanized friend walking along the busy street of a large city. Around them rushed the varied activity of the city, cars jamming up and honking furiously, machines humming industriously, people rushing here and there. Suddenly, mid-conversation, the Indian stopped talking, turned his head to one side, listened intently, then remarked, "There's a cricket in a window box three stories up on the other side of the street." Which, of course, amazed his city friend who could not understand the Indian's miraculous hearing ability.

This story, it seems to me, suggests two important points about what it means to be inspired. By definition, to be inspired means to be controlled or guided in some way. In our story the Indian's previous experiences—his life in the wilderness—guided his sensibilities so that he, unlike his urban counterpart, was tuned to the song of the cricket. Similarly, the urbanite probably heard sounds that might have gone unnoticed to the Indian's ears.

I've often wondered just how I differ from Bible prophets. I've been taught all my life that God communicates with me directly, either through his word or through prayer, and that sounds, at least to me, a lot like inspiration. And certainly no one would dispute my claim to be controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit, assuming I've done nothing to suggest otherwise. Can I not then say that I am inspired? Perhaps.

The question seems to be one of orientation, in part. Both the Indian and the urban friend were capable of hearing, but what they heard depended upon what they were used to hearing. Trained as he was to hear the quiet sounds of nature, only the Indian caught the cricket's chirp in the city din. And then, too, the Indian heard the cricket because he was listening for it; in a matter of speaking, he was tuned in to a certain sound so that when it came, he was ready to hear it.

So what two points does the story suggest? Simply this: Yes, God does communicate with all of his children, and perhaps with some who do not profess kinship; in that sense all of us are inspired. But through the ages, there have been those who, because they were, perhaps, more acutely tuned in to his voice, or because they were in the habit of listening more intently, have served as mouthpieces for an Infinite Spokesman.

## REACT

What is the difference between the "inspiration" of a Bach, a Luther or a Michelangelo and the inspiration of the Bible writers?

Is it possible for modern individuals to be as acutely tuned to the voice of God as the Bible writers?

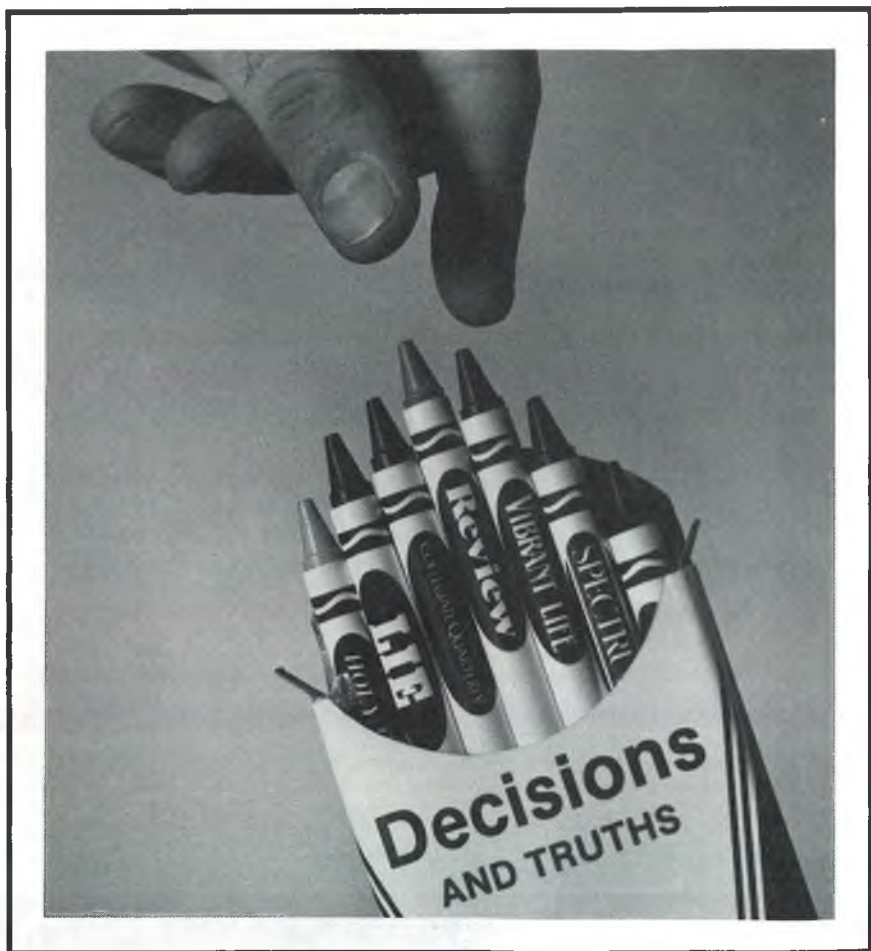
"But what they heard depended on what they were used to hearing."

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Roger Allison writes from Berrien Springs, Michigan.

# The Need for Discernment

“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you . . . discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you” (Proverbs 2:1, 11, RSV).





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# "Beauty"

by Claudia Tagliasacchi

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
2 Peter 2:1-9

The Rose  
Planted securely in the garden.  
Little weed, smiling, growing  
Taller as roots spread quickly  
Under the surface, tangling:  
Smiling.

"What beauty," says the rose, "what flower are you?"  
"Beauty," shrieks the weed, "Let me stay."  
"Surely," says the rose.  
Smiling.

Time, Growth  
Smiling, Trust  
Results.

The Rose  
The smile fades.  
She bends her head  
And coughs her last breath.  
"If I had only seen  
the weed . . ."  
Smiling.

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Claudia Tagliasacchi is a junior English major at Andrews University.

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# Beware of Exploiters!

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Christians should be on guard against those who distort the truths of the faith and use their influence in the church for exploitative purposes.

### 1. The Rise and Fall of Pseudo Teachers (read 2 Peter 2:1-3).

*"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves" (2:1, NIV).*

Having discussed the importance of the inspired prophets in 1:19-21, Peter now refers to the fact that in the Old Testament record there seems to be at least one false prophet for every true one. Thus, it is not surprising that false teachers would also arise in the Christian church, exhibiting the same characteristics as their Old Testament counterparts (see Jer. 6:13-15; 23:14, 32; Micah 3:11; Isa. 28:7). Peter here speaks of the false teachers in the future tense, but their emergence must already have been occurring, at least to a degree, for in v. 10b his description of them switches to the present tense.

The false teachers' *method* was to introduce their views subtly. They postured themselves as proponents of a new and improved brand of Christianity, rather than as outright opponents of the faith. But Peter labelled their teachings "destructive heresies." For the Greeks, the word translated heresy was a neutral term meaning simply a line of thought that an individual chose for himself among several alternatives. The New Testament writers, on the other hand, made truth-claims that demanded exclusive allegiance. Therefore for them any heresy—any philosophy or opinion asserted against the truth God had revealed—was necessarily something destructive, something to be opposed.<sup>1</sup>

The *motivation* of the false teachers was greed. They cynically exploited people's spiritual emotions and needs for financial gain. As Lenski puts it, "They have no concern for the sheep but only for shearing their wool."<sup>2</sup>

The unfortunate *effects* of the false teachers' irresponsible activity were the deception of many and some unjustified "bad press" for the Christian church.

The *fate* of the false teachers is pronounced unequivocally. The unusual figure of speech in v. 3 suggests that the judgment which has been pronounced against them and which will one day destroy them has somehow already been set into motion (compare v. 9).<sup>3</sup>

*Does exploitation of religious people still take place today? How can we guard against or counteract such exploitation?*

### 2. Assurance of Judgment and Deliverance (read 2 Peter 2:4-9).

*"The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold*

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*the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment" (2:9, NIV).*

In the Greek vv. 4-9 form one long, complex sentence with an "if-then" structure: A series of clauses introduced with "if" lead up to a "then"—the conclusion in v. 9. Three well-known examples are used to build up to the conclusion.

The Greek word for the "hell" to which God consigned the rebellious angels is Tartarus. In ancient Greek mythology, Tartarus was "the abode of the wicked dead and the place where punishment was meted out to them." In using this term with which readers in a Hellenistic environment would be familiar, Peter is not endorsing the Greek idea, but rather expressing the truth that God has the evil angels under restriction and slated for inevitable doom. Thus this passage does not support the idea of hell as a place of eternal torment for evil souls.

One might inquire how evil angels are able to exert their influence on earth when they have been shut up in "gloomy dungeons." But Peter is not concerned with giving a systematic explanation of how the unseen world operates. His point is that those who cause evil and suffering on earth are ultimately under God's control and that he deals decisively with them.

The two subsequent examples of the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are more familiar to us and require less comment. They further establish the dual conclusion of v. 9: (1) though the faithful experience trials, God's intervention is certain; and (2) the unfaithful not only face certain judgment at the end unless they turn back to God, they continually suffer from the consequences of their sins in the present.

*Peter speaks of Lot quite favorably. Are we perhaps generally too hard on Lot for his decision to move into Sodom?*

D.F.M.

1. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 316.
2. R. H. C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, p. 307.
3. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 329.

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# Safe From Delusion

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
2 Peter 2:1, 2

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20. The people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard against the influence of false teachers and the delusive power of spirits of darkness. Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions. At every revival of God's work the prince of evil is aroused to more intense activity; he is now putting forth his utmost efforts for a final struggle against Christ and His followers. The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.

Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.

**None but those  
who have  
fortified the  
mind with the  
truths of the  
Bible will  
stand."**

Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves.

Notwithstanding the Bible is full of warnings against false teachers, many are ready thus to commit the keeping of their souls to the clergy. There are today thousands of professors of religion who can give no other reason for points of faith which they hold than that they were so instructed by their religious leaders. They pass by the Saviour's teachings almost unnoticed, and place implicit confidence in the words of the ministers.

Many are the ways by which Satan works through human influence to bind his captives. He secures multitudes to himself by attaching them by the silken cords of affection to those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Whatever this attachment may be, parental, filial, conjugal, or social, the effect is the same; the opposers of truth exert their power to control the conscience, and the souls held under their sway have not sufficient courage or independence to obey their own convictions of duty.

The truth and the glory of God are inseparable; it is impossible for us, with the Bible within our reach, to honor God by erroneous opinions. Many claim that it matters not what one believes, if his life is only right. But the life is molded by the faith. If light and truth is within our reach, and we neglect to improve the privilege of hearing and seeing it, we virtually reject it; we are choosing darkness rather than light."

Selected from *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593-597.



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# "My Heart"

by L. J. Holman

The great tent was filled with the simple people of the earth. Browened and leather-faced from the sun and wind, they sat with intent, hopeful faces. In front of them, on a raised platform, stood the famous evangelist who had come to this arid land to preach his message. The organ swelled and the fifty-voice Divine Promise Choir blended in crescendo as the Preacher stepped to stage center.

His trained voice reached out and hooked into the audience, commanding their attention. He roamed back and forth across the stage, dramatically illustrating his assertions with sweeping hand gestures. He was brilliant this particular night. His sermon on God's will was a masterpiece.

Then arrived that part of the show everyone came to see: the time for the laying on of hands.

He was God's angel, he said humbly into Camera 3. He was merely the channel for the Holy Spirit. Camera 2 dollied in for a spectacular close-up of the Preacher's cure of an old woman in a wheel-chair. He touched her on top of the head and she immediately leaped to her feet and shouted for joy, dancing around the white-robed attendants and hugging the Preacher. The audience went into a frenzy of moaning and clapping.

Finally, the last ones climbed up onto the polished stage. They were an old couple bent with years and sadness.

"Where does it hurt, sister?" the Preacher asked in a rising voice.

"My heart," she murmured. "It hurts in my heart. A child is what I want."

"Heart trouble!" an attendant sang out to the cameras.

"How old are you, sister?" the Preacher asked with blazing eyes.

"Ninety. Please, a son."

"A bad heart can be cured!" the Preacher howled.

The woman's husband grabbed the Preacher's snow-white sleeve.

"Please sir, it's a boy my wife needs."

"And you, brother, how many years do you have?"

"I'm one hundred."

"A hundred!" the Preacher yelled out. The audience cheered.

The tall man took the husband's rough fingers in his smooth left hand and placed them on the woman's chest. With his free hand raised up over his head, he called on God to cure the pain in the woman's heart.

The organ rattled the floor and the two attendants rushed the old folks away as the choir formed a half circle around the Preacher.

Outside in the clean, dark night, the woman sobbed into her husband's embrace. He patted her head with clumsy, loving movements.

"Please, Sarah, don't cry," Abraham begged in a soft voice.

The announcer's sharp-edged words leaked around them from the bright tent.

"Tune in next week when sadness and pain will be miraculously washed away. . . ."

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
2 Peter 2:3

"He was God's angel, he said humbly into Camera 3."

Reprinted from *The Wittenburg Door*, No. 69 (Oct.-Nov., 1982), pp. 28, 29.

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# Personalizing the Standard of Truth

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**1 Corinthians**  
**10:13**

Throughout the ages God has made available a reliable standard of truth, so that no one need be led astray. Today, when harmful error is being attractively packaged both in the world and in religious circles, we have a deep need to avail ourselves of that standard. Here are some guidelines for doing so:

**1. Study the Word of God diligently for yourself.** Study to know and understand how God's truth can work in that distinct combination of personality traits, physical make-up, and capabilities that is you.

**2. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you study God's Word.** The Holy Spirit impresses truth on each individual mind. He knows your unique combination of characteristics and can give you the particular understanding you need to meet your own special circumstances.

**3. Follow the Word of God, not people, not even those who claim to be the people of God.** Others may be following God according to the guidance God has given them, but since you are unique you cannot with safety uncritically follow anyone else.

**4. Apply the teachings of the Word to today's world, not yesterday's.** We are living in an ever-changing world and have to apply God's truth to new situations. Take for instance, the question of movie attendance. When I was young, I was told that going into movie houses was wrong because the environment of the movie house cannot be conducive in any way to Christian living. But today, when a quick trip to the nearby video store can bring virtually any movie at any time into any home, environment is certainly not in itself the only basis for judging the appropriateness of movie viewing.

The present generation must derive from Scripture its own criteria for judging the appropriateness of watching a movie, and not simply accept the rationale of earlier times without thought.

**5. Know that there is a way out of every temptation.** No matter what situation arises, God can and will deliver you out of temptations. Our own spiritual eyesight is such that we do not always see a way out, and we may try to devise a way not in accordance with God's truth, but rather in accordance with the false teachings that have been propagated. But God has promised a way out of every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13) and no one can be forced to do wrong.

In following these steps, you are taking advantage of a standard of truth which can keep you safe from harm and error as you walk in the way of salvation.

## REACT

Should we ever sacrifice or compromise our personal understanding of God's truth in order to comply with the views of the church at large?

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Author anonymous.

# Divine Insight

by Chester H. Damron

The growing, maturing Seventh-day Adventist Christian is continually learning. The quality which that learning needs to be in these last days calls for careful and critical thought involving both heart and mind—thought that is evaluative and discerning.

Webster defines discernment as “The power of showing good judgment . . . insight . . . keen perception.” The everyday, knotty problems of life concerning needs, desires and character development call for this sort of Christian discernment.

My prayers should always reflect the same spirit as the wise man Solomon. “Solomon loved the Lord,” according to 1 Kings 3:3. That love for God so possessed him that one night he dreamed a dream (v. 5). In this dream God asked Solomon a question—a question I would love to have God ask me—“What shall I give you?” Now Solomon could have asked for any number of things—long life, health, wealth, friends. However, motivated by love for God, he asked for that gift most needed by all sincere, growing Christians in this end time of earth. He asked for *discernment*. “Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may *discern* between good and evil” (v. 9, emphasis supplied).

True to His word, the Lord God made Solomon the wisest and most discerning man who ever lived. Time and again Solomon challenges us:

Know the Creator God and love Him—this is the beginning of knowledge. (See Prov. 1:7.)

The keeping of wisdom is insight. (See Prov. 4:7.)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (discernment). (See Prov. 9:10.)

As our Lord carries we need more discernment and divine insight than ever before. Why? Because the evil of the day is upon us. False leaders and teachers abound on every hand. It is easy to become cynical about many things, but cynicism about our Christian faith is perilous to our own souls.

Discernment through the power of the Holy Spirit will help us recognize the difference between rhetoric and real conviction; between social pressure and real social need; between what is expedient and that which is ethical and moral. It will enable us to stand firm for the right though the heavens fall. By God’s grace I will be faithful to God and his Word in a time of shifting emotions, a time when words can be shells with no content, a time when my actions alone truly speak. I shall be wise in my understanding of what happens around me, because I know my God and I know that some things are *not* negotiable and that neither the means nor the ends are justified if they are contrary to God’s Word.

Discernment in the Spirit will save me from rationalization which allows my mind to find reasons to excuse what my spirit knows is wrong. I believe our God is able to deliver us from good-sounding bad values. He will do this through Spirit-filled discernment.

## OPINION

Key Text:  
1 Kings 3:9

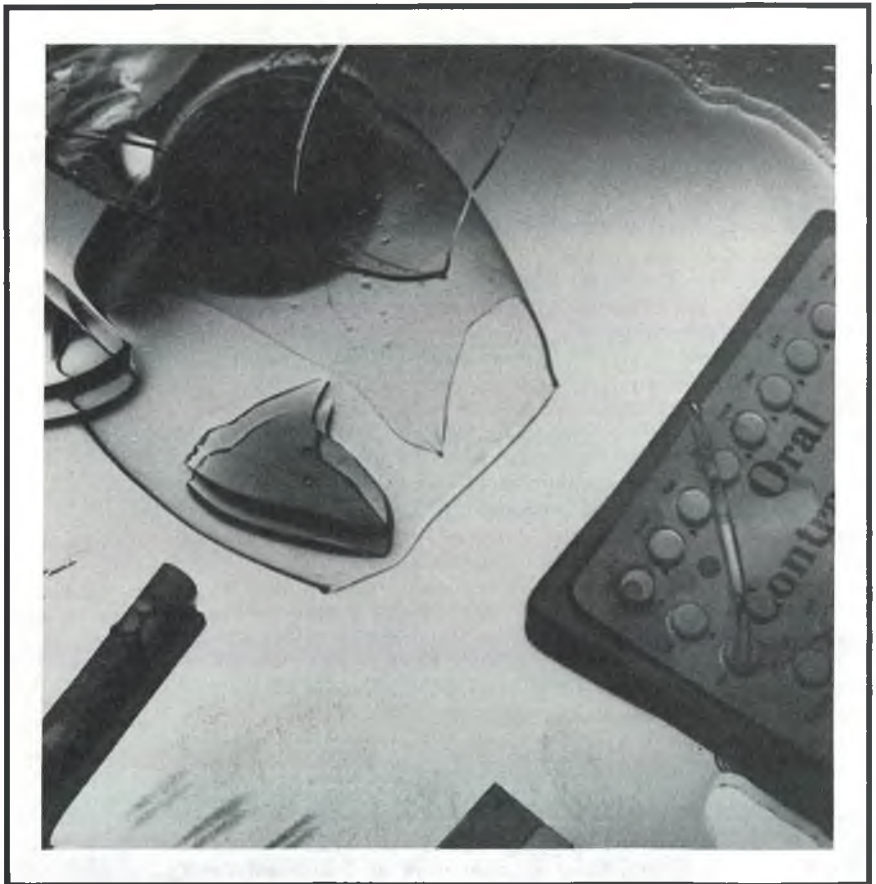
“Discernment will help us recognize the difference between rhetoric and real conviction.”

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Chester H. Damron is the associate pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church for campus ministry and chaplain of Andrews University.

# Facing the Consequences

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world”  
(1 John 2:15, 16, RSV).





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# Bye, Bye, Rabboni

by William Muehl

## INTRO- DUCTION

### This Week's Scripture:

#### 2 Peter 2:10-16

"And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'"

The woman rose from her frightened crouch and started to scurry away. But then, as though suddenly aware of Jesus' closing injunction, she stopped and looked quizzically at her rescuer.

"What do you mean, 'do not sin again?'" she asked.

"I think you know what I mean," Jesus replied.

"But I don't know, Rabbi. Unless you are suggesting that my relationship with Reuben is sinful."

"What would you call it?"

"A significant relationship," the woman answered, "an interpersonal commitment in which each of us seeks to realize our full potential."

"Oh really!" Jesus said.

"Reuben and I love one another. Surely you know what that means. How can a relationship be sinful when it expresses true love?"

"But what about your covenant with your husband?"

"Isaac? Well, Rabbi, Isaac and I have never really turned one another on. We cannot realize our full sexuality together."

"What does that have to do with . . .?"

"Come now, Rabboni, people have a duty to themselves, you know, a right to their happiness."

"They do?"

"Certainly. And why

should we let an outmoded legalism tie us into relationships that are sterile and unfulfilling?"

"Oh, you mean that Isaac is unable to father children: and you hope that Reuben . . .?"

"Rabbi, you're putting me on. You know very well what I mean. God knows, Isaac can father children. I have three of them to prove that."

"You have three children, and you propose to ignore your marriage vows and carry on with this man Reuben?"

"O Rabbi, you're really cute! 'Carry on with this man Reuben.' That kind of talk went out with the age of the judges. I'm not saying that Reuben and I will stay together forever. We may very well outgrow one another after a time and need room to explore our authentic selfhoods. People do change, you know."

"But the children?"

"Kids aren't as fragile as you think, Rabboni. You'd be surprised at how well they get along with Reuben, the way they hang on him when he stays for breakfast. When Isaac is away on a camel drive, that is. They call him 'Uncle Rube,' and he does magic tricks for them—and they like that. They much prefer him to Nathan."

"Nathan?"

"My previous significant relationship. He got to be a terrible drag. Said his conscience bothered him and legalistic stuff like that. I told him he should pay more attention to people like you."

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"Like me? How might I have helped him?"

"Oh, you know. That stuff you say about not being paralyzed by guilt and fearing human opinion?"

"Ah, yes. That. But tell me, if this Reuben loves you so deeply, why wasn't he here today?"

"He wanted to be, Rabbi. He really did. Very much. But he just can't stand the sight of blood. He's a very sensitive person. Not at all like Joshua."

"Joshua? Another significant . . .?"

"Oh, that was over long ago. And it wasn't really sig-

nificant. Not really. You might say I was just trying my wings."

"And then again, I might not."

"Mmmmmmm?"

"What will you say to your husband about today?"

"I'll tell him to view it as a learning experience, a chance to broaden his horizons. Well I must run now. Bye, bye, Rabboni. Have a good day."

Jesus gazed reflectively after the departing figure. Then he stooped to the ground, stretched forth his hand and picked up a large stone.

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# Punishment in Process

**Theme:** Those whose lives are dominated by greed and lust suffer the consequences of their deeds both in this life and on the day of judgment.

LOGOS

## 1. Punishment of Evildoers (read 2 Peter 2:9, 10, 13)

*"The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment" (2:9, NIV).*

In this passage Peter brings to culmination what he has been saying in the previous verses. By pointing to the past he brings meaning and hope to the present. The trials the young church is facing are not new, he says. There have been false prophets but these God did not spare. In the past he rescued the faithful and he will do the same now. This promise is not just for the abstract future, for a final testing on the last day. It is for the present. God rescues godly men and women from affliction of the spirit, disillusionment, the temptation to be lax, and all that the righteous experience as a result of living among the ungodly.

It is by the same token that the ungodly are punished, or put "under punishment" as in the RSV. There are two schools of thought regarding the Greek for this phrase. The first assigns the punishment for which the wicked are held to the day of judgment. The second understanding of this text, a little closer to the intent of the Greek, translates the passage "while being punished." Here the emphasis changes from the future to the present. This interpretation balances the first half of the text and accords better with the previous verses. It is in harmony with the moral of the cited Old Testament illustrations, which show God's immediate action on sinners without excluding the possibility of punishment on the last day. This is not to say that the wicked are punished from the moment of their death until the judgment and then forever after. Rather their punishment is now, in their lifetime, since they are not rescued from the afflictions of the spirit, temptation, and trial as are the righteous. They suffer from their own wrongdoing.

*What constitutes a "false prophet"? Is v. 9 a promise for an easy life free from trial?*

## 2. The Arrogance, Lust and Greed of the Wicked (read 2 Peter 2:10-16)

*"But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish" (2:12, NIV).*

Peter now launches into scathing rhetoric with a fiery hue, denouncing the false prophets—those who blaspheme what they don't even understand and revel in the sensual. Evil men, he says, are like brute beasts, slaves to their animal instincts, born only for capture and death. They have no other destiny. This end is unavoidable.

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able because to make the pursuit of pleasure an all-consuming goal, the central focus and theme of one's life, is suicidal. Physical health, mental well-being, and spiritual character eventually are ruined. All pleasure is lost and the once cherished means of achieving it no longer contains any joy. The glutton is destroyed by his appetite, the drunkard by his inebriating solace, the sensualist by his own body, and the self-indulgent by his weakened character.

The pursuit of pleasure is subject to the law of diminishing returns. With time the means of achieving gratification lose their thrills and so it takes more and more to satisfy. Everything must be done to increase the high; the addict more drugs, the promiscuous more partners and the power-seeker more prestige. This life has no future and its transitory pleasure ends in pain. And those that follow it there are born only for its capture and resulting death.

These evil doers have, as Peter says in v. 15, left the straight road. But in the previous verse the picture is more tragic. What the NIV translates as "experts" comes from the Greek meaning to train as an athlete does for the games. "These people have actually trained their minds to concentrate on nothing but the forbidden desire. They have deliberately fought with conscience until they have destroyed it; they have deliberately struggled with finer feelings until they have strangled them."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the case with Balaam. Contrary to an undeniable knowledge of God's will he attempted to curse God's people but was prevented from doing so. Nevertheless, he remained determined and seduced Israel with Moabite women. He was covetous and he taught Israel to sin. Such were the faults of the false teachers in Peter's day and in the 2000 years since, they remain the same. These false teachers are the blots and blemishes that so often come in the guise of good, in the cloak of liberating reform, and the disguise of innocent fun. But those who love gain and lure others to evil stand condemned. Like Balaam they will be rebuked for their wrongdoing and held under punishment. For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly. . . .

*Peter talks about people being trained to sin (experts in greed—v. 14, NIV). Is sin natural or willful? If committing sin involves a conscious choice and action upon that choice, does not goodness, the opposite of sin, involve the same? Or does God's grace automatically supply all goodness?*

E. R. M.

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1. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 332.



# Immorality's Outcome

by Bruce Closser

No more powerful biblical example of the effects of greed and lust in our lives exists than that of David. Ellen White writes that David's association with his surrounding nations lessened his reliance on Jehovah's power and caused him to rely upon his own wisdom and might. In this condition he was unable to resist when Satan sought to "arouse the unholy desires of David's carnal nature." Tempted by Bathsheba's great beauty, David took her for himself, sending her husband off to his death on the front lines. Ellen White observes that "Every effort which David made to conceal his guilt proved unavailing. He had betrayed himself into the power of Satan; danger surrounded him, dishonor more bitter than death was before him."

As a result of David's sin, God sent Nathan with the familiar story of the poor man and his one lamb, and a curse that "'Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house. . . . Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor. . . . For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'" God could not, even in his infinite power, "interpose to prevent the result. He would permit things to take their natural course, and thus David was severely chastised. . . . Swiftly and surely a day of judgment and retribution was approaching, which no repentance could avert, agony and shame that would darken his whole earthly life. Those who, by pointing to the example of David, try to lessen the guilt of their own sins, should learn from the Bible record that the way of transgression is hard. Though like David they should turn from their evil course, the results of sin, even in this life, will be found bitter and hard to bear."

Fortunately for David, his "repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. . . . Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow-men than before he fell. . . . The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul."<sup>1</sup>

The operative phrase here is "truly repentant." Either way, we will suffer for our deeds and misdeeds, but without true repentance, not only will we suffer here and now, as did David, we will suffer infinitely more in God's final judgment, as will a whole host of humanity who never knew true repentance.

## TESTIMONY

Key Text:  
2 Samuel 11:27

"Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 717-726.

Bruce Closser, is an assistant professor of English at Andrews University.

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# Everybody Isn't Doing It

by Alberta Mazat

## EVIDENCE

Key text:

Romans 12:1, 2

*The New Celibacy*, by psychologist Gabrielle Brown (Ballantine Books, 1980), is a surprise book—celibacy hasn't exactly been the first thing on everyone's mind following the sexual revolution. In fact, people have gotten the message that not only is sexual experience possible outside of marriage (contraceptives and antibiotics have done their part), it's fun (any one of scores of books and manuals could make sure of that), and it's also obligatory (if you don't you are hopelessly undersexed, or at the very least, distressingly inhibited)!

Now, the sexual revolution was *supposed* to be about women and men being equal. But like most revolutions, it got out of hand. The excesses it promoted included adoption of a whole new set of myths about sex: The more, the better. Your femininity/masculinity is evaluated by your willingness and performance. It's as natural, as satisfying as any other "appetite." If you don't like/want/do it, there's something wrong with you.

Since parents, teachers and ministers were not facing sexual realities with forthrightness and honesty, these myths found ready acceptance. Younger and younger people began engaging in sex and it is now not unusual to find sexually experienced children in junior high and earlier. The result, of course, is more and more college-age people who have already experimented with genital sex. Some statistics suggest that probably one-third of college women are virgins, and about one-fourth of college men.

Dr. Brown perceived a problem. Along with a number of other therapists, she has real concerns about behaviors which dissociate sex from the qualities that make it most fulfilling—emotional intimacy, cherishing, a sense of ultimate commitment. Young people in their twenties and thirties are sometimes bored and disinterested with sex just when they should be most interested.

There is another specific problem group. These young people come from religious backgrounds. They grew up with strong prohibitions against sex before marriage. These prohibitions may not have been explained to them carefully and with proper emphasis, but they are there, nonetheless. Going against these moral values has brought great amounts of guilt, remorse and self-devaluation. Many begin to have sex before they have thought things through in a careful manner. Then, since they have already "done it," they feel that because they are no longer virgins—what difference does it make? This pessimistic attitude causes them to continue in the path of least resistance. It's hard to stop, both physically and emotionally.

Dr. Brown's book is aimed at providing another option, a new look at celibacy, and her voice is only one being raised in our society at this time. All over the nation are young people who are not truly happy with their sexual situation. They are looking for alternatives. Dr. Joel Moscowitz of Columbia University refers to a student population he is familiar with—those who have found sexual activity before marriage disillusioning. They have now become "scrupu-

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Alberta Mazat teaches in the department of marriage and family therapy at Loma Linda University.

"Probably one-third of college women are virgins, and about one-fourth of college men."

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# Dealing With Sexual Immorality

by Pamela Dutcher

Peter's comments on sexual immorality seem to have been written for this time in earth's history. Regarded as punishable by death in Old Testament times (Lev. 20:10-21), sexual immorality is now accepted by society in general. The church and its members must know how to deal with it.

**HOW TO  
Key Text:  
Galatians  
5:19-25**

**1. Look at how Jesus dealt with the situation when he was on Earth.** Jesus lived in the public eye for three short years. During that time, he showed us how to live. He said, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15, RSV). Two examples of the way Jesus dealt with sexual immorality come from the gospel of John. When he spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:4-42), he offered her a better life as well as hope for the future despite her past lifestyle. When the scribes and Pharisees brought him a woman caught in adultery, he did not condemn her, he instead told her to sin no more (John 8:3-11). He did not turn away from these women. He did not revile them for what they had done. Although he stated that sexual immorality is a sin (Mark 7:20-23), he accepted the women as they were.

**2. Be aware of and on guard against our own human nature.** We need to keep our eyes on Christ (Matt. 22:37) so that we do not fall into sin (Gal. 5:19-21). With Christ's help, we need to set our "affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). We need to cultivate Christ-like characteristics (Gal. 5:22-25), and keep our minds on the true, honest, and pure (Phil. 4:8).

**3. Remember that it is not our place to judge.** Jesus told us we are not to judge one another (Luke 6:37; Matt. 7:1, 2). Paul asked the Christians in Rome why they were judging those around them (Romans 14:10-13). He pointed out we will all ultimately "stand before the judgment seat of God" (v. 10, RSV). We imperfect humans have no right attempting to do God's work for him, "for God will judge the immoral and adulterous" (Heb. 13:4, RSV).

**4. Encourage those caught in sin.** We can show them that nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:35-39). We aren't left to live Christian life on our own: the Holy Spirit has been sent to help us (Rom. 8:26, 27). Sexual temptation may at times seem impossible to resist, but we always have hope in Christ. Jesus said "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:25, 26, RSV).

## REACT

1. What practical measures can the church take today to deal with the apparent increase in sexual immorality among Christians?

2. Does the church have a responsibility in dealing with open sexual immorality on the part of its members? Read 1 Cor. 5:1-12 and 2 Cor. 2:5-11 for insight on this question.

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Pamela Dutcher is an instructor in the communicative disorders department at Andrews University.

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# October Leaves

## OPINION

### Key Text:

2 Peter 2:12, 13

"Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy." Whenever I think of her I usually find myself humming the words of this song. Perhaps it's an ironic expression of sorrow because, Sunshine, when on my mind, can almost make me cry.

Sunshine, a word and name that evokes images of what is light, warm, and happy, had so little in common with the girl. Instead she was more like rain in a flood, unneeded, unwanted, unloved. Oh, she did have some friends who extended a measure of care, but these were peripheral. I was one of these. I saw her seldom and when I did it was barely long enough to look happy and say, "keep smiling Sunshine." The last time I saw her, however, was different.

It seems like a long time ago now. The details of the memory have dimmed. Some images, though, will always remain: the look in her blackened and bloodshot eyes, her hair ragged and unkempt, and the tobacco odor exuding from her presence, and her face that cried with pain and hate instead of tears.

I asked how she was doing. The answer was all too obvious. We sat down on a low stone wall. For a time she didn't say anything just stared down at her worn sneakers. Then finally she slowly shook her head and sighed. "I just spent the night in jail," she said. "My boyfriend, that \_\_\_\_\_, kicked me out of my own apartment, my own place! So I went home, but my \_\_\_\_\_ parents wouldn't let me in the \_\_\_\_\_ door! Oh \_\_\_\_\_! I haven't slept one \_\_\_\_\_ bit. That's why I look so \_\_\_\_\_. I've taken just too \_\_\_\_\_ much! I'm going to get the \_\_\_\_\_ out'a here, I really am!"

She was right, at least partially. She had seen a lot in her life. By a young 17 she had already lived with a few men and messed around with at least one married man. But knowing her background made it hard to condemn. Unwanted at home, her "Christian" parents for a time placed her in a correctional home run by the state. When her term ended she went home. But her parents' demands and her willfulness didn't mesh so at the first opportunity she moved out. She drifted between ever-changing jobs, the roller-skating rink, and the men she picked up there. And now having recently lost her job, she had also lost her boyfriend and apparently her "place."

The sky was gray and the wind bustled through the brown October leaves, long since fallen. For weeks they'd been tossed and turned over the ground, never going, never staying. The leaves rustled and skipped around our feet as the wind caught her hair and threw it across her face. She threw it back and stood up. She was agitated now, almost livid. "I'm going to get the \_\_\_\_\_ out of here! I'm gonna blow this place man!" I am, I can, I will, I . . ." The words tumbled out with her bitter pain. At almost 18 she'd seen and done just about everything and now she was desperate.

"Where are you going?"

She threw out some names. Borneo, New Guinea, Europe, Australia. She didn't know for sure, except for Borneo, she knew she wanted to go there.

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"Why there?"

She shrugged. "I'm just going to get the \_\_\_ out'a here and that's about as far away as I can get. \_\_\_, I don't know!"

"How long are you going to stay?"

"A year or two, I don't know!"

"Then what?"

She had calmed, a little. She sat down and looked at me, then looked away. "Oh, I don't know," she said quickly, still trying to maintain that "nothing hurts me, nothing touches me, I don't give a care attitude," that was fast losing ground to transparency.

Grappling for words, wondering what to say, I asked, "Sunshine, what are you running from?"

The answer was quick. "From all of this garbage, all this \_\_\_ garbage! I'm not wanted here and I don't want what's here!"

Wrong question. I tried again. "Sunshine, what are you looking for? What is it that you hope to find?"

She kicked at one of the leaves and turned away.

"Sunshine," I said, "when you come back why don't you come here to school? I'll still be around."

For the moment this was at best all I could suggest. I could have said, "Sunshine, why don't you try religion?" But I knew the religion she'd seen had been a cold, empty form, and a hypocritical one at that. I could have said, "Sunshine, why don't you try Jesus?" But she'd heard this line one too many times and the Jesus she'd seen condemned instead of loved. But she still hadn't tried him so I asked her to come back.

She paused for a moment but then stood up. "Ya, OK. I'll do that. I gotta go now. See you sometime."

I wished her well as she went. I watched her leave, then I turned and walked away, kicking at the brown October leaves with Sunshine on my mind, almost making me cry.

E. R. M.

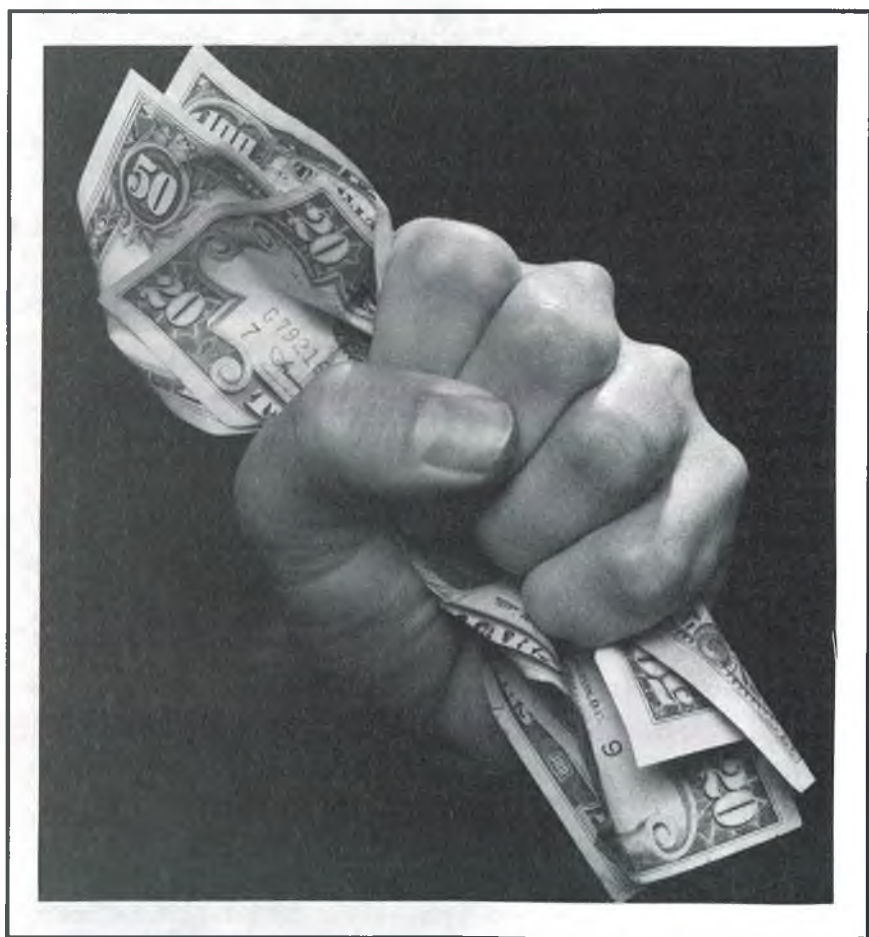
## REACT

In this week's passage Peter talks about false teachers who seduce others into immorality. Can living a false religion—one that is cold and Christless—have the same effect as the seducers of Peter's day? If so, what does this say regarding our responsibility for others?

**"I knew the religion she'd seen had been a cold empty form."**

# Springs Without Water

“They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him” (2 Peter 2:19, NIV).



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# Empty Without the Song

by Calvin Miller

## INTRO- DUCTION

### This Week's Scripture: 2 Peter 2:17-22

The student known as Everyman was indeed a troubled youth but grateful for the wind and rain. Though he often hungered to be free, he was not among the thousand who had been unchained.

He accepted all the sciences as truth but rejected all ideas that Earthmaker could exist. Yet he sometimes wished such mystic falsehoods true. For those who claimed to be unchained seemed so naive to Everyman. And yet they seemed to own contentment he had never managed in pursuing all his sciences. He could not make himself believe the Singer was the Father-Spirit's Son. Nor did he trust the rumor that the Singer had returned to life. Yet the Singer haunted all his idle hours. . . .

Everyman was reading from a scroll called the REASON OF EMPTINESS while he lay on a grassy slope of summer.

"Hello!" called out a voice from somewhere behind him. "What do you read?"

Everyman looked up and then looked back upon his book. He said, "I read of reason."

"What reason?" queried the approaching youth.

"The reason that teaches Terra made herself when there were civil wars among the stars."

"And do you think it true?" the stranger asked when finally he reached his side a little out of breath.

"How can I tell? . . . Come now . . . let us not begin with our philosophies but with our names . . . I am Everyman."

"And I am Sarkon!"

"And tell me, Sarkon, do you believe?"

"Yes," said the handsome youth. "I believe in eating when I hunger, loving when I lust and sleeping when I weary of the game."

"But of the current madness that the Father-Spirit has a living Son who sings?"

Sarkon laughed. "It's a myth for ignorance to feed upon." . . .

"Perhaps," said Everyman, staring vacantly into the distant sky. "Do you believe the Singer came alive again?"

"No—not at all. I know the man who buried him, you see. His grave is in a country field. . . ."

"But then why do I hunger for more than I am fed from all the scrolls of science?"

"You hunger," Sarkon said, "for something else. Come, let us fill our bellies so our minds will not be restless, nor our hearts. I know women who can make philosophy an elementary matter. When lust has eaten at the table of desire, you will be satisfied again. When the flesh feeds itself the hunger of the spirit is forgotten."

Sarkon stood. He was quite practical it seemed to Everyman, who was tired of study. Everyman also thirsted for the taverns of the city where he and Sarkon could forget their emptiness of soul. . . .

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Calvin Miller is a pastor of a Baptist church in Omaha, Nebraska and is the author of many well-known books, including *The Singer*.

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As Sarkon and Everyman came through the city gates a street minstrel was singing to a crowd. Sarkon despised the poor who listened to the balladeer.

"Do you know the man who sings?" asked Everyman.

"His name is Anthem," answered Sarkon with no apparent interest.

"Isn't he the street singer who sang the day the wind came from the mountain?"

"He is. But careful, friend, or he will have your science in his pouch. You'll be dancing to his tunes."

They passed so near the street singer they could hear the verses of his song.

"Come to the Singer you science-stained.

Cry for the crime and be unchained . . ."

As they were leaving . . .

Everyman could hear him singing once again:

"Come, Terra. Let us sing of love

And the broken hand in

the ragged glove.  
For ours it is to be set free,  
Unchained and given destiny."

"How can he sing?" thought Everyman.

He wanted to turn back, but he placed his hand on the latch to the tavern door.

Dawn came swiftly on the eve of lust. When Everyman awoke his head was on the bosom of a maid.

"Did I satisfy you, Everyman?" she asked.

"Last night you did," he answered. "But now I hunger once again."

"For food or love or books?" she asked in deep sincerity.

"For none of these. For something more, if something more there be." And then he asked, "Where is my young and god-like friend? Still with his maid?"

"Which maid? Five went to him last night. His science is his appetite—ever eating, never full."



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# Empty Promises

LOGOS

**Theme:** Teaching that promotes immoral behavior may have illusory, seductive appeal, but it leads Christians who accept it into a slavery worse than if they had never known Christ.

## 1. Dry Wells (read 2 Peter 2:17 and John 4:14)

As Peter continues his attack on the false teachers, he uses two very descriptive metaphors. He first refers to them as "wells without water." They offered that which gives the appearance of bringing joy and fullness of life but when actually experienced turns out to be worthless. What a contrast with the offer Jesus made to the Samaritan woman: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, NIV). The false teacher's "water" may be exciting momentarily, but it only wets the lips and does not satisfy the soul.

The second metaphor—"mists driven by a storm"—describes the instability of the false teachers and the transitory nature of their teachings. They claimed to bring new insights but instead bring the darkened haze and inconsistent rain that characterizes mist. Their end would be "blackest darkness" of hell.

*Peter is vehement in denouncing false teachers. Should we use the same approach against those we perceive to be in error today?*

## 2. Enslavement Rather Than Freedom (read 2 Peter 2:18-21 and John 8:34)

*"They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him" (2 Peter 2:19 NIV).*

The false teachers may have been teaching the Gnostic-type heresy that the salvation of the immortal soul is all that is important. What a person did with his body was of little importance. It is also possible that they suggested, as many second-century heretics did, that the deeply spiritual should express their religion sexually.<sup>1</sup> Paul must have faced similar adversity about the nature and treatment of the body, for in writing to the Corinthians he referred to the body as the dwelling place of the Spirit of God. Anyone who would destroy or misuse his body, God would destroy. (See 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:18-20). As is usually the case, the false teachers were having their greatest success with the newly converted, who hadn't had time to become established in the faith (v. 18). Peter very forcefully declares that their glamorous promises of freedom were actually enticements into a trap of slavery. The illicit pleasures made to appear so appealing would in reality turn out to be harsh taskmasters.

Verse 21 suggests that it is better to be in ignorance of Christianity than to apostatize. Knowledge brings responsibility. The person who has had knowledge of Christ and then has backslidden is accountable for the knowledge he has once known.

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*What does this portion of Scripture say about those who have backslidden? Is there any hope for one who has known Christ and then backslidden?*

### **3. A Return to Vomit**

*"Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud' " (2 Peter 2:22, NIV).*

Peter concludes his chapter of chastising the false teachers by applying two proverbs to them. The first is found in the Old Testament (Prov. 26:11) and the second is non-biblical but was most likely well-known in Christian circles of the time. These proverbs graphically illustrate the disgusting conduct of those, especially false teachers, who had once left the corruption of sin, and were returning to it once again. The intelligence of their behavior is at the level of a dog or a pig who naturally gravitates toward filth.

Peter spends the entire chapter on denouncing false teachers. Why? Perhaps he had become righteously indignant over the apparent success of the false teachers with the new Christian converts, and wished once and for all to expose their errors plainly and forcefully. The temptations that faced the early Christians to whom this letter is addressed are still with us today in a society that is "money-mad, materialistic, sex-mad, anti-authoritarian."<sup>2</sup> Peter's warnings should lead us to serious reflection, and to greater dependence on Christ.

P. H. H.

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Michael Green, *Second Epistle of Peter, Jude* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 18), p. 116.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

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# To Be Free

Every soul that refuses to give himself to God is under the control of another power. He is not his own. He may talk of freedom, but he is in the most abject slavery. He is not allowed to see the beauty of truth, for his mind is under the control of Satan. Christ came to break the shackles of sin-slavery from the soul. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" sets us "free from the law of sin and death." Rom. 8:2.

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. When the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan's control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.

The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. "The truth shall make you free;" and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one's self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is "the law of liberty." James 2:12. . . .

The fact that although they could find no sin in Christ the Jews would not receive Him proved that they themselves had no connection with God. They did not recognize His voice in the message of His Son. They thought themselves passing judgment on Christ; but in rejecting Him they were pronouncing sentence upon themselves. "He that is of God," said Jesus, "heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

The lesson is true for all time. Many a man who delights to quibble, to criticize, seeking for something to question in the word of God, thinks that he is thereby giving evidence of independence of thought, and mental acuteness. He supposes that he is sitting in judgment on the Bible, when in truth he is judging himself. He makes it manifest that he is incapable of appreciating truths that originate in heaven, and that compass eternity. In presence of the great mountain of God's righteousness, his spirit is not awed. He busies himself with hunting for sticks and straws, and in this betrays a narrow and earthly nature, a heart that is fast losing its capacity to appreciate God. He whose heart has responded to the divine touch will be seeking for that which will increase his knowledge of God, and will refine and elevate the character. As a flower turns to the sun, that the bright rays may touch it with tints of beauty, so will the soul turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven's light may beautify the character with the graces of the character of Christ.

## TESTIMONY

Key Text:

2 Peter 2:19,  
John 8:31, 32

**"Christ came to break the shackles of sin-slavery from the soul."**

Excerpted from *The Desires of Ages*, pp. 466, 461

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# Christianized Sensuality?

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
1 John 2:15-17

In today's key text, the apostle John gives a three-fold warning that is similar to Peter's message in 2 Peter 2. He first warns against the "lust of the flesh." Sex and food are most prominent in this category, but the various sensuous pleasures that prosperity brings—heated swimming pools, thick carpeting, soft sheets, stereo music, etc.—might also be included. These may all be blessings from God, but when we ardently seek them for their own sakes, they enslave us. Current, popular evangelical literature may reflect the tendency to make the "lusts of the flesh" a preoccupation. Some Christian sex advice books seem to promise that Christians experience the ultimate in copulation ("Christians make better lovers," as the bumper sticker reads.) And, the plethora of Christian cookbooks gives the seal of approval to gourmet food and drink, implying that we deserve them. They are our right, regardless of the fact that millions lack basic food.

There are also the "lusts of the eyes," the nice things of "the good life." Cars, gardens, paintings, clothes (color-coordinated and chic), vacation cottages, exotic settings for our Christian conferences and conventions. Nothing wrong with them. The gifts of a generous God. But once again, their desirability and their importance have been blown out of proportion. We have elevated them to necessities. We collect them ardently, and we worship what we collect. In the spirit of the age we lust for things.

"We have fashioned 'Christianized' sensual delights into idols."

And "the pride of life"? This, most of all, typifies the spirit of the age, an age that will terminate under the edict of divine judgment, but is ruled by proud Lucifer until that judgment. Our wealth, comfort and moral respectability blind us to our true condition of spiritual bankruptcy. Pride thus blocks our relationship with God and our feelings of superiority prevent us from true love and service for others.

We have fashioned "Christianized" sensual delights into idols that humiliate and enslave us, we have forged our possessions into chains that bind us to a deteriorating economy, and we have exalted ourselves with a pride that compels us to humiliate our fellow human beings by our arrogance and selfishness. We need to be reminded forcefully that these are all part of the world that "passes away" so that we may seek anew the will of God, through which we "abide forever."

## REACT

1. Isn't the recent trend among Christians to recognize sexuality as God-given and to be fully enjoyed (in the proper context) a healthy trend? How do we distinguish between legitimate enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and gratifying the "lusts of the flesh."

2. In what practical ways can we break away from the materialism that tends to enslave us?

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Author anonymous.



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# No Longer Slaves

by James E. Miller

It seems I've always known slaves. My world is filled with them. As an undergraduate in a secular college I had two alcoholic professors, and I watched a friend slowly turn himself into an alcoholic. I know many drug addicts. They are nothing more than empty shells, though it is amazing to watch some of them return to functional life once they have been freed. A gay friend still longs for freedom from his lifetime of habit, and a girl I grew up with known as "everybody's" wonders why she is so lonely with so many boyfriends. Then, of course, there is the all-American slave master—food!

Slavery empties life. It centers our lives around a false god and dries up our energy and joy. Having had many slave masters, I know. But even those who want to be free don't find it easy. Where do you turn? What do you do?

**1. Recognize your slavery.** In Alcoholics Anonymous, members are required to admit being hopelessly enslaved to alcohol. Likewise with Overeaters Anonymous, Homosexuals Anonymous, etc. Just as you can't be forgiven unless you admit to being a sinner and you can't be healed unless you admit to being sick, so you can't be freed until you admit to being a slave.

**2. Remember that only Christ can truly set you free.** Any other freedom only means exchanging one master for another. Remember to spend some time with him, get to know him, and make a new habit of leaning on him.

**3. Choose to be free.** God can free us, but only when we choose. This involves exercising the will, but even more it involves exercising faith. The faith he gives can move mountains, but we must choose to use it.

**4. Know that you will falter and fall.** Count on it. Never carry around the burden of guilt, however. Christ died to give you forgiveness and set you free. Confess your failing and let him forgive you. Then forget you ever fell and carry on. If we focus on failure we will fail. If we focus on him we will forget how to fail.

**5. Share in Christian community.** Paul told us to bear one another's burdens and Jesus said that wherever two or three are gathered in his name he is there with them. Whenever possible turn to another believer who will understand your burden. Also remember to bear the burdens of others. In the church God has provided each believer with a reservoir of strength. It is in sharing and praying together that the church becomes one and its people become strong.

**6. Don't let go of your relationship with God, no matter what.** He is supportive when no one else can be. He forgives when no one else will. He's always there when no one else is around. You don't have to be embarrassed about your problem with him, because he already knows all about it and he loves you anyway.

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**John 8:31-36**

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James E. Miller is a master of divinity student of Andrews University.

Thursday, November 21 81

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# The Curse of Superficial Religion

by Richard Quebedeaux

## OPINION

Contemporary religion in America is . . . marked by a lack of deep and fulfilling personal relationships—and absence that provides . . . evidence of its superficiality. This deficiency is the direct consequence of popular religion's de facto self-centeredness that maximizes self-awareness and self-development and minimizes self-sacrifice for others. The relational superficiality of the religion of modernity is manifested both in its method and in its message. In a culture that has been instrumentalized by the scientific method, in which everything is understandable, remediable, and achievable, God isn't really necessary at all, because "right thinking" men and women can do it themselves. God exists for them only when he is *useful* to the method of their own self-actualization. Modern American religion, very simply, doesn't care about doing anything *for* God. It wants only to use him. Even the popular exclamation "Praise the Lord!" is little more than a thank-you note to God for having been useful in helping "me" acquire something "I" wanted. . . .

If, as a possibility thinker, I can do anything—by an act of the will and a positive mental technique—not only do I not need God (unless I think he's useful), but I really don't need anyone else either (unless he or she happens to be useful for whatever it is *I* want). Any kind of religion carried by the mass media, of course, is especially vulnerable at this point, because that which is carried by the mass media *must* give its fans what they want, what *they* think is useful for themselves. People most often expose themselves only to those media offerings that coincide with their own predilections and desires. Thus there are no prophets on TV—only profits. If God is a divine Santa Claus in modern American religion, then its celebrity and pragmatic leaders are his reindeer. When taking precedes giving as a norm, people in relationship with other people literally become commodities, created and socialized to be bought and sold. Relationships here are not only superficial, they have become trivialized as well. . . .

In his recent book, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*, Daniel Yankelovich maintains, on the basis of his firm's survey research, that modern Americans are increasingly hungry for deeper personal relationships. There is a growing conviction, he asserts, that a me-first, satisfy-all-my-desires attitude leads inevitably to relationships that are "superficial, transitory, and ultimately unsatisfying." Seventy percent of Americans now recognize that while they have many acquaintances, they have few close friends, and they experience that as a serious void in their lives. Furthermore, two out of five (41 percent) state that they have fewer close friends now than they had in the recent past.

Feeling this void, in Yankelovich's opinion, causes people to grow less preoccupied with themselves (potentially, at least) and to *look* for closer ties to others. In 1973, 32 percent—roughly one third—of Americans felt an intense need to compensate for the impersonal and threatening aspects of modern life by seeking mutual identifica-

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Richard Quebedeaux holds degrees from UCLA, Harvard Divinity School and Oxford University. He has written several books on American religion.

"There are no prophets on TV—only profits."

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tion with others based on ethnic bonds or ties of shared interests, needs, background, age, or values (as in religion). But by the beginning of the 1980's, the number of Americans deeply involved in the "search for community" had increased from 32 percent to 47 percent, a large and significant jump in just a few short years (*Psychology Today*, April 1981, p. 85).

In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard J. Foster insists that superficiality is the curse of our age (Harper & Row, 1978, p. 1). In modern American religion, superficiality derives from the fact that most individuals view religion primarily as a therapeutic means to get relief from boredom through entertainment. The celebrity leaders of popular religion, and their imitators in the leadership of the institutional church, have fans, but not followers. And because celebrities merely entertain and do not offer deep teaching, they can hardly impose a *discipline* on others to incorporate in their daily lives. Fans, obviously, are not disciples.

If modern religious leaders have fans, but not followers, then the question has to be raised whether they are actually "leaders" at all. . . . Religion carried by the mass media—invisible religion—constitutes the *ultimate* in relational superficiality, because the only communication and interpersonal relationships between celebrity and fans are the printed page, the record or tape, the radio voice, the video image, the computer-written letter, and the anonymous phone call. Such "relationships," of course, are not real at all.

Ours is a chronically bored mass culture, and, as Erich Fromm puts it in his masterpiece, *The Art of Loving*, to be bored or boring is to be unloving. Boredom itself indicates the presence of superficial relationships, or no relationships at all. People who are really interested in other people, who *care* about them and demonstrate this care in personal engagement, are not bored, nor are they boring. Invisible religion may, indeed, relieve boredom—for a while—but it is no substitute for demonstrated love between nearby significant others. And love cannot exist apart from deep continuing relationships marked by give and take from the center of our very being itself, from the heart. Love transforms superficiality and strengthens the authority of a leader by authenticating that authority in the wisdom of his teaching and the goodness of his example. In leadership love is best expressed, even in the context of visibility and strength, by humility and servanthood. By their fruits you shall know them.

**"Religion carried by the mass media constitutes the *ultimate* in relational superficiality."**

## REACT

Is all religion conveyed by mass media necessarily superficial?

Do you think Peter would include today's TV preachers in his indictment of false teachers?

Excerpted from Richard Quebedeaux, *By What Authority*. Copyright © 1982, by Richard Quebedeaux. Used with permission from Harper and Row Publishers. In pp. 151-155.

# A Response to Skeptics-I

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. . . . But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away for a long time.’ . . . The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of” (Matthew 24:45-50, NIV).





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# How Can You Be Sure It'll Really Happen?

by John Bedell

## INTRODUCTION

### This Week's Scripture:

2 Peter 3:1-7

Each blade of grass wore a soft, brown coat of dust. The leaves, fluttering in a cool even breeze that brushed across the tree tops, were also dressed in an earthy film.

The stillness of the evening was broken by the voices of two young men carrying on an aimless conversation. It was the kind of rambling talk reserved for close friends.

The pace slowed to a stop as they approached the building site. A huge frame had been erected. All around it scaffolding climbed high into the air. Boards and trusses were piled up nearby. Already it was an imposing structure.

"So this is their project," the shorter of the two said.

"Yes, it's kind of impressive, don't you think?" the tall youth countered.

"How can they pay for this? I thought they were a small group."

"Oh they are, but I read that they give very generously to their church."

"Yeah, my dad was talking about them the other night. He knows some of them at work. He says they are completely dedicated to their cause. It's as if their religion is their whole life."

"You remember Mike in school? Remember how he gave up sports because of the day the games were on."

"I remember him. He was a nice guy, but I never understood why he punished himself with those beliefs. He talked to me once about this end of the world stuff."

"Really! I'd like to hear it."

"Well, some of their basic beliefs are about the same as ours. They believe in one person as a prophet. It seems this prophet had visions from God. Some of these visions were about the world ending. They believe the world will end with some type of phenomenon in the sky. God will cause this to happen and he will save his people and put an end to the unbelievers."

"It is an interesting idea," the tall, slender teenager commented. "Not that I think it will happen though."

"No, I don't think so either," the shorter one said. "They have preached this for over a hundred years. If it were true it would have happened by now."

The two skeptics gazed at the uncompleted structure. For several minutes they were silent as they lost themselves in thought.

"What do they call this big event that will happen in the sky," the tall one asked, staring at the large wooden structure.

"It has something to do with the weather. I think they call it 'rain.'"

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John Bedell is an elementary school teacher in Gary, Indiana, who graduated from Andrews University in 1980.

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# Judgment for the Scoffers

**LOGOS** **Theme:** The delay in Christ's return leads some to question its reality. But the Christian's hope for the second coming is firmly grounded in the creative, powerful word of God, which brought the world into existence and has dramatically intervened in its history.

## 1. The Purpose for the Reminder (read 2 Peter 3:1-2)

*"I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles" (3:2, NIV).*

Peter now shifts the focus from the debauchery of the wicked to the duty of the Christian. After a lengthy denunciation of unsound teachers he shifts from negative condemnation to positive encouragement. He addresses his readers as "dear friends." His heart goes out to them. He is concerned about the temptations and subtle heresies they face. He appeals to their "sincere" minds (RSV). As of yet they are undefiled and undistorted by the destructive heresies. They are "established in the truth" (1:12). Yet there is ever need for vigilance. There is always cause to remember the words spoken in the past, both by the prophets of old and by the message of Jesus Christ given through the apostles. It is interesting to note that the tense of the Greek indicates that the "words," though spoken in the past, continue to have effect into and through the present.

*How is theological and religious validity established? How can one be sure of a "sound mind"?*

## 2. A Precedent for Destruction (read 2 Peter 3:3-7)

*"Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (3:4, NIV).*

The connection is obvious. First there is the licentiousness of the pseudoteachers, and second there is their denial of Christ's second coming. The two go hand in hand. After all, who would live in immoral excess if he believed in the imminent return and judgment of God? It is the denial of judgment that is the center of the other heresies. And by destroying this one, Peter crushes the others.

To do this Peter presents the argument that the world is not eternally stable. Everything does not continue in the same way. He uses the flood as an example. Though the world was formed and sustained by water, through God's word it was destroyed by water. By the same token the world will someday be destroyed by fire. This will be the day when all receive judgment and the wicked their destruction.

*How should a knowledge of a coming judgment alter one's behavior? How should it not alter one's behavior? Can the knowledge of Christ's return cause a Christian to be too otherworldly? How can the proper perspective be maintained?*

E. R. M.

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# Seeing Through Skepticism

selected by Roy C. Naden

To acknowledge that we cannot fully comprehend the great truths of the Bible is only to admit that the finite mind is inadequate to grasp the infinite; that man, with his limited, human knowledge, cannot understand the purposes of the Omniscience. Because they cannot fathom all its mysteries, the skeptic and the infidel reject God's word; . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Disguise it as they may, the real cause of doubt and skepticism, in most cases, is the love of sin. The teachings and restrictions of God's word are not welcome to the proud, sin-loving heart, and those who are unwilling to obey its requirements are ready to doubt its authority. In order to arrive at truth, we must have a sincere desire to know the truth and a willingness of heart to obey it.<sup>2</sup>

We see the minds of many wandering through the mazes of skepticism. The causes of this are ignorance, pride, and a defective character. Humility is a hard lesson for fallen man to learn. There is something in the human heart which rises in opposition to revealed truth on subjects connected with God and sinners, the transgression of the divine law, and pardon through Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Others adopt skeptical principles from pride and indolence. Too ease-loving to distinguish themselves by accomplishing anything worthy of honor, which requires effort and self-denial, they aim to secure a reputation for superior wisdom by criticizing the Bible. . . . There are many who seem to feel that it is a virtue to stand on the side of unbelief, skepticism, and infidelity. But underneath an appearance of candor, it will be found that such persons are actuated by self-confidence and pride.<sup>4</sup>

In studying the word, the soul that hungers and thirsts for righteousness will be impressed by the divine utterances. Skepticism can have no power over a soul that with humility searches the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

## TESTIMONIES

Key Text:  
John 7:17

**"In order to arrive at truth we must have a willingness of heart to obey it."**

## REACT

1. Is there such a thing as an honest skeptic? If so, how should the believer relate to such?

2. What role, if any, should critical, evaluative thinking play in finding ultimate truth?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 113.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 111.  
3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 588.  
4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 526.  
5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 449.

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# Beyond Evidence

by Charles T. Everson, introduced  
and adapted by Roy C. Naden

**EVIDENCE**  
**Key Text:**  
**Matthew**  
**24:36-39**

*What makes the serious taunts of skeptics hard to combat is the fact that in many cases they contain an element of truth. And there lies the rub. When we evaluate issues we need to see not only, or necessarily, where the weight of "evidence" lies, but rather of first importance, what God's Word and God's Spirit indicate is our course of duty.*

*Decades ago one of Adventism's first great evangelists, Charles T. Everson, used the story of the Flood to illustrate how "evidence" can actually obscure truth. Imagine yourself in a tent with the smell of canvass and sawdust, the sound of horses outside the tent flap, your cramped New England homestead a mile or two away, as Elder Everson climaxes his account of one man's search for security after hearing Noah preach a few weeks before the flood.*

**"The Lord is too good to destroy anyone!"**

He went home and told his wife about it and she said, "I'll tell you what you can do. Go down and see our preacher and get your conscience fixed up." So he went down to see the minister who said, "Listen my dear man, you're unduly excited. You've been listening to that old man on the hill over there—Noah—and he told you about the Flood that is coming. Well you should keep in mind that the Lord is too good to destroy anyone!"

When he got home his wife could see the conversation with the minister had calmed her husband down but to be sure she suggested he see a sociologist who told him, "I can dispel the trouble from your mind in a second. If Noah was a good man and a real Christian, instead of taking all that wood to build a boat—cords and cords of it—he would have chopped it up and given it to poor widows and the destitute. Because when you give to the poor you lend to the Lord."

Leaving the sociologist he ran into another scientist who remarked, "You know we've never had enough water from the sky to float a chip. Surely you don't expect enough water to float that huge ship off the top of the hill!" And as if that all wasn't bad enough when he got home his wife exclaimed, "Grandfather was just in and I told him about your new fangled religion. He told me to tell you he heard Noah preaching this Flood stuff a hundred years ago. Take a look at the weathered side of the ark and you'll see it's black with age! Nothing's going to happen, nothing!"

For a while the man tried to forget the whole business but one day he noticed a great flock of animals filing orderly into the ark. "Oh," he exclaimed, "that's what Noah said would happen. Those lions, tigers, and elephants couldn't have just walked here by chance." At that very moment a reputable scientist came by to see what was happening at the ark and the young man asked him how he explained what they were watching. The scientist replied, "This is easily explained. This is an innate propulsion of the animal kingdom animated by the supreme activity of the subconscious mind and superinduced by posterior spheres of cerebral afterglow; sensitizing every scintilla of the corporeality of the brute creation thus effecting a translocation of their materialistic concepts to more salubrious environments." The speech sounded very convincing because he

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couldn't understand it and he left. Soon after, as he was passing the ark he noticed the door had been shut. He exclaimed, "That's what Noah told me! God would shut the door! The Flood is coming!" He rushed home to tell his wife. She tried and was ultimately successful in calming him down by pointing to the clear skies. The next day he didn't see a cloud either and by the fourth day the sky was still as blue as ever and he began to feel somewhat easy again.

Three nights later he went to bed and tossed as he reviewed the whole story point by point and week by week. Suddenly in the midst of that night there was a flash of lightning and a bolt of thunder. As quick as flash he jumped out of bed, ran to the barn, hitched the horses and bundled his wife and children into the carriage crying, "It's true. The story of the Flood is true." He whipped the horses and headed for the mountains. By now the rain was rushing down, and the roads were breaking up and great wells of water poured out. Soon the waters caught up with him. So he got out of the carriage and climbed a fir tree. But the waters kept rolling higher and higher. Finally clinging to the topmost branch of the tree for dear life, his face ashen, his eyes wild, the waters gripped his feet and pulled him under—lost. "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

**"Grandfather told me he heard Noah preaching this flood stuff a hundred years ago."**

### **REACT**

Is the weight of rational evidence today in favor of the second coming or against it? How would you define the basis for believing in the second coming?

Adapted from the story by Charles T. Everson, published posthumously by Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1929.

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# How Can It Always Be “Near”?

by Roy C. Naden

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**Revelation**  
**22:12, 20**

How near is “near”? We have been talking about the nearness of the Lord’s return since the 1840’s, and some have become skeptical or blasé about the *nearness* of the event. How can it always be “near”? One of Ellen White’s early visions contained a startling set of details about some individuals present at an early Adventist conference. She wrote: “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.’”<sup>1</sup>

The conference took place in 1857 and all of the individuals present have been dead for decades. Of course, the Bible writers also speak about Christ’s return as an event to be fulfilled *very* shortly. Paul wrote “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up . . .” (1 Thess. 4:17). John began the Apocalypse describing “things which must *shortly* come to pass” (Rev. 1:1). And he ended with the words, “Behold, I come quickly. . . Surely I come quickly” (Rev. 22:12, 20).

So, it must be that God has both an “ideal will”—the time he plans and desires events to transpire—and an “accommodated will”—the actual time that events take place, which is influenced by the cooperation of mankind.

God would have us constantly conscious of his return which can certainly become reality “soon.” If fact it *will* occur as soon as the gospel has been proclaimed to every creature—a work in which we all should participate! Perhaps it would be better for us to give thought to the one grand sign yet to be fulfilled than trying to guess the precise meaning of “near.”

Ellen White wrote: “There is a large work to be done outside the pulpit, by thousands of consecrated lay members. Long has God waited for the spirit of service to take possession of the whole church, so that everyone shall be working for Him according to his ability. When the members of the church of God do their appointed work . . . the Lord Jesus will return to this earth in power and great glory.”<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

Is the timing of the second coming then contingent on the effectiveness of Seventh-day Adventist evangelism? Are there other factors to consider?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 131, 132.  
*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 111.

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# Remember!

by James E. Miller

As Jesus predicted, we who are living just before his return are caught up in the routine of eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage (Matt. 24:38), just like those whom the Flood took by surprise. Time has a way of dulling our sense of expectation, and after nineteen centuries the Christian church seems occupied with everything else but the return of its Lord. Even we Adventists who put our expectation of his return in our name, have largely turned to other interests. Don't get me wrong. I don't think we should stop marrying and giving in marriage. And, I don't think we should stop eating and drinking, either. I *do* think we need to get less wrapped up in such interests.

Millions were washed away by the Flood because they didn't take the time to recognize the call of their God. Instead they continued their trivial endeavors. If we also get caught up in the things of this world we might as well be buried along with them. The record of the Flood still stands as a silent witness to us of the cost of complacency.

I am not suggesting that we get so starry-eyed about Christ's return that we forget our responsibilities here on earth. That hope does make a difference in our orientation toward life, however. We are not overwhelmed by the suffering and imperfection in the world. The ugliness of this world makes us long all the more for the next. The inconsiderate and undependable people make us long for the one who is closer than a brother. The loss of loved ones makes us long for the great reunion when death is swallowed up in victory. When compared with the treasures of heaven, the treasures of this earth just don't measure up. When our hearts are set on heaven, how can we help but watch in eager anticipation for his return?

When the angels hurried them out of the city, Lot and his daughters knew very well how wicked the city was. They enjoyed its comforts, but knew when it was better to leave. Lot's wife, however, didn't see it that way. The comforts of the city were the treasure of her heart, and where her treasure was, there her heart was also.

Remember Christ's promise to return. Remember the flood, and how only eight survived. Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:32).

## REACT

Does spending time, energy, and resources on things other than the second coming, such as improving this world, reflect diminished faith that Christ's return is near?

## OPINION

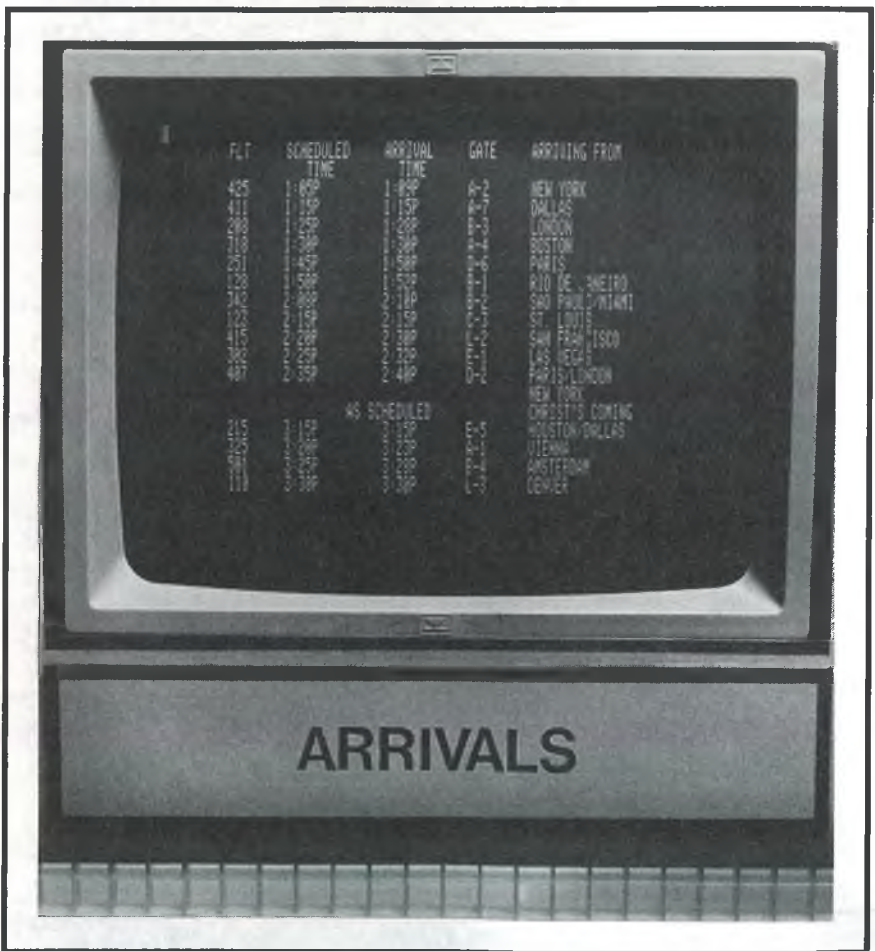
Key Text:  
Luke 17:32

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James E. Miller is a master of divinity student at Andrews University.

# A Response to Skeptics-II

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36, NIV).





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# Too Late

by Dan Snider and Bruce Closser

**This Week's Scripture:**  
**2 Peter 3:8-10**

*Davis's turn:*

This was it. The last day before final exams week. Not only that, but it was also the last, and I mean no-more-chances-after-this day to hand in any late material. Most classes had set this deadline earlier in the semester, but some teachers had given a grace period of a few days to hand in any back work. Dr. Simpson, who taught Medieval English Lit was one of these and for the time being I was able to breathe a little easier.

Now the only thing standing in my way of getting a decent grade for the semester was an in-class presentation on a book I read, or rather was supposed to read. But as the hands of the clock approached the seventeenth hour, my hopes of passing his class with anything better than a low C were getting dimmer and dimmer.

I knew in my mind that he had given me countless opportunities, but still, how could he really expect me to read a 300-page novel that to me was merely a boring sideline to my college experience. Besides, I had other things that were

more important. Organic chemistry was taking all of my spare time and then some.

Why, with classes in the morning, labs in the afternoon, and work in the evening, Simpson was lucky just to see my face in his class. He just wasn't being fair.

*Simpson's turn:*

Davis just left my office. I did my best to explain his C-grade in Medieval English Lit, but it didn't go well. It never does. People like Davis just don't understand that there isn't any extra time, once the gradesheets are due in the records office. When the quarter's up, it's up. Besides, it doesn't make the confrontation any easier, knowing that Davis missed every other deadline I set up—not just a few now and then, mind you, but every one. He's got a good mind. Quick. Sharp. I even envy him. He could have gone far in the class, and I did my best to make it possible for him. I gave him extra time on every assignment, but it wasn't enough. I feel sorry for him. He could have done so much better. But there isn't anything more I could do. It was too late. I just wish he understood.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**

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Dan Snider and Bruce Closser are student and teacher at Andrews University and have taken classes with each other.

Sunday, December 1 93

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# The Coming Day of the Lord

## LOGOS

**Theme:** The reasons for the deferral of God's judgment lie in his loving character, but Christ's promise assures us the day of the Lord will come at an unexpected time.

### 1. A Thousand Years as a Day

*"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8, NIV).*

The apostles are getting older. A few have already died and perhaps in the new generation of believers some of the burning pentecostal fire is also beginning to die. "This generation" is already passing and "all these things" have not yet happened (see Matt. 24:34). Questions and doubts are beginning to form. Recognizing this Peter changes the direction of his argument from the scoffers to the orthodox believers who may be inclined to succumb to impatience.

"The opening clause may be translated, 'but let not this one thing escape your notice, beloved.'"<sup>1</sup> The point has obviously escaped the mockers as evidenced by their ignorant mocking. They have deliberately shut their eyes to the facts. But the thing Christians must remember is that God is not bound by time. His relation to time must never be confused with our relation to time. Human standards of calculation are inappropriate when estimating the slowness or speed with which God fulfills his promises. With God all things are eternally present. Past and future have no meaning. "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4, NIV). It is through faith that we are orientated to this understanding of eternity. Through faith we become in tune with larger realities, whereas unbelievers remain subjects of time, limited by its narrow vision. For this reason then, believers should be undisturbed by a presumed delay in the second coming, for the surety remains—God will fulfill His promises.

*What if you knew that Christ would not come for another hundred years? How would this affect your faith? Would you be more or less concerned about the arms race, world poverty, and other societal problems?*

### 2. The Character of God

*"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).*

If v. 8 were to stand alone, the promise of Christ's soon return might sound a little hollow. So to those who might still suspect that the scoffers may be correct, Peter furnishes a final answer to doubt. God uses time to make effective the purposes of his grace. When the passing of time is seen in this light, one no longer thinks of delay but rather of a God "who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth" (1 Tim. 2:4, NIV). This longsuffering extends

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time, allowing for a change of heart and mind, giving opportunity for repentance and salvation. And if in this time some are brought to this change, what is a thousand years to God and to the Christian? The delay means salvation and it ought to be the basis for evangelistic fervor, not for doubt at the hands of the skeptics. God delays the end to provide opportunity for all to realize the promise of salvation and believers must take the advantage of this promise to as many as possible.

*If Christ were to cut short his delay and come tomorrow what would your reaction be? Be honest. Is it possible that your hypothetical reaction, if a positive one, is based on a desire to escape (school pressure, job stress, and life's hassles in general)? Is this desire necessarily negative?*

### 3. Like a Thief

*"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10, NIV).*

Peter has settled the doubts regarding the second coming and has quieted the clamor of the skeptics. Now he tells what the coming of the Lord will be like. The delay may be long or short but the actual appearing and the events that accompany it will not require much time at all. Suddenly, instantly, the end will come. The statement is emphatic. There is no room for doubt. And with this undeniable coming there will be catastrophic displays that mockers would not like to dwell on.

God is patient and desires to save all, but this patience, unlike the desire, will not last eternally. The time will come when suddenly the roar of his approaching flight (the word translated "roar" refers to the noise created by beating wings) will rend the heavens and "everything will be laid bare."

Other versions translate this phrase "burned up" or its equivalent. There is some discussion over which is correct. But the NIV rendition is interesting. More than just the physical earth being burned bare, it denotes that *everything* will be laid bare. Every act, every secret thought, every motive, and every desire will come to light. And to the universe will be displayed the nature of evil. In the burnt wake of this exposing fire there will be no gray, only black and white. Sin in all its subtle forms will be exposed and its results will be clearly evident. And there will be no more doubt, neither will there be any more questions or delusions, for everything will be laid bare.

*In describing the day of the Lord, Peter was using Old Testament apocalyptic terminology. Is it possible, then that his description is meant to be taken allegorically? If not, why? If so, what are the implications?*

E.R.M.

1. SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 614.

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# What Are We Waiting For?

## TESTIMONY Merciful Deferral

Key Text:

Matthew 24:14

The long night of gloom is trying, but the morning is deferred in mercy, because if the Master should come, so many would be found unready. God's unwillingness to have His people perish, has been the reason for so long a delay.<sup>1</sup>

It [Christ's return] will not tarry past the time that the message is borne to all nations, tongues, and peoples. Shall we who claim to be students of prophecy forget that God's forbearance to the wicked is part of the vast and merciful plan by which he is seeking to compass the salvation of souls?<sup>2</sup>

### Don't Blame God!

The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.<sup>3</sup>

We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel; but for Christ's sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course.<sup>4</sup>

Had the purpose of God been carried out by His people in giving to the world the message of mercy, Christ would, ere this, have come to the earth, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God.<sup>5</sup>

### We Have a Role

God had committed to His people a work to be accomplished on earth. The third angel's message was to be given, the minds of believers were to be directed to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ had entered to make atonement for His people. The Sabbath reform was to be carried forward. The breach in the law of God must be made up. The message must be proclaimed with a loud voice, that all the inhabitants of earth might receive a warning. The people of God must purify their souls through obedience to the truth, and be prepared to stand without fault before Him at His coming.<sup>6</sup>

By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord's return.<sup>7</sup>

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.<sup>8</sup>

### REACT

Will the second coming be delayed indefinitely if the church fails to cooperate with God?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 192 (1868).
2. *Review and Herald*, June 18, 1901 (*Evangelism*, p. 697).
3. Manuscript 4, 1883 (*Evangelism*, p. 694).
4. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 450 (1900).
5. Letter 104, 1901 (*Evangelism*, p. 696).
6. Manuscript 4, 1883 (*Evangelism*, p. 694).
7. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 635 (1898).
8. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69 (1900).



# The Legacy of 1844

by Brian E. Strayer

October 22, 1844: Waiting. Praying. Studying. *Hoping*.

"Our expectations were raised high, and thus we looked for our coming Lord until the clock tolled at midnight. The day then passed. . . . Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, . . . We wept, and wept, till the day dawn."<sup>1</sup>

October 23, 1844: Weeping. Praying. Re-studying. *Enduring*.

The experience of those pioneer Adventists should be encouraging to those now awaiting the second advent. The expectations of the pioneers "were raised high" three times—March 1843, March/April 1844, October 22, 1844<sup>2</sup>—only to be "blasted" each time. Yet many of them endured and studied.

Many scoffers have ascribed the Millerite phenomenon to religious fanaticism, psychological delusions, and emotional instability.<sup>3</sup> The most convincing evidence against these charges is what the waiting accomplished for the Christian experiences of the Advent believers, and how they reacted to crushing disappointments. I. T. Hough, a Philadelphia tailor, placed a sign in his shop window which read: "This shop is closed in honor of the King of kings, who will appear about the 22nd of October. Get ready, friends, to crown him Lord of all." Expectation meant preparing. Mr. N. Southard wrote in a newspaper: "If any human being has a just pecuniary claim against me, he is requested to inform me instantly." Waiting meant honest accounting. Clorinda Minor's ad began: "Warning—I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will be revealed in the clouds of heaven, on the 10th day of the 7th month . . . I therefore entreat all whom this may reach to prepare to meet their God."<sup>4</sup> Hoping meant witnessing and warning.

Then came 12:01 a.m., October 23, 1844, and they "wept, till the day dawn." Then they faced scoffers who slandered them with malicious stories of ascension robes, insane behavior, and suicide.<sup>5</sup> Others mocked them with "What! Haven't you gone up yet?" Some Millerites found a most effective rejoinder: "And if I had gone up, where would *you* have gone?"

So how did those who endured react to crushing disappointment? With renewed study, prayer and commitment. Joshua V. Himes wrote to Joseph Bates: "I never felt more happy and reconciled to His will; the late work has *saved* me. . . . Now let us *hold on*." William Miller stated in the *Advent Herald*: "Although . . . disappointed, I am not yet cast down or discouraged . . . my hope in the coming of Christ is as strong as ever." He urged believers to "hold fast," and declared, "I have fixed my mind upon another time . . . and that is To-day, To-DAY and TO-DAY, until He comes."<sup>7</sup>

Readiness TODAY—until He comes. That is the spiritual legacy of the Millerite movement for us.

## REACT

How did the Millerites' waiting for the "blessed hope" affect their lives during the "tarrying time?" Has this hope affected your lifestyle in similar ways? In different ways?

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
Titus 2:11-13

"I have fixed  
my mind  
upon another  
time . . ."

1. Hiram Edson manuscript, reprinted in E. F. VandeVere, *Windows* (Nashville, TN: South Publishing Assoc., 1975), p. 25.

2. Richard Schwarz, *Lightbearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 1979), pp. 44, 49, 51.

3. F. D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Assoc., 1975), p. 15. C. E. Sears, *Days of Illusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924).

4. Cited in E. M. Dick, "The Millerite Movement 1830-1845," in Gary Land, editor, *Adventist America*, unpublished manuscript, pp. 25, 4.

5. VandeVere, *Windows*, pp. 19, 20.

6. Schwarz, *Lightbearers*, p. 53.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 54.

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# Renewing Spiritual Patience

by Nancy Driscol

## HOW TO

Key Text:  
Colossians 4:1-4

In today's fast-paced society, most of us find it hard to be patient. It's much easier to get angry when you're stuck in an endless cafeteria line with two minutes before class, or when the computer goes down 30 minutes before an assignment is due, leaving you with nothing but an apology to give your teacher.

As Christians, our lack of patience may account, in part, for our apathy towards the final judgment and Christ's return. For example, students find that the immediate rewards for keeping up with homework are much more tangible than the rewards for concentrating on the abstraction called "Eternity."

To keep eternal values from getting crowded out of your life, try:

**1. Mentally putting yourself in God's place.** How does he view time? If you were omniscient what would a "delay" of 20 years mean? What about 1000 years (see 2 Peter 3:8)? Perhaps the word "delay" is a necessary part of heaven's vocabulary only in attempting to communicate with the human race.

**2. Making it a point to talk about God.** Don't just think about him during your devotional time, share those thoughts with others. If you are surrounded by Adventists, you may think there is no need to share your faith, but there *is* a need! It's yours and mine. I never realized, until I was a student missionary, how talking about God with others helps me grasp a new dimension in the reality of God.

**3. Trying to picture what heaven is actually like.** Shove the old stereotypes out of your mind. (I'm not sure I'd still get excited about sliding down a giraffe's neck!) It's OK if you don't want to study for all eternity, although studying for the sole purpose of learning, with no tests, no grades, and a perfect mind sounds great to me! Heaven offers limitless opportunities. My favorite sport is waterskiing. It is exciting to think of having eternity to perfect my skiing!! I won't even need a boat to pull me.

God's love is a reality! The more in tune we are with his promises, the greater our expectations will be for the future.

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Nancy Driscol is a journalism major at Andrews University.

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# Can We Be Sure The End Is Near?

by Edward W. H. Vick

Why have so many died believing that Jesus Christ would come in their generation? How can the hope of the second advent persist through so many centuries when it has not yet been realized? Is it reasonable to think that Jesus' coming might be also for us in the twentieth century a distant and not an imminent hope? If so many have believed in and have not actually seen the coming, are we also being unreasonable in thinking He will come in our day? May we not "demythologize" the hope of the second advent and express it in terms of the believer's certainty that his faith in Jesus Christ is well founded? The question is not as to the possibility of such an interpretation but rather as to whether such an interpretation does justice to the New Testament hope. This it does not do. . . .

But why is it necessary that the advent be thought of as imminent? Because it is a fact, in two ways. First, the contingency of life is such that man can never predict his own affairs accurately: He does not know when he will die. Over the day and hour of his death he can pronounce no accurate word. The possibility of death is open at any moment for everyone. "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment." Hebrews 9:27.

After death comes judgment, the judgment that takes place at the *parousia*. In the interval man knows nothing. This means that the next thing known after death is the revelation of God at the complex of events which make up God's final manifestation at the consummation of the age. It is a very real insight, therefore, that stresses the imminence of the advent. The next thing known after death, a death which impends over every person and may take place at any time, is the revelation of God at the "last day."

But it is also plain, that since the *parousia* is literal, taking place at a point in time, there will be a generation which will witness it. It was concerning these that the apostle wrote to console the mourners in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Those who remain alive until the *parousia* do not take precedence over the dead. They are united together. However, along with ample signs of the advent indicating its imminence is also given the warning that the exact time is unknown, hence the need to watch as if it were to take place at any time. Matthew 24:36, 42-44. The element of uncertainty makes preparation essential; the certainty of the fact makes the preparation meaningful.

## REACT

Is it proper for Adventists to stress that Christ is coming *soon*, when in fact we do not know exactly when he will return?

## OPINION

Key Text:  
Hebrews  
10:37, 38

"May we not  
'demythologize'  
the hope of  
the second  
advent?"

Excerpted from Edwa  
W. H. Vick, *Let Me As  
you* (Mountain View: F  
cific Press Publishing  
society, 1968), pp.  
168, 169.

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Edward W. H. Vick is chairman of the department of religious studies at Forest Fields College in Nottingham, England.

Friday, December 6 99

# Living in View of Christ's Return

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Peter 3:11, 12, NIV).





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# Living In Expectation

by Meredith Jones

## INTRO- DUCTION

**This Week's Scripture:**  
2 Peter 3:11-16

Should the girls on the grounds department crew be allowed to wear shorts to work? (The men in the administration building who wore white shirts to work certainly didn't think so.) Should the grounds department workers be allowed to listen to radios while they worked? (The secretaries who listened to WYEZ were sure the answer should be no.)

Those were our main concerns that summer as we squatted hour after hour in the hot sunshine, picking weeds out of the petunias. That and trying to find a cool spot for breaks.

We could barely answer civilly, by the end of the summer, when neatly dressed people hurried into air-conditioned buildings and called cheerily, "Now don't work too hard!"

When some passers by of a different kind came up to talk to me, I was taken completely unaware. These people had the air of sightseers.

"What kind of a university is this?"

"Well, it's a Seventh-day Adventist university."

"What do Seventh-day Adventists believe?"

Just like that. It was my big chance to "share my faith," dropped right in my lap! My heart beat a little faster. What could I say to these people that was succinct and that would express the distinctive character of Adventism? I blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

"Well, Adventists don't smoke or drink."

Even as I said it, I blushed with humiliation and frustration. That wasn't at all what I had wanted to tell them; I had failed miserably at my first big opportunity to "witness." I promised myself it would never happen again. I would listen carefully in Bible class, prepare myself, and be ready for the next time.

The next time came a few summers later. (I'm not a door-to-door witnesser, as you may have guessed.) In a small, steamy summerhouse a fellow seminar classmate popped the question:

"So, what do Seventh-day Adventists believe?"

I was ready for him: "Seventh-day Adventism is a Christian religion. That means we believe in Christ as our Savior. Besides that, the name 'Seventh-day Adventist' expresses two of our foremost beliefs. We keep the seventh day, Saturday, as the Sabbath. We also believe that there will be a literal second advent, a day when Christ will return to earth to establish his kingdom."

I was about to continue my spiel and refine it when my interrogator interrupted me. He was Jewish. Point number one wasn't surprising. Point number two was familiar to him. He went right to point number three.

"What is it like to live in expectation of Christ's imminent return?" he said.

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Meredith Jones teaches English at Andrews University.

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And once again I was humiliated, frustrated, . . . and speechless. Why hadn't anyone ever encouraged me to think about it like that before? Why hadn't we discussed it in my Bible classes?

This new friend, I knew, wouldn't be satisfied with, "I try not to do anything wrong just in case he arrives." He was expecting a positive response, not a negative or even a passive one. He wanted to know how my belief in a second coming

shaped my actions, my thoughts, my philosophy.

As I realized the implications of his question, I felt overwhelmed. The more I thought about it, however, the more excited I became.

How, indeed, does our expectation make us different? Does it influence everything in our lives? Our politics? Our social concerns? Our treatment of the environment? Our relations with other people?

Someday someone is going to want to know.

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# In View of His Coming

**Theme:** Anticipation of a new world in the future should lead us to live out the qualities of the coming world in the present one. **LOGOS**

## 1. Ethical Implications of the Second Coming (read 2 Peter 3:11-14)

*"What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God" (3:11, 12, NIV).*

The intent of Peter's capsule description of the day of the Lord is not to inspire terror in the hearts of faithful Christians, but to call for moral and spiritual seriousness. If the world is hastening to a time of final reckoning, obviously one ought to live a life that will stand firm under scrutiny. Here the Greek carries more impact than the English translation conveys. The call is more along the lines of "how outstandingly excellent" people ought you to be? If there is to be a new heaven and earth of purity and righteousness it is only logical that one try his or her utmost to fit into its setting. It is this end or beginning that gives direction and purpose to life.

The Greeks gave little thought to an afterworld. And when they did give it some consideration they saw it as a dark and dismal place. In Hades there was neither joy nor pain, existence was but a shadow. If there is no hope of a second coming, no goal to which all creation moves (see Romans 8:19) then life is pointless. The tremendous truth of the second coming is that life is going somewhere, and without this conviction there is nothing to live for. Selfish hedonism becomes life's central theme. But the promise of God coming to meet man face to face brings hope, and this hope, meaning, and this meaning, moral action.

According to Peter this moral action can even hasten the coming day. Commentators are divided over this point as verse 12 can also legitimately be translated "as you look forward to the day of God, earnestly desiring it." However, the translation as it stands in the NIV, KJV and RSV more closely correlates to the conviction of v. 8. If the Lord delays his coming to allow as many to repent as possible, believers can aid in this work, bringing it to a sooner completion.

*Is the "moral action" mentioned above primarily evangelistic (proselytizing) or humanitarian? If we may indeed hasten Christ's coming, are we manipulating God by our retarding or hastening his coming? Do we then take the blame for the delay and all the misery and pain the world has experienced during the delay?*

## 2. Peter Quotes Paul (read 2 Peter 3:14-16)

*"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you . . ." (3:15, NIV).*

Both Peter and Paul saw that the fact that God sometimes withholds his judgment is not an excuse to sin but an opportunity for repentance (see Rom. 2:4). So Peter reminds his readers of Paul's writing to support his own.

E. R. M.

1. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles Peter and Jude*, p. 367.

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# Living In Heaven's Atmosphere

selected by Bruce Closser

**TESTIMONY**  
**Key Text:**  
**Genesis 5:24**

Of Enoch it is written that he . . . walked with God three hundred years. . . . After the birth of his first son, Enoch reached a higher experience; he was drawn into a closer relationship with God. He realized more fully his own obligations and responsibility as a son of God. And as he saw the child's love for its father, its simple trust in his protection; as he felt the deep, yearning tenderness of his own heart for that first-born son, he learned a precious lesson of the wonderful love of God to men in the gift of His Son, and the confidence which the children of God may repose in their heavenly Father. The infinite, unfathomable love of God through Christ became the subject of his meditations day and night; and with all the fervor of his soul he sought to reveal that love to the people among whom he dwelt.

Enoch's walk with God was not in a trance or a vision, but in all the duties of daily life. He did not become a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had a work to do for God in the world. In the family and in his intercourse with men, as a husband and father, a friend, a citizen, he was the steadfast, unwavering servant of the Lord. . . .

Enoch was a man of strong and highly cultivated mind, and extensive knowledge; he was honored with special revelations from God; yet being in constant communion with heaven, with a sense of the divine greatness and perfection ever before him, he was one of the humblest of men. The closer the connection with God, the deeper was the sense of his own weakness and imperfection.

Distressed by the increasing wickedness of the ungodly, and fearing that their infidelity might lessen his reverence for God, Enoch avoided constant association with them, and spent much time in solitude, giving himself to meditation and prayer. Thus he waited before the Lord, seeking a clearer knowledge of His will that he might perform it. To him prayer was as the breath of the soul; he lived in the very atmosphere of heaven.

## REACT

What does the example of Enoch suggest for those wishing "to be found spotless, blameless and at peace" with God when Christ returns? Did Enoch achieve sinless perfection before he was translated?

**"The closer the connection with God, the deeper was the sense of his own imperfection."**

cerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 84, 85.

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**Bruce Closser is an assistant professor of English at Andrews University.**



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# Heaven- Inspired Purpose

by Bruce Closser

The 18th-century lexicographer, essayist, and poet, Samuel Johnson, well knew the dilemma of living in one world while looking forward to life in another. Journal entries in the form of prayers and meditations trace his struggle to shape his thoughts and behavior in accordance with the coming of a new world. On Easter Eve of 1757 he writes: "Almighty God, heavenly Father, who desirest not the death of a sinner, look down with mercy upon me, depraved with vain imaginations, and entangled in long habits of sin. Grant me that grace, without which I can neither will nor do what is acceptable to Thee."

On the same Eve in 1761 he laments: "Since the communion of last Easter, I have led a life so dissipated and useless, and my terrors and perplexities have so much encreased, that I am under great depression and discouragement; . . ."

Early in the morning of April 21, 1764, Johnson observes: "my indolence . . . has sunk into grosser sluggishness, and my dissipation spread into wilder negligence. My thoughts have been clouded with sensuality; and, except that from the beginning of this year I have in some measure forborn excess of strong drink, my appetites have predominated over my reason. A kind of strange oblivion has overspread me, so that I know not what has become of the last year; and perceive that incidents and intelligence pass over me without leaving any impression."

In the midst of despair, however, Johnson has not lost hope. He writes: "Yet I purpose to present myself before God tomorrow, with humble hope that he will not break the bruised reed." And after a lengthy reading of the Gospel of St. John which keeps him up till the early hours of the 22nd of April, 1764, Johnson purposes, "from this time, to reject or expel sensual images, and idle thoughts. To provide some useful amusement for leisure time. To avoid idleness. To rise early. To study a proper portion of every day. To worship God diligently. To read the Scriptures. To let no week pass without reading some part. To write down my observations. . . ."

Johnson records a prayer that is an excellent summary of our own need to live in expectation of Christ's imminent return: "This is not the life to which heaven is promised. I purpose to approach the altar again tomorrow. Grant, O Lord, that I may receive the Sacrament with such resolutions of a better life as may by thy grace be effectual, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."

**EVIDENCE**  
**Key Text:**  
**1 Thessalonian**  
**5:5-9**

Citations from Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1958), pp. 32-34.

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# End Time Spiritual Fitness

by Monte Salyer

## HOW TO

### Key Text:

1 Peter 4:7, 8

Today almost everyone cares about health and fitness. Nearly everywhere you look you see people getting in shape. Healthful foods are in demand. The list of best-selling books includes *Aerobics* by Dr. Cooper and *Eat to Win* by Dr. Haas. Society values physical fitness; we get in shape at least partly to gain approval.

Christians share this concern for health and fitness. But because we belong to a heavenly society as well as to an earthly one, we care even more about our spiritual health.

Knowing that the end of this world is near, Seventh-day Adventist Christians are seriously preparing for Jesus' second coming. The urgency of the situation gives us clarity of mind and spiritual discipline. Students who are told that they will be tested in the near future but are not told which day the test will fall, are wise to be ready at all times. So it should be with us who have been told that Christ will return soon, but haven't been given the date.

Athletics give us another helpful metaphor for spiritual preparation. Serious athletes do not live for momentary pleasures. They train for an event according to their coach's program. Likewise, Christians live, no longer by human passions, but by the will of God (1 Peter 4:2). We accept God's will because we recognize it leads to enduring peace and pleasure.

Above all, we who live in view of Christ's return love one another, since love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). We do not compete with other Christians for the prize of salvation. Everyone may pass this examination. In fact, our teacher asks us to help each other get ready for that day.

Though we are to make every effort to be found spotless, we should not become anxious. Time is short, we face the ultimate test, and our adversary is like a roaring lion in his efforts to destroy us. But thank God the champion is on our side! We thus joyfully can accept the advice of Peter, "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7, RSV).

## REACT

What, specifically, does a Christian need to do in order to be prepared for the second coming?

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Monte Salyer teaches English as a second language at Andrews University.

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# Cleaning and Hastening

by Roger Allison

OPINION

At the time of this writing I am living in the expectation of the arrival of my wife's parents. For some time now I've known they plan to visit, and, along with Kathy, I'm waiting for them to come.

Now, the whole idea of waiting for them to come gives pause for some miscellaneous musings. Separately unrelated, collectively my philosophizings suggest something of how we might relate to 2 Peter 3:11-16.

What does it mean to wait for the Lord's return? Waiting for Kathy's parents is hardly a passive affair. All week long there has been a flurry of activity around our place, the likes of which I'll not bother you with here. Suffice it to say that our house has never been cleaner; likely it will never be this clean until their next visit. With both of us working outside the home, and given my aversion to sharing household duties, you might guess that I've been busy with a variety of chores I would otherwise leave undone and unconsidered.

There is a great danger, as we are warned in v. 16, of wresting Scripture to our own advantage. Yet how easily we look hard at the first half of v. 12 without giving due thought to the last half and to v. 14. We concentrate on waiting for the Lord's return, but unfortunately we wait for him like we wait for our income tax returns, anxiously, but with little activity on our own parts.

"What sort of persons ought we to be?" asks v. 11. Certainly we ought to be persons who employ our waiting time profitably. I know for a certainty, and you can easily guess, how my wife would feel if I took the evenings just before her folks' arrival to improve on my newly acquired golf skills. Can the expectations our Heavenly Father, who admonishes us to be found without spot or blemish, and at peace, be any less?

And how much more important does the analogy become when we examine it on the very point at which it fails! No activity on my part will speed the arrival of Kathy's folks. They'll get here when they get here. But our Heavenly Father more than hints that we might hasten the coming of the day of God. It's almost as if, somehow, through a magical twisting of reality, I could get Kathy's mom and dad here a day earlier, if I only finished cleaning the deck windows!

## REACT

Is our degree of preparation the sole determinant of the timing of the second coming? Does it have *anything* to do with the timing of the second coming?

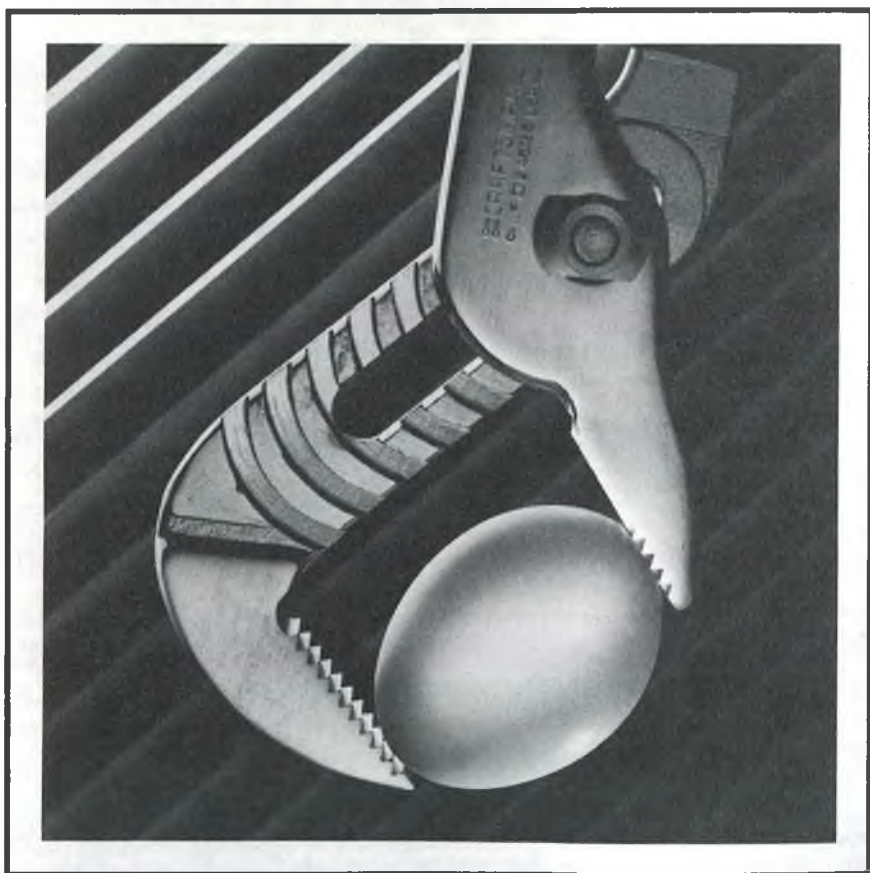
**"Unfortunately we wait for him like we wait for our income tax returns, anxiously, but with little activity on our own parts."**

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Roger Allison writes from Berrien Springs, Michigan.

# Contending for The Faith

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:30, 31, NIV).





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# Personal Opinion and Non-Negotiable Truth

by Jim Zackrison

## INTRO- DUCTION

### This Week's Scripture: Jude 1-23

I never could figure out just what the man's problem was. It seemed to be a matter of great joy to him to be against everything. He would latch on to any literature produced by anyone who had an axe to grind with the church, but if the literature was positive on something, he was against it. On the church board, you could count on him to vote against whatever was being discussed. The climax came the time he presented an idea to the church board that was really good. The board liked it; in fact they were excited about it. But when the time came for the vote—you guessed it—the man voted against his own idea. His was the only negative vote that night.

We humans seem to have a hard time staying in the middle of the road. We love to veer off to one side or the other—or better yet, go around in circles. When that characteristic shows up in the church, it usually has to do with doctrinal issues, church standards or personality clashes. Some point or other becomes a consuming fire in someone's mind. They be-

come a law unto themselves, determined that everyone else must fit into their particular mold.

The epistle of Jude deals with individuals who were stirring up controversy in this way. They had gotten into the church—"secretly slipped in" Jude says—and were beginning to erode both the doctrinal stance and the lifestyle of the church members. Personality wise, they were arrogant and demanding (v. 10).

The problem in this church was not simply one of people with two wrong opinions getting together to share their ignorance and denounce one another. Jude is not dealing with differences of opinion over peripheral issues where there is room for speculation and personal opinion. He is dealing with aberrations from the fundamentals of the faith—fundamentals which are non-negotiable. As we study Jude this week, we face such questions as: How can you disagree without being disagreeable? How can an atmosphere of peace and tolerance be maintained without sacrificing to personal opinion the non-negotiable principles of the "faith once for all entrusted to the saints"?

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Jim Zackrison is a member of the Pasadena, Calif. SDA church.

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# Building on the “Once-For-All” Faith

## LOGOS

**Theme:** We should stand firmly in defense of the faith “delivered once for all,” and continually build ourselves up in this “most holy faith.”

### 1. To Those Called and Kept by Christ (read Jude 1, 2)

Nothing is known for certain about Jude, the author of the brief, vigorous defense of the gospel that we are studying this week. Since he identifies himself as the brother of James, probably the best guess is that the author is the Judas of Mark 6:3, who is listed there, along with James, Joseph and Simon, as a brother of Jesus.

The bulk of Jude (vv. 4-18) shows a strong similarity to 2 Peter 2:1-3:3. The similarity in the progression of ideas, examples and even phrases, indicates that one author was dependent on the other, or both drew from a common source.<sup>1</sup>

Jude’s reference to the “apostles” in the past tense (v. 17) suggests that the letter was written toward the end of the first century, perhaps around 80 A.D.

### 2. A Clear and Present Danger (read Jude 3-19)

*“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3, NIV).*

After becoming aware of an immediate danger threatening the spiritual life of the community of faith, Jude dropped his plan to write a general theological treatise in order to sound a warning about the danger. His style is not moderate, diplomatic or gentle. The danger he saw, though hidden to some, was in his eyes like a tornado sweeping through the church. Therefore, bells must be rung, sirens must go off, and emergency systems must be activated.

We learn at least four things about Christian faith from verse 3:

1) It is “entrusted” or “delivered” (KJV) to us. The faith is, in the best sense of the word, a *tradition*. It has been transmitted to us through an unbroken, living chain beginning with Jesus Christ, continuing with the apostles, the faithful of all ages, down to those parents, teachers, pastors or friends who passed it on to each of us.

2) The apostolic proclamation of the faith is “once for all.” Though each generation (and each individual Christian) must discover and express the faith anew, there is a permanent core that can never be altered if the faith is to remain Christian. This core is the everlasting gospel—God incarnate in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was raised on the third day, and who will come again bringing judgment and resurrection to life eternal (see 1 Cor. 15:1-5, 20-28).

3) It is entrusted to “the saints.” The faith is not the private possession of various individuals. The understanding, preservation and proclamation of the faith is entrusted to the corporate community of God’s people—the church.

4) It is something for which we must “contend.” The faith demands open, decisive advocacy.<sup>2</sup>

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Jude felt compelled to contend against a two-fold threat to the faith that was surreptitiously infiltrating the church through the devious activities of certain individuals who:

1) used the grace of God as an excuse for doing whatever they pleased, no matter who they hurt;

2) in some way denied Christ and his Lordship. Many scholars believe that Jude's opponents were exhibiting an early form of Gnosticism, a widespread heresy that plagued the church in its first centuries. If this is true, Barclay explains that "they would have two mistaken ideas about Jesus. First, since the body, being matter, was evil, they would hold that Jesus only *seemed* to have a body and was a kind of spirit ghost in the apparent shape of a man. . . . They would deny the real manhood of Jesus Christ. Second, they would deny his uniqueness. They believed there were many stages between the evil matter of this world and the perfect spirit which is God; and they believed Jesus was only one of the many stages on the way."<sup>3</sup>

In vv. 5-7, Jude compares the spiritual threat to three notorious instances of abandonment of faith in the past. The first two examples—the Israelites who died in the desert and the angels who fell from heaven—show that even the greatest privileges from God do not guarantee salvation for those who reject his Lordship over their lives. The third illustrates for us the fate of those who irrevocably reject God. "Eternal fire" does not mean everlasting torment for the lost, but rather destruction, like that of Sodom, which is utter and irreversible—eternal in its effect.

*Do Jude's denunciations in verses 8 through 19 have any relevance for today's church? (See Gen. 4; Num. 16:1-35; 22-25; 31:8, 16 for background).*

### 3. Staying With the Faith (read Jude 20-23)

*"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (vv. 20, 21, NIV).*

In contrast to the erroneous course of those who were perverting God's grace into a license for "anything goes" behavior, Jude urges his readers to build on the foundation of faith provided by the prophets, apostles and Christ himself (see Eph. 2:20-22), and to keep themselves in the sphere of God's love. That love for everyone is un-failing, but unless we have an abiding relationship with Christ (see John 15:1-6), we are in danger of separating ourselves from the benefits of that love, and ending up in the condition of the spiritual losers in Jude's letter.

*Read carefully vv. 22 and 23 in several versions, if possible. What is your understanding of this advice and its implications for today?*

D. F. M.

1. See the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 701, 702 as well as other commentaries for a discussion of this issue.

2. These four points were adapted from W. Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, pp. 17, 179, 203.

3. Barclay, p. 180.

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# “Hold Fast That Which Is Good”

selected by Don Boyko

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Jude 18-20

It is when Satan appears as an angel of light that he takes souls in his snare, deceiving them. Men who pretend to have been taught of God, will adopt fallacious theories, and in their teaching will so adorn these fallacies as to bring in Satanic delusions. Thus Satan will be introduced as an angel of light and will have opportunity to present his pleasing fables.

These false prophets will have to be met. They will make an effort to deceive many, by leading them to accept false theories. Many scriptures will be misapplied in such a way that deceptive theories will apparently be based upon the words that God has spoken. Precious truth will be appropriated to substantiate and establish error. These false prophets who claim to be taught of God, will take beautiful scriptures that have been given to adorn the truth, and will use them as a robe of righteousness to cover false and dangerous theories. . . .

The Christian is to be “rooted and grounded” in the truth, that he may stand firm against the temptations of the enemy. He must have a continual renewal of strength, and he must hold firmly to Bible truth. Fables of every kind will be brought in to seduce the believer from his allegiance to God, but he is to look up, believe in God, and stand firmly rooted and grounded in the truth.

“Let your  
faith be  
substantiated  
by the Word  
of God.”

Keep a firm hold upon the Lord Jesus, and never let go. Have firm convictions as to what you believe. Let the truths of God’s Word lead you to devote heart, mind, soul and strength to the doing of His will. Lay hold resolutely upon a plain “Thus saith the Lord.” Let your only argument be, “It is written.” Thus we are to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. That faith has not lost any of its sacred, holy character, however objectionable its opposers may think it to be.

Those who follow their own mind and walk in their own way will form crooked characters. Vain doctrines and subtle sentiments will be introduced with plausible presentations, to deceive, if possible, the very elect. Are church members building upon the Rock? The storm is coming, the storm that will try every man’s faith, of what sort it is. Believers must now be firmly rooted in Christ, or else they will be led astray by some phase of error. Let your faith be substantiated by the Word of God. Grasp firmly the living testimony of truth. Have faith in Christ as a personal Saviour. He has been and ever will be our Rock of Ages. The testimony of the Spirit of God is true. Change not your faith for any phase of doctrine, however pleasing it may appear, that will seduce the soul.

The fallacies of Satan are now being multiplied, and those who swerve from the path of truth will lose their bearings. Having nothing on which to anchor, they will drift from one delusion to another, blown about by the winds of strange doctrines. Satan has come down with great power. Many will be deceived by his miracles. . . .

I entreat everyone to be clear and firm regarding the certain

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Don Boyko is the first elder of the Pasadena, Calif. SDA church.



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truths that we have heard and received and advocated. The statements of God's Word are plain. Plant your feet firmly on the platform of eternal truth. Reject every phase of error, even though it be covered with a semblance of reality. . . .

All genuine experience in religious doctrines will bear the impress of Jehovah. All should see the necessity of understanding the truth for themselves individually. We must understand the doctrines that have been studied out carefully and prayerfully. It has been revealed to me that there is among our people a great lack of knowledge in regard to the rise and progress of the third angel's message. There is great need to search the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation, and learn the text thoroughly, that we may know what is written.

The light given me has been very forcible that many would go out from us, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. The Lord desires that every soul who claims to believe the truth shall have an intelligent knowledge of what is truth. False prophets will arise and will deceive many. Everything is to be shaken that can be shaken. Then does it not become everyone to understand the reasons for our faith? In place of having so many sermons, there should be a more close searching of the Word of God, opening the Scriptures text by text, and searching for the strong evidences that sustain the fundamental doctrines that have brought us where we now are, upon the platform of eternal truth.

**"The Lord desires that every soul shall have an intelligent knowledge of what is truth."**

## **REACT**

When it comes to religious faith, open-mindedness is a good quality:

- a) always
- b) usually
- c) sometimes
- d) never

What are the reasons for your answer?

# Dealing With Dissidents

by James W. Zackrison

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
Jude 8-10

Jude's letter deals with a perennial issue in the church: how to deal with dissidents. He states that there is a non-negotiable "faith." In order to be biblically correct, certain truths have to be accepted. He takes it for granted that the "saints" know what those truths are, so he does not list them. He is however, explicit about the ways in which the dissidents are departing from them.

There were four main problems in the church to which he wrote:

1. A perversion of the teaching of free grace into an excuse for immorality leading to sexual misbehavior (vv. 4, 8).
2. A denial of the Lordship of Jesus (v. 4).
3. Subsequent rejection of religious authority, even that of celestial beings (vv. 8, 10).
4. Political maneuvering in the church in order to gain personal advantage (v. 16).

He condemns the dissidents by comparing them to the rebels during the Exodus, especially Korah (v. 11), Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, and Balaam—all classic examples of insurgence against God.

He also illustrates his point from extra-biblical sources, such as his references to the conflict over the body of Moses and to the statement by Enoch.<sup>1</sup> If you believe in verbal inspiration, these passages present a problem. Why would a Bible writer use non-biblical material? The answer to this puzzle is not really theological at all. Jude is simply using familiar information to illustrate a point. Michael did not argue with Satan about Moses' body, he did not "slander" him, he simply appealed to the authority of God. The point is that of ourselves we don't have any "imperial" authority—only God does. "It is written" is always authoritative.

"It is written" is always authoritative. 'I think' or 'I feel' rarely are."

Jude's purposing in using these extra-biblical illustrations is to impress the church with the final outcome of the ideas being advocated by the dissidents. However you look at it, that outcome is that "they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion." In other words, the bad guys have had it!

Those who don't rebel, on the other hand, should not show the same spirit as the rebels. "Be merciful to those who doubt," Jude urges (v. 22, NIV).

Jude's 25-verse letter is one of the most concise examples in the Bible of how to handle this issue of dissent in the church. He had no sympathy for the *ideas* of the rebels, but he has a great deal of sympathy for the *dissidents themselves*. That is where real Christianity comes into play.

## REACT

A dissident is someone who:

- a) turns against the gospel;
- b) openly rejects any of the 27 beliefs of the church;
- c) rebels against church authority.

Which option best completes the sentence? Why? Is dissent in the church always bad?

<sup>1</sup>Enoch 48 and 108 and "The Assumption of Moses," a book which is mentioned by a number of early church writers though no copy now exists.

At the time of this writing James W. Zackrison was the pastor of the Pasadena, Calif. SDA church.

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# Mercy— With Caution

by Kathy Petersen

Successful coping with divisive elements in the church requires first of all that we apply some basic spiritual principles to our own lives:

**1. Communication.** Communication plays a vital part in this whole issue. Listening and attitude are vital to communication. This applies especially in terms of how we communicate with God. Prayer, in the right spirit, gives God access to us. It's not enough to kneel and quickly dump our needs and petitions on him. We have to allow him time to stimulate our minds with his thoughts. That attitude produces the ability to do the same with people.

**2. Spiritual growth.** Knowledge by itself isn't enough. It has to make a difference in everyday living. Daily Bible study will promote both knowledge and application. This way we will know what the "faith entrusted to the saints" is and how it works.

**3. Anticipation of the second coming.** When my children are anticipating a special event they will cooperate, modify their behavior and be prepared for that event to take place. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we as adults had the same attitude toward Christ's coming? More important than believing in the second coming is being prepared for it by living a responsible life now.

The Christian's approach toward the victims of false teaching is clearly outlined in Jude.

**1. Show mercy to those who doubt (v. 22).** We are not to judge and condemn those in doubt but to show mercy. "The merciful are 'partakers of the divine nature,' and in them the compassionate love of God finds expression. All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim and not to condemn."<sup>1</sup> That means a redemptive attitude.

**2. Help "pull out of the fire" as many as possible (v. 23a).** Those hesitant to discard their fundamental beliefs, but easily influenced by false teachers, need constant encouragement and support so that they will remain firm in their convictions.

**3. Keep your distance when necessary, always being kind (v. 23b).** Some people will never be convinced that they are wrong. They don't even want to be convinced! Though we may not like to admit it, we cannot spend a lot of time with such individuals without being personally affected. We can't abandon our responsibility to those in error, but we have to exercise caution in dealing with them. Even while extending kindness, it might be necessary to limit our association with them so that we are not ourselves swayed by their wrong beliefs.

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**Jude 20-23**

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p.

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Kathy Petersen is the minister of music at the Pasadena, Calif. SDA church.

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# Distorting the Grace of God

by Ben Patterson

## OPINION

Key text:  
Jude 4

"I've never been with a man that made me feel happier." That was the way she described the love of her life. She was a Christian and he was a Christian. Each understood exactly what the other was feeling or thinking, often without a word being spoken. They had the same interests. It was the perfect relationship, except for one thing: she was the wife of another man.

My connection with all of this was that I was her pastor. She had come to me to be counseled on what she should do. After nearly two hours of listening and asking questions, my counsel came down to this: "Try to save your marriage, and begin by ending the adultery."

I will never forget the pain and astonishment I saw in her eyes when I said that. "But I can't," she sobbed, "I have no love left for my husband, and I have never in my life been more in love with anyone than I am with \_\_\_\_." I asked her if she understood the verdict of God on what she was doing. "Yes," she said, "I know the commandments. But I've never been happier. Somehow, I think God will understand if I go on with the affair."

"God will understand. . . ." Is that what the grace of God means? Does it mean that, for him, our wishes and happiness come first? That he graciously accommodates his purposes to our purposes? That he accepts us all for what we are?

No, it is not; not if the words of Christ and the witness of the Scriptures are to be taken with any seriousness. Does Jesus accept us all for what we are? Hear the "unlesses" of the Gospel: unless you become like little children, unless you repent, unless you are born again, unless you abide in me, unless you believe that I am he, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees. Does that sound like God "understands"? Does that sound like God accepts people for what they are? Obviously, it does not.

God's love extends to everyone, no matter how good or how bad, but it is a love whose integrity is grounded in his holiness. It is holy love, and is therefore not hobbled by the sentimentality and easy tolerance that passes for love today. "God will understand" is neither love nor grace: it is flaccid indulgence. It doesn't care enough to demand growth or change. It just leaves people alone, and wants the same for itself.

As usual, C. S. Lewis is helpful here. He writes, "To ask that God should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God. Because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled by certain strains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labour to make us lovable. God is committed to nothing less than restoring in us His image broken in the Fall, and making us like His Son. 'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works' (Eph. 2:10). Because of this," Lewis concludes, His love "is more sensitive than hatred itself to every blemish in the beloved . . . of all powers He forgives most, but condones least, He is pleased with little, but demands all."

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Ben Patterson is pastor of the Irvine Presbyterian church in Irvine, Calif.

"I think  
God will  
understand if  
I go on with  
the affair.' "



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God understands, that is true. But he understands in a way that is more fiery and more shattering than we can ever imagine this side of Glory, if even then. I read somewhere of an artist who was commissioned to paint a mural on the great window at the entrance to Macy's department store in New York City. A few weeks after he finished he walked to the store to look again at his work. It was then that he discovered that the store had hired someone else to make some alterations in what he had painted. He was so horrified and enraged at the distortion of his creation, that he hurled his body through the window.

I don't know if that story is true, but if it isn't it ought to be, because it is such a vivid picture of God's holy love and the wrath that is, of necessity, a part of that love. He resists us as we are, not because he doesn't love us, but because he does. His grace is love that will not let us go, even when it would be perfectly just to do so.

God's grace is the punch line in his bad news/good news joke. First the bad news: you and I are dead in sin and condemned to Hell. Next the good news: Christ died for our sins. In the language of the Bible, it is "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). The good news makes no sense without the bad news. In fact it is no good news at all; just a brute fact like the existence of the moon or of earthworms. Grace torn from the call to repent has no hilarity to it, only the cynicism of the aphorism: I love to sin, God loves to forgive—it is a splendid arrangement.

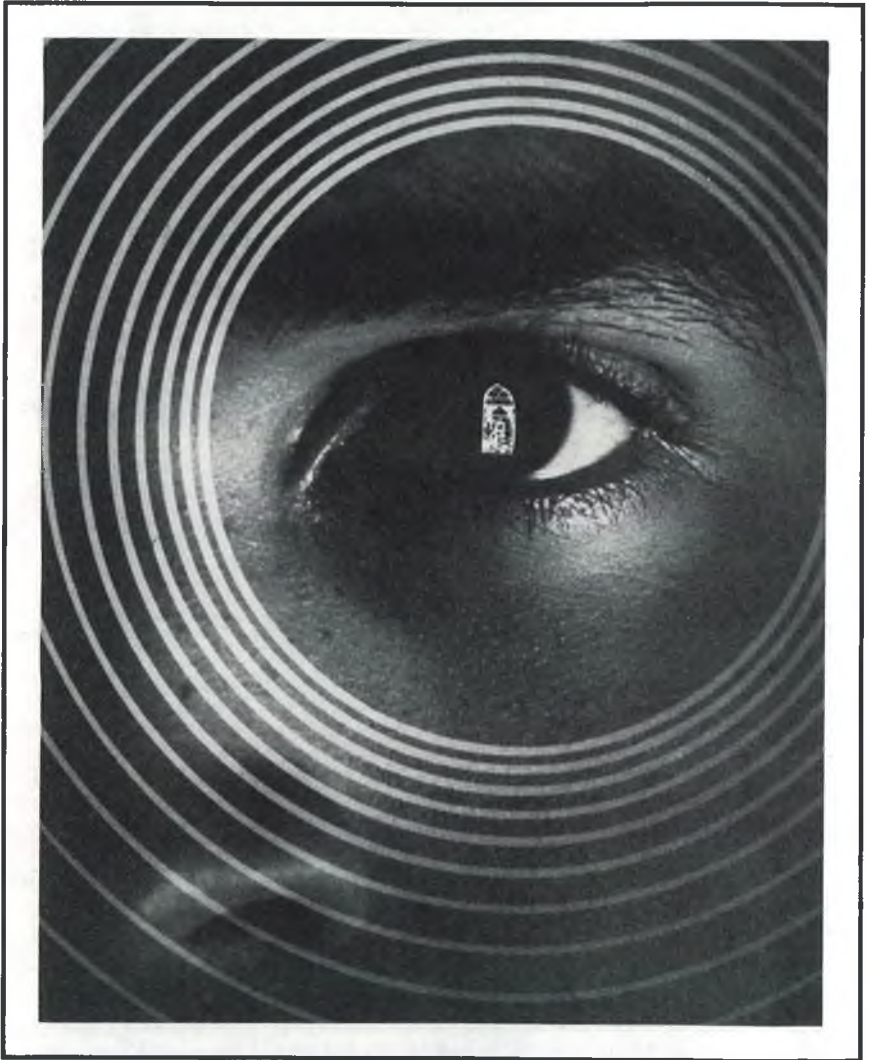
To borrow an analogy from Earl Palmer, the Gospel is always sung antiphonally. On the one hand is the lyric of judgment and wrath; on the other hand is the lyric of forgiveness and love. They must always be sung together, one answering the other. When the church gets stuck on one side of the antiphon there is a gap in its proclamation and there are long and awkward silences. Of late the tune has been only "God understands," and the silences have been filled by the pop psychology of men like Robert Schuller. Perhaps the time has come for another Jonathan Edwards to tell us we are sinners in the hands of an angry God.

**"'God will understand' is neither love nor grace it is flaccid indulgence."**

Excerpted from "A Splendid Arrangement" *The Wittenburg Door*, vol. 71 (Feb.-March, 1978) pp. 2, 3.

# Parting Words

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light” (Matthew 6:22, NIV).



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# Sleek and Faultless

by Janet Richardson

## INTRO- DUCTION

**This Week's Scripture:**  
2 Peter 3:17, 18; Jude 24, 25

My latest diet had not gone well, so it was with great relief that I surveyed the other bodies roasting in the sun on "my" section of the beach. No one here drank diet drinks, ate low-cal dinners, or skipped a second dessert. I was able to blend in with these rotund contours and portly potbellies with not even a twinge of self-consciousness or guilt.

Suddenly my security was shattered. Where had she come from? Her thick, dark mane bounced as her sleek, bronzed body raced toward the luring waves. What a perfect figure! My eating indiscretions became real in my mind again. Why couldn't I look like that? Why was I trapped in a pale, cellulite-ridden body?

As I continued to compare the difference between what I was and what I wished to become, an interesting thought took shape. Christ is able to grant my desires. He can present me before God changed and immortal and faultless. But that will be at some unknown time in the future. What about now? Must I continue to flounder in my

sins, my body bearing the results of my disbelief in his power? Am I merely con-signed to praying for a miracle and wishing for the best? And much more importantly, was I doomed to miss out on immortality because I couldn't even begin to be perfect or faultless in this life?

After warning us against corruption, rebellion and falsehood, and urging us to remain faithful, Jude commends us into the hand of the One who *is* able to keep us from falling and *is* able to present us as faultless. Jude's eloquent doxology leaves no doubts as to the Savior's power.

But I am not Jude, and I don't live in his day. I too long to be presented as faultless; I long to be kept from falling. And with Peter, I long to grow in grace and knowledge. But so often I am what Jude describes as the spot in the love feast; I am a cloud without water; I am a tree with withered fruit (Jude 12).

To develop the kind of faith Jude and Peter wrote about and apply it to life in the 1980's is no small task. It is the work of a life time, and it is the object of our study this week.

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Janet Richardson is a member at the Alhambra SDA Church.

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# The Purpose and the Promise

OGOS

**Theme:** In the conclusions of 2 Peter and Jude we find the promise of Christ's keeping power and the purpose of growing in grace and our knowledge of him.

## 1. The Purpose—Steadfastness and Growth

*"You have been warned about this, my friends; be careful not to get carried away by the errors of unprincipled people, from the firm ground that you are standing on. Instead, go on growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory in time and in eternity" (2 Peter 3:17, 18, Jerusalem Bible).*

Like Jude, Peter's bottom line concern is that his readers not, through carelessness or rebellion fostered by false teachers, lose out on what they already have in Christ. The gospel has placed us on "firm ground," or put us in a "secure position" (NIV). Being in that secure position frees us from any sense of spiritual dread or condemnation. Yet if we are to maintain our position, our commitment must continually be renewed. And, armed with the scriptural insight such as 2 Peter has given us, we must be on guard against that which would lure us away from our security.

Being fixed on the firm ground of the gospel does not mean stagnation or inflexibility, though. While we are in the secure sphere of grace, we grow. The Christian life is developmental. Like a tree that increases in stature and develops new branches, leaves and fruit as it sinks its roots ever deeper into the ground, so the life that is rooted in Christ will continually experience the development and refinement of characteristics, insights and abilities that enhance usefulness to others and the cause of the gospel.

Growth in the knowledge of Christ refers to more than theory about him. It means experiential, relational knowledge. But it also implies vigorous use of our mental abilities in regard to spiritual matters. Christianity is not anti-intellectual. We are to love God with our minds (see Matt. 22:37).

*The concept of growth in knowledge (v. 18) would seem to assume openness to new ideas, whereas v. 17 seems to imply a defensive posture against new ideas, at least theological ones. What is the relationship between openness and defending absolutes when it comes to understanding Christian truth?*

## 2. The Promise—There is One Who is Able

*"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen" (Jude 24, 25, NIV).*

As one scholar has observed, there is a "tonal shift" in Jude's writing as this majestic doxology begins. Until this point Jude has been issuing severe denunciations of those promoting error and has been

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laying strong challenges on his readers. But he does not leave us with the conclusion that we must struggle alone against the powers of evil. Rather, he gives us assurance by pointing to the one who is able to keep us and bring us to our ultimate destiny.<sup>1</sup>

Major commentators (Kelly, Kittel, Reicke) have noted the strong eschatological thrust of this passage. God's ability to keep us from falling relates not only to preventing moral fall into sin but also to his ability to bring us safely into his presence at the last day, despite the dangers and vicissitudes of life, and our own penchant for slipping. "To walk with God is to walk in safety even on the most dangerous and slippery path. In mountaineering climbers are roped together so that even if the unexperienced climber should slip, the skilled mountaineer can take his weight and save him. Even so, when we bind ourselves to God, he keeps us safe."<sup>2</sup>

The Greek word translated "without fault" was used for the animal sacrifices in the Jewish system which were to be without any physical blemish. In the New Testament, according to Kittel, it refers to the moral and religious blamelessness required of the eschatological community of believers.<sup>3</sup> Comparison with other passages suggest two shades of meaning for the idea of being "without fault," either or both of which Jude may intend. 1 Corinthians 1:8, 1 Thess. 5:23, and Rev. 14:5 suggest a blamelessness—an undivided and undeviating loyalty—which develops in the believer by the power of God. Ephesians 1:4, Col. 1:22, and Heb. 10:14 on the other hand, suggest that we are presented blameless because we are hidden in Christ, the one perfect, unblemished sacrifice (Heb. 4:15; 7:26) whose atonement for us is all-sufficient.

Either way, we have assurance. For it is God who is the active agent in bringing us "without fault" into his presence. And in his presence there will be a great joy that pales into insignificance any temporary joy sin offers.

Words fail in any attempt to express praise to this kind of a God, but in v. 25, Jude comes about as close as anyone can.

*What do the following passages suggest to you about the biblical concept of blamelessness before God, or perfection: Gen. 6:9; Ps. 19:13; Eph. 1:4; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:23; Rev. 14:4, 5?*

D. F. M.

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1. Bo Reicke, *The Anchor Bible—The Epistle of James, Peter, and Jude*, p. 217.

2. William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude*, p. 207.

3. Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 831.

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# Preventing the Fall

by Yvonne Macias

## ESTIMONY

Key text:  
Psalm 50:15

God did not leave us in the face of sin to fend for ourselves. He provided us with Jesus Christ to help keep us from stumbling and to present us to God free from sin. Is there anything we can do to facilitate Christ's task? Ellen White provides us with the following guidelines, taken from *Christ's Object Lessons*:

*Prayer*: "The children of God are not alone and defenseless. Prayer moves the arm of Omnipotence."<sup>1</sup>

"Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan."<sup>2</sup>

"Call upon me in the day of trouble." (Psalm 50:15).

*True Obedience*: "The man who attempts to keep the Commandments of God from a sense of obligation, merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. . . . True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God."<sup>3</sup>

*Study of Scripture*: "The scriptures are the great agency in the transformation of character. . . . If studied and obeyed, the Word of God works in the heart, subduing every unholy attribute."<sup>4</sup>

*Love of Christ*: "The love of Christ with its redeeming power has come into the heart. This love masters every motive and raises its possessor above the corrupting influence of the world."<sup>5</sup>

*Surrender/Submission*: "If we surrender our lives to His service, we can never be placed in a position for which God has not made provision. . . . If in our ignorance we make missteps, Christ does not leave us."<sup>6</sup>

"But man cannot transform himself by the exercise of his will. . . . The grace of God must be received by the sinner before he can be fitted for the Kingdom of Glory. . . . All who would be saved, high or low, rich or poor, must submit to the working of this Power."<sup>7</sup>

"Do not listen to the enemy's suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better, until you are good enough to come to God. . . . Tell the enemy that the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin."<sup>8</sup>

"But man  
cannot  
transform  
himself by the  
exercise of his  
will . . ."

## REACT

Are there guidelines for praying in a way that contributes to spiritual success?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 172.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 250.  
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97.  
4. *Ibid.*, p. 100.  
5. *Ibid.*, p. 101.  
6. *Ibid.*, p. 173.  
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97.  
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 206.

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Yvonne Macias is a clinical dietitian living in Temple City, Calif.

# Spiritual Sure-Footedness

by Erwin Joham

Jude's thrilling doxology reminds us of God's power manifesting itself in two aspects through our lives:

- 1) it keeps us from falling, and
- 2) it presents us without blame before his glory.

*Aptaitos*, the Greek word translated "from falling," appears only this once in the New Testament (such a single occurrence is known as a *hapax legomenon*). In extra-biblical literature the word has various meanings: a "sure-footed horse that does not stumble," a "steady falling of snow," and a person "who does not make moral lapses." God is able to do all that for us. He can keep us sure-footed, steady, and free from moral falls.

Note, it does not say, "he keeps you," but "he is able to keep you." "He is able" implies a degree of uncertainty, a conditionality. Uncertainty, not because of any lack of power on his part, but because of our free will and the potential of a wrong choice on our part. If we "keep [ourselves] in the love of God" as Jude has admonished in verse 21, then God is "able to keep [us] from falling." Thus the condition placed upon his ability to keep us from falling is not so much one of moral action as it is of free choice and decision.

If we turn the "reins" over to the Lord, all the heavenly potential is unleashed and he keeps us sure-footed and steady, and consequently he "will present [us] faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

*Amomos* (faultless, without blame) is a sacrificial word, used to describe an acceptable offering to the Lord. This otherwise rare Greek word is used rather frequently in the LXX and the New Testament.

"Paul says that 'there is *now* no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1). Jude says 'that *then* they will be without blemish.' Both are ultimately saying the same thing. When a man is justified by faith he has his day of judgment in advance. ('Justification is eschatological.') . . . The language varies: 'being justified' and 'without blemish.' The time varies: 'now' and 'then.' But the gospel is one."<sup>1</sup>

If we are to reach perfection, at last, then we have to let him keep us from stumbling here. That is the message of Jude's last words.

## REACT

Is there any distinction between the freedom from condemnation that comes through justification and the perfection required by the final judgment?

## EVIDENCE

Key Text:  
Jude 24, 25

"The time varies: 'now' and 'then.' But the gospel is one."

1. Ronald A. Ward, *71 Epistles of John and J A Study Manual*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bak Book House, 1965), p. 100, 101.

Erwin Joham is the associate pastor of the Alhambra SDA Church.

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# Carpenter's Apprentice

by Gayland Richardson

## HOW TO

Key Text:  
Psalm 145

"How?" is a question of fundamental importance to any endeavor. It is a question that has of late fallen upon hard times in the Adventist community. "How?" suggests work is involved. Therefore, some would say it is an inappropriate question to ask when the topic is personal salvation. "Who?" "Why?" "Where?" "When?" These are all good questions held near and dear to scholars. "How?" on the other hand, is a question for the common laborers—such as carpenters.

Actually, "How?" is a good question for the believer, too. How does it happen that I, a sinner, with a natural knack for doing, saying, and thinking the inappropriate, am kept in a relationship with the righteous God of the universe? After the who's and why's have been answered, I'm left at the mirror, toothpaste in one hand and brush in the other, looking at a person that missed the mark again. How do I keep from falling?

How am I kept from falling? The text says it is something Christ does. My part in the exercise appears to be a demonstration that I am willing to be kept. My effort is not founded on the issue of keeping myself upright, for that is Christ's job. My effort is only obliquely related. My "How?" relates to developing a relationship that trusts him to keep me and an attitude of wanting to be kept.

Since studies and experience tell us that people with similar values are more likely to have enduring relationships, then any "How To" on my part must focus on embracing values that are godly values. Try this for a start:

1. Turn to Psalm 145, read through and underline each characteristic of God listed.
2. Close your eyes and remember where you have been, what you have done, who you have seen in the past week. Now, circle the attribute of God you are most thankful for.
3. Next, place a check by the attribute you wish you displayed more often.
4. Write down the name of a person to whom you wish to display this attribute.
5. Write out an action, including time and place, that will help you practice this godly trait.
6. Pray, asking God to empower you to be like him more often and thanking him for his keeping power.<sup>1</sup>

## REACT

If we are in a right relationship with Christ, are we automatically kept from falling?

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My friend, Chuck Miller, first led me in this exercise.

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Gayland Richardson is the senior pastor of the Alhambra SDA Church.



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# The Safety Net of Praise

by Christopher Curl

**OPINION**

**Key Text:**  
Jude 24, 25

The word "benediction" brings to my mind a picture of my father standing in front of the rostrum at the close of the worship service, his hand raised in a gesture of blessing, and praying, "May the Lord bless you and *keep* you; may he make his face to shine upon you and give you peace, both now and forever more."

Perhaps he might have added, as Jude does, "To him who is able to keep you *from falling* . . ." (Jude 24, NIV).

As I contemplated this idea of a God who is, in effect, our "safety net," I tried to think of how he performs this act of upholding us. It occurred to me while reading Jude that one of the ways in which God accomplishes this is through our praise to him. If we are exalting in God's greatness, acknowledging his power and claiming his promise of redemption, we cannot help but to be drawn closer to him. This idea is confirmed in a comment on our text in the *Interpreter's Bible* (vol. 12, p. 343): "Here is an ascription [an . . . expression of exaltation] which is also a benediction . . . used at the end of a worship service as Christians part one from another. . . . They are to take with them the spirit of the church; they are to remember that God never forsakes them. . . . Christians are always in the benediction of God."

A new concept of the benediction began to emerge. It's more significant than I had previously realized—an expression of praise reminding us that God is *indeed* able to do all that he says he will and that he will never leave us.

But how do we go about bringing praise into our lives each day? Here are a few suggestions to get started:

1. Spend some time daily thinking about God's care for you and how he has led you through some particular problem or decision.
2. Start a list of things to thank God for in your life. Be specific.
3. Join with a small group of friends and begin to share these milestones. (You'll be surprised at the strength and hope you can impart and receive through this process.)
4. Go through your favorite hymnal and pick out some praise songs. Try learning some new ones. Record some, if possible, and keep them handy in your car.

In the words of a song, "Praise the Lord" (Bannister-Brown) I find a summation to this study:

" . . . Praise the Lord, He can work through those who praise Him,  
Praise the Lord, for our God inhabits praise;  
Praise the Lord,  
For the chains that seem to bind you  
Serve only to remind you  
That they drop powerless behind you  
When you praise Him."

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Christopher Curl is a journalist living in Alhambra, Calif.

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**Coming Next Quarter:**

## **ONE IN CHRIST**

Studies in Ephesians

*Lesson 1, (for Sabbath, January 4) - THE NEW COMMUNITY*

*Theme:* Ephesians may be called "the quintessence of Paul," for it sums up the leading themes of Paul's letters, presenting God's eternal purpose to reconcile human beings to himself and to each other through Christ and to empower them for spiritual maturity.

*Scripture:* Ephesians 1:1, 2

*Lesson 2, (for Sabbath, January 11) - THE CHOSEN COMMUNITY*

*Theme:* In Christ, God has lavished on us the highest spiritual blessings, in keeping with his eternal purpose of bringing all things together under Christ.

*Scripture:* Ephesians 1:3-14

*Lesson 3 (for Sabbath, January 18) - THE HOPE AND THE POWER*

*Theme:* Paul's desire was that every Christian grasp the magnitude of the hope and power available to them in the church of which Christ is the head.

*Scripture:* Ephesians 1:15-23

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## THIS QUARTER'S ARTISTS



The art for this quarter was prepared by Don May, instructor of photography at Andrews University. Professor May joined the Andrews faculty in 1979 after completing a bachelor of fine arts degree in photographic illustration at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He is currently working on an interdisciplinary degree in Visual Communications.

May's professional experience includes working as an assistant to a professional photographer, developing technical systems for use in the Andrews archaeological endeavor, and developing a comprehensive photography and multi-image academic program for Andrews. He is a member of the Professional Photographers of America.

Larry Coyle, a senior in the media technology program at Andrews and Don May's student staff assistant during the 1984-1985 school year, helped in preparing the illustrations. Coyle's experience includes a position as staff photographer for the 1984 archaeological season on Tel el Umeri in Jordan.

May comments, "Part of the reward and joy of being a teacher is developing friendships with the diverse people who come to our campus and watching them grow personally and professionally. Larry Coyle, my student assistant, and I have enjoyed such a relationship and are pleased to submit these photo illustrations as a team effort.

"I feel as if the concepts set forth in this series of lessons have unfolded to me as I have worked on the illustrations in the studio. We hope the illustrations will open to you yet another avenue of interpretation to the eternal truths we seek to understand."

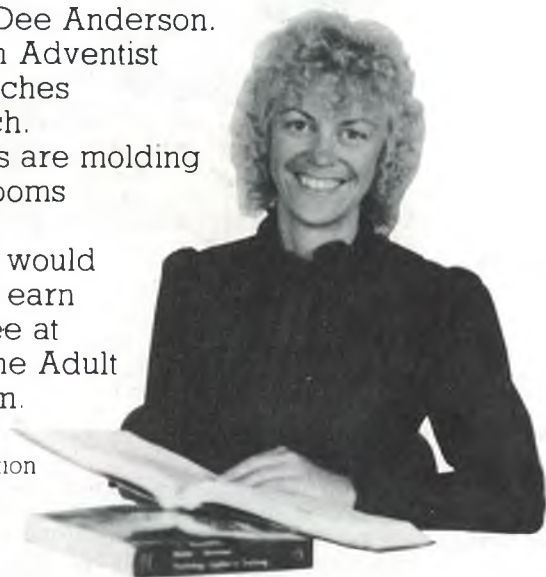
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