

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

North American Church Ministries Publication    October-December 1986

## Calls to Commitment



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# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

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# CALLS TO COMMITMENT

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Sabina sent out nine invitations to her sixth birthday party. But when the great day arrived, only two of her guests showed up. It reminded Sabina of the party Jesus is planning for the world.

# YOU may help send the invitations

Eight million people in Sweden need an invitation to God's ultimate reunion party. That is why the Stockholm church is building an evangelistic center where young people and ethnic groups may have a place to worship and hear the heavenly invitation. And that is also why children like Sabina extend God's invitation through religious radio programs produced in makeshift studios at their church. You may help their dream become a reality this Thirteenth Sabbath. The **Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offering, December 20**, will help build an evangelistic center in Stockholm, Sweden and a K-12 school for children in Birmingham, England.

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you for your  
generous  
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## THIS QUARTER'S ARTIST



Jim McClelland is a Professor of Art at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he teaches drawing, painting and design classes. He is well known for his watercolor and oil paintings. Painting birds is a specialty and his work may be found in private and corporate collections throughout the United States. His work is widely exhibited and has received awards and recognition nationwide.

The drawings for this issue symbolically visualize the abstract concepts of the quarter's lessons. The viewer is encouraged to follow the concrete symbols in the drawings to act as a catalyst for his own visualization of the experiences and attitudes involved in commitment to Jesus.

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# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

## Facts You Should Know

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

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

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

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

## Pointers for Study

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The CQ and the Church

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



## Introduction to the Quarter

# THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE

In Chaim Potok's story, *The Chosen*, Reuven, a Jewish boy living in the late 1940s, is worried about his father overworking himself in the cause of Zionism. The father, Rabbi Malter, responds to his son's concern this way:

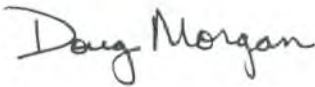
"Human beings do not live forever, Reuven. We live less than the time it takes to blink an eye, if we measure our lives against eternity. So it may be asked what value is there to a human life. There is so much pain in the world. What does it mean to have to suffer so much if our lives are nothing more than the blink of an eye? . . . I learned a long time ago, Reuven, that a blink of an eye in itself is nothing. But the eye that blinks, *that* is something. A span of a life is nothing. But the man who lives that span, *he* is something. He can fill that time span with meaning, so its quality is immeasurable though its quantity is insignificant. . . . A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life. A life filled with meaning is worthy of rest. I want to be worthy of rest when I am no longer here."<sup>1</sup>

Each of our lives are bound up with the search for significance. Our aspirations vary, but we all want our lives to have some significance, we want them filled with worthwhile meaning. For Rabbi Malter, meaning comes through commitment to a cause—the cause of making a better future possible for his people.

Commitment is a key word in the Christian's search for significance, too. Though their settings and themes are diverse, the three books we will study this quarter, Haggai, Malachi, and James, share a common objective: to challenge the community of God to move from apathy to commitment, from malaise to vitality, from drift to direction. With vigor, each book reminds us that for the Christian, life does have significance, and that significance is found in unreserved commitment to God and His will for our relationships with others.

After opening the quarter with a biblical overview of the theme of commitment, we will spend two weeks on Haggai's call to proper priorities, seven weeks on James' call to functional faith, and three weeks on Malachi's call to reformation.

May our study of these calls to commitment from times past clarify our vision of what God is calling us to be and do today, and intensify our zeal to live up to that calling.



Doug Morgan  
Editorial Director

1. Chaim Potok, *The Chosen* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1967), pp. 204, 205.

# Self-Giving Commitment

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1, NIV).



# Commitment to Life

by Melanie Show

## INTRODUCTION

Marion Seller was putting the finishing touches on the Friday evening supper. For once she and Ken would have a blissful solitary evening together—just the two of them. The students at the African college where they taught were gone for the holidays, as well as most of the missionaries. So, for a short while, quietude would descend onto the mission compound, and she had every intention of savoring it. Because it was the one thing she *must* have this Christmas.

At her visit to the obstetrician last week, he'd listened, as usual, for the fetal heart tones. Then he'd listened again, and again, and again. Maybe the stethoscope is defective, Marion thought. Maybe I should roll over. Maybe I shouldn't have carried that box yesterday—maybe, maybe, maybe.

But no more maybes. The baby was dead. Would she ever hear anything from a doctor besides those final words? This had been the third time they had lost. They would not be getting their long-hoped-for Christmas present. Once again they had to face disappointment, heartache, and an empty nursery.

And there was yet one lingering horror tacked on like a nasty postscript: she had not yet expelled the fetus. So she was literally carrying death within her—within the womb created for life. Was there

anything worse than that?

This was why she needed Ken so badly now—needed his closeness, his love, his consolation. Just he and she. Together. They could face it together—all they needed was each other and time. Time alone.

She heard his familiar step come up the drive, and so she took one last glance at the perfect meal for two, and went to greet him.

As he opened the door, she saw immediately that he was *not* alone. Two other couples entered with him, and she read the story in his face. The reservations at the guest house had been botched up again, and here were four people several hundred miles from their mission home without a room or meal. And, of course, there was no other mission family around to share the burden.

The weight of resistance within her was terrible. Didn't she have a sufficient burden already? Hadn't she suffered enough without adding this to the pile? What did the Lord want from her, anyway?

"Just a room, Marion. Just a room in your inn."

And suddenly she understood. Death might be within, but life was without, and in need of sustenance and nurture. And this she must give, as if it were to the Christ child Himself, in order that all around her might have the Life that conquers death.

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Melanie Show is a librarian at Union College's Crandall Memorial Library.

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# Dimensions of Commitment

## LOGOS

**Theme:** The gospel calls us to a response of giving ourselves entirely to Christ, committing to Him every resource that we have been given.

### 1. Complete Commitment

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1, 2, NIV).*

The biblical call to commitment is no arbitrary command. Rather, the commitment to which we are called is a response of gratitude for God's commitment to us. It is "in view of God's mercy," which Paul expounds with such clarity and power in Romans 1-11, that we offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

To give ourselves as living sacrifices means our commitment must be comprehensive and unreserved. No facet of our being can be withheld or only partially given. Commitment means loving God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27, NIV).

Complete commitment is possible only as we break out of the constricting and dehumanizing pattern of this world. Such freedom requires transformation, or in the Greek, *metamorphoō*. Paul uses this verb only one other time, and that is in 2 Cor. 3:18, where he declares that it is in contemplating the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ that we are changed (*metamorphoō*) into the likeness of Christ. Renewal of the mind through contact with Christ makes possible the transformation necessary for commitment.

*What does it mean to love God with each of the following aspects of our beings mentioned in the great commandment: heart, soul, strength, mind?*

### 2. Commitment of Resources (read 2 Cor. 8:1-9)

*"But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving" (8:7, NIV).*

Genuine commitment to God, Jesus declared, involves submitting all of our material resources to Him to be used for His purposes (see Luke 14:33; 16:13). In responding to Paul's efforts to raise funds for the needy Jerusalem church, the Macedonian churches exemplified the spirit of self-giving commitment called for by Jesus. They gave, and their generosity welled up not out of guilt but out of "overflowing joy," not out of expendable abundance but out of "severe trial" and "extreme poverty" (2 Cor. 8:2). They gave beyond their ability and at their own initiative (vv. 3, 4). Their financial giving to others was an outgrowth of giving their entire beings to God (v. 5).

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So Paul urges the Corinthians, a community of believers that excelled in so many spiritual gifts, to also excel in the "grace of giving" (v. 7) or, as the New English Bible puts it, "to show yourselves equally lavish in this generous service." He then points to the supreme example—and motivation—for Christian giving, the self-giving love of Christ who laid aside the riches of heaven that we might someday share in those riches (v. 9). "If this love of Christ, so magnanimous in its motive and so self-sacrificing in its execution, is an active force in the believer's heart, how unnecessary, the apostle implies, any *command* to practice almsgiving ought to be."<sup>1</sup>

*In view of Paul's commendation of the Macedonians for giving despite their "extreme poverty," how are we to balance our own needs with the needs of others?*

*What principles for giving do you find in the following passages: Deut. 16:17; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:6-9?*

### 3. Results of Commitment

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, 'no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life' "* (Mark 10:28-30, NIV).

The New Testament, as William Barclay observes, is not hesitant to present the "reward motive" for following Jesus. As true as it is that we must give up everything to follow Jesus, it is equally true that what we gain in so doing infinitely surpasses what we lose.

We gain the surpassing riches of Christ's grace (Eph. 2:7), the riches of the heavenly city, and, most tangible in the here and now, the riches of Christian fellowship. Family and friends who may reject us because of the gospel are replaced by the entire Christian family. True Christian community offers a wealth in deep, loving relationship far exceeding any that can be found outside the community. Possessions given up for the sake of the gospel are replaced by a share in the possessions of the entire Christian community, where the well-being of the group is placed ahead of the luxury of individuals (see Acts 2:43-47; 4:32). The care of Christ and His people provides security and fulfillment that can never be found by going it alone in a competitive world.

In a sinful world, the life committed to self-giving must necessarily involve suffering and sacrifice. But such a life is the way to the genuine and lasting satisfaction for which the human heart longs.

*Is it wrong to follow Jesus for the sake of what we get out of it?*

D. F. M.

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1. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 116.

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# The Joy of Liberality

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
2 Corinthians  
8:5

"The apostle Paul in his ministry among the churches was untiring in his efforts to inspire in the hearts of the new converts a desire to do large things for the cause of God. Often he exhorted them to the exercise of liberality. . . .

"Nearly all the Macedonian believers were poor in this world's goods, but their hearts were overflowing with love for God and His truth, and they gladly gave for the support of the gospel. When general collections were taken up in the Gentile churches for the relief of the Jewish believers, the liberality of the converts in Macedonia was held up as an example to other churches. . . .

"The willingness to sacrifice on the part of the Macedonian believers came as a result of wholehearted consecration. Moved by the Spirit of God, they 'first gave their own selves to the Lord' (2 Corinthians 8:5), then they were willing to give freely of their means for the support of the gospel. It was not necessary to urge them to give; rather, they rejoiced in the privilege of denying themselves even of necessary things in order to supply the needs of others. When the apostle would have restrained them, they importuned him to accept their offering. In their simplicity and integrity, and in their love for the brethren, they gladly denied self, and thus abounded in the fruit of benevolence. . . .

"Unselfish liberality threw the early church into a transport of joy; for the believers knew that their efforts were helping to send the gospel message to those in darkness. Their benevolence testified that they had not received the grace of God in vain. What could produce such liberality but the sanctification of the Spirit? In the eyes of believers and unbelievers it was a miracle of grace.

"Spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality. The followers of Christ should rejoice in the privilege of revealing in their lives the beneficence of their Redeemer. As they give to the Lord they have the assurance that their treasure is going before them to the heavenly courts. Would men make their property secure? Let them place it in the hands that bear the marks of the crucifixion. Would they enjoy their substance? Let them use it to bless the needy and suffering. Would they increase their possessions? Let them heed the divine injunction, 'Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.' Proverbs 3:9, 10. Let them seek to retain their possessions for selfish purposes, and it will be to their eternal loss. But let their treasure be given to God, and from that moment it bears His inscription. It is sealed with His immutability."

## REACT

How can we capture the spirit of joy in our giving that characterized the Macedonian church?

Excerpted from  
*The Acts of the Apostles*,  
pp. 342-345.

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# Commitment in a Nuclear Age

by Ron Sider

## The Bad News

Here's the news—both bad news and good news. And the bad news is really very bad. There is no point in kidding yourselves. The world you enter after graduation is going to be full of horribly difficult problems. The economy seems unmanageable; foreign affairs look impossible.

Behind these daily realities stand some complex problems. For one thing, we are simply running out of cheap natural resources. The world cannot afford to constantly increase its consumption of ever more scarce, ever more expensive natural resources. We will have to learn how to get along with less, and the transition is going to be traumatic for most North Americans. . . .

Equally serious is the steady erosion of belief in the sacredness of human life. What will abortion on demand, biological engineering and the growing demand for widespread euthanasia do to the traditional Christian belief in the sacredness of each individual?

And there is the ultimate threat to the sacredness of human life—nuclear holocaust. There seems to be no way to check the spiraling arms race. Each generation of nuclear weapons further destabilizes the balance of terror. Responsible experts say that it would be worse than what was depicted in *The Day After*.

There is no point in playing games with each other. It is a difficult, dangerous world. The bad news is very bad.

## The Good News

But there is also good news—very good news—although at first sight it hardly looks capable of matching the bad news.

It all began with a babe in a manger who became a carpenter and then an itinerant preacher. He walked the dusty roads of a tiny Roman colony caring for the poor, the sick, the hurting ones that the powerful usually neglect. And he preached fantastic good news—he said the messianic kingdom, long expected by the Jews, was happening in his own life and work.

But then he blew it. He offended everybody in sight by challenging the status quo at every point where it was wrong.

He offended men who were happy with the easy divorce laws, insistently reminding them that God intended one man and one woman to live together in lifelong, joyful union. Jesus defied social customs which treated women as inferiors who were not allowed to touch a copy of the Torah (the Old Testament Law) by treating women as equals and teaching them theology. He offended the revolutionaries of his day, who were fired with violent zeal to kill Roman oppressors, with his summons to love even enemies. He terrified the economic establishment of his day with his call to forgive debts and share with the poor. And he offended the religious establishment by teaching that God freely forgives even the worst of sinners. And he associated with prostitutes and tax collectors to underline his point and then added the ultimate offense: he claimed divine authority to forgive sins.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Joshua 24:15

**“There is good news although at first sight it hardly looks capable of matching the bad news.”**

---

Ron Sider is the author (with Richard K. Taylor) of *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (IVP).

---

It is hardly surprising that they killed him—as a blasphemer, a heretic and a dangerous political radical. Well, that's hardly good news! But God had the last word. On Easter morning, God raised him from the dead. The tomb is empty. The risen Jesus appeared to his discouraged disciples, and their lives were transformed. . . .

Confident that the New Messianic Age had broken into the present, confident that the risen Jesus was now Lord of the universe, they proceeded to turn the Roman Empire upside-down. . . .

That good news is better than the bad news of broken homes, the erosion of belief in the sacredness of human life, the danger of global wars, even nuclear holocaust. Those dangers are real, not imaginary. And we must fight against them. But we can do that because we have heard the good news that Jesus reigns as sovereign Lord of this whole universe.

### The Choice

Well, that is the news—both bad and good. What is the choice? It is precisely the good news that poses the choice. Jesus, as we already noticed, offended all the supporters of the status quo. And he still does. We have to choose between Jesus' new messianic kingdom and cultural Christianity which often supports the status quo. . . .

**“We have to choose between Jesus' new messianic kingdom and cultural Christianity.”**

We face unusually difficult choices in at least four areas.

First of all, *sexuality and marriage*. Powerful pressures coming from the surrounding society will work to discourage you from following the biblical version of lifelong marriage. When tension and disagreement arise, when one of you hurts or betrays the other, you will be tempted by the popular narcissism to think that you have a right to self-fulfillment and that if your spouse is not meeting your needs, then you should find someone who does. You have to choose between Jesus and contemporary values, between the costly demands of Jesus' new messianic kingdom and cultural Christianity which increasingly sanctions easy divorce and sexual promiscuity.

Second, the area of *personal economic lifestyle*. How much should you spend on yourself as you enter the job market and begin to earn good salaries? Surrounding society and cultural Christianity say: You deserve to enjoy whatever you can earn (donating, of course, a small sum to charitable causes). And every four years the politicians guarantee us a constantly increasing standard of living. Jesus says: you have to choose between God and Mammon, for no one can serve two masters. Well over one half of the world's people have never heard of Jesus Christ, and yet American Christians give only \$700 million per year for worldwide evangelism—a figure equal to what North Americans spend each year on chewing gum! We spend as much money on pet food every 52 days as North American Christians spend on missions every 365 days. As we persist in our affluent lifestyles, thousands of people die every day of starvation. Seven hundred fifty million people have incomes of \$75 per year. Jesus' command to the rich young ruler (Go sell what you have and give to



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the poor) is uniquely relevant to affluent Americans in the eighties. We could drive smaller cars, refuse to keep up with clothing fashion, live in smaller houses—and in a thousand different ways spend less on ourselves so we could give far more generously for evangelism and justice. We must choose between Jesus and materialism.

Third, *international economic injustice*. We dare not think only in individualistic terms about the problems of world hunger. A top-level international commission headed by Willy Brandt, former leader of West Germany, reminds us that if we are to survive, the gap between the rich and poor must be closed quickly. To close that gap will require fundamental, costly changes, in U.S. foreign policy.

But many North Americans have no interest in that. Powerful forces in our society tell us that we have earned our standard of living and we ought to be able to enjoy it indefinitely, even if other nations are desperately poor. Furthermore, we should even be ready to use our military power to protect our affluence. But if we go that route, we will embark on a collision course with the poor of the earth, and the result will be ghastly international conflict and chaos.

The only alternative is to change our foreign policy so that we use our influence in the world to promote human rights and an adequate standard of living for all people. . . .

Finally, *nuclear war*. We must decide whether our children will have a future on this planet. The dangers of nuclear holocaust multiply with every new generation of nuclear weapons. Can Christians who know that human life is sacred stay silent while the destruction of the planet becomes more likely year after year? John Stott, a prominent evangelical church leader, accepts the criteria for a just war. But he argues that precisely those criteria lead to nuclear pacifism. Nuclear war, Stott says, can never be justified. And yet, we slip ever closer to that ghastly possibility with hardly a whisper of protest from most Christians. We must choose between Jesus and the nuclear arms race.

Now I don't mean to oversimplify. But there is a great danger of becoming mesmerized by complexities. At bottom the choices are clear-cut, even though the concrete implementation of those choices will be full of difficulty, ambiguity and complexity. . . .

Jesus invites you to choose him. He invites you to take up his cross no matter what the cost. But he also promises that his yoke is easy and his burden light. You must choose this day and all the coming days whom you will serve—God or the status quo.

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the Bad News With the  
Good News," *His*, June  
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# Giving Systematically

by David Show

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**2 Corinthians**  
**9:6-11**

Have you ever listened to an offering appeal and felt guilty about the new pair of shoes you just bought? Or have you ever wished you could increase your support for various causes but knew you just didn't have the money to give more? According to Paul, giving should not be associated with guilt or anxiety. Rather, we should decide in our hearts what to give and then give it cheerfully. Using the following plan has helped me to do just that and to avoid the guilt of not giving more.

**1. Begin returning tithe.** This is the major source of money for the church as a whole and allows you to contribute to the total operation of the world church.

**2. Commit a percentage of your income to your local church.** As a student or a newly graduated wage earner who is trying to pay off some loans, you will probably not be able to meet the guideline established by your church finance committee for the local church budget, but it is important to give something. Start at 1/2-1% of your income (5-10% of your tithe) and gradually work up to meet the suggested giving level.

**3. Consider setting aside a small amount to use in response to special appeals.** There will be times when a crisis or special need arises to which you would like to respond. If you have some money already set aside for this you can painlessly and joyfully give a significant offering.

**4. Periodically give prayerful review to what you are giving.** A good time for this is when you get a pay raise. World missions and local conference evangelism are needs to which you might start giving a small percentage. (Each of these areas also has a suggested giving level established by the local conference or General Conference.) Eventually, as the percentages grow, you will find that you are giving more than you ever thought possible.

The first thing to do when you receive your paycheck is to set aside the amount you have committed to the Lord. Now you can manage your personal budget with what is left, secure in the knowledge that you have met your obligations to your Lord and to the church. In response to the Lord's blessing, allow the percentages given to increase towards the various suggested giving levels, and you will never have to feel guilty during an offering appeal again.

## REACT

1. If we are giving the suggested percentages for the various aspects of the church program, can we rest assured that we have fulfilled our stewardship responsibility before God?

2. Are we responsible for how our money is used once it is given?

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# Perspectives on Commitment

by Bruce Forbes

Commitment immediately makes many of us uncomfortable. We fear its entrapment, and thus try to avoid decisions concerning lifework, lasting relationships, anything that demands a total commitment of ourselves.

Perhaps we fear where these commitments might lead us. Total commitment often involves personal risk. And a total commitment to God is no exception. It will profoundly affect every aspect of our lives. But the overwhelming message evident in Scripture is that the gospel calls us to a response of total commitment, of giving ourselves entirely and unreservedly to Christ.

Christ Himself, in response to the question of "What must I do to be sure of eternal life?" answered, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27).<sup>1</sup> That's total commitment! In another instance, He made a more specific demand, "Go now and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor—you will have riches in Heaven. Then come and follow me!" (Matt. 19:21). The wealthy young ruler turned away, overwhelmed by the enormity of the commitment required to follow this Man.

Maybe that is what we fear. We suspect that we'll be asked for something we are not willing to give. Maybe we will be asked to sell everything we own, give up a promising career, and devote our lives to the poor of the world, or to a thankless job in our own country.

Paul seems to view the idea of Christian commitment from another angle. In Romans 12 he begins, "With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies. . . ." He continues, in verse 2, "Let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practice that the will of God is good, acceptable to him and perfect."

There's no fear here, no blind commitment. Paul is confident that if we clearly see the character of God and the results of His working in the lives of others, a choice to give ourselves totally to Him will be an intelligent choice. For those fearful of where commitments may lead, here is an entirely new perspective on the meaning of commitment to God.

## REACT

1. Does God ever ask us to make a commitment with an outcome that is unknown to us? Does commitment ever require blind faith?

2. In what specific ways would you complete the following sentence: "Commitment as an act of intelligent worship means . . .?"

## OPINION

Key text:  
Romans 12:1, 2

**"We fear where commitments might lead us."**

1. All Bible verses are quoted from Phillips Translation.

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# A Problem of Priorities

“So the Lord stirred up . . . the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God” (Haggai 1:14, NIV).



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# Rebuilding the Lord's House

**Theme:** Commitment to God means making His cause our highest priority, and the well-being of a community of believers depends on whether its priorities are ordered in the right way.

LOGOS

## 1. A Call to Build the Lord's House (read Haggai 1:1-11)

*"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory. . . ." (1:7, 8, RSV).*

In the years after their return from the Babylonian exile, the Jews in Jerusalem lapsed into the very dangerous condition of spiritual apathy. As their sense of commitment dulled and self-interest became predominant, they began to accept "as normal conditions that demanded drastic changes."<sup>1</sup> In the brief, often overlooked message of Haggai, we find the prophetic vision and conviction which was necessary to shake the people from their apathy and motivate them to reorder their priorities before it was too late.

The compiler of Haggai's prophecies provides us no personal background on the prophet himself. But he does give precise dates for the four messages, all delivered in 520 B.C., the second year of Darius, ruler of the Persian Empire (see Evidence for more background information).

The purpose of Haggai's first message, delivered August 29, 520 B.C., was to help the Jews to see the hard times they were experiencing in the light of their relationship with God. It was because they were no longer centered on Him that, even though they sowed diligently, their crops failed, and though they saved scrupulously, the purchasing power of their money dropped so fast it was as if they were putting their shekels in bags filled with holes.

The contrast between the completed houses of the people and the house of Yahweh in ruins demonstrated how the Jews had twisted their priorities. Haggai called them to reverse those priorities by putting the temple at the top of the agenda.

Haggai's contention that God was punishing His people with bad harvests and a bad economy for their neglect of the temple may clash with our view of God's character and/or our view of how the world operates. But do not our own times demonstrate the devastating consequences, both to nature and society, when God is neglected? As Paul Tillich expresses it, our "technical civilization, the pride of mankind, has brought about tremendous devastation of original nature, of the land, of animals, of plants. . . . It has occupied everything for domination and ruthless exploitation."<sup>2</sup>

In the societal realm, injustice spawns violent revolution, the will to power prompts a seemingly endless arms race and greed results in economic chaos. Haggai was right in perceiving that at the core of problems in nature and society is the problem of people being out of touch with God.

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Whereas earlier prophets had stressed the need for justice in society and true worship from the heart, without which temple rituals were worthless, Haggai focuses exclusively on an institutional, external building program. One reason for this was that the honor of Yahweh among the peoples of the earth was bound up with the fate of the temple. Though the God of Israel could not be contained in one locale, He had chosen to display His glory on Mt. Zion. With Zion's temple in ruins, Yahweh was discredited. A rebuilt temple would be a sign that He was still alive and active in human affairs. "Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever" (Eze. 37:28, NIV).

The temple also held eschatological significance. Two hundred years prior to the time of Haggai, the prophet Micah had foreseen a day following Jerusalem's destruction when the temple would be reestablished and would become the center from which God's justice and peace would flow to all nations (Micah 4:1-5). In the century following Haggai's, Malachi prophesied that the Lord would suddenly come to His temple to initiate the judgment of the last day (Mal. 3:1). Sharing the outlook of these other prophets, Haggai was probably convinced that the messianic age could not begin until the temple was rebuilt.

*What does this passage suggest to you about the character and ways of God?*

## **2. The Remnant Respond (read Haggai 1:12-15)**

*"So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God" (1:14, NIV).*

Through Haggai's stirring message (of which probably only the outlines are recorded), the Spirit of the Lord jolted both leaders and people together out of their apathy (v. 12). Only three weeks after the prophet first delivered his message, they began the formidable task of temple building.

Once the people took the risky step of commitment to God's program, they were given the assurance of His presence with them (v. 13). The external conditions had not changed—the temple was still in ruins, the agricultural yields still low, and the economy was still bad. But in reality everything had changed, for they had linked themselves with God's purposes, they had aligned their priorities with His priorities and His presence now guaranteed a promising future.

*How does the New Testament develop the idea of the temple (see Mark 14:58; John 2:19; Eph. 2:19, 22; 1 Pet. 2:4, 5)? What in our modern setting might be equivalent to the temple lying in ruins? Are there ways in which we, too, need to begin rebuilding our "temple"?*

D. F. M.

1. Joyce Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), p. 27.

2. Cited in Stephen Winward, *A Guide to the Prophets* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), p. 194.

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# This Is the Time!

## Immobilized by Prophecy Misapplied

"They misapplied the prophecy [the seventy years of Jer. 29:10] given by Inspiration. They misinterpreted the Word of God, and declared that the time to build had not yet come, and that until the days were fully accomplished, they would not undertake the work. But while they left the building of the house of the Lord, the temple in which they could worship God, until the end of the time specified as the captivity of the Jews had fully come, they built mansions for themselves."<sup>1</sup>

## A Time to Persevere

"The expression, 'This people say' [Hag. 1:2], is significant. In the hour of their opportunity, the Israelites had not shown themselves willing. Prompt obedience is expected of those whom the Lord chooses and leads. Pleas for delay are a dishonor to God. And yet those who choose to follow their own way, often frame ingenious excuses in self-justification. Thus the Israelites declared that they had begun to rebuild, but that they were broken off in their work because of the hindrances devised by their enemies. These hindrances, they reasoned, were an indication that it was not the proper time to rebuild. They declared that the Lord had interposed difficulties to reprove their hot haste. This is why, in a communication through His prophet, He referred to them not as 'my people,' but as 'this people.'

"The Israelites had no real excuse for leaving their work on the temple. The time when the most serious objections were raised was the time for them to persevere in building. But they were actuated by a selfish dislike to encounter danger by arousing the opposition of their enemies. They did not possess the faith that is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. They hesitated to move forward by faith in the opening providences of God, because they could not see the end from the beginning. When difficulties arose, they were easily turned from the work.

"This history will be repeated. There will be religious failures because men do not have faith. When they look at the things that are seen, impossibilities appear; but God can lead them step by step in the course He desires them to take. His work will advance only as His servants move forward by faith. While they may be called upon to pass through trying times, yet they should ever remember that they are contending with a weakened, beaten foe. God's people will finally triumph over every power of darkness."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

In what ways might prophecy be misapplied today in a way that actually hinders us from doing the will of God?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Haggai 1:2, 3, 14

**"The time when the most serious objections were raised, was the time for them to persevere."**

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1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1176 (Manuscript 116, 1897).  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1175 (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 5, 1907).

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# Background of Haggai's Message

by Beatrice S. Neall

## EVIDENCE

### Chronology of Events

- 606/605 to 537/536 B.C. The seventy years' captivity of Judah in Babylon beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's first attack on Jerusalem and ending with the return of a large group of exiles.<sup>1</sup>
- 537 B.C. Decree of Cyrus for the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of their temple (Ezra 1).<sup>2</sup>
- 536 B.C. Jews erect altar and inaugurate services (Ezra 3:1-7).<sup>3</sup>
- 535 B.C. Foundation of temple built (Ezra 3:8-13). Shortly thereafter the building of the temple is frustrated and discontinued (Ezra 4:4, 5) though work on the city and walls continues.
- 529-522 B.C. Reign of Cambyses II, son of Cyrus.<sup>4</sup>
- 522 B.C. Darius I becomes king.<sup>5</sup>
- 520 B.C. Resumption of construction of temple under guidance of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1, 2).<sup>6</sup> The governor opposes Jews, but Darius I confirms their right to build.
- 515 B.C. Completion of temple (Ezra 6:15).<sup>7</sup>

Fifteen years had passed since the Jewish exiles, newly returned from Babylon, had laid the cornerstone of a new temple on the spot where the rubble of Solomon's temple lay. And still only the foundations stood, mute testimony to discouragement, frustration, and delay. From an auspicious beginning, with the support of Cyrus, the Persian monarch, the building project had mired down under criticism from within and opposition from the hostile Samaritans without.

Enter the prophet Haggai. With startling clarity he denounced their error in concentrating on their own personal fortunes to the neglect of the worship of God. He pointed out that their own happiness and prosperity had crumbled as a result. Then he challenged Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, to exercise their God-given leadership in rebuilding the center for the worship of Yahweh.

God's covenant with Israel required a visible house of worship where He could dwell with His people. If the covenant which had been dissolved during the exile was to be renewed, the rebuilding of the temple was of first priority. Though the new temple did not contain the ark with its tables of the law inside, God had promised in His new covenant to write the law upon the hearts of His people (Jer. 31:31). He also promised that He Himself would come to His temple (Mal. 3:1) and that the glory of the second temple would exceed that of the first (Hag. 2:9).<sup>8</sup>

Haggai's message electrified leaders and laity alike. With enthusiasm they plunged into the task, undeterred by opposition from their enemies. And the attempt of the provincial governor to shut down the work only resulted in renewed support from the Persian monarch. Five years later a revived people dedicated their new temple to the Lord (Ezra 6).

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1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 90.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 96.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 340.  
4. George A. Buttrick, ed., *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 352.  
5. *Ibid.*  
6. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 352.  
7. *Ibid.*, p. 360.  
8. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Bible Commentary on the Old Testament*, Haggai (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 170, 171.

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# The Missing Dimension

by Beatrice S. Neall

The returned Jews faced a new problem that was not unique to their day. Finding the work of the Lord discouraging and difficult, they decided to drop it in favor of their own personal projects. They had enough work to keep them busy 25 hours a day—clearing rubble, hewing timber, building houses, cultivating farmland, establishing business. By dint of hard labor they achieved prosperity, with status-symbol paneled houses to show for it (Hag. 1:4). But while they spent years building up their personal fortunes, the house of the Lord lay in ruins. Since it is unthinkable that they would have assembled year after year in the rubble without deciding to rebuild, it is likely that they had discontinued the weekly and yearly worship services during the 15 years that had elapsed since the temple foundations were laid. God's house lay desolate—His worship forsaken.

But trouble comes to any life that neglects the spiritual dimension. Haggai invited the Jews to consider what had happened to them. "You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put them into a bag with holes" (vv. 5, 6). Was this misfortune a punishment from God? Is calamity evidence of divine displeasure, while prosperity indicates divine favor? Perhaps, but not necessarily in the way we might think. Financial reverses often have very human causes. Those who leave God out of their planning, having no goal in life but selfish gratification, often squander their means. Never satisfied with what they have, they eat but "never have enough"; they drink but "never have their fill." They always crave the newer, the bigger, the better. How many couples with large incomes are hopelessly in debt! How many big wage earners are one paycheck away from bankruptcy! Their money goes into a "bag with holes." When life has no spiritual dimension—no noble goals—it is squandered.

What, for us, is "the Lord's house" that needs to be built? It may be more than a building. It may be the Lord's *household*—the Lord's family—that needs our time and energies, both church and home. There may be people out in the cold who need to be invited into the shelter of God's house. There may be family relationships that need to be strengthened in the bonds of love—husband/wife and parent/child relationships. How ironic that while a couple slaves to acquire a house and all the goods that goes with it, the marriage often breaks up with the loss of house and family!

Haggai calls us to set our priorities straight. When God is in our plans, we have something to live for, projects to sacrifice for, goals to labor for. We learn to manage time and money well so that we are blessed spiritually and materially. Our priorities set God first, human relationships second, and material things last. Then life takes on real meaning.

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Haggai 1:6**

**"Is calamity evidence of divine displeasure, while prosperity indicates divine favor?"**

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# An Alternative for Expressing Commitment

by Rick Blythe

**OPINION**  
**Key text:**  
**Deuteronomy**  
**14:22-29**

No one ever has enough money. We all want more. Whether it's you and me who put off the auto maintenance until something starts rattling under the hood, or a multinational corporation introducing a new product, we could all feel better if our budgets were a bit larger and our wallets were a little fatter. And if tomorrow we were to wake up and find that they really were a little thicker we would send the car to the shop and wish we had a few more bucks to get the carpets shampooed . . . an endless cycle.

It is the same way with an organization. There are always new projects and bigger and better things waiting to be done if there was only enough money. You know what I'm talking about; we hear it from the pulpit as often as we hear it from the oil industry or any other special interest group.

At this point, I would like to suggest an alternative. It is merely a personal opinion which I hope will encourage discussion. Instead of answering the weekly offertory by placing a check in the passing plate, place the equivalent of your time at the disposal of the Lord and His church. To be honest this isn't such a radical idea; the Israelites paid tithe in a variety of ways besides cold cash (see Deut. 14:22-29). I'm not quite sure what your local treasurer would do with bushels of wheat or head of cattle these days, but I'll bet the pastor would not refuse if you offered to refinish the old bookcase in the church office.

Let's look at it in more detail. Suppose you earn \$15,000 a year net income. That breaks down to approximately \$7.50 per hour. One tenth of your monthly income would be \$125.00 and its equivalent would be 16  $\frac{2}{3}$  hours. Imagine how a church would explode with activity if even half of the members devoted this much time supporting and spreading the Good News every month!

Obviously, not all this effort should go into evangelism. Each member could work to support the Lord's work according to his specific talents, just as the tithe was intended. A secretary could type the pastor's correspondence, an electrician could maintain the heating system, an accountant might keep the church's financial records . . . the possibilities are endless.

If you and I initiated this program this week, I think we would see another surprising development. Money would begin flowing into the church in enormous amounts. People put their funds where their interests are. If involvement were to center on the church I'm sure the church treasury would overflow in no time at all. This would be "commitment" in action.

But maybe that is the problem. An alternative method of church tithing like this is based on the assumption of commitment. Commitment by you and me to the ideals and mission of the Christian church. I hope our commitment holds firm when it requires a portion of our time.

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**Rick Blythe is the public information officer at Union College.**

**"If involvement  
were to center  
on the church,  
the church  
treasury would  
overflow in  
no time."**

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## REACT

Review the current church policy on tithing as expressed in the excerpts below from the *Church Manual*. Then discuss the following questions:

1. Would giving a tithe of time rather than money be going contrary to biblical direction? According to Ellen White, Deut. 14:22-29 refers to a *second* tithe (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 530). What significance does this have for the point under discussion?

2. How effective do you think the Opinion author's proposal would be in "building the Lord's house" in our day? Should church policy be revised to allow for this plan?

**Church Manual on tithe:** "The gospel plan for the support of the work of God in preaching the everlasting gospel among men is by the tithes and offerings of His people. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has followed this plan from its earliest days.

"The Biblical basis for the paying of tithes and offerings will be found in the following references: Lev. 27:30; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 9:6-15. . .

"In recognition of the Bible plan and the solemn obligation that rests upon church members as children of God and members of His body, the church, all are encouraged to pay a faithful tithe (one tenth of all their increase) into the denomination's treasury.

"Policies have been developed for the gathering and disbursing of funds in all the world and for the conducting of business affairs of the cause. The financial and business side of our denominational work is of great importance. It cannot be separated from the proclamation of the message of salvation; it is indeed an integral part of it.

"The tithe is not used or disbursed by the local church but is passed on to the conference treasurer. Thus the tithe from all the churches flows into the conference treasury which in turn passes on one tenth of its total tithe income to the union. The union in turn passes on to the General Conference one tenth of its total tithe income. . . .

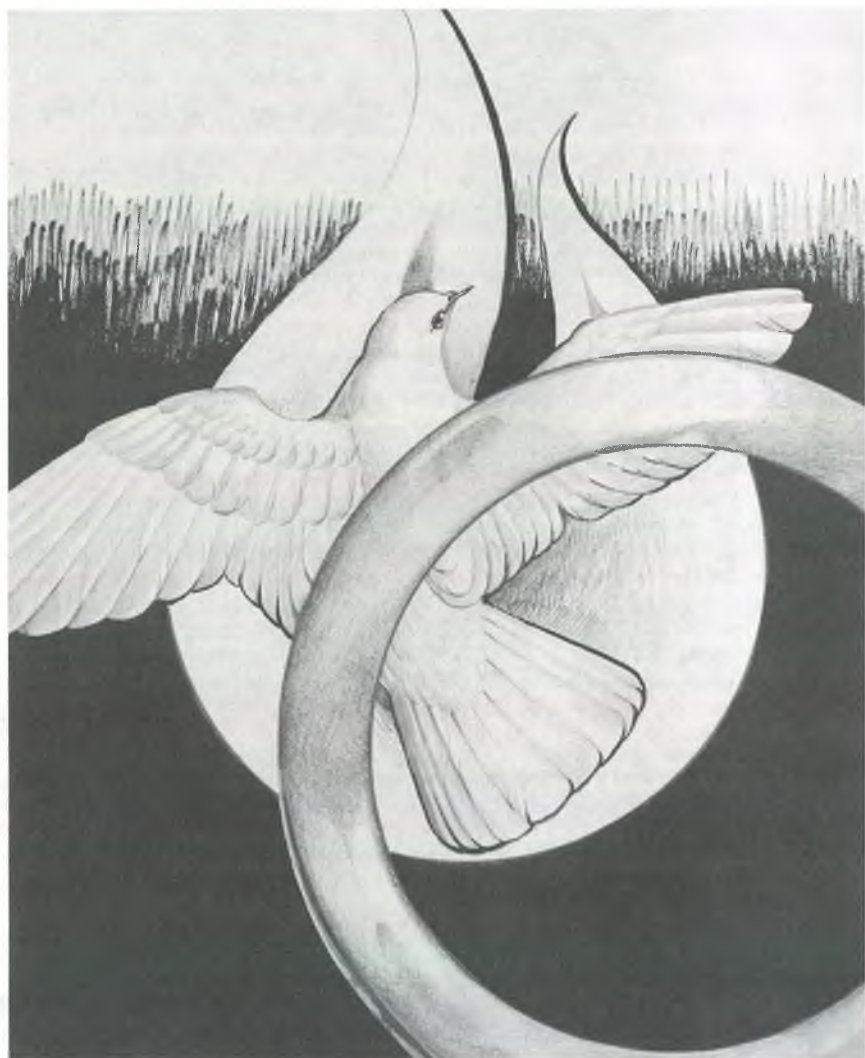
"The financial plan of the denomination serves a larger purpose than appears in our financial and statistical reports. The arrangement is more than a means for gathering and distributing funds. It is, under God, one of the great unifying factors of the Advent Movement. God's people are a united people. There is a remarkable unity of belief and purpose among the Advent people in all the world. We seek to conduct a worldwide work under unified administration. Our system of dividing the tithes between the conference and the union and between the union and the General Conference and of sharing the funds with the world fields has served a wonderful purpose in unifying the work throughout the world."<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 1976, pp. 202, 204-206.

# The Presence and the Promise

“Take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts. . . . My Spirit abides among you; fear not” (Haggai 2:4, 5, RSV).



# Waiting's Strength

by Cheryl Hayward

One deep breath and a hundred hesitant steps brought me to the first door. I could turn around and walk away without anyone knowing I am here, I thought. But a text came to mind—a remnant from my morning devotions:

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he will strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14).

Timidly I knocked. The silence confirmed my hope and relief. I traveled back down the walk, 100 pounds of flesh carrying 20 pounds of books. My first day of summer literature evangelism had begun.

A year before I had committed my life to Jesus. The joy of sharing my new found friend had set me on this journey. Now I longed to share Him with others. But the emphatic No's, slammed doors, and deserted houses I encountered as I went on began to wear down my courage.

Approaching a tidy picketed home tended by a retired couple, I felt a surge of hope. A manicured poodle bounced behind his mistress as she swept grass clippings from the walk. Enchanted by the picture before me, I walked forward with determination—only to be met by a firm set frown from an aging man. I

had no sooner uttered my first two words than a bitter “we don't want any” shattered my illusion. The wife's angry voice stifled any further attempts to explain my mission. On my retreat I received a final word from their poodle and a bite on the leg. Courage gave way to despair as their laughter left me with a broken spirit.

Psalm 27:14 no longer dominated my thoughts, only disappointment and discouragement. My load of books seemed heavier as I walked back toward the car. I couldn't possibly go to one more house, meet one more person, and face one more No. I wanted to quit.

But it was at this time that the power of Psalm 27:14 made its greatest impact—a time when I had little strength, less courage and no will to wait. The Lord gave me strength. And with this strength I did go to the next home, and I did face another person, and I did receive my first Yes. I did wait on the Lord.

Haggai, addressing a people dispirited by the apparent inadequacy of their efforts, reiterates the psalmist's message: “Be strong all ye people of the land . . . and work, for I am with you saith the Lord of hosts” (Hag. 2:4, 5).

**INTRODUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Haggai 2

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# Prelude to Greater Glory

## LOGOS

**Theme:** It is the presence of God's Spirit, not immediate external appearances, which determines the success of an endeavor, and that same Spirit is a guarantee of peace and glory for God's chosen and faithful people.

### 1. Promised Glory of the New Temple (read Haggai 2:1-9)

*"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty. "And in this place I will grant peace," declares the Lord Almighty" (2:9, NIV).*

About a month after the rebuilding work began, Haggai delivered another message from the Lord. Perhaps slow progress and unanticipated frustration were causing zeal to wane. Also, observance of the major festivals that came in the seventh month of the Jewish year would have delayed the work. The Feast of Trumpets was on the first day of the month, the Day of Atonement on the tenth, and then on the fifteenth the Feast of Tabernacles began in which everyone camped in leafy shelters for a week in memory of the Exodus wanderings.

On the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Haggai encouraged both the leadership and the people to persevere despite the unimpressive appearance of their project.

They were to be strong or "take courage" (RSV) for two reasons: (1) God was with them (vv. 4, 5); (2) this new temple would ultimately be greater than the old, for it would be the focal point of a new era of peace brought about by God (vv. 6-9).

For Haggai the restoration of the temple was an eschatological (last-day) event. The people's commitment to rebuilding was to be the prelude to God's decisive intervention in history. In the Exodus and at Sinai God had shaken the earth (Psalm 68:7, 8), and now He would do so again, but in such a dramatic way that all nations and even the very heavens would be convulsed. The result would be a splendor for the temple far surpassing anything in the past, for all nations would bring their treasure to it (see the RSV and NEB rendering of v. 7). More than that, the glory of God Himself would fill the temple, and Jerusalem would truly become the city of peace, the center from which God's *shalom* would flow out to all people (v. 9).

In the perspective of Haggai's vision, then, the "unspectacular service in a time of financial stringency" rendered by the post-exilic community would "play its part in God's final purpose."<sup>1</sup> Haggai's community did not have the resources to endow the temple with wealth, but God owns the wealth of all nations (v. 8), and He would crown the commitment of His people by bringing to the temple unimaginable splendor.

*Did Haggai's prediction of greater glory come true in the way he expected it to (see Mark 13:1; Luke 2:25-35; John 2:13-22; Matt. 12:6)?*

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## 2. Blessing for a Defiled People (read Haggai 2:10-19)

*"From this day on I will bless you" (2:19, NIV).*

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, or December 18, 520 B.C., Haggai delivered his final recorded messages. Citing an example from priestly law, he declares that rather than the people's sacrificial offerings purifying their disobedience, their disobedience pollutes everything they do and touch, including their offerings. And the practical result of the defilement was unfruitfulness of the earth and failure of the economy.

But this passage also seems to be saying something about God's grace, as Joyce Baldwin explains: "(i) Israel had originally been set apart for the Lord and was therefore holy (Ex. 19:6), but (ii) The nation had been defiled, and everything it touched, including offerings, became unclean. The ruined Temple, a witness to sins of negligence, stood like a corpse in the midst. How could the defilement be purged away if every offering was itself defiled? . . . For Israel there was no known remedy. The only hope lay in free acceptance by God, and the promised blessing implies that such acceptance was granted. By heeding the prophet's rebuke and by turning good intentions into actions Israel exercised faith and experienced saving grace."<sup>2</sup>

## 3. God's Signet Ring (read Haggai 2:20-23)

*"On that day," declares the Lord Almighty, "I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel," declares the Lord, "and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the Lord Almighty" (2:23, NIV).*

As is true of other Old Testament prophets, Haggai's vision of the future was telescoped. In his view the international upheaval which was taking place around him merged with God's final shaking of the nations. From his perspective, this upheaval was to be quickly followed by a new age of peace centered around a restored Davidic monarchy in Israel. He saw the governor, Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, as God's chosen ruler in this new era.

Zerubbabel was compared to God's "signet ring." The signet ring contained the king's seal, which functioned like a signature—the instrument with which all official documents were endorsed and transactions accomplished. As God's signet ring, Zerubbabel was seen as the one who would give effect to the Lord's decrees.

Zerubbabel, however, did not rise to a restored throne of David and, in fact, disappears quite suddenly from recorded history. The fulfillment of Haggai's vision was deferred until, in the fullness of time, there came another descendant of David who disarmed the principalities and powers at the cross and even now reigns at God's right hand until that day when His enemies are no more.

*What does Haggai 2 suggest to you about the relationship between divine and human roles in the outworking of God's purposes?*

D. F. M.

1. Joyce Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), p. 48.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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# Polishing the Precious

## TESTIMONY **Mirror of God's Presence**

**Key text:**  
**Malachi 3:17**

"The outward glory of the temple was not the glory of the Lord. Instruction was given as to what constituted the blessing that was to rest upon the temple. Its restoration in a plainer style than that of the first temple was to place before the people in a proper light their past error in depending upon the pomp and splendor of outward form and ceremony. The temple was to be erected at this time, also, to remove the reproach of their disloyalty to God. Haggai instructed the people that by heartfelt repentance and by speedy completion of the temple, they were to seek to be cleansed from the sin of disobedience that had led away from God.

"In neglecting the temple, which was the mirror of God's presence, the people had greatly dishonored God. They were now instructed to hold His house in sacred honor, not because of its magnificence, as did the Jews in the days of Christ, but because God had promised to be there. And this second temple was to be superior to the first because in a special sense the Messiah would honor it with His personal presence."<sup>1</sup>

### "I Will Make You Like a Signet Ring"

"Christ says to man, 'You are mine. I have bought you. You are now only a rough stone, but if you will place yourself in My hands, I will polish you, and the luster with which you shall shine will bring honor to My name. No man shall pluck you out of My hand. I will make you My peculiar treasure. On My coronation day, you will be a jewel in My crown of rejoicing.'

"The divine Worker spends little time on worthless material. Only the precious jewels does He polish after the similitude of a palace, cutting away all the rough edges. This process is severe and trying; it hurts human pride. Christ cuts deep into the experience that man in his self-sufficiency has regarded as complete, and takes away self-uplifting from the character. . . .

"'In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, . . . and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.' Blessed be the experience, however severe, that gives new value to the stone, and causes it to shine with living brightness."<sup>2</sup>

"This personal word to Zerubbabel has been left on record for the encouragement of God's children in every age. God has a purpose in sending trial to His children. He never leads them otherwise than they would choose to be led if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose that they are fulfilling. All that He brings upon them in test and trial comes that they may be strong to do and to suffer for Him."<sup>3</sup>

### REACT

Does God's direction for plainness in the second temple suggest that we should avoid splendor and magnificence in our own worship structures and services?

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1176, (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 12, 1907).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1177, (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 19, 1907).

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 578.



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# The Glory of Total Commitment

by LeVerne Bissell

As the last chords of the piano faded into the rafters of the church, we sat for a moment transfixed. Then a wave of response swept through the congregation, and we were all on our feet applauding the musician, who had brought us nearer the Majesty of Heaven. We had just witnessed commitment to perfection in musicianship and commitment of talent and life to the glory of God.

Such commitment had been lacking in Haggai's time. Yet now that they had responded to the Lord's messages, the old prophet assured the builders that their puny efforts would be rewarded. The new temple, he said, would be even more glorious than the former. That their lack of resources could produce a structure that would exceed the brilliance and majesty of Solomon's glory was beyond their understanding. But, awesome as the first temple had been with all the treasures of David and Solomon, it lacked one great Transforming Resource that would bring glory to this new temple. Into the temple gates the Desire of all nations would come. His divine presence, veiled in human form, would illuminate the temple with a radiance greater than the Shekinah glory of Solomon's sanctuary.

Only in contemplation of that Life could they, can we, comprehend total commitment. From the first dawning of consciousness, at age 12, that His mission was to be the sacrificial Lamb of God, to His final words on the cross, "It is finished," He lived for one purpose—the glory of His Father. He sought that glory through the total commitment of Himself for the salvation of a dying race.

It was the presence of the totally committed One that brought glory to the temple. When He walked among men, His concerns transcended laws and legalities, yes, even doctrinal purity. His concerns drew suffering humanity into the circle of His love. With open heart and arms He accepted them as they were—"He that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Their pasts, even their presents, were not prerequisites to His acceptance. Their futures were glorious in His grace. He committed Himself, heart, mind, and spirit to the needs of a lost and lonely world. That totally committed Life was the glory of the temple.

Two thousand years later the Christian church still stands outside the temple gates. As in the days of Haggai, profanely we ask, "Where is the glory of the temple? The power and majesty of His church?" If we seek the glory in the physical structure, shall we find it? If we look for doctrinal purity, can the glory be found? If we turn to the church body itself, the purity of His people, can we find the glory there? We search in vain.

The glory is in our midst and we have esteemed Him not. For the glory now as then is the Desire of all nations, the only begotten Son of God. He is here among us, and we have not known Him. In that committed Life alone is the glory and power that we seek.

## REACT

What role do we, as God's people, play in revealing His glory?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Haggai 2:3, 7-9

"The Glory  
is in  
our midst and  
we have  
esteemed  
Him not."

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LeVerne Bissell is registrar and director of institutional research at Union College.

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# Renewing the Contract

by Bill Roberts

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Haggai 2:4, 5**

I hadn't been to church in weeks. My Bible lay unobtrusively on a bookshelf, buried beneath a pile of last semester's textbooks. I rarely felt the need to dig it out. Sometimes I heard people on campus discuss God and what He was doing in their lives. They sounded excited. I vaguely remembered being excited about God—after all, I had been a student missionary. But now I just didn't seem to have the time to concern myself with Him.

"Would you write an article for the *Collegiate Quarterly*?" I was asked. I said Yes, greeting this request as an opportunity to force myself back into Bible study. But Haggai? What did I know about Haggai? I found it hard enough to understand the Gospels. What could I get out of a rustic book like Haggai?

I read that little book through several times wondering what it had to do with anything of consequence today. Zerubabel? The unclean offerings? God's smiting the land with mildew and hail? I almost returned my Bible to the shelf, willing to let the textbooks bury it again, but then a theme caught my attention.

The people of Haggai's day gave up on the rebuilding of the temple and returned to working their land and building quarters for themselves. They did what is so tempting and easy to do—they forgot about God. They grew tired of God's assurances that the second temple would outshine the first; they turned their backs on the work God asked of them and pursued their own interests instead.

Isn't that quite similar to what I was doing? Hadn't my spiritual perception become as dry as those fields in Haggai's day? Hadn't I quit building the spiritual "temple"—the one God and I began to build when I made my decision to be a Christian? God and I had a contract, and I was not living up to my portion of the agreement. I'd been forgetting God's promise to restore the temple to greater glory.

Haggai's message to me, far from the cryptic code I thought it would be, is a reminder from God of the ways in which we lose sight of Him.

1. We grow discouraged with our God-given work.
2. We forget God's promises.
3. We leave God's work to occupy ourselves with things that exclude God.
4. We force God out of our lives.

If we reverse these trends, we can, I'm told by Haggai, discover how it is possible to "rebuild the temple."

## REACT

How can we come to fuller recognition of Christ as the supreme glory of the church? What would be the practical effects of such recognition?

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Bill Roberts is a journalism student at Union College.

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# The Desperation of God

by Judy Duncan

When I read Haggai I am struck by what seems to me to be one of the dominant themes of the book: the desperation of God. Without meaning to detract in any way from the dignity of the divine character, His actions here remind me of little-boy tricks to get the attention of a special little girl: the proverbial slimy, green frog in her desk, pulling her pigtails, etc. Little suitors seem almost to torture their feminine friends into taking notice of them.

In this book God confesses His desperation for His people to turn to Him, and He is willing to take drastic measures to make them notice Him: "I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me" (Hag. 2:17, NIV). In addition to thus warning them of the consequences of the spiritual neglect, He also tries to get their attention by reassuring them of His presence. "I am with you," He says. "Be strong," He reiterates three times. "I will bless you"; therefore, "Do not fear," He urges. He longs for their loyalty and reminds them that they have a special place in His heart—"for I have chosen you" (v. 23). And He hopes that through His promises and the vision of His glory in the temple that His people will take notice of Him and become bonded to Him.

For Israel the splendor of God in the temple was a tangible, constant monument to His presence and the bond between them. Today it is not as easy to picture our modern church in quite the same way. We think of it more in terms of *our* action there: our acts of worship, our communion with other believers, and our reception of God's message. And yet God's desperation to reveal Himself and be acknowledged by His people continues in our generation.

So what are the symbols of God's presence on earth today? A pat answer would be that He still meets with us in church; we know He manifests Himself in nature; and we feel His love through the medium of a caring community. All of these are true, but like the Israelites we will probably not receive the full benefit of God's presence without conscious effort on our part. God's chosen people were asked to lay aside their own rebuilding and expend a lot of energy to restore the temple.

God has assured us that He still wants to be among us, but it is up to us to be creative, self-sacrificing, and steadfast in building and maintaining "temples" for Him—whether these be within our own hearts or externally as part of a community.

The desperation of God is everlasting, and we have assurance that the spiritual splendor, if not the physical, will always shine for us. And, like most reciprocally formed bonds, our assurance of divine presence will be more real if we create a temple for Him in our lives.

## REACT

Does God send us suffering and hardship in order to get us to notice and respond to Him? (Compare Deut. 8:2-5; Matt. 7:9-11; Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 12:7-10, and Testimony for this week.)

## OPINION

Key text:  
Haggai 2:17

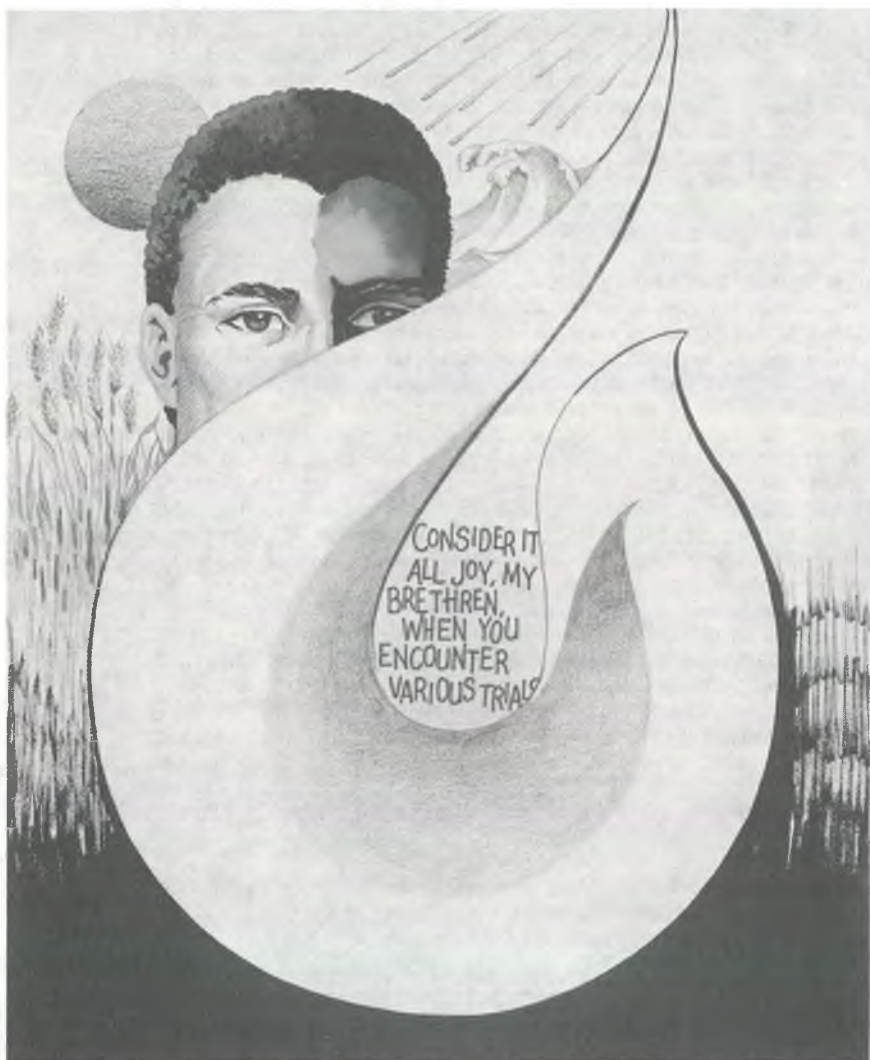
"His actions here remind me of little-boy tricks to get the attention of a special little girl."

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Judy Duncan is a graduate student in English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

# The Testing of Commitment

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4, NIV).



# Calyxes of Gold

by John Abbott

Why, why, *why*? God must hear that question more than any other. Not, Why have You given me so much? Or, Why have You been so kind and full of mercy even when I've turned You away? Rather, the "whys" God seems to hear the most are, "Why did You let me get into such a mess? Why didn't You stop all this pain before it ever started? Why should a simple, innocent Christian have to experience trials and times of testing? I thought you were big enough to halt an army of woes—Why don't you stop mine?"

Questions such as these are hard to answer. They must be answered through personal experience. God is big enough to prevent our troubles, but He is also wise enough to allow us to go through trying experiences, if need be. Paul encourages us to rejoice in *every* circumstance (1 Thess. 5:18), and that must mean that even trials fill needs in our lives, needs that cannot be filled in any other way. Paul discovered that through personal experience. He was subjected to so many physically and emotionally trying ordeals, yet he came to realize, as the song points out, that "there's a reason and a plan, there's a purpose, and there's a goal. . . . And Jesus who loves us more than anyone can, is still in control."

There are valuable treasures to be found in our sufferings that can yield eternal rewards if we allow them to (see 2 Cor. 4:17). Remember

that word *eternal*, because we can't always see the rewards this side of heaven.

If we could push ajar the gates of life

And stand within, and all God's working see,

And could interpret all this doubt and strife

And for each mystery find a key!

But not today. Then be content, poor heart!

God's plans, like lilies pure and white, unfold;

We must not tear the close-shut leaves, apart;

TIME will reveal the calyxes of gold.

And if, through patient toil, we reach the land

Where tired feet, with sandals loosed may rest,

Then we shall clearly know and understand,

I think that we shall say: "God knew the best."<sup>1</sup>

Heaven will provide us with plenty of opportunity for discovering the whys of life's difficulties and hardships. But our lesson for this week invites us to consider the value in our trials now. When I do that, I see that my trying times give me something most of this world doesn't have—a great longing to be with Christ. And anything that could give us a greater longing to be with Christ would be absolutely worth experiencing. For our longings lead us to seeking, and seeking to finding. And finding ourselves at His feet learning of His love is the very best of places we could be.

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
James 1:1-15

1. Poem by Mrs. Charles Cowman from the book *Nevertheless Afterward* (Los Angeles: Cowman Publications, 1957), p. 8.

At the time of this writing, John Abbott was a theology major at Union College.

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# Count It Pure Joy

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Hard times and temptations test our commitment, but when we turn in faith to God for wisdom, we are enabled to persevere. And perseverance builds our spiritual strength and leads to the maturity of character that God desires for His sons and daughters.

### 1. The Meaning of Hardship (read James 1:1-3)

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (1:2, NIV).*

The letter of James is really a sermon in the form of a letter. Nowhere in the New Testament is the call to commitment given more forthrightly—in the letter's 108 verses there are 60 imperatives! The author presupposes his readers know the gospel, and his concern is to remind them how Christians ought to live. In so doing, he frequently echoes the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup> Little is known for certain about authorship and date. According to Christian tradition, the source of the letter is James "the Just," brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19; 2:9).

James makes no bold pretensions in introducing his epistle. Assuming tradition is correct about his identity, it is noteworthy that he gives no reference to his position on the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13) to bolster his authority and exploits nothing from his relationship to Jesus. He opens simply with the title, "A slave of God and Jesus Christ." In this is his honor and in doing his Master's bidding his highest glory.

It is in this context that trials can be faced with a calm assurance and joy in the knowledge that the hardships we encounter in the service of God bring about great good. "All kinds of experiences will come to us. There will be the test of sorrows and the disappointments which seek to take our faith away. There will be the test of the seductions which seek to lure us from the right way. There will be the tests of the dangers, the sacrifices, the unpopularity with which the Christian must so often involve. But they are not meant to make us fall, they are meant to make us soar."<sup>2</sup>

*Who is ultimately responsible for "trials"? Can pain really be considered a joyous experience?*

### 2. The Result of Hardship (read James 1:4-8, 12)

*"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive a crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (1:12, NIV).*

The secret of happiness is in doing the will of God. But the question still remains, how can trials be considered "pure joy" when they so often contain great pain? The solution lies not in gritting one's teeth and valiantly trying to "dance in the rain," but rather in the understanding that persevering through hardship brings a perfect-

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ing and maturing of the Christian character. "[U]nswerving consistency removes the weaknesses and imperfections from a man's character. Daily it enables him to conquer old sins, to shed old blemishes and to gain new virtues, until in the end he becomes entirely fit for the service of God and man."<sup>3</sup> From this perspective trials and their accompanying pain can be viewed in a context of "pure joy," for through them the Christian lives more victoriously and in closer harmony with Jesus Christ. There is no greater joy than this way of life, and its outcome is a "crown of life" (v. 12).

*In the midst of a discussion on trials, why do you think James interjects a comment on wisdom (v. 5)?*

*Are prayers of doubters never answered? (Compare vv. 7, 8; Matt. 9:24; John 20:24-29).*

### 3. Who's to Blame? (read James 1:13-15)

*"After desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fullgrown gives birth to death" (1:15, NIV).*

In the face of hardship there is the ever present temptation to take the easiest escape—to retreat instead of conquer, to give up, rather than persevere. To Job, in the midst of his troubles, the temptation came in the words "curse God and die." All too easily we blame God for our problems, when instead the cause lies in our own stubborn and willful foolishness. The excuses are myriad: "God made me this way, I can't help it"; "God led me here, so it's not my fault"; "The woman thou gavest me . . ."; "The serpent [you made] deceived me." But James points out that the correct sequence for blame does not go back to God but extends into man. Death results from sin, and sin is spawned from desire cherished and nurtured in man's heart.

*How is the desire-sin-death sequence broken?*

### 4. On Status (read James 1:9-11)

*"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position" (1:9, 10, NIV).*

The Christian's view of status is the reverse of the world's, where worth is often measured by position, wealth, or feats accomplished, rather than by quiet, thankless service. The world's standards bring no significance to life, for their instruments of measure retain all the permanence of the beauty in a wildflower under a scorching sun. But the selfless service of the Terry Foxes and Mother Teresas of the world, though most of their names may be forgotten, will filter down the ensuing generations and reach on into eternity.

E. R. M.

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1. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1469.

2. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 42, 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

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# Tested by Fire

compiled by Ralph Schnell

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
James 1:2, 3

"Many who sincerely consecrate their lives to God's service are surprised and disappointed to find themselves, as never before, confronted by obstacles and beset by trials and perplexities. They pray for Christ-likeness of character, for a fitness for the Lord's work, and they are placed in circumstances that seem to call forth all the evil of their nature."<sup>1</sup>

All too often in our failures and discouragements, we forget to look for God's plan and purpose for permitting trials. "God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil' (Jeremiah 29:11). The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange."<sup>2</sup>

"Trial is part of the education given in the school of Christ, to purify God's children from the dross of earthliness. It is because God is leading His children that trying experiences come to them. Trials and obstacles are His chosen methods of discipline, and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their weaknesses better than they themselves can know them. He sees that some have qualifications which, if rightly directed, could be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these souls into different positions and varied circumstances, that they may discover the defects that are concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to overcome these defects and to fit themselves for service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to burn, that they may be purified."<sup>3</sup>

"The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious, which He desires to develop. If He saw in us nothing whereby He might glorify His name, He would not spend time in refining us. He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines. The blacksmith puts the iron and steel into the fire that he may know what manner of metal they are. The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction, to prove what temper they are of, and whether they can be fashioned for His work."<sup>4</sup>

"All our sufferings and sorrows, all our temptations and trials, all our sadness and griefs, all our persecutions and privations, in short, all things work together for our good. All experiences and circumstances are God's workmen whereby good is brought to us."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

Does the faithful Christian have greater trials and perplexities than the non-Christian? Is the popular emphasis on conversion leading to happiness and success misleading?

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Ralph Schnell is a religion/social science education major at Union College.

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.
2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 524.
4. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 489.



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# Playing Second Fiddle and Life's Other Trials

by James L. Hayward, Jr.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's rival Antonio Salieri, in the fictionalized *Amadeus*, cannot fathom why God inspires the vulgar Mozart with the most sublime music ever written. God, to all appearances, mainlines divine themes directly through Mozart, a most unworthy penman. The pious Salieri has prayed from youth to be a conduit for holy melody, but he has received only modest talent. Salieri's bitterness burns so intensely that he sets out to destroy Mozart—and so spite God.

Young Mozart, weakened by gross intemperance, succumbs and is buried in an unmarked grave. Years later Salieri, still wrapped in anger and bitterness, slits his own throat. He survives, but lives out his life as an asylum inmate who proclaims himself sovereign of mediocrity.

Playing second fiddle can be one of life's cruelest trials. How I wish that I could write with the pathos and sensitivity of novelist Willa Cather! How I'd love to lecture with the skill and insight of Harvard's Stephen Jay Gould! How I'd enjoy playing world class science in league with Barbara McClintock or Linus Pauling! If only I could be best in just one endeavor!

The trials of life come in many forms—inadequacy, poverty, rejection, insecurity, uncertainty, illness, death—the list could be extended indefinitely. But James writes, "Whenever you have to face trials of many kinds, count yourselves supremely happy, in the knowledge that such testing of your faith breeds fortitude, and if you give fortitude full play you will go on to complete a balanced character that will fall short in nothing" (James 1:2-4, NEB).

No one ever said that trials would be easy. But neither can anyone say that trials will fail to do us a good turn. Am I impatient? Trials can make me more patient. Do I lack sensitivity? Trials can make me more sensitive. Do I thirst for intimacy with God? Trials can bring me closer to Him. Like driftwood tossed by a stormy sea, we are beautified by the turbulence of life. Tragically, Salieri did not understand this. Rather than work through his trials, he refused to accept them, missing magnificent opportunities in the process.

And what of Cather, Gould, McClintock, Pauling, Mozart, and all the other luminaries? You can be assured they have borne their share of life's burdens. I wonder where our own trials will lead us?

## REACT

Is every trial a potential blessing?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
James 1:2-4

"Salieri lives out his life as an asylum inmate who proclaims himself sovereign of mediocrity."

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At the time of this writing James L. Hayward, Jr., was an associate professor of biology at Union College.

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# Reading Committee Joys

by Rich Carlson

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Proverbs 11:14**

I write this from the “friendly skies of United” upon returning from a long, frustrating day in Washington, D.C., with the *Collegiate Quarterly* reading committee.<sup>1</sup> Why can’t they see things my way? Why must they be so “disagreeable”? I settle back in my seat and open the Bible to receive my spiritual nourishment and, there it is—“Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials . . .” (James 1:2, RSV). That’s easy to say when things are going my way. In fact, one of my favorite sermon illustrations centers around some very positive feedback I got the first time I used this verse to help a depressed counselee. But now, for me, it must be different. Count it all joy when people don’t agree with me and things just don’t go my way? How? Here are the lessons for me today; perhaps they will help you as well.

**1. The reading committee was not all wrong.** When things go wrong the fault is not always with “the other guy.” Proverbs like “There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors” (Prov. 11:14) and “Pride goeth before . . . a fall” (Prov. 16:18) gently remind me that I may not have all the answers. The minute I insist that my way is right, and everyone else is wrong, I alone become accountable for the results of my position. I should “count as all joy” the trial and discipline of listening to and learning from others, because it can save me from hardships I might bring on myself and for which I alone would be responsible.

**2. I was not all right.** Besides the gentle reminder, through frustration, that others have something to teach me, I can also “count it all joy” that God helped me recall that at times I might just be wrong. (God forbid that I should ever let that thought even cross my mind!) The frustrating privilege of being reminded that I might be in error could be very discouraging (especially as I wrestle with the big “I” of pride), or it could set me up for the greatest opportunity in life.

**3. God always provides growth.** As soon as God uses all the circumstances and situations around me (“various trials”) to bring me down, then He has a chance to offer me the blessings of *His* wisdom (v. 5), which He is eagerly waiting to bestow on me. What a privilege to be brought down so I can be lifted up to greater heights through His promises.

Well, we are on final descent at O’Hare, and I have finally caught a glimpse of the joy that can be mine as I take advantage of the trials that have come my way. These trials have reminded me that I don’t have all the answers and that I need to learn the value of listening to others. And they have reinforced the assurance that God never allows more than I can handle and always provides the potential for growth if I only take time to recognize it.

Thanks, reading committee, for a great day!

1. The *Collegiate Quarterly* reading committee (see masthead, p. 3) meets each quarter to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of the quarterly manuscripts, and to discuss possible changes.

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Rich Carlson is the campus chaplain at Union College and director of Collegiate Publications.

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# Handling a Test of Commitment

by Rick Blythe

While in college, I spent a summer studying oceanography in San Diego. Housing was provided at "The Clubhouse," better known as the University of California at San Diego, and consisted of two co-ed dorms about five blocks from the beach. What a break from Lincoln, Nebraska! Needless to say it was enjoyable, and I even learned a bit about oceanography.

But that wasn't all I learned. As sundown arrived on Friday evening I realized that I had been placed in a compelling situation. While making introductions during the week, the eight of us in the suite had learned something of each other's backgrounds, including the fact that I came from a Seventh-day Adventist college in the Midwest. I couldn't deny this was the "seventh day" now that the sun was approaching the horizon.

Here was the test of commitment to God's arbitrary request to set aside the seventh day of the week for worship. No physical or moral necessity requires us to honor the Sabbath; it is simply a request by God to recognize His saving grace by setting aside time for Him.

Now, it is easy to respect the Sabbath in a traditional manner when those around us are doing the same. Adventist colleges are havens for young people to worship collectively from sunset to sunset on peaceful campuses.

But, as I discovered, several other options are open to you if you are outside the cloistered environment. You can participate completely in the activities of the group in which you find yourself or select only certain appropriate activities or abstain from all activities and confine yourself to meditation.

How do you select one of the options for Sabbath observance? It is simple. One's commitment to certain ideals requires consequent actions. If you are committed to demonstrating a Christian's influence for good in even the most questionable environments, you might select option number one and hang out with the group. If you are committed to abstaining from activities labeled by some as "sinful," but understand the importance of a Christian's witness, you might select option number two and participate in a limited way. Or, if you are committed to refreshing your soul through thoughtful meditation, you might select option number three and avoid all distractions of this busy world.

Whichever route, or combinations, you choose, one essential element must remain uppermost: be true to your commitment. None of the three generalized options are right or wrong in themselves. They acquire meaning only when linked by commitment to a worldview. Your task is to keep that worldview centered on Christ, and your actions will fall into place by themselves.

## REACT

Do you agree with the author that there may be differing, equally valid commitments to follow in the sort of situations he has outlined? What would you do in his situation?

## OPINION

Key text:  
1 Corinthians  
10:31

"Here was the test of commitment to God's arbitrary request to set aside the seventh day."

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Rick Blythe is the public information officer at Union College.

# Authentic Religion

“The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25, NIV).



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# Should "Religion" Be Replaced?

by Gerry Tetz

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
James 1:16-27

I have a kind and gentle friend who is a dancer. Who was a dancer. Who is an Adventist. I share her sadness as her gift lies unused because the church we're a part of has no place for it.

I wonder what Miriam would have done could she not have danced in celebration at the drowning of Egypt's finest. Or the women, celebrating David's prowess at killing his ten thousands.

I wonder too at dancers gracing Adventist lyceum stages and General Conference session platforms. It seems some are allowed to dance in the name of culture, some forbidden in the name of religion.

"Religion" is such a catch basin. It's used to justify and condemn, maim and heal, marry and divorce. It is shrouded in the dark mists of time. It blazes from the klieg lights of a TV sound stage. Like some immense constellation, today's cast of religious stars wheels through our consciousness, a Babel of voices bombarding us with the final word on every possible subject and world event.

I gave up on the word "religion" several years ago—on the way it defines goodness or organized goodness. I observed it being used by Muslims to justify killing Chris-

tians, Christians to condemn Jews, Jews to fight Muslims.

I saw it being used by wealthy city parishes with rental units as a sideline business—"slumlord" was the word that kept cropping up in the papers. The Ku Klux Klan, The Covenant, The Arm and Sword of the Lord, and other social clubs seemed to find it a useful cover also.

So, like many other words distorted beyond recognition, I relegated it to the alphabetical scrapheap. In its place I used "spiritual."

But "spiritual" doesn't quite replace "religion." In my mind, life and usage there is a difference. "Spiritual" is essential, innate, alive. "Religion" is organizational, utilitarian, external. And it bothers me that one has been diminished in meaning, the other changed by substitution.

I don't believe it has to be that way. And I don't believe my friend would either. Her religion—the way she shows her concern for others—is an extension of her spirituality. I think her life defines religion well, though she is unable to express it publicly in dance.

James, I think, would see it that way, too. He helps us cut through the distorted perceptions of religion and better grasp its essence.

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At the time of this writing, Gerry Tetz was a writer for the Institutional Advancement Office at Union College.

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# Remembering the Mirror

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Among the key indicators of whether an individual's religion is authentic are his manner of communicating, his moral quality, and his response to the needs of others.

### 1. The Source of All Good (read James 1:16-18)

*"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (1:17, NIV).*

The context of this passage is rooted in vv. 13-15, studied in last week's lesson, which dealt with the question of whether God is a source of temptation. There was a trend in Jewish thought which attempted to explain man's duplicity, his propensity for both good and evil, by arguing that since God created everything He must also have created the tendency for evil.

James rejects this notion. From God no evil comes. Instead He is the source of all good, never capricious, never changing. To illustrate his point, James employs an astronomical term. God is the creator of the heavenly lights, but, unlike them, in Him there is no variability or shadow of turning. The sun's intensity changes with the passing of day and the moon alters in its cycle. But God, in His love, remains constant, ever giving good gifts to His children. The greatest of them is the gift of new life, or re-creation.

*When asked the ultimate question, "If God is good how could He allow the death of a child," Nobel laureate author Isaac Bashevis Singer, replied, "Well, maybe He's a little God." How would you respond to this?*

### 2. Practical Christianity (read James 1:19-27)

*"Do not merely listen to the word, . . . do what it says" (1:22, NIV).*

In a day and age when religious discussion tends to center around the love of Christ and His sacrifice given freely to us, the pejorative label "legalism" is readily assigned to any talk regarding what effect being a Christian has on one's lifestyle. The "How to be a Christian" instruction goes little further than the catchall "Develop a relationship with Jesus Christ." While this cliché is certainly true and cannot be treated lightly, it is not the complete and final answer. The fact remains, we can have a relationship with Jesus Christ and still sin. And the line "Just be patient, God isn't finished with me yet" cannot be used as an excuse for sin just because one claims to have a "relationship."

Christlike characteristics must be manifested in a Christian's life, for "anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (vv. 23, 24, NIV).

So from where do the characteristics of a Christian lifestyle come? As one develops a relationship with Jesus Christ do they just

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naturally/supernaturally fall into place, or do they come through years of grit and determination? The answer is yes and no to both questions. No, a smoker seldom finds himself suddenly not smoking anymore, and for many it is exceedingly difficult if not impossible to quit through a mammoth exercising of the will. But yes, a relationship with Jesus does help him quit, and so does the use of his will.

The balance between the divine and human role in salvation is fine indeed and has provided the fodder for centuries of discussion. But here in James it is beautifully laid out. Salvation comes from God. "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (v. 18, NIV). But with this gift comes a responsibility. "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth" (v. 21, NIV). Religion that God our Father accepts as faultless requires action on our part, "to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (v. 27, NIV).

*Do our works contribute to salvation? If so, how? If not, why bother with them?*

*One viewpoint is that while there is a role for willpower and effort in the Christian life, it should all be directed toward strengthening one's relationship with Christ, with the automatic result being good works. Support is found in comparing John 15:5 and Phil. 4:13 and 2:13. Does James refute, affirm, or even speak to this viewpoint?*

E. R. M.

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# On Genuine Religion

## TESTIMONY Never Cramping

Key text:  
James 1:27

"Many seem to feel that religion has a tendency to make its possessor narrow and cramped, but genuine religion does not have a narrowing influence; it is the lack of religion that cramps the faculties and narrows the mind. When a man is narrow, it is an evidence that he needs the grace of God, the heavenly anointing; for a Christian is one whom the Lord, the God of hosts, can work through, that he may keep the ways of the Lord of the earth and make manifest His will to men."<sup>1</sup>

### A Fountain of Charity

"The pure religion of Jesus is the fountain from which flow streams of charity, love, self-sacrifice. . . .

"A Christian is a Christlike man, a Christlike woman, who is active in God's service, who is present at the social meeting, whose presence will encourage others also. Religion does not consist in works, but religion works; it is not dormant."<sup>2</sup>

"Among all whose needs demand our interest, the widow and the fatherless have the strongest claims upon our tender sympathy and care. [James 1:27 quoted].

**"Religion does not consist in works, but religion works."**

"The father who had died in the faith, resting upon the eternal promise of God, left his loved ones in full trust that the Lord would care for them. And how does the Lord provide for these bereaved ones? He does not work a miracle in sending manna from heaven; He does not send ravens to bring them food; but He works a miracle upon human hearts. He expels selfishness from the soul; He unseals the fountain of benevolence. He tests the love of His professed followers by committing to their tender mercies the afflicted and bereaved ones, the poor and the orphan. These are in a special sense the little ones whom Christ looks upon, whom it is an offense to Him to neglect. Those who do neglect them are neglecting Christ in the person of His afflicted ones. Every kind act done to them in the name of Jesus is accepted by Him as if done to Himself, for He identifies His interest with that of suffering humanity. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

"In the professed Christian world there is enough expended in extravagant display, for jewels and ornaments, to supply the wants of all the hungry and clothe the naked in our towns and cities; and yet these professed followers of the meek and lowly Jesus need not deprive themselves of suitable food or comfortable clothing. What will these church members say when confronted in the day of God by the worthy poor, the afflicted, the widows and fatherless, who have known pinching want for the meager necessities of life, while there was expended by these professed followers of Christ, for superfluous clothing and needless ornaments expressly forbidden in the Word of God, enough to supply all their wants?"<sup>4</sup>

### REACT

How can we avoid making our religion a narrowing, cramping influence?

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 935 (Manuscript 3, 1892).
2. *Ibid.* (Letter 7, 1883).
3. *Welfare Ministry*, p. 214 (*Review and Herald*, June 27, 1893).
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 217 (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 21, 1878).



# Only Believe?

by Ralph Neall

Does Jesus really do it all? If we trust Him for forgiveness and power, can we then be passive like a glove on the hand of God or like a straw in the Gulf Stream? Paul could be understood in this way. He wrote, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).<sup>1</sup>

James, however, seems to contradict Paul, for he emphasized obedience and good works. Actually, the contradiction is more apparent than real. In the very next verse in Ephesians 2, Paul himself preaches good works: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (see also Titus 3:5, 8).

And James, in the first chapter of his epistle, preaches grace: "Of his own will he [God] brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

The "word of truth" in this verse is the gospel message of salvation by faith in Christ. James knows just as well as Paul that we do not save ourselves, but that God "brought us forth" by His own will. Salvation was and is a sheer gift from Him who loved us.

It must be admitted, however, that James is concerned about "cheap grace"—that is, grace which rejoices in Christ as Savior, but rejects Him as Lord; grace which rejoices in forgiveness, but refuses to help the poor or hungry.

James does not support the idea of "natural obedience," which says that all a Christian has to do is to believe in Christ and everything else follows naturally. If he had held that view he could have written a much shorter epistle. He knew that Christians are still human and therefore need exhortation and instruction.

And so we find James warning us about our words in vv. 19-21 and 26, about our overall obedience in vv. 22-25, and about helping the poor in vv. 26, 27. For practicality James can be compared with Proverbs. His advice about being slow to speak and slow to anger has its parallels, for instance, in Prov. 10:19; 13:3; 17:28; and 29:20.

When he compares the disobedient believer to someone who looks in a mirror and then forgets what he looks like, he is condemning cheap grace and also showing the proper place of law in a Christian's life. While the mirror cannot wash my face, it can show me I need washing. In the same way, the law cannot save me from sin, but it can convict me that I need saving.

When James urges us to help the orphans and widows he is echoing the words of Christ in Matt. 25:36: "I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Thus he emphasizes the most important duties of genuine religion.

## REACT

What is the human role in sanctification? (In addition to James 1:16-27, see Matt. 7:24; John 15:4, 5; Gal. 5:22, 23; Phil. 2:12, 13.)

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Ephesians  
2:8-10

"James does not support the idea of 'natural obedience.'"

1. All Scripture quotations from the RSV.

Ralph E. Neall is a professor of religion at Union College and former missionary to Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore.

# Communication That Counts

by Greg G. Rumsey

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**James 1:19-27**

At least two themes which emerge from the first chapter of James offer practical implications for our interpersonal relationships, our walk with God and our Christian service.

**1. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.** Have you ever listened to a CB radio or used a walkie-talkie when two parties tried to transmit messages simultaneously? All you could hear was a high-pitched whine drowning out any intelligible voice, right? It is to avoid such confusion that the Federal Communications Commission strictly regulates the frequencies on which radio and TV stations operate.

The same type of interference plagues any communication setting characterized by too much "transmitting" and not enough "receiving." An argument with a family member, friend or work associate often evolves into a contest over whose point can be made more quickly and loudly.

The next time you need to work through an interpersonal conflict, try listening first—just as intensely as you will reply. Then speak. As St. Francis of Assisi said, "Seek not so much to be understood as to understand." Chances are the other person will respond in kind.

Our relationship with God works on similar principles. God wants to hear our praise and our petitions, but we miss the point if we do all the talking. Feeding on His word and pausing for quiet meditation help make us aware of our own needs and those of others.

**2. Act on what you hear.** Listening is essential, but you cannot stop there. The knocking in your car's engine signals the need for a trip to the repair shop. Your doctor's warning about reducing calorie intake is pointless unless you change your habits. When your snooze alarm has cycled for 27 minutes, it's time for action.

Spiritually speaking, we often remain entrenched in the hearing stage and fail to become doers of the word. Changing our ways requires specific decision and commitment, not just passive acknowledgement of the truth.

If, upon going to bed, you purpose in your heart to arise at the first sound of the alarm clock, getting to work on time is more probable. Similarly, to be victorious over a given temptation, you must decidedly resolve before it occurs that by God's grace you will respond by resisting. Decision is the link between knowledge and action.

In our Christian service, too, merely observing the needs of a hurting world will not suffice. Pure and undefiled religion motivates us to plan specific responses to those needs. That may mean baking bread for a hungry family, visiting a lonely student or church member, volunteering time or giving money.

When our increased awareness gained through listening to God or to a friend, spouse or neighbor in need translates into positive action, we have truly fulfilled the gospel of James.

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**Greg G. Rumsey is an assistant professor of journalism at Union College.**

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# Accepting Both Gifts

by George Gibson

The relationship between salvation and behavior makes for interesting and sometimes heated discussion among evangelicals today. We accept that salvation is a gift and that we cannot save ourselves. But if salvation is a gift then why do the biblical writers have so much to say about behavior? At one extreme, some answer that good works will mysteriously appear if our relationship is right. At the other extreme, some argue that we need to handle our behavior and let God handle salvation.

Those who ascribe good works totally to the power of God seem to see God's will as overriding human power to choose and act. For example, some Christians have said, "I'd never choose to do this job, but God's will forced me to it." On occasion some can even be heard to pray during committee meetings, "If we make a wrong decision, please overrule it." Rarely have we observed God forcing a decision one way or the other. And even after prayer, we can see times when wrong decisions have been made that have done real damage.

James speaks to these issues. He states that every good gift is from above. Salvation is a gift. The ability to decide and act intelligently is also a gift. Some want to accept only one gift or the other. But if we genuinely want to do God's will, we will accept both gifts. James points out that if we attempt to accept only the gift of salvation, our faith is not genuine.

Christians need to learn to be comfortable with using common sense. God has given us that ability. To develop His image in us, we must learn to make intelligent decisions. And, we must learn to accept responsibility for those decisions rather than lamely saying, "Oh, it must have been the will of God." Too many Christians will make decisions about situations they perceive to be unimportant or secular but attempt to shift responsibility to God for important or religious decisions. This is a cop-out. God doesn't want to be our crutch. For us to be genuinely happy, we must learn to make decisions intelligently.

It is said that Abraham Lincoln liked to walk down to the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church to listen to the Wednesday evening service. Rather than cause a commotion, he would slip into the pastor's study and leave the door open a crack. One evening the aide that went with Lincoln wanted to know what Lincoln thought of the sermon. Lincoln said that it was eloquent and had good content. "Then you thought it was a great sermon?" the aide persisted.

"No," Lincoln replied, "he forgot to ask us to do something great."

It is vital to want to do God's will. But to bypass the careful thinking and hard work of making good decisions is to refuse a gift God has given. God asks us to do something great!

## REACT

Does the view that power for sanctification comes exclusively by faith, or through the devotional life, lead Christians to avoid responsibility for their actions?

## OPINION

Key text:  
James 1:17

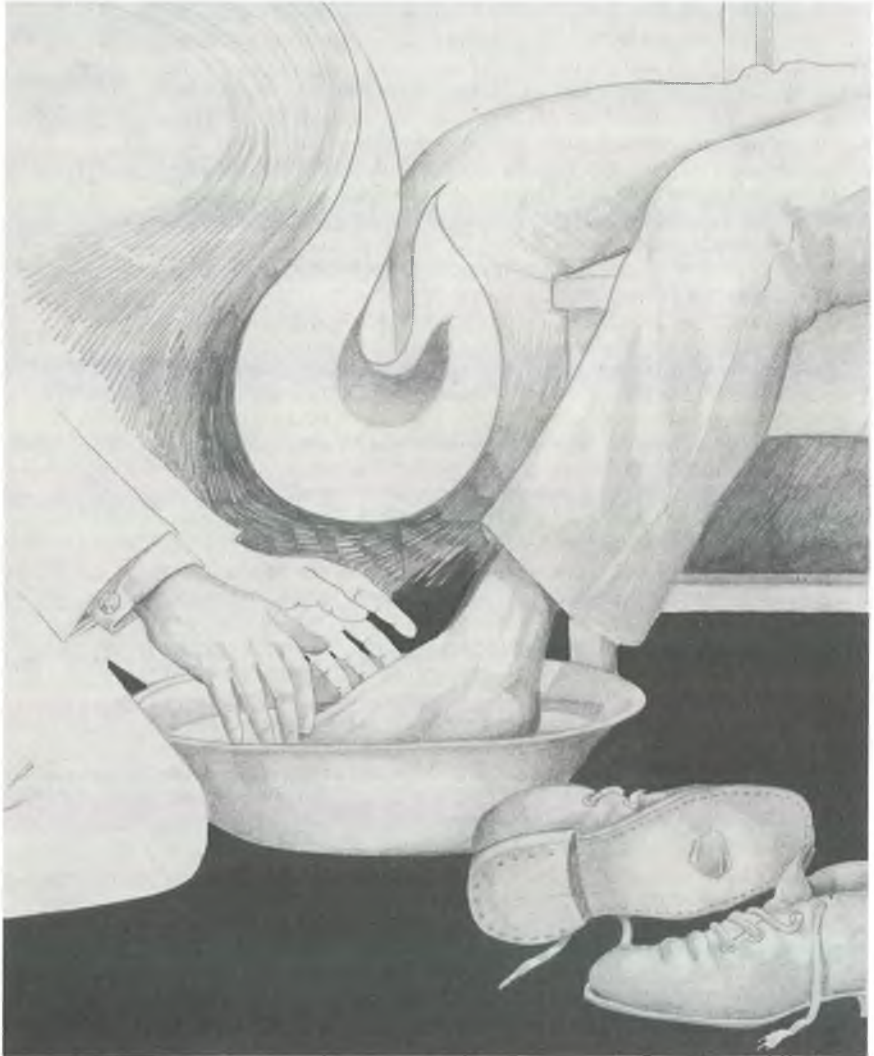
"God doesn't want to be our crutch."

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George Gibson teaches history at Union College.

# Faith in Motion

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead”  
(James 2:26, NIV).



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# Honoring Man and Mammon

by Andy Demsky

You're sitting in church one hazy Sabbath morning and decide to invite a visitor to have lunch with you. That day there are two visitors. One is the vice-president of a successful Wall Street investment firm; the other is the night watchman at a Sears store in Po-dunk, Wyoming. Who will you be having lunch with?

You work in a college alumni office. For alumni weekend who will you honor? The founder and owner of a national chain of nursing homes or the man who's been fighting dust build-up and crab grass at the SDA church in Mt. Peliior, Ohio, for the last 15 years?

Wealth implies drive, cunning and ambition; therefore, it's only logical to honor those who have accumulated it. Right? The wealthy are living metaphors of all those dear old Puritan doctrines of hard work, tenacity and carrot juice. Is it any wonder they are our guest speakers, honored alumnists and oracles of ready wisdom?

If only we could have the same drive . . . if only we could swing the same deals . . . if only we had the same knack for taking over a situation . . .

maybe then we could be as the wealthy.

So we place them on committees and boards and advisory panels, hoping that old success bug will somehow rub off on the rest of us. By beholding we become changed. So we behold, and we award and we fawn over.

Unfortunately, there is this one hurdle we must overcome. In James the second chapter we read that when we make distinctions between the rich and poor in our midst, we become "judges with evil thoughts." James then adds that when we don't love our neighbors as ourselves (this includes the poor apparently) that we have broken all the commandments of God and will be judged as transgressors. Whew, what a blow!

Does this mean the security guard at the dog food plant has the same right to be head elder as the well-respected, successful physician? Surely there must be some mistake.

But, the book of James is small; maybe no one will notice. All who wish to accept the physician please signify by the uplifted hand . . . all opposed, same sign . . . it's carried.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
James 2:1-26

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At the time of this writing Andy Demsky was a student volunteer working for Adventist World Radio in Italy.

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# The Faith-Deeds Duo

**LOGOS** **Theme:** True faith inevitably moves the Christian to tangible, loving action on behalf of others. Such faith also involves an impartial outlook which refuses to discriminate on the basis of wealth or status.

## 1. On Prejudice (read James 2:1-13)

*"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers" (2:8, 9, NIV).*

"[T]he church must be the one place where all distinctions are wiped out. There can be no distinctions of rank and prestige when men meet in the presence of the king of glory. There can be no distinctions of merit when men meet in the presence of the supreme holiness of God. In His presence all earthly distinctions are less than dust and all earthly righteousness as filthy rags. In the presence of God all men are one."<sup>1</sup>

In a world where social distinction was accepted and expected, the early Christian church was a place where all people were equal. Unfortunately the "church" was not always held to this high standard. There has been historical justification for the charges of Lenin and Marx, and others, that Christianity is an instrument of suppression.

Nicholas Berdyaev, a Russian Christian philosopher, wrote, "Christians, who condemn the communists for their godlessness and anti-religious persecutions, cannot lay the whole blame solely upon these godless communists, they must assign part of the blame to themselves and that a considerable part. . . . Have Christians done very much for the realization of Christian justice in social life? Have they striven to realize the brotherhood of man?"<sup>2</sup>

Too often have Christians become complacent with the status quo, allowing the shallow excuse "we are not of this world" to fall easily from their lips, thus appeasing a ripple of conscience. But a religion which contains within it the promise of the highest moral development cannot tolerate social prejudice within its ranks or be accommodating to discrimination in society. The Christian who shirks the awesome responsibility of upholding justice will not escape the judgment of Christ: "Depart from me. . . . Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matt. 25:41, 45, NIV).

*Is there a distinction between "in the church" and "in society" when it comes to the Christian responsibility for justice?*

## 2. Faith and Deeds (read James 2:14-26)

*"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" (2:14, NIV).*

Some commentators interpret this portion of the book of James as an attack on Paul's teaching "faith—without works," claiming that

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Paul's *sole fidei* ("justification by faith alone") represents authentic Christianity, while James is little more than modified Judaism. Standing on Paul's tenets, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31) and "For we hold that man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28), some even discard all purpose for the law. With this perversion comes the viewpoint that Christ relaxed the requirements of the law because its tenets proved too rigorous for man to obey and that God indulges the faults of His children if they just continue to pray for forgiveness. But it is precisely this view against which James contends. He is not attacking Pauline theology; he is attacking its perversion.

True faith, he says, is not devoid of its manifestations. While we are not saved by these evidences of Christ's working in us, we cannot hope to be a child of Christ if they are not seen. "The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works. By far the best analogy is that of a great human love. He who is loved is certain that he does not deserve to be loved, but he is also certain that he must spend his life trying to be worthy of that love.

"The difference between James and Paul is a difference of starting point. Paul starts with the great basic fact of the forgiveness of God which no man can deserve; James starts with the professing Christian and insists that a man must prove his Christianity by his deeds. We are not saved *by* deeds; we are saved *for* deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. Paul's emphasis is on the first and James' is on the second. In fact they do not contradict but complement each other: and the message of both is essential to the Christian faith in its fullest form."<sup>3</sup>

*If you were called on to write an "epistle" to meet the spiritual needs of your home church, would your emphasis be more like James' or more like Paul's? Why?*

E. R. M.

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1. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 65.  
2. As quoted in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 37.  
3. Barclay, p. 74.

# In the Steps of Jesus

compiled by David W. Pennock

## TESTIMONY

Key text:

James 2:5, 6, 9,  
15, 16

"So long as He lived among men, our Saviour shared the lot of the poor. He knew by experience their cares and hardships, and He could comfort and encourage all humble workers. Those who have a true conception of the teaching of His life will never feel that a distinction must be made between classes, that the rich are to be honored above the worthy poor."<sup>1</sup>

"To the rich, God has given wealth that they may relieve and comfort His suffering children; but too often they are indifferent to the wants of others. They feel themselves superior to their poor brethren. They do not put themselves in the poor man's place. They do not understand the temptations and struggles of the poor, and mercy dies out of their hearts. In costly dwellings and splendid churches, the rich shut themselves away from the poor; the means that God has given to bless the needy is spent in pampering pride and selfishness. The poor are robbed daily of the education they should have concerning the tender mercies of God; for He has made ample provision that they should be comforted with the necessities of life. . . . Those who themselves have not endured the pressure of want too often treat the poor in a contemptuous way, and make them feel that they are looked upon as paupers."<sup>2</sup>

"I was near you  
in the person  
of these  
afflicted ones."

"When you doled out the pittance of bread to the starving poor, when you gave those flimsy garments to shield them from the biting frost, did you remember that you were giving to the Lord of glory? All the days of your life I was near you in the person of these afflicted ones, but you did not seek Me. You would not enter into fellowship with Me. I know you not."<sup>3</sup>

"It is because this work is neglected that so many young disciples never advance beyond the mere alphabet of Christian experience. The light which was glowing in their own hearts when Jesus spoke to them, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' they might have kept alive by helping those in need. The restless energy that is so often a source of danger to the young might be directed into channels through which it would flow out in streams of blessing. Self would be forgotten in earnest work to do others good."<sup>4</sup>

"Many feel that it would be a great privilege to visit the scenes of Christ's life on earth, to walk where He trod, to look upon the lake beside which He loved to teach, and the hills and valleys on which His eyes so often rested. But we need not to go to Nazareth, to Capernaum, or to Bethany, in order to walk in the steps of Jesus. We shall find His footprints beside the sickbed, in the hovels of poverty, in the crowded alleys of the great city, and in every place where there are human hearts in need of consolation. In doing as Jesus did when on earth, we shall walk in His steps."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

How does the existence of a "welfare state" in most Western countries affect the church's responsibility to the poor?

David W. Pennock is a religious education and mathematics education major at Union College.

1. *The Desire of Ages*,  
p. 73.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 639.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 640.  
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 640, 641.  
5. *Ibid.*, p. 640.



# The James/Paul Dissonance

by H. Ward Hill

Most people are uncomfortable trying to maintain two opposing views on a question of significance. The normal mind seeks to resolve this "cognitive dissonance" and welcomes resolution. For some Bible students the teachings of Paul and James can be the spawning ground for such dissonance.

James calls for equal treatment of believers and states categorically that a person is justified by "works" and not by "faith only" (James 2:1, 24). Did he *not* believe, as Paul did, that elders are "worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17) and that we are saved by "faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28)?

In the past most conservative biblical commentators have sought to harmonize scriptural accounts. It is more common in recent years to find conservative interpreters declaring that biblical writers sometimes take opposing views and at times misunderstand each other.<sup>1</sup>

On the matter of dealing with class distinctions among believers, finding harmony between James and Paul is no problem. James would simply remind us that a fawning treatment of some, purely on the basis of their wealth, and a denigrating attitude toward others, solely because of their poverty, is unchristian. The apostle Paul's work for Gentile candidates for the Christian church certainly clears him of any charge of promoting class distinctions.

Paul and James may also have been in basic agreement on the relationship of faith and works at the primary level, but they had different emphases, which have been perpetuated by Christians since their day and can indeed be found in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Resolving this type of difference is complex since different assumptions underlie the varying positions.

Those who presuppose the widest gulf between man and God are likely to place more emphasis on believing than upon acting. They wish to make perfectly clear that their new status with God comes about solely by an acknowledgement of God's provision for their justification. Their behavior is in no sense a bargaining factor. Those who narrow the gulf between themselves and the Lord of heaven (as suggested by their belief that Christ shared human nature fully, not simply the nature of man in his sinless state) tend to focus on sanctification and the necessity of overcoming sin as Christ did.

Those who emphasize justification, thus giving a secondary role to sanctification, are sometimes viewed as having drifted precariously close to the "once-saved-always-saved" camp of evangelical Christians and, as a consequence, likely to lose their way in permissiveness. Those who stress the new life of the Christian with justification in a secondary position hazard the perception by others that they inadequately diagnose the gravity of sin and are unconsciously toying with the Babylonish view that man can save himself.

James was most likely attempting to place faith and works in a proper perspective. He may have been reacting to misconceptions of the apostle Paul's teaching in this area. What appears undeniable is that for him faith and corresponding deeds were inseparable.

## EVIDENCE

**Key text:**  
James 2:24;  
Romans 3:28

**"Paul and James had different emphases, which can be found in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today."**

1. See George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 41.

H. Ward Hill teaches religion at Union College.

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# Mirror Beyond Measure

by Linda Lou Dick

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**James 2:18,**  
**20-24**

The endless debate over "faith or works" arises out of our human need to measure our spiritual progress, whether our own or that of our neighbors. We want limits: how much is enough to fulfill God's requirement? Where are we now on that ladder to heaven?

But can we put faith in a measuring cup or chalk up a perfect number of rules kept or good deeds done?

James suggests that faith and works are partners in our spiritual growth, one springing naturally and necessarily from the other (James 2:24). He gives the example of Abraham acting on his faith, sacrificing Isaac, "and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God" (James 2:23, Phillips). But God, not Abraham, decided when Abraham was ready to be called "the friend of God." We do the growing; only God can do the measuring.

We can look to Jesus as the only perfect partnership of faith and works this earth has ever seen. And as Christians, our duty is not to "measure up," but rather to "mirror" Christ's character to those around us. Jesus didn't ask His disciples to keep tally of how many items of clothing they gave to the poor each week. He said simply, "Follow me."

Charles Sheldon, in his book *In His Steps*, brings this challenge to the twentieth century. In this story, a Kansas minister and a small group of his congregation ask, "What does it mean to follow Jesus?" They decide to experiment. All pledge individually to follow these guidelines for one year:

1. I will ask in every situation, "What would Jesus do in my place?"

2. I will study Jesus and His life through the medium of the Holy Spirit. Only through this test can I decide what Jesus' answer would be to the perplexing questions of my civilization that are not mentioned directly in scriptural accounts of His teachings.

3. After making a Spirit-guided decision about what Jesus would do, I will act on that decision, regardless of the results to myself, my business, my human relationships.

4. I cannot be swayed in my actions by what others think Jesus would do in my place. By earnestly and honestly seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit, I can "be free from fanaticism on the one hand and too much caution on the other."

5. I cannot expect uniformity of action from others who have taken the pledge. Human beings cannot be expected in all cases to reach the same conclusions, even about what Jesus would have done.

6. At the same time, I will take courage in the fact that Jesus' example is given as "the example for the world to follow. It must be feasible to follow it."

In sum, each individual's goal is to "mirror" Christ in everyday actions. A radical idea? Some think so. Some give up on the pledge after a few days or weeks. But some extend the original year's experiment into a lifetime principle. They claim spiritual growth and reward beyond measure.

Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935).

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Linda Lou Dick teaches English at Union College.

# Hard Choices

by Gerry Tetz

What was a nice Jewish girl doing here? In a few hours she would lose her virginity in the arms of the Persian king, a heathen, her people's captor. All in a bid to capture a position of power for her people.

Outside the court her cousin waited out the night. He thought of her beauty, of the former queen's banishment for defying her husband's order to appear before his guests. What would the king command Esther to do? He, Mordecai, had told her not to reveal her race or religion to anyone.

Perhaps while waiting for the king's call that night, Esther thought of Joseph of the colored coat. He had suffered foreign captivity, had been surrounded by incredible wealth, power and allure. He had resisted what she would embrace. He was known as a Hebrew; she hid the fact. Neither knew the outcome of their very different choices. Both acted as children of Israel, chosen of God. Both brought their people's deliverance.

Which makes me wonder how God viewed the practical workings of their religion. Is God into situational ethics when it comes to practical religion? The question falls short of the mark. From the apparent contradiction of Esther and Joseph emerges a picture of God operating on a level of His own proportions.

As we relate, in a religious sense, to one another based on our perception of God and His ways, the enjoinders found in James 2 confront us with hard choices. The alabaster heroes of yesterday likewise struggled with hard choices that, examined closely, sometimes snap back at sanctimonious hardnoses. We are not always prepared for the realities of the past. They have come to us through so many filters.

Uncomfortable as it makes me, James' injunction to live a practical religion takes on an additional dimension, in part because of Esther and Joseph. She worked to save her people, he to save the Egyptians and their neighbors. Joseph and Esther teach me that it is in caring for those both like and unlike ourselves that religion becomes both difficult and real.

## REACT

1. For the Christian, is there an objective set of rules of behavior which apply in every circumstance?

2. What reasons, or principles, lay behind the differing choices of Joseph and Esther? Was Esther doing God's will in becoming queen at a pagan court?

## OPINION

Key text:  
James 2:24-26  
(NIV)

"He had resisted what she would embrace."

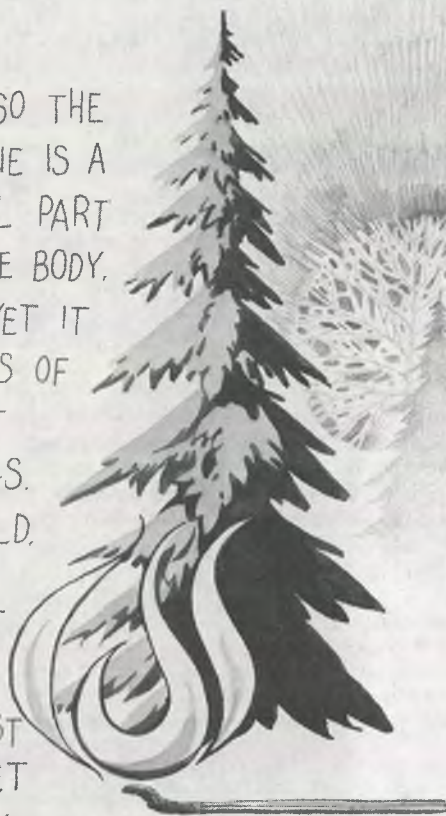
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At the time this piece was written, Gerry Tetz was working in the office of Institutional Advancement/Communications at Union College.

# Wisdom for the Tongue

"The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17, NIV).

SO ALSO THE  
TONGUE IS A  
SMALL PART  
OF THE BODY.  
AND YET IT  
BOASTS OF  
GREAT  
THINGS.  
BEHOLD,  
HOW  
GREAT  
A  
FOREST  
IS SET  
AFLAME  
BY SUCH A SMALL FIRE!



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# Rick

by Fran Mosley

It was the second week of the new fall quarter before I noticed him. Most of the students enrolled in my philosophy of education class were decently motivated, fairly articulate, and usually anxious to test their philosophical assumptions against those of the masters. But then there was Rick.

Older at thirty-one than the typical university senior, he sat clearly in my line of vision on the very end of the back row. I could not have missed him, even with myopic vision. He was sleeping.

At that point in my teaching career, I was of the firm opinion that a brand-new doctorate conferred a special kind of sanctified intellection upon an instructor. And students should be conspicuous in their obeisance. But then there was Rick.

Dozing in my class. Ignoring my erudition. His somnolent behavior cut to the very core of my inflated ego. I mentally composed a vindictive speech that I would heap upon his head after the sounding of the bell. But Rick slipped out of class as quietly and as quickly as he had entered.

For the next several weeks my tolerance level for the apparent napping in class hit

zero, and my speech (still undelivered) became even more tainted with ridicule, rancor, reproach, and revenge. I was determined to entrap this ungrateful, disrespectful student before his exit from the classroom, but at the end of each period Rick would somehow manage to slip around those students who had lingered to continue the discussion or to get copies of last week's assignments.

My tongue became so weighty with the accumulated pique that my ability to properly pontificate philosophical points was affected. I finally decided to give up. I would simply conduct the class as if everyone was wide awake and conversant with the day's topic. And Rick continued to doze in peace.

At the end of the term, Rick had earned a "B" in the course, which I reluctantly recorded, and then I walked to the administration building to deliver my final grade reports. When I returned to my office, I found this note under my door: "Thank you for being so patient with me this quarter. I have had to work the late night shift to support my family. But I wanted you to know that I really enjoyed your class. I learned so much. Rick."

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
James 3

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Fran Mosley is a professor of history and education at Southwestern Adventist College, formerly professor at Western Illinois University.

Sunday, November 9 61

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# The Greatest Wisdom

**LOGOS**    **Theme:** The tongue has immense potential for evil, and human power cannot tame it. But wisdom from above is available to guide and control all facets of life, including the tongue.

## 1. Taming the Tongue (read James 3:1-12)

*"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (3:9, 10, NIV).*

James begins his counsel on use of the tongue by warning that one aspiring to teach should consider the responsibility as well as the privilege of the role—a teacher is held accountable by God to the highest standard of conduct (v. 1). The teacher's primary "instrument"—the tongue—is the most difficult component of human make-up to control, James argues. Anyone faultless in speaking would be perfect because he would have mastered the most difficult thing. Therefore, the person who contemplates specializing in using the faculty of speech is facing the most formidable spiritual challenge possible. The sincere, dedicated individual should not be discouraged from teaching or preaching because of his imperfection, however, for James acknowledges that everyone, including himself, makes frequent mistakes (v. 2).

In vv. 3-5, James strings together three vivid metaphors to illustrate the tongue's immense, decisive power, so disproportionate to its small size. Then, in v. 6, he declares three truths about the tongue's evil effect. First, he calls the tongue a "world of evil" in the body. When James uses the term "world" (*kosmos*), he is thinking of it exclusively in the negative sense (cf. 1:27; 4:4). The world is that sphere of attitudes, actions, and systems which function in opposition to God. Verse 6 teaches us that we cannot conceive of "the world" as something external from which we Christians, in our fortress of piety (whether individual or corporate), can insulate ourselves. Rather, the world—with its hatred, greed, lust and inhumanity—is located right in our own mouths!<sup>1</sup>

Second, the tongue's evil "corrupts the whole person." Words of lust, abuse or anger evolve into deeds involving the entire body. The evil can't be contained within manageable limits.

Third, the tongue "sets the whole course of life on fire." Words can inflict wounds which leave permanent scars. The effects are felt throughout the entire course of life.

Finally, James decries the duplicity of the tongue which praises God in one breath and curses people in the next (vv. 9-12). The perversity of such inconsistent behavior lies in the fact that every human being bears God's likeness, "and the likeness in biblical thought was seen as representing the person it depicted. To bless or thank God and then turn around and curse his likeness is like praising a king to his face and then smashing the head off his statue as one leaves the palace."<sup>2</sup>

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*In what specific ways might the power of the tongue exert its evil influence in the church today? Is one who causes controversy with his speech necessarily evil?*

## 2. Two Kinds of Wisdom (read James 3:13-18)

*"But the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (3:17, NIV).*

It is wisdom from God that channels the otherwise uncontrollable (v. 8) power of the tongue toward constructive ends.

But before outlining the characteristics of divine wisdom, James refers to a contrasting kind of wisdom—that which comes from the world and is inspired by the devil. Beneath the surface of this wisdom is "bitter envy" and "selfish ambition" (v. 14). The latter term denotes a "party spirit"—the promotion of a faction or a particular point of view out of desire for self-exaltation at the expense of others.<sup>3</sup> Such a spirit of rivalry "destroys the cohesiveness of the Christian community, which is built on unity and love. Once the 'glue' is destroyed, all kinds of disorder and rebellion creep in."<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the attributes of the wisdom that comes from above make for the highest quality of life that humans can know (v. 17). This wisdom is:

1. *Pure*. It is uncompromised by the self-centeredness that characterizes earthly wisdom.

2. *Peace loving*. Barclay points out that the idea behind the Greek word for peace (*eirênê*) is right relationships. True wisdom brings people closer to each other and to God.<sup>5</sup>

3. *Considerate*. The Greek word here is *epieikês*, which Aristotle defined as "justice and better than justice" and as that "which steps in to correct things when the law itself becomes unjust."<sup>6</sup> The person who is *epieikês* goes beyond that which is required by societal norms in kindness to others. He knows when love requires that one go beyond the letter of law, or refrain from strictly applying it.

4. *Submissive*. The Greek term here may mean either a willingness to obey, or an openness to reason, as the RSV and NEB render it.

5. *Full of mercy and good fruit*. In the Good News Bible this phrase reads, "full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds." Wisdom means not just a mental disposition but practical action.

6. *Impartial*. True wisdom eliminates prejudice or bias.

7. *Sincere*. There is nothing phony about wisdom. The inner motives and outward actions of those who have it are consistent.

*Consider carefully each of the components of true wisdom James gives, looking at them in several Bible translations, if possible. What strikes you as particularly important among these characteristics, both for individual relationships and societal issues?*

D. F. M.

1. Peter H. Davids, *James*, Good News Commentary (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), p. 56.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

3. R. V. G. Tasker, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 80.

4. Davids, p. 62.

5. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 95.

6. *Ibid.*

# The Talent of Speech

compiled by Karl Konrad

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Proverbs 25:11

As with many of God's gifts, the talent of speech presents us with a dual challenge: control, that is, avoiding the negative; and development, which involves strengthening the positive. Keep these two facets in view as you study the following.

"The power of speech is a talent that should be diligently cultivated. Of all the gifts we have received from God none is capable of being a greater blessing than this. With the voice we convince and persuade, with it we offer prayer and praise to God, and with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. How important, then, that it be so trained as to be most effective for good.

"The culture and right use of the voice are greatly neglected, even by persons of intelligence and Christian activity. There are many who read or speak in so low or so rapid a manner that they cannot be readily understood. Some have a thick, indistinct utterance; others speak in a high key, in sharp, shrill tones, that are painful to the hearers. Texts, hymns, and the reports and other papers presented before public assemblies are sometimes read in such a way that they are not understood and often so that their force and impressiveness are destroyed. . . .

"By diligent effort all may acquire the power to read intelligibly, and to speak in a full, clear, round tone, in a distinct and impressive manner. By doing this we may greatly increase our efficiency as workers for Christ.

"Every Christian is called to make known to others the unsearchable riches of Christ; therefore, he should seek for perfection in speech. He should present the word of God in a way that will commend it to the hearers. . . .

"The right culture and use of the power of speech has to do with every line of Christian work; it enters into the homelife, and into all our intercourse with one another. We should accustom ourselves to speak in pleasant tones, to use pure and correct language, and words that are kind and courteous. Sweet, kind words are as dew and gentle showers to the soul. . . .

"Not one word is to be spoken unadvisedly. No evil speaking, no frivolous talk, no fretful repining or impure suggestion, will escape the lips of him who is following Christ. . . .

"Upon every family, upon every Christian, is laid the duty of barring the way against corrupt speech. When in the company of those who indulge in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject of conversation if possible. . . .

"Not abruptly, but with tact born of divine love, we can tell them of Him who is the 'Chiefest among ten thousand.'"<sup>1</sup>

## REACT

Is it ever right to express criticism or condemnation of others? (Compare Matt. 7:7; 23:33; Acts 23:3; Rom. 14:10-13; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2:11.)

Karl Konrad is a professor of chemistry at Southwestern Adventist College.

"In the company of those who indulge in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject."

1. Excerpted from *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 335-339.



# Is Your Tongue for Weal?

by Ronald L. Jolliffe

The firste vertu, sone, if thou wolt lere,  
Is to restreyne and kepe wel thy tonge.<sup>1</sup>

Although Chaucer's English is not contemporary, his counsel clearly is. His "first vertu" is easy to preach, just hard to practice. In 42 B.C. Publilius Syrus explained how the ignorant person can appear wise: "Let a fool hold his tongue and he will pass for a sage."<sup>2</sup> Ben Sira (ca. 198 B.C.), perhaps known to you by his book *Ecclesiasticus* in the *Apocrypha*, warned, "A slip on the pavement is better than a slip of the tongue."<sup>3</sup> His analogy makes sense unless your skinned knees are still bleeding after a fall on the sidewalk.

Sayings of this nature are called proverbs. Some collections of proverbs can be pigeonholed together into a literary category known as "wisdom." You can probably think of an Old Testament book or two fitting into this category (*Proverbs*, or *Ecclesiastes*). There are other types of pigeonholes in which we can place other kinds of literature. Mark belongs to the kind of literature known as "gospel," Revelation to "apocalyptic," Galatians to "epistle."

Wisdom literature has warned of the power of the tongue at least as early as the second century B.C. when an Egyptian king counseled his son Meri-ka-re:

Be a craftsman in speech, (so that) thou mayest be strong,  
(for) the tongue is a sword to [a man],  
and speech is more valorous than any fighting.

In the New Testament the book of James belongs to this category of "wisdom" literature. James compares the tongue to a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, a small spark, and deadly poison. Each one, though seemingly insignificant, has tremendous potential power. Analogies similar to those in James are found in antiquity. Amen-em-opet (sometime between the tenth and sixth centuries B.C.) said:

Steer not with thy tongue (alone).  
If the tongue of a man (be) the rudder of a boat,  
The All-Lord is its pilot.<sup>5</sup>

Here one finds not only the comparison of the tongue to a rudder as in James, but also the recognition that the tongue needs the guidance and control of God. Ahiqar in the late fifth century B.C. observed, "Soft is the tongue of a King, but it breaks a dragon's ribs."<sup>6</sup>

There is little unique, original, or new in James 3. What he says has often been said before by Jews, Christians, and pagans. It is, however, nevertheless true—the tongue can bring us woe or weal.

We would therefore do well to pray with Ben Sira:

Oh for a sentry to guard my mouth  
and a seal of discretion to close my lips,  
to keep them from being my downfall,  
and to keep my tongue from causing my ruin!  
Lord, Father, and Ruler of my life,  
do not abandon me to the tongue's control  
or allow me to fall on its account.<sup>7</sup>

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Psalm 34:13

"Oh for a sentry to guard my mouth."

1. Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Maunciples Tale," line 332.

2. Maxim 914.

3. *Ecclesiasticus* 20:18.

4. "The Instruction for King Meri-ka-re," James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 415.

5. "The Instruction of Amen-em-opet," xx. 4-6.

*Ibid.*, pp. 423, 424.

6. "The Words of Ahiqar," vii. 95-110.

*Ibid.*, p. 429.

7. *Ecclesiasticus*

22:27—23:1.

Ronald L. Jolliffe is an assistant professor of religion at Southwestern Adventist College.

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# Thinking What You Say

by Dale L. Clayton

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Psalm 51:10

Woody is my dad's older brother, my boyhood hero and the world's greatest coon-dog trainer. I remember a fellow criticizing Woody's best hound. "Never liked a dog that carried his tail like that," he said.

"Never worried much about tails," Woody responded. "If he's got a good nose the tail will tag along."

How can you answer that? A dog that can follow a cold trail and stick to the spoor of a tricky old raccoon through Killmaster Swamp has to have a good nose, and there was no tail wagging Woody's dog. I wasn't very old, but I knew that much.

I was considerably older before I learned that bridling the tongue is a figure of speech, that the tongue does not wag itself. But like the tail, the tongue is a good indicator of where the head is. That was a revelation! As a man thinks in his heart . . . so goes his tongue (see Matt. 15:17-20 and Prov. 23:7).

Consider the consummate Christian lady who caught her finger in the car door in her haste to reach the steps of the church. After turning the air blue with expletives, she looked up and saw the pastor. In submissive, stained-glass tones she explained, "I didn't think what I was saying." The preacher to whom she was speaking told me this story, and he concluded that she *had* thought what she "was saying" so frequently that it had become an integral part of her.

Controlling what we think, then, is the key. How do we do that? Consider the following suggestions:

1. **Listen to what you say.** Hindsight is tomorrow's foresight.

2. **Monitor thought patterns.** Set your watch to beep on the hour and record the tone and substance of your thinking at the beeps for a day. Do patterns or attitude profiles emerge?

3. **Trace lines of reasoning.** What leads you to thought and speech patterns you wish to change or emulate? To keep the wellsprings of your lines of reasoning healthy, remember Paul's counsel: "Finally brethren, whatever is true . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . gracious . . . excellent . . . worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8, RSV).

4. **Study Psalm 51.** Develop the insight and the living relationship expressed by a man after God's own heart.

Remember, if the mind is good, the tongue will tag along.

## REACT

In view of Psalm 51:10, Matt. 15:17-20 and Phil. 4:8, should Christians avoid all books, TV programs and films which contain bad language and graphic depictions of sin?

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Dale L. Clayton is a professor of biology at Southwestern Adventist College.

# Remembering the Power of Words

by Carol E. Routon

We don't think about the immense power necessary to operate appliances each time we switch on a fan, lamp, or hair dryer. Likewise, we don't, each time we speak, think about the immense power of that tiny but powerful part of us—the tongue.

Take that careless sarcastic remark. We didn't mean to hurt; we only meant to be humorous, but somehow our words were misunderstood. And that remark may have had long lasting implications. A friendship might have been permanently strained; a chance for helping someone might have been lost.

Or that bit of news that somehow was interpreted as gossip. We didn't realize the deep hurt it would cause—the tarnished reputation, the misunderstandings, the magnification of rumors. We didn't think that one piece of information could possibly harm anyone because we had forgotten for a moment what the tongue could do.

The power of persuasive speaking has been proven over and over. In World War II it was demonstrated by the dictators Hitler and Mussolini who, through the power of speech, goaded Europe into the abyss of war. During the same time period, Churchill proved the tongue's power when he galvanized his nation into action with his numerous stirring speeches.

In our day to day lives, we don't always see immediately the effects of our words. Yet we know our words have consequences, because we can feel their impact upon our own lives. We have felt the bitterness of unfair accusation, the sting of slander, the humiliation of rejection. And we have known, too, the rejuvenating power of a heartfelt Thank you, a friendly Hello, or a sincere compliment.

All our words originate in our minds. When we allow God to control our minds and thoughts, we find that we are less careless. When a bitter word tries to spill out, something restrains it. We realize that the thought, and the word, are not in harmony with our concept of God's desire for us.

We don't always think about the power source when we turn on a light, but we trust it. And when we're trusting God, our ultimate Power Source, we find that our words become lights in the darkness.

## REACT

How would you exercise the power of speech in the following situations:

1. Susan is not very attractive, and she can tell that most people she knows make fun of her behind her back and think of her as ugly. She comes to you for help and advice.<sup>1</sup>

2. Professor Brinkman's lectures are boring and disorganized, and most of the class is doing poorly. Some classmates come to you and say they are going to speak to the academic dean about the situation, and they ask you to be the spokesman.

3. The after-Sabbath-dinner conversation is running mainly in the vein of criticizing and laughing at the foibles of others. It's fun, but you feel a little uncomfortable about it inside.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Ephesians 4:29

**"We know our words have consequences, because we can feel their impact upon our own lives."**

1. Adapted from *Tension Getters*, Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice, eds. (Youth Specialties, 1981), p. 45.

Carol E. Routon is an English major at Southwestern Adventist College.

# Strength Through Submission

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12, NIV).



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# TV Channels, Cheese and Submission

by Sharon Leach

"Submit the report by next Tuesday, please."

"Submit your check with the invoice, please."

"Submit yourself. . . ."

Forget it. *I want my own way.*

It's a typical day in the cartoon house of the Van Pelt family. Lucy tells her brother Linus to change the TV channel. He asks what right she has telling him what to do. Holding up her right hand, she says, "These five fingers: individually they are nothing. But curled together, they become a fighting force terrible to behold." Linus submits to force and changes the channel.

Submission is hard for Charles Schulz's "Peanuts" characters, and it's hard for the rest of us, too.

*I want my own way.*

Our first argument after the wedding was about cheese. We were standing in a Safeway deli section, arguing whether to buy pre-sliced American or unsliced Colby. I thought his pre-sliced was plastic, not-quite-real cheese. He thought my Colby was too much trouble. He thought I was a brat. I thought he was a bully. And we were still on our honeymoon!

*I want my own way.*

Since then, Benjie and I have learned a lot about what Nancy Van Pelt (no relation to Lucy and Linus) calls "mutual submission." That means viewing each other as equals, and learning to defer to each other's wishes and competencies.<sup>1</sup> That also means that now we buy two kinds of cheese.

In James 4, the writer talks of submitting ourselves to God as the only way to overcome selfishness, envy, dissension, strife and slander. And if we don't?

Playwright Eugene O'Neill told an interviewer, "If the human race is so stupid that in two thousand years it hasn't had brains enough to appreciate that the secret of happiness is contained in one simple sentence which you'd think any school kid could understand and apply, then it's time we dumped it down the nearest drain and let the ants have a chance. That simple sentence is: 'For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"<sup>2</sup>

Maybe I don't have to have my own way after all.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Key text:  
James 4:1-12

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1. Nancy Van Pelt, *The Complete Marriage* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), p. 99.  
2. United Press dispatch, New York, September 2, 1946; quoted in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 53.

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Sharon Leach is public relations director at Southwestern Adventist College.

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# The Strength of Grace

**LOGOS** **Theme:** Dissension and strife in the Christian community are caused by selfishness and envy, but these attitudes can be transcended by submission to God.

## 1. The Source of Strife (read James 4:1-3)

Some of James' readers were placing the pursuit of pleasure at the top of life's agenda, and he names this attitude as the source of their turmoil. They were apparently willing to stop at nothing to gratify their desires (*hedonai*), no matter whom they had to fight with or crush in the process.

On top of that they wanted God to legitimize and aid their schemes, and God will not be manipulated in this way.

*How would you summarize the New Testament teaching about prayers of request as found in this passage and others such as Matt. 7:7-11; Mark 11:23, 24; John 14:13; 1 John 5:14?*

## 2. Submit, Resist (read James 4:4-10)

*"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (4:7, NIV).*

James calls his readers "adulterous" (v. 4) because, while maintaining their profession of fidelity to Christ, they were snuggling up to the world—the sphere of values and structures organized apart from God and hostile to Him. In giving their selfish desires and ambitions preeminence over service, they were subordinating the values of the kingdom of God to the values of the world.

Scholars are divided on how v. 5 should be translated. It may mean "He [God] yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell in us" (RSV, see also Jerusalem Bible and Living Bible). If so, it fits with the idea of spiritual adultery in v. 4. Yahweh is a jealous lover (see Ex. 20:5; Zech. 8:2). He passionately desires from us a response of wholehearted, undeviating love and commitment.

However, the text could instead mean "the spirit which God implants in man turns toward envious desires" (NEB, see also KJV, NIV, Phillips). If this is the case, then the thought flows with v. 6. Though the human spirit gravitates toward the strife-inducing desires of vv. 1-3, the grace God gives is stronger, or "more" than that envious spirit (v. 6).

The grace God gives is stronger because it comes through Jesus Christ, the One who has conquered earth's principalities and powers and now sits enthroned over all (Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:20, 21; 2:6, 7). It is stronger because it overwhelms all sin. No amount or type of sin can defeat grace (Rom. 5:20). And, it is stronger because it enables resistance to both the arrogant of the earth and the devil himself (vv. 6, 7).

In vv. 4-7, James uses ten verbs (italicized in the following) to describe how we should respond to God's graciousness. First, we should *submit* to God. Submission is the natural outcome of true humility—recognition that God is infinitely greater, better and more worthy of honor than we are.

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It is only in the stance of submission that we are enabled to *resist* the devil. Submission does not mean we are passive. It involves action—taking advantage of the spiritual resources available to withstand the enemy, as Jesus did in His wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

James draws on the language of Old Testament ritual law for the three exhortations in v. 8. In the Old Testament sanctuary, only the priests, at appointed times and places, could *come near* to God (Ex. 19:22; Lev. 10:3; Eze. 44:13). James extends the privilege to all believers.

In coming near to God, sinners are to *wash* their hands—reform their outward actions (see Isa. 1:16). On a deeper level, they must *purify* (see Num. 8:21; 1 Peter 1:22) their hearts—their inner selves—of the worldly interests and selfish motives which cause double-mindedness or divided loyalties and commitments.

With the staccato commands *grieve, mourn, wail* in v. 9, James delineates the appropriate response of one who is sensitized to the seriousness of his sinful condition. A frivolous, superficial attitude becomes a “narcotic that encourages false satisfaction and security, while all the time the soul is on the brink of destruction.”<sup>1</sup> When this attitude takes hold, it is time to *change* laughter to the mourning which brings the blessings of God (Matt. 5:4).

In the final imperative in the section—*humble* yourself (v. 10)—the “picture is that of someone prostrate before an oriental monarch, begging mercy. The monarch leans down from the throne and lifts the petitioner’s face from the dust. The person rises with grateful joy, knowing he or she is forgiven.”<sup>2</sup>

*How would you define worldliness? Can it be identified by specific behaviors? How can it be avoided?*

### 3. Who Are You to Judge? (read James 4:11, 12)

“*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*” (4:12, NIV).

To speak against or pronounce judgment on others is to set oneself above the law of God, for the fundamental tenet of that law is to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18). And since only God is competent to discern and rightly analyze all of the motives, circumstances and actions of a person, and since only He has the power to execute true justice for all people, it is absurd for a human being to set himself up as a judge over even one other person.

*Is there a difference between loving, constructive criticism and “judging”? Is it legitimate for the church or individual Christians to express value judgments about the behavior of a person? (See Matt. 18:15-20 and Gal. 6:1-5 for some ideas.)*

D. F. M.

1. SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 533.  
2. Peter H. Davids, James, Good News Commentary (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1983), p. 75.

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# Perfect Submission

compiled by Clint Anderson

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
James 4:7

The devil is constant in his endeavors to undermine the church. Playing upon man's natural propensity to selfishness, he promotes dissension and turmoil, which spreads like a poisonous venom. The following excerpts from testimonies Ellen White gave to church members of her time, all published in 1875, remain relevant today as antidotes to the devil's efforts to destroy.

In an appeal to youth she pointed to Christ's revelation of the true meaning of submission by sacrificing His life for us:

"God gave His Son to a life of humiliation, self-denial, poverty, toil, reproach, and to the agonizing death of crucifixion. . . .

"Could God give us any greater proof of His love than in thus giving His Son to pass through this scene of suffering? And as the gift of God to man was a free gift, His love infinite, so His claims upon our confidence, our obedience, our whole heart, and the wealth of our affections are correspondingly infinite. He requires all that it is possible for man to give. The submission on our part must be proportionate to the gift of God; it must be complete and wanting in nothing. We are all debtors to God. He has claims upon us that we cannot meet without giving ourselves a full and willing sacrifice. He claims prompt and willing obedience, and nothing short of this will he accept."<sup>1</sup>

**"The submission on our part must be proportionate to the gift of God."**

Another testimony, dealing with man's duty to his fellow men, calls for perfect submission: "It may take time to attain perfect submission to God's will, but we can never stop short of it and be fitted for Heaven. True religion will lead its possessor to perfection. Your thoughts, your words, and your actions, as well as your appetites and passions, must be brought into subjection to the will of God. You must bear fruit unto holiness. Then you will be led to defend the poor, the fatherless, the motherless, and the afflicted."<sup>2</sup>

Writing in January 1875, Mrs. White urged a Brother "C" to consider the outcome of submission to God:

"I point you to the life of Jesus as a perfect pattern. His life was characterized by disinterested benevolence. Precious Saviour! What sacrifices has He made for us that we should not perish, but have everlasting life! Heaven will be cheap enough if we resign every selfish interest to obtain it. Can we afford to have our own way, and take ourselves out of the hands of God, because it is more pleasing to the natural heart? God requires perfect submission and perfect obedience. Eternal life is worth everything to us. You may come in close connection with God if you will agonize to enter in at the strait gate."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

How would you define perfect submission? Are we unsaved until we arrive at perfect submission?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 369.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 538.
3. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 218.

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# Galilee's Greatest Fisherman

by Douglas R. Clark

James 4:1-12 is a complex section of Scripture containing several cryptic statements of exhortation which intend to convey significant biblical principles for Christian living. The seriousness with which our author approaches these issues can be seen somewhat obliquely by noting a shift from the more neighborly address elsewhere in the book of "brothers" to less honorific epithets such as "unfaithful creatures" (= adulteresses, v. 4), "sinners," and "men of double mind" (v. 8).

Following is a memorable story (adapted from a fictional adaptation of a biblical story), illustrating in precious and creative fashion what is nevertheless a serious and essential component of the Christian life. James summed up that component with the dictum, "Submit yourselves therefore to God." God is looking for humble people to whom He might reveal Himself.

(Please note that the story is not intended to be factual or accurate. It is simply an imaginative retelling to illustrate a point.)

## Peter and the Large Catch of Fish<sup>1</sup>

It is well known by everyone who cares to know that the Lord Jesus and St. Peter used to repair to the local cafe after a hard day of ministry to knock back a few glasses of drink.

On a certain rainy night St. Peter looked up from his soda to the Lord Jesus and grinned, "We're doing real good."

"We?" said the Lord Jesus.

Peter was silent. "All right, you're doing real good," he finally said.

"Me?" said the Lord Jesus.

Peter was silent a second time. "All right. God's doing real good," he reluctantly admitted.

The Lord Jesus laughed and hit the table with glee.

It was the laugh that got St. Peter. He pushed his face toward Jesus and blurted out, "Look! I was somebody before you came along. You didn't make me. I know how everybody says, 'There goes the Lord Jesus and his sidekick St. Peter. Jesus cures the sick and Peter helps them up.'"

"But it wasn't always that way. People knew me in my own right. They would say, 'There goes Peter, the greatest fisherman in all of Galilee.' I was respected and looked up to."

"I heard that you were a very good fisherman, Peter," said the Lord Jesus.

"You bet I was! And tomorrow I am going to prove it. We are going to go fishing, you and me, and you'll see how the other fishermen respect me and look to my lead."

"I would love to go fishing, Peter. I have never been fishing," said the Lord Jesus, who was always looking for new adventures.

So the next morning at dawn the Lord Jesus and St. Peter were down at the shore readying the boat. And it was just as St. Peter had said. When the other fishermen saw St. Peter, they sidled over.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
James 4:6, 7

"I was somebody before you came along. You didn't make me."

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"Going out, Peter?" they asked.

"Yes," answered Peter, not looking up from the nets.

"Mind if we follow along?"

"Why not," shrugged Peter. And he looked at the Lord Jesus and said, "See!"

St. Peter's boat led the way with the Lord Jesus hanging on tightly in the prow. Now St. Peter was a scientist of a fisherman. He tasted the water, scanned the sky, peered down into the lake, and gave the word in a whisper, "Over there."

The boats formed a wide circle around the area that Peter had pointed to. "Let the nets down," Peter's voice crept over the surface of the water.

As the fishermen were letting their nets slowly into the sea, the Lord Jesus tapped the side of the boat. And all the fish in the sea dove to the bottom.

As they pulled in the nets, the muscles of their arms did not tighten under the weight of the fish. The nets rose quickly, the arms of the men slack. All they caught was water. The fishermen rowed over to St. Peter.

"The greatest fisherman in all of Galilee, my grandmother's bald head! You brought us here for nothing. We have wasted the best hours of the day and have not one fish to show for it. Stick to preaching, Peter." And they rowed toward shore, shouting over their shoulders at Peter.

The Lord Jesus said nothing.

St. Peter checked the nets. He tasted the sea a second time. He scanned the sky a second time. He looked at the Lord Jesus a second time and said, "Over there!" No sooner had he said this than the Lord Jesus was at the oars rowing mightily. And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter let down their nets. And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter hauled in their nets. And all day long under the searing sun the Lord Jesus and St. Peter caught nothing. Evening fell and an exhausted St. Peter raised the sail to make for shore. The weary Lord Jesus held on tightly in the prow.

It was then as the boat glided toward shore that all the fish in the sea of Galilee came to the surface. They leapt on one side of the boat, and they leapt on the other side of the boat. They leapt behind the boat, and they leapt in front of the boat. They formed a cordon around the boat, escorting it toward shore in full fanfare.

And then in a mass suicide of fish, they leapt into the boat, landing in the lap of the laughing Lord Jesus, smacking the astonished St. Peter in the face. When the boat arrived at shore, it was brimming, creaking, sinking under the weight of fish.

The other fishermen were waiting. They gathered around St. Peter and slapped him on the back. "Peter, you old rascal," they said, "you knew where the fish were all the time but you never let on. You put us on. You surely are the greatest fisherman in all of Galilee."

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**"We have  
wasted the best  
hours of the day  
and have not  
one fish to show  
for it.  
Stick to  
preaching,  
Peter."**

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But Peter was uncharacteristically silent. He only said, "Give the fish to everyone. Tonight no home in this village will go without food." After that, he said nothing.

As for Jesus, he went to the mountains, alone.

### REACT

What does this story suggest about the nature of humility, and how true humility manifests itself?

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1. Adapted from the retelling of the gospel story by John Shea, "Storytelling and Religious Identity," *Chicago Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (spring, 1982): 39-41 as cited in William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1984), pp. 123-125.

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# Declaring Independence From Sin

by Steve Yeagley

## HOW TO

Key text:

Romans 6:17, 18

The word "submission" rings out anything but liberty in a society where independence is cherished and freedom is the norm. Submission connotes dependence, slavery and restriction. Americans have never sung about "the land of the submitted, and the home of the humble."

In our society, young people are encouraged, and even forced, to seek independence. We must "be on our own" and "make something of ourselves." It's quite natural for us, then, to assert our personal independence. This is particularly true of those recently released from a restrictive or dependent environment (e.g. dorm, family).

Yet, the danger exists that in making a physical or emotional "declaration of independence" we may make a spiritual one, as well. In the process of shedding our earthly dependencies, we shed our heavenly dependency. In seeking independence from those below, we seek independence from the One above.

How can we, while striving for earthly independence, experience godly submission?

**1. Don't flee from submission.** An "independence" that asserts self is nothing more than submission to Satan. We are not free when we set out on our own course apart from God. "Satan takes the control of every mind that is not decidedly under the control of the Spirit of God."<sup>1</sup> The results of this control are disastrous (see James 4:1-5).

**2. Choose to submit to God.** Submission is the result of a choice to "resist the devil" (James 4:7, NIV), and to "come near to God" (v. 8, NIV). We can choose to become "slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18, NIV), to be under obligation to the Master in the freedom of our choice.

**3. Celebrate your independence!** Submission is our freedom! It is the Christian's declaration of independence from sin. Those of us who were once slaves to sin, having chosen to be obedient from our hearts to God's standard, are now set *free* from sin (Rom. 6:17, 18, author's paraphrase).

**4. Don't force submission on others.** If submission to God is a matter of free choice, then we must not try to deprive others of that power of choice. Also, those of us who hold Christian values must be careful not to confuse submission to God with submission to a set of standards. Even though our standards may reflect a life committed to God, we must always make our first burden the hearts of others, rather than trying to enforce on them the particular ways we manifest our submission. We must lead them personally to submit their lives to Christ.

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1. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 79.

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At the time of this writing, Steve Yeagley was a theology major at Southwestern Adventist College.

# Choleric Cleric

by Carol Sample

Whether we submit to our God, our country, or our spouse, most of us do not acquiesce readily. George Herbert, rector of the small parish church in Bemerton, England, wrestled with aspirations for wealth, courtly preferment, honor, pleasure even after he had chosen the vocation of the priesthood. For the seventeenth-century clergyman, the battle was as real as it is for us.

In images of mounting tension drawn from the prestige-conscious and pleasure-filled world of his day, the poet-parson depicts his unruly passions in rebellion against the restraints and denials imposed upon him by his choice to be a Christian and a priest. Only at the point where he can sustain the tension no longer does he hear a quiet voice calling, "Child." At that ineffable moment wrath dissipates, defenses crumble, and brokenness emerges as strength.

## The Collar\*

I struck the board, and cry'd No more.  
I will abroad.  
What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free; free as the roe,  
Loose as the winde, as large as store.  
Shall I be still in suit?  
Have I no harvest but a thorn  
To let me bloud, and not restore  
What I have lost with cordiall fruit?  
Sure there was wind  
Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn  
Before my tears did drown it.  
Is the yeare onely lost to Me?  
Have I no bayes to crown it?  
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?  
All wasted?  
Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.  
Recover all by sigh-blown age  
On double pleasure: leave thy cold dispute  
Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage,  
Thy rope of sands,  
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee  
Good cable, to enforce and draw  
And be thy law,  
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
Away; take heed:  
I will abroad.  
Call in thy deaths head there: tie up thy fears.  
He that forbears  
To suit and serve his need,  
Deserved his load.  
But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde  
At every word,  
Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Child!*  
And I reply'd, *My Lord.*

—George Herbert

## OPINION

Key text:  
2 Corinthians  
12:9, 10

\* Note: The title "The Collar," is vital to a meaningful reading of the poem. Punning, a convention of 17th-century metaphysical poetry, contributes much to the poem's richness. Most significant of the multiple meanings implicit in the pun is "choler" which refers to the yellow bile dominant in the choleric (rebellious) temperament—one of the four temperaments deriving from the Medieval theory of the four humours (body fluids). More obvious to contemporary readers are the associations of the collar with a yoke placed around the neck of an animal for purposes of control, the clerical collar, and the Christian's yoke. "Collar" has also been considered as a pun on "Caller"—the one who calls after the Child to whom he responds, "My Lord."

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# Verdict on Oppression

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-3, NIV).



# Greed for Gain

by Dalton Baldwin

James M. Oswald, 53, won two \$5,000 prizes on the fifth day of the California lottery in October, 1985. "Isn't it a trip? The Lord was looking after me that afternoon," he commented to the Associated Press.<sup>1</sup>

Was God's action the determining factor in these lottery events? Specifically, was God the prime mover when the citizens of California voted to approve using a lottery to finance education? Was God nudging Oswald forward when he took \$42 out of his wallet and gave them to a clerk for lottery tickets?

Many church leaders and educators in California did not believe that starting the lottery had God's approval. Many pastors advised their members to vote against the proposal. They pointed out that raising money by lottery places a disproportionate burden on the poor. The poor buy lottery tickets more often than the rich perhaps because they feel that they have so little to lose and so much to gain. Educators feared that the electorate would reduce its support for education because people would hear so much about the lottery and think that education has all the money it needs. In actuality only thirty-four cents out of every dollar spent on lottery tickets finally goes to support education. The lottery aggravates the unjust accumulation of wealth in the hands of the undeserving rich which has been produced by the deserving poor.

Then why did the California

voters approve of the lottery? After the voters had turned down a prior lottery proposal, a company called Scientific Games Inc. spent \$2.2 million promoting a new initiative which the voters approved. This was a paying investment because the company now has a \$40 million contract for printing 1.9 billion tickets. It might appear that some rich people hid their purpose to exploit the poor behind a mask of support for education and then persuaded the poor majority to vote for the measure in the hope that they could become rich without effort. The promoters persuaded the rich minority to vote for the measure in order to save themselves taxes which would otherwise support education. A group of free and responsible human beings created an evil structure which oppresses the poor. They were greedy for gain.

The Christian believers who received the letter of James faced similar problems. Greed to "get gain" (James 4:13) constantly tempted them. They easily forgot that they were dependent on God for all things.

Mr. Oswald was right when he said that the Lord was "looking after" him, but he was confused about which events were the Lord's doing. When we depend on the Lord for all good things, we need to choose to cooperate in those things that God sponsors and oppose structures of evil. James has good counsel to help us in making this important distinction.

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**James 4:13-5:6**

1. *San Bernardino Sun*, October 9, 1985.

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# Riches' Reward

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Despite the boasting of the arrogant, our transient lives are dependent on God for all things. And though wealthy oppressors may prosper for a time through exploitation, God's judgment against them is certain.

### 1. A Warning to the Arrogant (read James 4:13-17)

*"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (4:17, NIV).*

Divided loyalties, a recurring theme of James, emerges again in this passage.<sup>1</sup> As we saw last week, the "double-minded" person (1:8; 4:8) is one who, despite his Christian profession, abuses and slanders others because his heart has been captured by selfish desires (4:1-12). And, now we find that though he may be a faithful church goer, his loyalty shifts to himself when it comes to planning the details of his secular life, and God is forgotten (4:13).

The picture we have in this passage is that of traders planning a venture that will boost their climb up the socioeconomic scale. Trading was the way to upward mobility in first-century Palestine. Though riskier than small farming or labor, the only way really to get ahead was to invest in a large stock of goods and take them to a place where they were scarce, and trade them at a profit for goods that were scarce back in the homeland. The final step was to return to Palestine with the foreign goods and sell *them* at a profit.

So perhaps James has in mind some partners sitting down with a map in front of them, doing a market analysis. After determining which commodity—grain, wine, oil, or spices<sup>2</sup>—will sell best in which market, and developing a year-long master plan for sales, they lean back and gloat about the killing they are going to make and how they are going to ace out their competition.

James is not condemning careful business planning, but an arrogant attitude, an approach to life which ignores both the sovereignty of God and the transience of human life.

Human plans should be made not only in the realization that such plans are contingent on God's will, but also in submission to that will (v. 15). Through prayer, the planning process should be opened to God's guidance, and each specific plan should be evaluated in the light of divine values and purposes.

### 2. A Warning to Rich Oppressors (read James 5:1-6)

*"Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty" (5:4, NIV).*

James simultaneously blasts out a warning to those who have amassed fortunes through injustice and consoles the oppressed with the assurance that God has not forgotten them. Like Jesus and the Old Testament prophets, James foresees a day when the God of justice will overthrow all oppressors and their luxury will be turned to misery (Psalm 94; Mal. 3:1; Luke 6:24; 12:13-21).

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James employs vivid imagery to picture the demise of the oppressors' wealth—imagery appropriate to each of the three primary forms in which wealth could be accumulated during that time. First, the produce of the fields "has rotted away." Second, garments are eaten away by moths. Finally, precious metals are "rusted" or "corroded." James was no doubt aware that gold does not rust. But this expression may have been his way of saying that in the execution of God's judgment, even that which is most valuable and indestructible by human standards is doomed.

Note that all three of the verbs denoting decay are in the perfect tense—they describe action which has already been completed. From James' prophetic perspective, the judgments of God are so real and certain they can be described as already having taken place.

Indeed, in James' view the "last days" (v. 4) had already arrived, and how tragically ironic it was that during these last days the wealthy would accumulate wealth, under the illusion that it brought them security, when in reality they were investing in their own destruction.

The rich oppressors financed their luxury and self-indulgence (v. 5) through brutal exploitation of workers (v. 4). In defiance of Old Testament law (Deut. 24:14, 15), they withheld prompt payment from the day laborers who had no savings and thus could not feed their families if a day's payment was skipped. No doubt whatever payments were made were far below the level of decency.

The oppressors' guilt went beyond unjust payments to murder (v. 6). Apparently they were influencing the judicial system to arrange the execution of innocent and defenseless men. And preventable deaths caused by malnutrition and disease among the poor would be on their hands too.

In all of this, the rich oppressors were fattening themselves either on or for the "day of slaughter" (v. 5). The Greek can mean two different things here, and it could be that James has both in mind: "On the one hand, it means: You have enjoyed yourselves on the day of slaughter. Since the fresh meat was soon dried or salted, it was customary to have a big barbecue when one slaughtered animals. But on the other hand, James understands the double meanings. . . . The wealthy have plenty to eat; they enjoy life. But it is the biblical day of slaughter, the day God slaughters his enemies (e.g. Isa. 30:33; 34:5-8). They have enjoyed life as if on a day of slaughter yet ironically *they* are now the fattened calf and God's slaughterer knife is about to fall."<sup>3</sup>

*Does God favor the poor over the rich? (compare 1 Sam. 2:2-8; Isa. 10:1-3; Luke 6:20-25; Gen. 13:2; Prov. 14:31; 19:15; 30:8).*

*What forms of economic oppression exist today? How should the Christian relate to them?*

*Should modern Christians retain the concept of God's "slaughtering" his enemies?*

D. F. M.

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 534.

2. Peter H. Davids, *James*, Good News Commentary (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers Inc., 1983), pp. 83, 97.

3. *ibid.*, p. 88.

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# Oppression and Social Action

by Dalton Baldwin

## TESTIMONY

Key text:

Luke 4:16-21;

1 Peter 2:13, 14

James condemned the oppression of the poor by the rich. The most oppressive economic structures are frequently so interwoven with the fabric of society that massive cooperation is necessary to change them. Should Christians cooperate with social and political actions seeking to change structures which are unjust?

Many answer this question with a resounding No, and support their position with quotations like the following: "The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses,—extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart."<sup>1</sup> This statement gives higher priority to the proclamation of the gospel which offers to transform individual hearts leading to eternal life than to social action which would improve conditions in this life.

**"The remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures."**

While Seventh-day Adventists have made gospel proclamation supreme, they have also been socially active, particularly in the antislavery and temperance movements. On one occasion, one of the brethren in Oswego County, New York, received a testimony reproving him for his proslavery views. "Your views of slavery cannot harmonize with the sacred, important truths for this time. Both cannot be cherished in the same heart; for they are at war with each other. . . . Unless you undo what you have done, it will be the duty of God's people to publicly withdraw their sympathy and fellowship from you, . . . We must let it be known that we have no such ones in our fellowship, that we will not walk with them in church capacity."<sup>2</sup> Ellen White here advocated that the church as an institution should take a stand on this political issue. A moral principle was at stake.

Ellen White's diary for March 6, 1859, indicates that Sabbath-keeping Adventists first recognized their responsibility to vote when temperance was at issue. "Men of intemperance have been in the office today in a flattering manner expressing their approbation of the course of the Sabbathkeepers not voting and expressed hopes that they will stick to their course and like the Quakers, not cast their vote." She summarized the discussion of the brethren at a meeting that night by saying, "They think it right to vote in favor of temperance men being in office in our city instead of by their silence running the risk of having intemperate men put in office."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

Was Ellen White's stance against slavery and alcohol interests a contradiction of the paragraph cited from *The Desire of Ages*?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 509.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 359, 360.

3. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 337.

# Patience or Confrontation?

by Dalton Baldwin

In his commentary Bo Reicke says, "The purpose of the epistle of James is to admonish the recipients to Christian patience, e.g., i. 21, v. 7-11."<sup>1</sup> He dates the writing of James, Second Peter, and Jude during the accelerating persecution under the emperor Domitian. "They have, in common with the Pauline and Pastoral epistles, a remarkably positive attitude to state and society, and condemn revolutionary tendencies and social hostility. . . . What we have here is a genuine Christian tradition of opposition to social agitation, developed in the epistles of Paul, continued by the Pastoral epistles, and reiterated by Second Peter (iii. 14-16)."<sup>2</sup>

When James said that faith required tangible action to overcome hunger (2:15-17), why did he appeal for patience with an oppressive state which was often responsible for that hunger? "This is not because of any political conservatism, respect for the mighty, or desire to avoid trouble, but rather a simple conviction that social obedience and patience are necessary for a Christian and valuable for the success of the gospel, and that God himself will judge iniquities."<sup>3</sup>

When James warned against showing partiality to "a man with gold rings and in fine clothing" (2:2), Reicke sees similarities to conditions under Domitian. Only senators and Roman noblemen had the right to wear gold rings. In the final years of Domitian a group of senators were conspiring to overthrow him and the poor sided with Domitian. The conspiracy may have involved Clemens, who was second only to the emperor. In A.D. 95 Domitian put Clemens to death and exiled his wife, Domitilla, with a charge of "atheism." In that setting the charge of atheism meant "non-belief in the official gods, and . . . a tendency toward Jewish customs." Since the Roman government at that time thought of Christianity as a sect of Judaism, Clemens might have been a Christian. Evidence in the catacombs shows that Domitilla was a Christian. A few months later Domitilla's steward, who was also a Christian, murdered Domitian with the collaboration of the senatorial party.<sup>4</sup>

This incident reveals that Christianity had penetrated to the very highest levels of the Roman government and brings new meaning to James' concern in 4:2. "You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war" (RSV). Christian involvement in fighting and intrigue in government would compromise the gospel.

Christian action should place the highest priority on proclaiming the gospel with individual invitations to exercise faith. Whenever there is conflict between gospel proclamation and social action overthrowing oppression, gospel proclamation comes first. There is no contradiction between appeals to stop oppressing the poor and appeals for patience with an oppressive state if attempts to overthrow the state would eclipse the gospel proclamation. God encourages us to be patient with sinners as we proclaim the gospel which is impatient with sin.

**Evidence**  
**Key text:**  
**James 4:2**

**"Christian involvement in fighting and intrigue in government would compromise the gospel."**

1. Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), p. 6.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii f.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.  
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

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# Patient with Sinners, Impatient with Sin

by Dalton Baldwin

## HOW TO

Key text:

Romans 12:14—

13:1

The zealots were impatient with those who broke the law. Paul was using the methods of the zealots when he participated in the stoning of Stephen. Paul must have thought that by using physical force he could stop the spread of belief in Jesus Christ and thus defend the law from what he thought to be a dangerous threat of destruction. As he was being stoned Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:59, RSV). Paul was impatient with those whom he thought were sinners, but Stephen was patient with sinners.

Paul was using the methods of the zealots when he set out for Damascus in pursuit of the followers of Jesus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed and a voice said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4, RSV). At first Ananias was afraid to meet this Saul who captured and killed followers of the Way. Then both Ananias and Saul learned that God is patient with sinners.

The zealots used terrorist tactics. They stirred up a riot in the court of the temple and hoped to kill Paul, but he was rescued by the Roman soldiers and put into the safety of the prison. When the zealots plotted a terrorist ambush in order to murder him on the way to Caesarea, he understood from his own past experience what drove them to this destructive zeal.

"Impatience and force turned people away from the real truths the zealots sought to defend."

Paul understood the futility and frustration of attempting to bring people into relation with God through economic, political or physical coercion. Zealot coercion turned people away from faith in God and invited persecution. Paul was writing out of his experience as persecutor and as persecuted when he wrote, "Bless those who persecute you. . . . Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 12:14—13:1, RSV).

Did Paul say that every assertion of authority was divinely authorized? Paul was certainly not saying that Nero's charge that Christians burned Rome was "instituted by God." He was saying that all the genuine authority exerted by rulers comes from God. He had learned that coercion does not motivate sinners to enter into a relationship with God. He therefore advocated patience with sinners, and here he applies this patience to rulers.

Paul knew from personal experience that the zealots' impatience with sinners blinded their eyes to their own errors which were mixed in with the truth they were trying to defend. Furthermore, impatience and force turned people away from the real truths the zealots sought to defend. Perhaps Paul could also see that their terrorist activities were leading inevitably toward the destruction of his beloved Jerusalem. Looking back on the results of zealot coercion James could say, "the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (1:20, RSV).

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# Appeal for Social Action

by Dalton Baldwin

James teaches that faith that does not work is dead. The conviction of faith without the commitment of faith is dead. The conviction that the poor and the hungry ought to be fed without commitment in action is dead faith (2:15, 16). The conviction, for example, that oppressed blacks of South Africa ought to be liberated without commitment in action is dead faith. The message of James condemning greed for gain and appealing for committed action to overcome oppression is important for us.

A few months after Ellen White had encouraged the brethren at the Iowa camp meeting to become actively involved in the political campaign for temperance in that state, she published an article which contains some general principles. She wrote, "Many deplore the wrongs which they know exist, but consider themselves free from all responsibility in the matter. This cannot be. Every individual exerts an influence in society. In our favored land, every voter has some voice in determining what laws shall control the nation. Should not that influence and that vote be cast on the side of temperance and virtue? . . . We need not expect that God will work a miracle to bring about this reform, and thus remove the necessity for our exertion. We ourselves must grapple with this giant foe, our motto, No compromise and no cessation of our efforts till the victory is gained."<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph mentions two avenues of impact. First, everyone has an influence which can exert its power even if there is no democratic voting. Second, in democratic nations every voter has a duty to vote responsibly.

We should not expect God to work a miracle to overcome structures of evil which have been created by sinful human decisions such as slavery and traffic in alcohol. Certainly apartheid, the threat of nuclear holocaust, the subordination of women and the forces blocking liberation of the poor in the third world are threats to virtue, health, and well-being analogous to the slavery and intemperance which Ellen White urged nineteenth-century Adventists to oppose.

If every Seventh-day Adventist in the world would by influence and action teach that the first goal of work is service, not greed for gain, we would be following the example of the Son of God. Paul pointed to Jesus Christ who took on the "form of a servant" as he appealed to the Philippians to do "nothing from selfishness" but to "count others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3-6). If every black Seventh-day Adventist in South Africa, in the spirit of Jesus, Ghandi, and Martin Luther King, would turn the other cheek and cheerfully carry burdens two miles, the conscience of their "Christian" oppressors would be touched by the Spirit of Christ. Let us be patient with sinners and impatient with sin.

## REACT

1. If the cause is really just, is zealot coercion justified?
2. Does God and should we run out of patience for sinners?

## OPINION

Key text:  
Philippians 2:3-6

**"We should not expect God to work a miracle to overcome structures of evil which have been created by sinful human decisions."**

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1. *Gospel Workers*, pp. 387, 388.

# Enduring Commitment

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:27, NIV).



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# Ordinary Jewels

by Bill Shelly

In his book *Make Friends With Your Shadow*, William A. Miller retells one of Zimmer's tales like this:

"Each day the king sat in state hearing petitions and dispensing justice. Each day a holy man, dressed in the robe of an ascetic beggar, approached the king and without a word offered him a piece of very ripe fruit. Each day the king accepted the 'present' from the beggar and without a thought handed it to his treasurer who stood behind the throne. Each day the beggar, again without a word, withdrew and vanished into the crowd.

"Year after year this precise same ritual occurred every day the king sat in office. Then one day, some 10 years after the holy man first appeared, something different happened. A tame monkey, having escaped from the women's apartments in the inner palace, came bounding into the hall and leaped up onto the arm of the king's throne. The ascetic beggar had just presented the king with his usual gift of fruit, but this time instead of passing it on to his treasurer as was his usual custom, the king handed it over to the monkey. When the animal bit into it, a pre-

vious jewel dropped out and fell to the floor.

"The king was amazed and quickly turned to his treasurer behind him. 'What has become of all the others?' he asked. But the treasurer had no answer. Over all the years he had simply thrown the unimpressive 'gifts' through a small upper window in the treasure house, not even bothering to unlock the door. So he excused himself and ran quickly to the vault. He opened it and hurried to the area beneath the little window. There, on the floor, lay a mass of rotten fruit in various stages of decay. But amidst this garbage of many years lay a heap of precious gems."<sup>1</sup>

One of the possible interpretations of Zimmer's story is that our wealth is determined by how we respond to the ordinary. And that's a concept which raises some questions about how we should live in view of Jesus' return. Does God expect us to do great deeds? Will "finishing the work" cause Him to return sooner? Or is the real test in how we respond to ordinary people with ordinary needs on ordinary days? Perhaps this week's concluding study in James will yield some clues.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**James 5:7-20**

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1. William A. Miller, *Make Friends With Your Shadow* (Augsburg, 1981).

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# Reasons for Endurance

**LOGOS** Theme: In view of Christ's soon return, we should patiently persevere in the Christian walk, despite the suffering it entails.

## 1. In the Face of Suffering (read James 5:7-11).

*"See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near" (5:7,8, NIV).*

James now turns his attention from the oppressor to the oppressed. He points them to the return of Christ as the basis for patient endurance through present suffering.

Jesus had compared the kingdom of God to seed that is planted—though apparently small and insignificant in the beginning, it results in a full harvest through the mysterious work of God. Or, in another parable, the kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a dominant tree (Mark 4:26-32). James likewise uses the agricultural metaphor to assure his readers that though the triumph of the kingdom of God is not yet apparent, it is certain. At present they are a small, persecuted, apparently insignificant minority. But they serve a King who will one day rule over all, just as surely as harvest time will come.

Though the farmer is involved in planting and cultivating, he can only wait in hope for the rain that makes the harvest possible. Likewise, the believer must endure patiently with hope grounded in what God has done and promised, not in human accomplishments. And while the rain may sometimes fail, God's promises do not.

In addition to being patient, James urges his readers to "stand firm" (v. 8). In response to corruption within the Christian community and oppression from without, they should neither retaliate nor compromise but stand firm—maintain faithfulness to the principles of the gospel in word and deed.

Furthermore, they should not let the pressures and inequities of their environment lead them to indulge in grumbling against or criticizing one another (v. 9). During tough times, the community needs to stick together rather than allow malicious criticism disintegrate its solidarity. In view of Jesus' teaching that Christians should not judge others (Matt. 7:1, 2), James warns that those who do judge—who malign or condemn others—shall be judged. And *the* Judge is so near that He can be pictured as standing at the door, reaching out to lift the latch!<sup>1</sup>

James goes on to cite the prophets and Job in particular as patterns for the qualities needed in the face of suffering. We commonly speak of the "patience of Job," and this phrase is found in the KJV translation of v. 12. However, the word James uses to describe Job, *hupomone*, is not the same word that is used for patience in the other verses of this section. It is better translated "steadfastness" (RSV) or "perseverance" (NIV). The fact is that Job was anything but patient with his "friends" and their traditional theories or even

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with God. But through all of his trauma—his passionate questioning, his bitter agonizing over his fate—he never let go of his hold on God, he persevered in faith (Job 13:15; 16:19; 19:25).

The *hupomonē* which described Job is “that gallant spirit which can breast the tides of doubt and sorrow and disaster and come out with faith still stronger on the other side.”<sup>2</sup> It is that same *hupomonē* which marks the believers who hold to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus in earth’s last crisis, despite external pressures to conform (Rev. 14:12). Those who patiently persevere are not freed from suffering, but in the long view it is they who are happy or “blessed” (cf. Matt. 5:11, 12) because they serve a compassionate, merciful God who works in all things for their good, as He did for Job (James 5:11; Rom. 8:28).

*Does this passage teach that Christians should be passive about injustice like that described in James 5:1-6, and simply wait for Christ’s return to take care of things (compare Isa. 1:17; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 21:12, 13; 23:22)?*

## **2. Concluding Counsel (read James 5:12-20)**

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (5:16, NIV).*

A possible explanation for the abrupt topical shifts in these concluding verses is that James was following the format of a Greek literary letter. It was typical to end such a letter with an oath to guarantee its truth and a reference to health. James comments on oaths in v. 12 and on health in vv. 13-20.<sup>3</sup>

Some commentators believe James’ main concern in v. 12 is the temptation to utter bitter expletives under the pressure of suffering. While his counsel may be applicable to angry cursing, he is probably referring primarily to casual use of oaths to reinforce the truth of one’s words. When one swears by a witness (e.g. God, heaven, earth, Jerusalem, the temple), he implies that he is being more truthful now than he is at other times, and that casts a shadow over *everything* he says, whether sworn or not. Again echoing the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:33-37), James urges that a Christian’s speech be literally “yes-yes” and “no-no.” This formula “means that one’s outer ‘yes’ should match an inner heart ‘yes,’ i.e., there should be absolute truthfulness and no hypocrisy.”<sup>4</sup>

In discussing health, James highlights God-centeredness as the key. Trouble should not lead us to wallow in despair but to connect with God in prayer. On the other hand, happiness should not lead us to forget our dependence on God, but to acknowledge it through praise (v. 13). In other words, neither good circumstances nor bad should be allowed to impair our connection with God.

Prayer is also the key to the restoration of physical health, for

*(Continued on page 93)*

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# Hiding a Multitude of Sins

selected by Bill Shelly

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
James 5:19, 20

"Too often when wrongs are committed again and again, and the wrongdoer confesses his fault, the injured one becomes weary, and thinks he has forgiven quite enough. But the Saviour has plainly told us how to deal with the erring: 'If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.' Luke 17:3. Do not hold him off as unworthy of your confidence. Consider 'thysself, lest thou also be tempted.' Gal. 6:1.

"If your brethren err, you are to forgive them. When they come to you with confession, you should not say, I do not think they are humble enough. I do not think they feel their confession. What right have you to judge them, as if you could read the heart? The word of God says, 'If he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.' Luke 17:3, 4. And not only seven times, but seventy times seven—just as often as God forgives you.

"We ourselves owe everything to God's free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heirship with Christ. Let this grace be revealed to others.

"Give the erring one no occasion for discouragement. Suffer not a Pharisaical hardness to come in and hurt your brother. Let no bitter sneer rise in mind or heart. Let no tinge of scorn be manifest in the voice. If you speak a word of your own, if you take an attitude of indifference, or show suspicion or distrust, it may prove the ruin of a soul. He needs a brother with the Elder Brother's heart of sympathy to touch his heart of humanity. Let him feel the strong clasp of a sympathizing hand, and hear the whisper, Let us pray. God will give a rich experience to you both. Prayer unites us with one another and with God. Prayer brings Jesus to our side, and gives to the fainting, perplexed soul new strength to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan.

"When one turns away from human imperfections to behold Jesus, a divine transformation takes place in the character. The Spirit of Christ, working upon the heart, conforms it to His image. Then let it be your effort to lift up Jesus. Let the mind's eye be directed to 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' John 1:29. And as you engage in this work, remember that 'he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.' James 5:20."<sup>1</sup>

## REACT

What principles should guide us in efforts to "turn a sinner from the error of his ways" (James 5:19)?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 249-251.

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# Active Patience

by Bruce Wilcox

I think it would be fascinating to know more about the personality of James and his relationship with Jesus during those "hidden years at Nazareth." One family trait that James seems to have shared with Jesus does show through in James' letter: when he wants to nail down a point, he uses something from daily life for an illustration. So, when he urges us to be patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord, he reminds us of the farmer being patient over his crops, waiting for the early rain, the late rain, and the harvest.

While a farmer may be patient, he is far from idle. I have never farmed in the Middle East, but I once did some tomato farming during my student days at Newbury Park Academy in the Conejo Valley north of Los Angeles. It was a year-round task. In mid-winter and in the spring we disked the fields, then plowed the furrows so we could irrigate. We decided which variety to grow in each field and set out the plants, standing barefoot and knee-deep in thick adobe mud. We cultivated, fertilized and weeded. When the ground was dry, but before the plants begin to wilt, we turned water into the furrows. If all went well the students and faculty went out and picked the crop in late fall. One year we had a plague of tomato blight, and the crop was poor. But, in good years, we had an abundance of rich red tomatoes with a flavor and texture unknown to people whose only experience is with the pale, tough spheroids from Lucky's or Safeway.

Even when we had done everything at the right time and in the right way, we were at the mercy of forces outside our control. When the leafhoppers brought in tomato blight, our best efforts yielded only a sparse crop. We could only be patient, enduring and active; we could not make the crop grow.

The same principle holds true in waiting for the Lord's return. There is much to do, at the right time and in the right way. And even when we have given our best efforts, the time of His coming depends on forces outside our control. But our activity is conditioned by our expectation, not eliminated.

## REACT

How much influence does human activity have on the timing of the Lord's return? Compare Matt. 24:14, 44; Acts 1:6-8; 2 Peter 3:8-12; 1 Thess. 5:1-4; Rev. 11:18.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
James 5:7, 8

**"The time of His coming depends on forces outside our control."**

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# Endurance in Community

by Bruce Wilcox

## HOW TO

**Key text:**  
**James 5:13-20;**  
**Matthew 10:39**

Patient endurance while waiting for the Lord's return is not sitting quietly with folded hands, eyes rolled toward the ceiling. It is skillful, intelligent activity conditioned by our expectation. James' concluding paragraphs give indications about what kind of activity is appropriate while we wait. Active, patient endurance is best carried out within the community of believers and in the company of close friends. Two suggestions for strengthening your involvement in Christian community are:

**1. Make a commitment to a group.** Church membership opens a door to commitment, but you have to step through. Find some small part of your church—a Sabbath School room, a youth group, a community action group, for example—and make a long-term commitment to it. I know from my years working in pre-college Sabbath Schools (juniors, earliteens) how few people will actually be there 48 or 50 times a year. Try it. The rewards will surprise you. You will be drawn out of yourself and learn by experience that "he who would save his life must lose it." When you allow yourself to be a channel for the Holy Spirit, the changes in you will be at least as great as in the people you work for, and usually greater. Furthermore, you will be opening the door to friendships, and to my second suggestion.

**2. Make a commitment to a person.** I'm not talking here about commitment to Christ, but about commitment to another human being. Some kinds of growth can happen only within an intimate one-on-one relationship. Find someone you can trust and who will reinforce the best in you. Establish an open and committed relationship—a friendship. Nurture the good and starve the bad in each other. Bear each other's burdens. Take seriously and act on James' assurance that "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16, RSV). It may happen that you will bring your friend back from the error of his way or that he will bring you back, and thus a soul will be saved from death and a multitude of sins covered.

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# Ready or Not, Here I Come

by Bill Shelly

Sometimes we get the cart before the horse. We say, "If we would only get busy and 'finish the work,' Jesus would return." So, if I am slow at finishing my portion of "the work" (whatever that is), then I am in part responsible for the delay in Jesus' return. Whatever happened to "ready or not, here I come"?

The summer our family moved to Indiana it became my job to close all the windows in the car and house whenever rain threatened, which was not infrequent in Indiana. Do you suppose the clouds waited until I had "finished my work" before they cut loose? Obviously, you can't make every illustration walk on all fours. But there is a sense in which the general warning of Scripture is, "Ready or not here I come." We certainly preach that way in our evangelistic meetings. But then we assure ourselves that we will recognize the signs and be ready. We forget that the entire Jewish nation missed Jesus' first advent.

How then can we get ready for Jesus' return? Paradoxically, we do not get ready by some abstract process of "getting ready." Rather, it is a by-product of patient service (see Matt. 25:31-46).

## OPINION

Key text:  
Matthew  
25:31-46

"Getting or being ready is a by-product of patient service."

## REACT

1. What are the purposes of signs and prophecies if not to let us know when we need to be ready for Christ's return?

2. Do you agree with the author that patient service makes us ready for the second coming (see also Rom. 5:1, 2; 1 John 3:1-3)?

*(Continued from p. 89)*

much is accomplished through the prayers of the righteous (v. 16) as illustrated by Elijah, one of the most venerated Old Testament figures during the first century (vv. 17, 18).

The sick person can, of course, be prayed for from a distance, but if possible the elders of the church should be brought to the bedside. Their presence at the actual scene of the suffering deepens the intensity of their concern and prayers, and along with the oil, is a tangible sign of God's healing power.

Verse 15 makes clear that it is the *Lord* who does the healing, not the oil, nor the elders, nor their faith, nor their prayers. And in the whole process, "the Lord remains sovereign: God answers prayer; he is not compelled by prayer."<sup>5</sup>

The last part of v. 15 alludes to the fact that God's healing is accompanied by His forgiveness. In v. 16 the correlation of healing and forgiveness is placed on the interpersonal level. In a community of openness and caring, where mutual confession, forgiveness, and prayers freely flow, there is an atmosphere that promotes healing and restoration (vv. 19, 20).

*In view of the development of modern medicine, is James' counsel in v. 14 still relevant? If so, should anointing be a last resort or a first resort for a sick individual?*

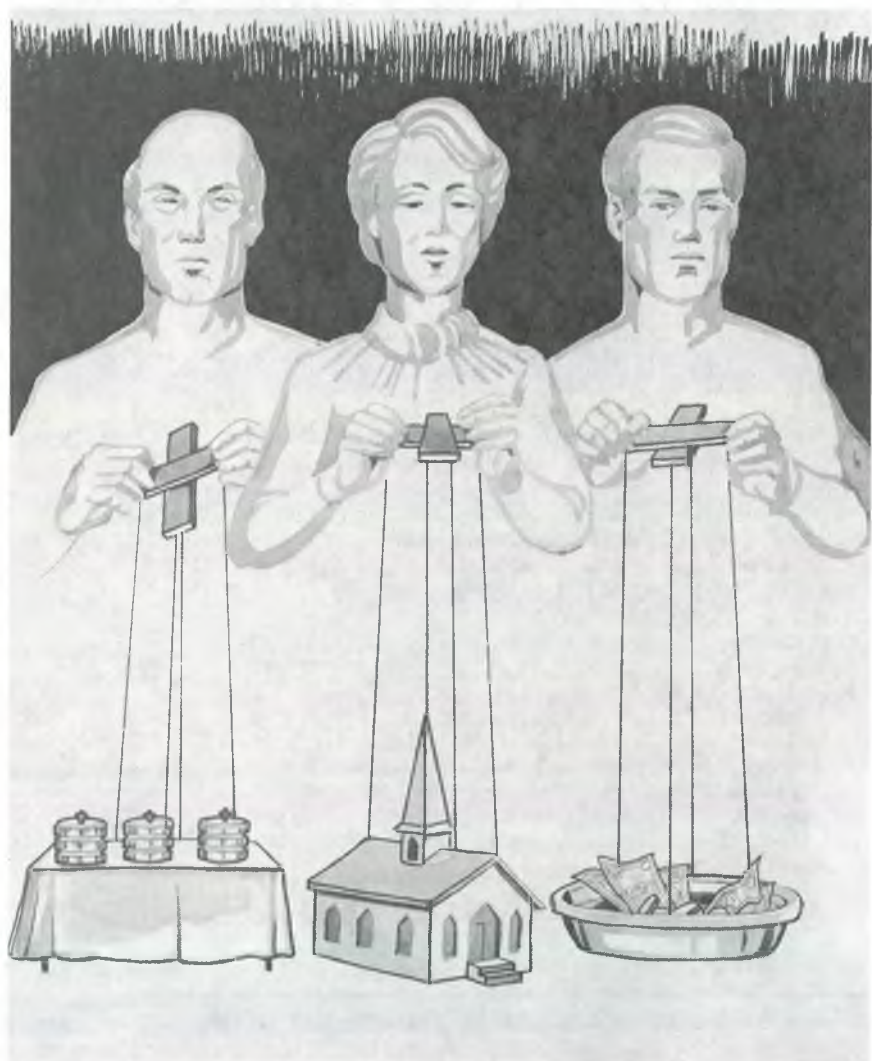
D. F. M.

1. Peter H. Davids, *James, A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1983), pp. 90, 91.
2. William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 125.
3. Davids, pp. 92, 93.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

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# Failure of the Privileged

"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. . . . Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21, 23, 24, NIV).



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# Too Hip

by Bill Shelly

It was the summer of '69. I was 17. I was still basking in the glow of having been junior class president at Modesto Union Academy. California was fun. Being a senior was going to be even more fun. I was cool, I was hip. Then my parents made that awful announcement. Our family would be moving to Indiana. The Beach Boys were singing about California girls, and I was headed for Indiana. What a drag.

To make matters worse, I wasn't getting along too well with Dad. Oh, I did the things he told me to do, but there was no real relationship. That summer I remember watching a man step on the moon. Right there in our Indiana living room, Houston and the moon talked to each other—240,000 miles away. Yet I couldn't communicate with my Dad sitting across the room.

One morning Dad woke me up early. "Come on, let's go have a look at Broadview Academy [Illinois]," he said. "Maybe you'll like it. If so, you can stay and work until school starts." I agreed. For three hours we drove west (my favorite direction), saying little. We drove on campus and parked behind the boys' dorm. B.V.A. is built on a little knoll. As I walked around the cam-

pus I realized that in whatever direction I looked all I could see was corn. Great.

I carried my suitcase into the dorm room. "Want to stay?" Dad asked. I grunted something affirmative. He turned to leave. All of a sudden something happened inside me as he walked out to the car.

By the time I caught up with Dad, he was in the car with the engine running. As I walked up to the driver's side he rolled down the window. I grabbed the door with both hands. I wanted to say, "Dad, I'm sorry I've acted like I have. I really do love you. I want to go home with you." But all I could do was squeeze the door and say, "Dad. . . ." My white fingernails on the door told him the rest. He smiled and said, "I understand. I'll come back soon."

I stood there in the parking lot and watched him drive away. I was no longer interested in being tough, cool and hip. Tears trickled down my cheek.

I wonder if Israel in Malachi's time was busy being too hip. Sure they obeyed the letter of the law. But where was respect and honor for God? Was Israel just going through its "too hip" teenage years? Or was the problem deeper than that?

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Malachi 1:1—  
2:16

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# A Message for the Discouraged

**LOGOS**    **Theme:** Failure to recognize and act on our privileges as God's people leads to insensitivity and infidelity in our relationships to God and to each other.

## 1. Introduction

A casual reading of Malachi may give one the impression of remoteness, of relevance limited to a world far distant from our own. With the exception that it contains a proof text for tithing, the book seems to touch little of our lives. Blemished sacrifices, an indifferent priesthood, and strained diplomatic relations with the Edomites are not among our major concerns. Yet when an understanding of the historical situation is gained, the book's relevance shines clear.

Many Jews expected that the ending of the Babylonian captivity would usher in the glorious messianic age. Permission to reestablish a national Jewish identity in Palestine generated grand expectations that the messianic prophecies would be soon realized. The nation, it was presumed, would recover the glory it once had under King David (Jer. 23:3-6). The land, barren from war and neglect, would miraculously become fruitful, and the rains would never fail (Eze. 34:26, 27). The meager population would explode (Isa. 54:1-3), and surrounding nations would come and serve the people of Israel (Isa. 49:8-12, 23). But as the generations passed, the hopes and dreams of grandeur mutated into frustration. The walls of Jerusalem still lay in ruins, and the nation was only a tiny, politically insignificant spot in the vast Persian empire. Unproductive soil, swarms of locusts, blight and famine, as well as human adversaries, made life hard. The struggle to survive was all-consuming.

Thus, by the time Malachi came on the scene, probably around 450 B.C., the expectations of glory had withered, and the community had drifted into cynicism and impiety. The faithful began to ask, Why?—"Where is the God of justice?" (2:17, NIV), "How have you loved us?" (1:2, NIV), and "It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements?" (3:14, NIV).

Understanding this background, the parallels and relevance for today are not hard to see. Seventh-day Adventists have lived for generations in the hope of a coming kingdom. But in view of the passing generations, the failed expectations of our forefathers, and our own ongoing lives in a world of struggle and pain, the question might easily be asked, "Where is the God of justice?"

*What went wrong in the Jews' interpretation of the prophecies referred to above? Do we have a better understanding of the eschatological prophecies than they did?*

## 2. A Privileged People (read Malachi 1:1-5)

*"I have loved you," says the Lord.*

*"But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'"*



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*"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the Lord says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated" (1:2, 3, NIV).*

The love of God for His chosen people must have been hard to see above the poverty in the tiny post-exilic community. The prophecies of glory helped little with the struggles of daily life and were viewed with increasing skepticism. But Malachi corrected the perspective of the people. Even in deepest poverty, the believer is richer than any worldly king, for true wealth and worth are not measured by possessions but by the presence of God.

Without the presence of God, destruction is certain. Malachi cites the invasion of Edom as evidence of this principle. The Edomites had gloated over the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and had taken the opportunity to annex some of Judah's territory. Subsequently, Edom was herself invaded by the Nabatean Arabs. Like the prophet Obadiah, Malachi apparently interpreted this invasion as divine judgment on Edom for its treachery and inhumanity, and as evidence that the Lord does indeed love His chosen people.<sup>1</sup>

*What indications about God's character do you see in this passage? Does He actively bring punishment on nations and people, or is their downfall the consequence of their own choices?*

### **3. Prostituted Privilege (read Malachi 1:6—2:16)**

*"Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (2:10, NIV).*

The shirking of religious and moral responsibility is the inevitable result of unchecked discouragement. Though the post-exilic Jews had fully reestablished the forms and institutions of worship, Malachi saw that the temple services had lost authenticity. The priests had become lax and superficial, accepting sick and lame animals for sacrifice and neglecting their duty to teach the law. For their part, the people were bringing inferior animals for sacrifice and were stingy at best in their financial support. They were becoming casual about ethics, too. Faithful wives were being divorced, workers cheated, and widows and orphans oppressed.

Discouragement was not the only cause of the spiritual decline. Institutional religion carries an inherent danger against which the Jews were failing to guard. "It is a sad fact that as religion becomes institutionalized and standardized it is apt to lose its primitive purity."<sup>2</sup> History is rife with examples of this truth, the most prominent being the metamorphosis of early Christianity into the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. Malachi's council remains ever relevant for those involved in institutional religion: "Guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith" (2:16, NIV).

*What steps can an institutionalized religion, such as our own, take to avoid losing its primitive purity and vitality?*

E. R. M

1. Stephen Winward, *A Guide to the Prophets* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), pp. 216, 217.

2. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 1127.

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# A Fruitful Tree or Sour Grapes?

by James W. Walters

## TESTIMONY

**Key text:**  
Isaiah 5:1-7

The Adventist Church has found new vitality in rediscovering the Lutheran emphasis on righteousness by faith. Faith in Christ's all-sufficient righteousness is a breath of fresh air, but one which can induce hyperventilation. Martin Luther's theology is balanced by John Calvin's. The confirmation of salvation, as Calvin rightly contended, is seen in good actions.

Ellen White, more Calvinistic than Lutheran, argues that performance must accompany profession.

### Privilege Requires Performance

"[The Jewish people] forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages were appropriated for their own glorification. They robbed God of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellowmen of religious guidance and a holy example."<sup>1</sup>

### Soured Blessings Are a Curse

"'And He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.' Isa. 5:2. The people of Christ's day made a greater show of piety than did the Jews of earlier ages, but they were even more destitute of the sweet graces of the Spirit of God. . . .

**"Their religion was misleading, and wrought ruin instead of salvation."**

"God in His Son had been seeking fruit, and had found none. Israel was a cumber of the ground. Its very existence was a curse; for it filled the place in the vineyard that a fruitful tree might fill. It robbed the world of the blessings that God designed to give. The Israelites had misrepresented God among the nations. They were not merely useless, but a decided hindrance. To a great degree their religion was misleading, and wrought ruin instead of salvation."<sup>2</sup>

### No Action Is Religiously Unimportant

"The priest and the Levite had been for worship to the temple whose service was appointed by God Himself. To participate in that service was a great and exalted privilege, and the priest and Levite felt that having been thus honored, it was beneath them to minister to an unknown sufferer by the wayside. Thus they neglected the special opportunity which God had offered them as his agents.

"Many today are making a similar mistake. They separate their duties into two distinct classes. The one class is made up of great things, to be regulated by the law of God; the other class is made up of so-called little things, in which the command, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' is ignored. This sphere of work is left to caprice, subject to inclination or impulse. Thus the character is marred, and the religion of Christ misrepresented."<sup>3</sup>

### REACT

In what ways might we as individuals and as a church be in danger of "misrepresenting God to the nations"?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 291, 292.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 215.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

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# Who Are the Underprivileged?

by James W. Walters

Malachi's contribution to Christian thinking is not merely tithing proof texts. The message of Malachi (lit. "my messenger") is more basic: God is no one's private preserve.

"From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name. . . . But you profane it" (Mal. 1:11, 12, RSV). In other words, the privileged people spurn their God while the underprivileged praise Him. Allow the prophet his hyperbolizing license, but don't miss his point: "the nations"—non-believers surely and probably heathen—are praised for true worship. Right words, true doctrine and correct ritual can, should and often do have transformative power in a believer's life, but they don't necessarily.<sup>1</sup> Orthodox thinking and living can lull believers into claiming God as corporate treasure, despite the faithful's parched inner life. Malachi bursts the illusion of exclusivity.

Israel said God was great (1:14) and awe inspiring (2:5), but she had become indifferent, even corrupt, in her worship. The very rites and sacrifices which symbolized the religious depth of Hebrew existence had become insipid. Familiarity had bred callousness. The rituals had lost their meaning, and the holy priests—who come in for major criticism (1:6—2:9)—were living parodies. God, so irked at His "son's" dishonor (1:6), bemoaned that no priest would simply "shut the doors" of the temple and quench the useless fire on the altar (1:10).

Open praise, in contrast, is lavished upon the "underprivileged" nations. These nations feared God—a startling prophetic insight! These peoples revered a power beyond themselves, the unknown Other. How could "anonymous believers"<sup>2</sup> respect the creating and sustaining God of the Bible?

They felt His power in the energizing rays of sunshine on their barley fields. They sensed his sovereign hand in their national prosperity—and adversity. They perceived a divine depth to life in the revealing insights of their national poets and seers. A divine power beyond human knowledge and manipulation was at work, and their grateful but uninformed heart response was Yes. They acknowledged and implicitly worshiped the true God in the deepest levels of their being—the fertile ground of all genuine doctrine and ritual.

Israel's correct belief system in lifestyle positioned her for vibrant life, but her wellsprings had gone dry; the soil was scorched and the rites were flat. Although God desires and expects more from His own, He is not limited to them. Finally, the God who so loved the whole world is available to all. Happenstance of birth is not eternal fate. In the end, the privileged will not be determined by rituals and labels.

## REACT

Are Adventists in any sense privileged by God over other people? If so, what are the implications? Could we lose our privileges?

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## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Malachi 1:11, 12

**"Orthodox thinking and living can lull believers into claiming God as a corporate treasure."**

1. A paraphrase of James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 240.

2. I am indebted to Karl Rahner, who coined the term "anonymous Christians."

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# The Predicament of the Pit

by Jerry Davis

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Psalm 99

Rabbi Abraham Heschel tells the following story which illustrates the predicament of a people who have forsaken the privileges of a covenant relationship with God.

"A tale is told of a band of inexperienced mountain climbers. Without guides, they struck recklessly into the wilderness. Suddenly a rocky ledge gave way beneath their feet and they tumbled headlong into a dismal pit. In the darkness of the pit they recovered from their shock only to find themselves set upon by a swarm of angry snakes. Every crevice became alive with fanged, hissing things. For each snake the desperate men slew, ten more seemed to lash out in its place. Strangely enough, one man seemed to stand aside from the fight. When indignant voices of his struggling companions reproached him for not fighting, he called back: If we remain here, we shall be dead before the snakes. I am searching for a way of escape from the pit for all of us."<sup>1</sup>

The Jews of Malachi's time had forsaken their Guide, struck out on their own, and had fallen into a pit of social injustice, economic depression, and spiritual desolation.

Do we not find ourselves in a similar pit today? In our society and, to an all too tragic degree, in our church, we have worshiped force, despised compassion, and have been governed by no higher law than our own appetites. The vision of the sacred has all but died from our souls. We have bartered holiness for convenience, loyalty for success, love for power, wisdom for information, tradition for fashion.

The greatest task of our time is to find a way out of the pit. That can only be accomplished if we realize and act on the truths, highlighted by Malachi, that:

1. The sense of the sacred is as vital to us as the light of the sun.
2. There can be no world without law.
3. There can be no brotherhood without a Father.
4. There can be no humanity without an attachment to God.

To escape the pit, we need to recover a vision of the sacred, a spirit of true worship which pervades every aspect of our beings. God will come to us when we are willing to let Him in our homes, our banks, our offices, our factories, our committees and our entertainments. For God is everywhere or He is nowhere, the Father of all people or of none, concerned about everything or about nothing. Only in His presence will we learn that the glory of man is not in his will to power but in the power of his compassion.

The lesson of Malachi is that indifference in worship is followed by a decline in the structure of society. Either our social institutions will reflect His presence, or they will disintegrate from His absence.

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1. Abraham J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 148-152.

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# Horizontal Religion

by James W. Walters

It's the old chicken and the egg question. It's like the horse and carriage, love and marriage.

Trust in God and faithfulness to one another are inseparable.

That's why Malachi merges concern for true worship of Yahweh into discussion of marital faithfulness. That's why Jesus answered a single question with a double-barreled answer: of course the great commandment is to love God with heart, soul and mind; but the flip side of God-love is neighbor-love. That's why the apostle Paul, following Jesus' lead, preached the gospel of love. Church members were so prone to neglect the human side of the love commandment that in Paul's two references to the command he doesn't even refer to the divine dimension.<sup>1</sup>

The world's need is not great preaching, but genuine living. Christian living is powerful preaching. Proclamation of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 is merely empty syllables sounding from hollow people unless the gospel's horizontal dimension is alive. A people who claim remnant status particularly are called to be a community of compassion in concrete deeds to a scared, hurting and starving world. The church is summoned to personify justice—in the pulpit, pew and workplace; within its organization and throughout all countries. God's chosen people don't have a stellar history of personifying justice, but as today's key text indicates, this is the church's top priority.

The inner core which will give substance to holy words about God and His great salvation is horizontal religion. An ancient Hasidic tale of Rabbi Mordekai is instructive:

"He has pursued a business in his youth and used all through the year to lay something aside from his earnings in order to be able to buy a beautiful etrog (a citrus fruit, or citron, over which the blessing is spoken on the Feast of Booths) at the end of the year. On the way into the city where he wanted to look for one, he met a water carrier who wept and wailed because his only horse had perished. The rabbi gave him the money that had been saved for the holy purpose in order that he might buy another horse with it. And when he was asked whether it had not been hard for him to make such a sacrifice, he said, 'What difference does it make? All the world says the blessing over the etrog, and I say the blessing over the horse that has been bought!'"<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

In what specific ways might we as Adventists "personify justice" with greater clarity both within the circle of our own church and in relationship to the larger society?

## OPINION

Key text:  
Micah 6:8

**"Proclamation of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 is merely empty syllables sounding from hollow people unless the gospel's horizontal dimension is alive."**

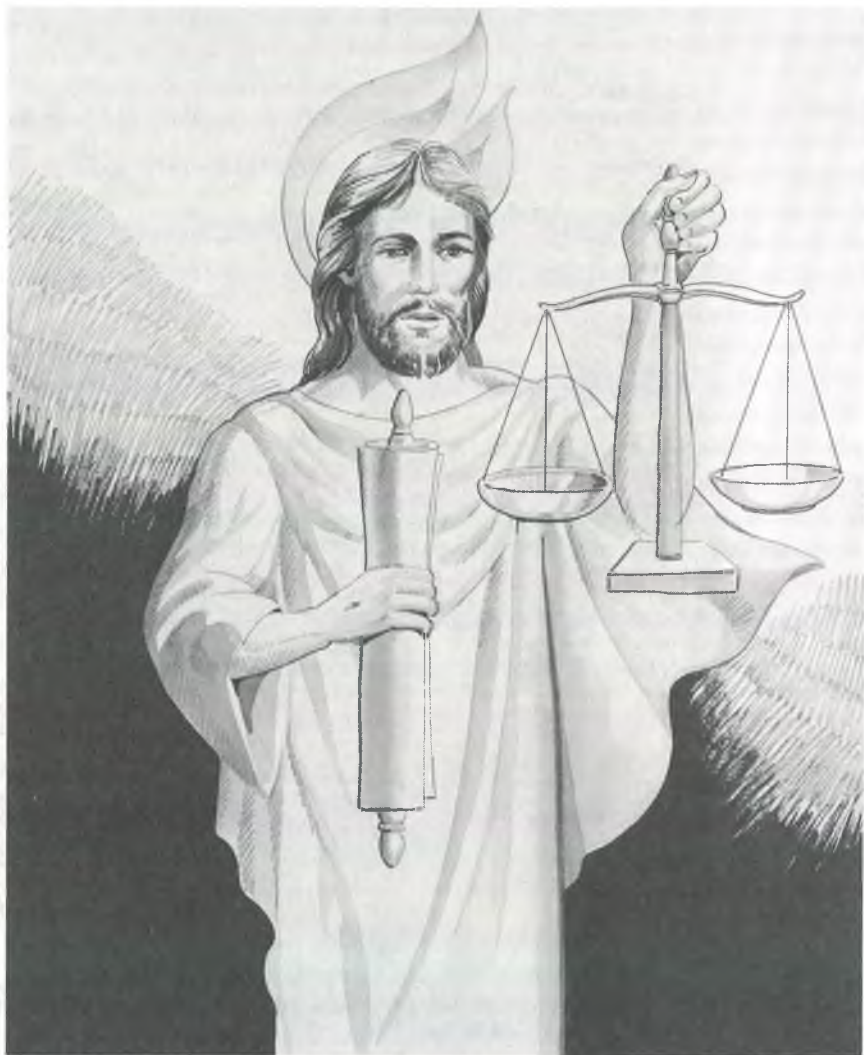
1. See Gal. 5:14 and Rom. 13:8-10.

2. Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man*, translated, edited and introduced by Maurice Friedman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 242.

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# A Scroll of Remembrance

“ ‘They will be mine,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him’ ” (Malachi 3:17, NIV).



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# “Whatever You Get, Get Insight”\*

by Dick Koobs

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Malachi 2:17—  
3:18

The opening and closing verses of this week's Scripture passage raise a crucial question: Why is it sometimes difficult to discriminate between the good and the evil person? Israel regarded people as good whom God saw as evil. Why were they confused?

Malachi begins his attempt to clarify the issue by pointing out that the coming Messiah would challenge the thinking of the people with regard to what is acceptable behavior, and bring judgment against evildoers. The prophet goes on to describe benevolence as a way for us to reform. Financial investment in the church indicates that God's unseen reality holds priority with us.

Those who were responsive to Malachi's message conferred with one another, evidently recognizing the need to share ideas and concepts as well as money. These are the people whom God honors by enrolling them in His family album.

But is this all it takes to gain eternal life—merely to talk about God? Could we do that and still be unable to discriminate between who is good and who is selfish? The emphasis in Malachi 3 on the ability to discern between good and bad rouses our suspicion that such discernment may

take more effort than is at first apparent. What significance should be placed on faith in making this kind of assessment? What about works?

And as we personalize the issue of what true goodness means, another series of questions present themselves. How analytical of our own behavior should we be? How careful are we about disadvantaging anyone by our choices? Can we tolerate living unselfishly forever? Is a strong commitment to the ethic of love necessary to preserve freedom for everyone? How important is this commitment for our lives now?

If God helps us to become loving individuals, is there a chance of failure even after requesting His assistance? We all have experienced serious failure, just as did Saul, the first king of Israel, and David. Why was David ultimately judged acceptable to God, although guilty of crimes as heinous as any Saul perpetrated? Given the ideal new earth society, why wouldn't Saul fit in as well as David? This week we shall seek a biblical perspective on understanding the difference between good and evil. We will explore the basis for God's judgment as well as the reasons for its accuracy.

\*Proverbs 4:7. RSV.

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# Messenger of Justice

**LOGOS** **Theme:** Though His justice now seems hidden, the Lord is coming to bring judgment against the rebellious and the oppressor, and to vindicate those who maintain their commitment to Him and are written in the scroll of remembrance.

## 1. Coming Judgment (read Mal. 2:17—3:5)

*"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty* (3:1, NIV).

In answer to the question, "Where is the God of justice?" Malachi declares that a time is coming when the Lord will appear to correct inequities. The distinctive feature of Malachi's eschatological prophecy is that it "involves two acts: first the coming of the messenger, to purify the temple cult and the priesthood (vs. 3) and, second, the coming of the Lord himself to his purified temple to judge his people according to their deserts. . . ."

"The purpose of the preliminary coming of the messenger is to purify the temple and its ministers in preparation for the full advent of God the judge. Quite in accordance with the ancient view, God is conceived of as a king and the temple is his palace (1 Kings 8:13). He cannot come until his house is set in order. His messenger will straighten out the abuses described in 1:6—2:9, and will restore the golden days of old, when worship was offered to God with dignity and sincerity of heart (2:6).

"When the temple has been cleansed and the house prepared for its Master, then God will come to set right the injustices which make men doubt his goodness. Here one sees that Malachi is no mere ritualist, in the sense of being preoccupied with cultic sins to the exclusion of sins against humanity. . . . He saw that contempt for the symbols of religion may be not a sign of spiritual emancipation, but the symptom of a profound contempt for religion and morality itself. But like the greatest of his predecessors, he regards sins against the social order as the sins with which God is most particularly concerned. In this list [v.5] only sorcery might be classed as a 'religious' sin (in the narrow sense); all the others are social, and the prophet lays chief emphasis on the wickedness of those who exploit the weak and the helpless. In the court which will be set up God will be both the judge and the principal witness, and the swiftness of his procedure then will make it plain that his apparent failure to act previously was not the result of impotence or indifference."<sup>1</sup>

The prophecy about the preparatory messenger met its initial fulfillment in John the Baptist. Today it calls forth a responsibility on the part of all those who claim the name "Christian." We are the messengers who prepare the way for the sudden coming of the Lord by urging all to get to know Him now so that they are ready to meet Him when He appears in the future.

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Since we are no longer living in the era of the temple and of Levites, what is the significance for us of Malachi's prophecy that the Lord will "come to His temple" and "purify the Levites"? (See also 1 Peter 2:4-10; 4:17.)

## 2. God's Desire to Bless (read Mal. 3:6-12)

"I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty" (3:6, NIV).

Any lover saying the words "return to me and I'll return to you" has never really left. The love has never dimmed and grown cold. It still burns with the same intensity, though wounded and hurt. How often has God made this call? How often, down through the ages has He pleaded with His people? How often has He given the invitation to you and me? Still, He is ever patient.

How does one answer the call? The same way any relationship is formed—by exercising trust. "Test me in this," says the Lord, "and see if I will not open the floodgates of heaven" (v. 10, NIV).

In pointing to the result of faithful giving, Malachi, like the wise man (Prov. 11:24, 25), Jesus (Luke 6:38), and Paul (2 Cor. 9:6), gives expression to the principle "that we reap what we sow, that those who in meanness withhold what they should give are themselves thereby inevitably impoverished, and that those who give abundantly are themselves thereby inevitably enriched."<sup>2</sup>

*If God owns "the cattle on a thousand hills," why does He need our tithe? Is the faithful tither guaranteed material prosperity?*

## 3. God's People Vindicated (read Mal. 3:13-18)

"They will be mine," says the Lord Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (3:17, 18, NIV).

Because God is so magnanimous and "ready to forgive," the temptation comes to postpone response to His overtures. This temptation can be particularly strong when it seems that being "wicked" has more advantages than being "good." The temptation is seldom as overt a form as "reject God and serve only yourself." It is much more likely to come in the form of a choice between dishonesty which will profit and honesty which will net a loss, or pressure to disguise momentarily one's Christianity for the sake of comfort. But for those who remain faithful, even in the minute details of life, there is a place in the scroll of remembrance, and the assurance that the Lord will make clear the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

E. R. M.

1. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 1137, 1138.  
2. Stephen Winward, *A Guide to the Prophets* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), pp. 222, 223.

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# Salvation— A Matter of Choice

by Dick Koobs

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
2 Peter 1:3-11

Failure to understand clearly the difference between good and bad behavior can lead to fatal self-deception:

"Many who profess to be Christians neglect the claims of God, and yet they do not feel that in this there is any wrong. They know that the blasphemer, the murderer, the adulterer, deserves punishment; but as for them, they enjoy the services of religion. They love to hear the gospel preached, and therefore they think themselves Christians. Though they have spent their lives in caring for themselves, they will be as much surprised as was the unfaithful servant in the parable to hear the sentence, 'Take the talent from him.'<sup>1</sup>

Failure to accept the human role in salvation is likewise perilous: "Many who excuse themselves from Christian effort plead their inability for the work. But did God make them so incapable? No, never. This inability has been produced by their . . . *deliberate choice*. Already, in their own characters, they are realizing the result of the sentence, 'Take the talent from him.' The continual misuse of their talents will effectually quench for them the Holy Spirit. . . . The sentence, 'Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness,' sets Heaven's seal to the *choice* which they themselves have made for eternity."<sup>2</sup>

"Enter the city of God, not as a culprit barely pardoned, but as a conqueror."

Writing in 1886 to the medical superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, Ellen White stresses our potential for succeeding in the Christian life:

"I have a most earnest desire that you shall enter the city of God, not as a *culprit barely pardoned*, but as a conqueror. . . . If you are true and humble and faithful in this life, you will be given an *abundant* entrance. Then the tree of life will be yours; for you will be a victor over sin; the city whose builder and maker is God will be your city. Let your imagination take hold upon things unseen. Let your thoughts be carried away to the evidences of the great love of God for you."<sup>3</sup>

In this testimony, Ellen White appears to be drawing on 2 Peter 1:4-11, where we are told that we may become partakers of the divine nature (v. 4). "For this reason," the apostle continues, "*make every effort* to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control . . . and . . . love. . . . Therefore . . . be the more zealous to confirm your call and election . . . so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom" (RSV, emphasis supplied).

These statements deny the mentality of the "sin-sick soul," the term William James, the father of psychology, used to describe some Christians. Why should we regard ourselves as worms, with no capacity for good? Eternal life seems not so much a gift as a choice.

## REACT

Do we become qualified for eternal life through the choices for good we make?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 365.
2. *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.
3. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 125, emphasis supplied.

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# A Choice for Change

by Dick Koobs

Malachi 3 declares that behavioral reform is necessary if the people of Israel are to relate properly to their Creator. Residing in the nature of man is the ability to make such reform. Recall that God told Cain he was capable of mastering his wrong impulses (Gen. 4:7).

Much of Christianity has de-emphasized the need for personal mastery of selfish behavior by appealing to Paul's rather strong statements that "no human being will be justified . . . by works of the law" and that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:20, 28).<sup>1</sup> However, these statements do not seem to follow from the premise Paul expresses earlier in the same letter: "He [God] will render to every man *according to his works*: to those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth . . . there will be wrath and fury" (2:6-8). He is emphatic that "it is not the *hearers* of the law who are righteous before God, but the *doers* of the law who will be justified" (2:13).

Further insight on faith and works can be gained by looking at the implications of the parable of the ten virgins. All were awaiting the Messiah's coming, but five proved unsuitable for life in the society of the new earth. Evidently a trait of character is needed that does not develop spontaneously by faith or by affiliating with those who turn out to be God's people. What were these five missing?

Two criminals were crucified with Christ. One said, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39). The other criminal rebuked him, pointing out that they were getting the just reward for their deeds but that Jesus was wrongly sentenced. He expressed faith in Jesus and was promised paradise. This incident illustrates that Paul was correct in saying that faith apart from works can save us, but such faith is not merely believing the Man on the cross to be Messiah. Both criminals believed that, but only one understood what living eternally demanded. He perceived that Messiah represented all that is good in man. He understood his choice included the willingness to be programmed for the new earth society.

The other criminal, like the five foolish virgins, failed to understand that. Dabbling in selfish behavior, as with drugs, leads to confusion in making moral choices, ultimately with irreversible consequences. The choice for eternal life is in reality the choice to conform to the ethic of love. In an evil world this requires a strong commitment to an unseen reality.

## EVIDENCE

**Key text:**  
**Romans 2:6-8,13**

**"His choice included the willingness to be programmed for the new earth society."**

1. All Scripture quotations from the RSV, emphasis supplied.

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# Setting the Mind and Practicing

by Dick Koobs

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Romans 7:21—  
8:8

In Romans 7, Paul speaks for most of us who find the choice to do right complicated by selfishness. He defines the dilemma by stating, "I . . . serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" (Rom. 7:25).<sup>1</sup> But he also makes clear what our responsibility is: "Those who live according to the flesh *set their minds* on things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit *set their minds* on the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5).

Paul does not here reveal the prescription for *how to set the mind* on the spiritual or unseen reality which is to characterize the society of the new earth.

We do find in Malachi 3, though, practical advice for reforming one's mindset given in understandable terms: "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse . . . and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not . . . pour down for you an overflowing blessing" (Mal. 3:10). Giving a portion of one's earnings is an objective way to practice benevolence. Investing in the church's ministry to mankind helps us set our minds on the unseen, spiritual reality. Through giving we can discover the fulfillment of God's promises.

Being unselfish requires practice just as much as learning music or gymnastics requires practice. Isn't it usually evident which performers have diligently prepared? And with their effort has come heightened enjoyment as well as the desire for more proficiency. The same is true for loving behavior—as we improve in our relationships, pleasure increases for others as well as ourselves, and we are motivated to even greater achievement.

Drug users, alcoholics, smokers and others who come to understand the endpoint of their habits may seek to change their behavior. They find the purifying process painful but rewarding. Some who fail to alter their behavior, however, have blamed God for not giving the help requested. If correct, their assessment would mean God is capricious in whom He may help. It would not then be possible for the judgment to be fair.

If God is involved in the "purifying" process, what can He do for us and still preserve our freedom of choice? He could help us to understand the difference between the kind of character we now have and what is required for preserving a free society. Are you interested enough to seek such understanding?

## REACT

Does God give people supernatural power to alter their behavior? Why do some who ask for power to overcome a habit succeed more quickly and easily than others who have also asked?

"Some who fail to alter their behavior have blamed God."

1. All Scripture quotations from the RSV, emphasis supplied.

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Dick Koobs is an associate professor of pathology at Loma Linda University.

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# Everyone Gets Their Choice

by Dick Koobs

How to become enrolled in God's book of remembrance—His family album—has been argued for centuries by Christians variably championing faith, works or some combination. One way to put this debate into perspective is to consider what must characterize the people forming a family that will remain free, interesting and secure forever.

To be truly free an individual must have an environment affording choices and the necessity for reaping the consequences of those choices. To make a choice but be denied its consequences is akin to slavery! A free society, therefore, cannot tolerate people who would, by their choices, disadvantage anyone else—that is, transgress the boundary of another's domain of choice. For every individual in the society of the new earth to be happy it is necessary that *no one* will *desire* to make a choice that disadvantages another in the slightest. God's kingdom can be free only if it is comprised of morally predictable beings, those who will always love others as themselves.

How is such a society selected from among human beings? God's judgment cannot be based on *belief* that is mere intellectual assent, or all of those who believe God exists and anticipate His advent should be saved. It is also evident that *performance* is not absolutely requisite—the criminal crucified with Christ was promised eternal life. And, to be fair and acceptable to those who *are lost*, the judgment cannot be perceived as arbitrary.

A judgment that is based solely on our choice embraces all of these conditions for fairness and validity. Justice requires that the judgment need do no more than confirm our choice. Such a judgment is not based on mere belief, nor on works nor is it arbitrary.

What if those who choose to be lost were given a second chance? Would they change their minds? I believe this will be a critical question for the saved, who are disappointed to find loved ones not with them.

The correctness of God's judgment is tested by the second resurrection, which is in a sense a second chance for the unsaved. John indicates these individuals will surround the camp of the saints, evidently to take it by force, and then will be destroyed (Rev. 20:7-10). Why would a loving God resurrect the wicked only to kill them again? Perhaps a demonstration for the saints is involved: the fact that the unsaved indeed got their choice is placed beyond doubt by the fact that they once again choose to defy God.

This week's study can be summarized in a simple question. Do you really think you can tolerate living unselfishly forever? It's your choice. Understand your desires with God's help and conform them to the program of love. This is the work necessary to establish your commitment and faith.

## REACT

Is the second resurrection a genuine second chance for those involved?

## OPINION

Key text:  
Deuteronomy  
30:19, 20

**"God's kingdom can be free only if it is comprised of morally predictable beings."**

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# The Greatest Day

“ ‘Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire. . . . But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings’ ” (Malachi 4:1, 2, NIV).



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# The Melting of the Elements

by Judson Klooster

In Malachi 4, God gives us a dramatic study in contrasts. First, we get a glimpse of "the day that shall burn as an oven" and then, assurance of God's care for His own. Peter described the same "Day of the Lord" as a time when the "earth and things that are therein shall be burned up" and "the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (see 2 Peter 3:8-13). Did you ever see a rock on fire? Could *stones* really *melt*? Anyone who's seen an active lava flow knows that rocks *can* melt—they can glow with incandescence like a light bulb, and can burn up to a powdery gray ash.

A pretty 18-year-old girl named Kaz looked up into a beautiful summer sky in 1945 and watched military planes flying high above her city, Hiroshima. She had seen them regularly, headed north for Tokyo and other targets. Her city had been untouched by the air war, even though it had a sizable military garrison. Kaz was not frightened by seeing the plane—she was born in California and felt some linkage with Americans, even though in some way they had become enemies of Japan. Kaz thought of these planes as "her American silver angels." And so she waved her hand toward the silvery bird she saw in the bright sky of that August morning, calling, "Hi, Angel!"

Then she saw a little white spot appear in the sky; it seemed insignificant, as if a

duck's feathers were floating down toward her. She thought it might be a parachute and wondered why the Americans would let anyone parachute over Japanese territory. Just then, her whole world exploded in a blinding flash of light and color—she was flung to the ground with such force that she broke off two front teeth and was knocked unconscious.

Crew members flying in this plane saw that brilliant flash, and felt a series of shock waves which almost caused their plane to go out of control. They looked for anti-aircraft fire to account for these shock waves, but saw no little white puffs of smoke from anti-aircraft batteries. As was customary, their plane turned for another pass over the target area before flying back to their carrier, to assess the effectiveness of the bombing run. The city, Japan's eighth largest, was . . . *gone!* None of the crew members had ever seen such comprehensive devastation.

In 1945 the world got a new lesson in what it's like to have rocks, concrete and steel not only burn but *evaporate*. Man was given a preview of atomic power unleashed. The blinding intensity of the flash of light produced by nuclear fission and the absolute devastation which follows in its wake twice destroyed an entire city in a matter of seconds . . . but Malachi described that kind of scene for the *whole earth!*

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Malachi 4:1-6**

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# The Spirit and Power of Elijah

LOGOS

**Theme:** The arrogant and evildoers of the earth will be utterly destroyed at the coming day of the Lord, but prior to that day, the message of Elijah will go forth to prepare human hearts.

## 1. Contrasting Futures (read Malachi 4:1-3)

*"For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Mal. 4:2, NIV).*

Having declared that an unmistakable distinction is going to emerge between "those who serve God and those who do not" (3:16-18), Malachi now goes on to delineate the sharply contrasting futures of these two groups.

Though they had appeared invincible, the wicked will be incinerated by the heat of the awesome "Day of the Lord," and they will go as quickly as a raging fire consumes a pile of straw. The picture is one of complete annihilation for the wicked, not an eternal existence in the fires of hell.

On the other hand, for those who "revere the name of the Lord," who, in other words, are committed to Yahweh and what He stands for, the heat of the coming Day will not destroy but will be like the sun—a sun of righteousness that brings healing. In picturing the sun with its rays as wings, Malachi is probably drawing on the symbol of the winged sun disk which appears on many ancient Near Eastern monuments and often signifies protection and blessing.<sup>1</sup> It is a fitting symbol for the God who is not only the mighty King and Judge, but also the Healer of those who open their lives to Him (cf. Isa. 57:18, 19; Hos. 14:4). The Hebrew term for the healing conveyed by the sun of righteousness is not limited to physical healing, but comprises restoration, tranquility, and wholeness for one's entire being.

For Christians, the rising of the sun of righteousness is seen supremely in the person of Jesus Christ, from whom emanates the Light which brings life and healing to all people.

In the new era brought about by the Day of the Lord, His people, like calves released from the confinement of their stalls, are at last freed from the confinement of sin, suffering, and death, and they leap about in exuberant celebration of the unimpeded abundance of life they now enjoy.

Throughout history, God's faithful ones have been trampled and oppressed and have had to persevere patiently in their suffering. At the Day of the Lord, fortunes are reversed. The righteous trample the wicked, who are like ashes under their feet (v. 3)!

*Read and compare the following passages on the Day of the Lord: Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 2:1, 2, 28-32; Zeph. 2:1-13; Mark 13:24-26; Rev. 6:12-15. What are the characteristics of the "Day of the Lord"? How much information do these passages give us about the precise course of future events? How do you feel about the events described in these passages?*

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*In view of Mal. 4:3, is it unchristian to relish the downfall of evil persons? (See Josh. 10:24, 25 for a clue about the imagery Malachi is using.)*

*Why is arrogance or pride the only sin of those who will be judged that Malachi singles out?*

## **2. A Preparatory Message (read Mal. 4:4-6)**

*"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the children to their fathers'" (4:5, 6 NIV).*

Before executing His judgment, God pulls out every stop to communicate His message of redemptive love and prepare as many as are willing for salvation. The central themes revealed in the past both through the Law (v. 4) and the Prophets (vv. 5, 6) are renewed and presented with special power (cf. Joel 2:28-32; Rev. 14:6-12) before "that great and dreadful day of the Lord."

Fidelity to the law of God is a crucial identifying mark of those who have chosen to serve God and are preparing to meet Him. But something much deeper than outward conformity to a legal code is needed. Hearts must be given a new orientation—away from fear, selfishness and rebellion, and toward trust, love and commitment.

The proclamation of this heart-transforming message is personified by Elijah the prophet. Elijah had been a powerful catalyst to bring Israel to the point of decision about life's most fundamental issue, the issue on which all else turns—to be for or against God (1 Kings 18:21).

Prior to God's decisive intervention in human history, He sent another spiritual catalyst, John the Baptist, to prepare the way for the Christ (Mark 1:2; cf. Mal. 3:1). Though John denied being Elijah himself (John 1:21), he came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17) and did the work Malachi foretold. Not only did his ministry bring the spirit of reconciliation between parents and children, but it brought many in Israel "back to the Lord their God," and turned "the disobedient to the wisdom of righteousness—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:16, 17 NIV).

John the Baptist was not the complete fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, however, for though the last things have been inaugurated in Jesus Christ, they have yet to be consummated—the Day of the Lord remains in the future. Before that awesome day, the everlasting gospel must be proclaimed with unprecedented clarity and power (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6), and in that final manifestation of the spirit and power of Elijah, we are invited to participate.

*What can we learn from the lives of Elijah and John the Baptist about what it means for us to bear the prophetic witness in our own time? Check the following passages for some ideas: 1 Kings 18:16-21, 36-38; 21:17-21; Matt. 11:7-15; Luke 1:15-17, 76-80; 3:1-20; John 1:29; 3:26-30.*

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1. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 1142, 1143 and Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 250.

# Does God Destroy?

Compiled by David R. Larson

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Ezekiel 33:11

"God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves; to reap that which they have sown."<sup>1</sup>

"The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death."<sup>2</sup>

"God destroys no man. Every one who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. Every one who stifles the admonitions of conscience is sowing the seeds of unbelief, and these will produce a sure harvest."<sup>3</sup>

"No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. 'Man turns from God, not God from him.' Our heavenly Father follows us with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests with the sinner. By resisting the Spirit of God today, he prepares the way for a second resistance of light when it comes with mightier power. Thus he passes on from one stage of resistance to another, until at last the light will fail to impress, and he will cease to respond in any measure to the Spirit of God."<sup>4</sup>

"Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love."<sup>5</sup>

"This [the perishing of the wicked] is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of his mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is 'alienated from the life of God.' Christ says, 'All they that hate Me love death.' Eph. 4:18; Prov. 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them."<sup>6</sup>

"If we will  
not accept His  
grace, what  
more can  
He do?"

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 36.
2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 235.
3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 84.
4. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 93.
5. *Steps to Christ*, p. 34.
6. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 764.

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# Dues and Don'ts in Malachi

by David R. Larson

Dismal, dreary, disappointing, and disillusioning. Such were the days of Malachi ("messenger of Yahweh"). The nation was a vassal of Persia, hardly the pinnacle of power and prestige anticipated by those who had returned from Babylon almost a century earlier. The land, hard and rocky, was always sparing but cruelly stingy when there was no rain. Injustice, adultery, fraud, perjury, oppression and violence were common. Lacking public respect because of their own obvious struggles, the clergy repeated old rituals without feeling or conviction. But worst of all, those who cheated won, those who stole prospered, and those who deceived convinced. And Yahweh didn't do a thing.

Malachi's oracle challenged the pious to take courage and comfort from the eventual dues that will be paid by those who don't treat others as they would be treated themselves. The arrogant and evil will burn like stubble, and the wicked will be ashes under one's feet, he proclaimed, but the righteous will sprint and leap like escaping calves. When that day comes, it will be easy to distinguish saint from sinner.

This oracle instructs us today insofar as it points toward the destruction evil persons will surely experience. But we should understand more clearly than did Malachi that this ruin will be more of a consequence than a punishment. There are rewards and there are rewards, as C. S. Lewis reportedly said. Some are intrinsic (like knowledge gained from hard study) and some are extrinsic (like the grade a teacher gives). God is not the extrinsic cause for an evil person's destruction. Such persons destroy themselves. Because evil is so very self-destructive, there is no need for vengeful retribution, divine or otherwise. We violate the great moral patterns of the universe at our own peril, not because God is waiting to chastise us but because it is fundamentally impossible for living beings to choose death without dying. Even God cannot make it otherwise.

This is why it is empty to suggest that even the most basic moral principles are nothing more than arbitrary customs. In this perspective the inherent awfulness of sin becomes clearer, and the mistaken notions of God's wrath that abound are corrected. But most important, this interpretation says that God can be trusted even when he lets evil persons have their own way. And that was Malachi's point in the first place.

## REACT

1. Is God ever, in any sense, the active agent in punishing evil? (Compare Isa. 13:6-13; Eze. 33:11; Luke 13:34, 35; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:9; Rev. 11:18; 20:9.)

2. How would you compare Malachi's time with our own? How would you apply his message in chapter 4 to today's world?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Luke 13:34, 35

**"Those who cheated won, those who stole prospered, and those who deceived convinced."**

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# Malachi's Therapy

by Judson Klooster

## HOW TO Key text: Malachi 4

In considering the relevance of Malachi 4 for life today, the following key terms emerge: shock therapy, satisfaction, reassurance, admonition, and promise.

**Shock Therapy.** Malachi's vivid description of the final holocaust shocks us into facing the reality that the future holds. His point is not that our behavior should be godly *because* we might be punished by this holocaust, but rather to give us a view of the future—a "world view"—which assures us that things will come out best for those who follow God's recommended pattern of life. That pattern offers us more peace in this life and a confident hope for the life to come.

**Satisfaction.** Though his description of the holocaust is fearsome, the prophet also points to satisfaction in seeing sin destroyed—it will be eradicated "root and branch." *Root* refers to Satan, *branch* refers to the societal structure resulting from his leadership. Have you ever been angry with some criminal who escaped punishment? Or a promotional schemer who got away with bilking people out of millions of dollars without appropriate punishment? Or a child molester that was not punished because of some legal technicality? On that day, by God's power, all these accounts will be settled, and you don't have to do *anything* to assure this ultimate justice.

In verse three, Malachi says we'll be *free* . . . free from vindictive thoughts or personal outrage at wrongdoers, free from the burdens of our own sins or the sins of others. We can be free *now* from anxieties about social conditions, knowing that God will eradicate sin, reestablish real justice, eliminate social inequities and redevelop the perfection of a divinely designed societal structure. We can abandon our concerns over factors we cannot control, remembering that He is in charge of *everything!* We need not carry the "burdens of the world," since God is in charge. We can focus our attention on those tasks He has given us to do and realize His power in addressing those tasks (John 1:12).

**Reassurance.** "But for you that fear My Name," He says, "the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its rays" (see v. 2). Though you're aware of the destruction of sin, *you will go free!* What kind of asbestos suit does it take to be safe from this kind of conflagration—from nuclear demolition of the *world?* An asbestos suit would just evaporate! Even a concrete bomb shelter with walls 16 feet thick might just evaporate like the buildings did in Hiroshima. But *your* God and mine says that all you need to do is to respect His power, and you will be entirely safe—"free" from the conflagration.

What about Malachi's descriptive ability? Like ours, it was limited to his own experience and observation; after all, *he'd* never seen a city destroyed by nuclear annihilation!

Not only will we walk comfortably through the ashes of that desolation (v. 3), Malachi promises us that we will "go out as calves from the stall" or "go free, leaping with joy, as calves let out to pasture,"

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as the Living Bible puts it (v. 2). This agrarian metaphor reassures us with the promise of genuine personal growth. We need not be discouraged by inadequacies in our development thus far—flaws of personality, tendencies to pettiness, temptations to dishonesty, etc. The promise of God's power (John 1:12, again!) for Christian growth is indeed an exciting reassurance. No one needs to be discontent with his or her present status or accomplishments. The inspiring prospect of growth, enhanced by God's nurture and cultivating power, can brighten our lives, even under any adverse conditions.

A sense of the constant presence of God and His loving concern can help us cope with the tough spots of each day's challenge.

Have you struggled, as I have, with the "little sins" of careless vocabulary, impatience, negative labeling of others, and a multitude of other personal flaws? To live with the continual sense of God's presence is an abundant resource helping me to cope with these troublesome flaws in the Christian life I *want* to live.

**Promise.** Malachi closes his prophecy with the promise of "another prophet like Elijah," whose "preaching will bring fathers and children together again, to be of one mind and heart" (see vv. 5, 6). John the Baptist gave the "Elijah message" prior to the public ministry of Christ, proclaiming, "Repent, publicans and sinners; repent, Pharisees and Sadducees, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

As people who believe in and eagerly expect Christ's soon return, we likewise have a very specific message, "Prepare to meet thy God." It is a message of personal inspiration and confidence, not one of fear and foreboding. What a magnificent privilege it is for us to be the instruments God has chosen to represent His character to the world, for us to have the promise of His power in living our lives for Him, and to have all of the joys and fulfillment that are the natural products of the lifestyle God has recommended to members of His family.

## REACT

Does knowing that God ultimately will deal with injustice mean that we don't have to worry about societal problems now?

# Choosing the Kingdom Agenda

an interview with Tom Sine

## OPINION

Key text:  
John 12:24

*The message of Malachi focuses our attention on the coming of the Lord to establish His kingdom, and how we should live in light of that coming. In the following interview,<sup>1</sup> Tom Sine, author of the award-winning book *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, talks about how expectation of the coming kingdom should affect the lives of ordinary people today. His thoughts provide a worthwhile conclusion to our quarter's study on the call to commitment.*

*What were your primary purposes in writing *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*?*

My primary purpose was simply to remind people of what the Bible teaches—that God works through the insignificant and the ordinary mustard seeds of this world to change the world. God is in the business of changing His world, and He works through ordinary people with ordinary lives to make sometimes a remarkable difference. The basic thing I want to get across is that, as we face the challenges of tomorrow's world, God can make a much greater difference through our lives than most of us allow ourselves to even consider.

I think this is particularly true for college-age young people. They're at a threshold time, when they have a much broader range of opportunities than some of us who are older and either are locked in or perceive ourselves to be locked in, and don't feel like we can take risks anymore. Young people have tremendous opportunity to take risks in considering how they can invest their lives much more fully in working for the kingdom of God. That has to do with lifestyle decisions, non-traditional vocational decisions, Christian community decisions—just creative ways that they can use their lives on a much more comprehensive scale to make a kingdom difference.

**“God is in the business of changing His world through ordinary people.”**

*How do you go about finding those alternatives and intelligently making those kinds of decisions?*

When I work on college campuses, and I do that quite a bit, I say, half facetiously, that the number one game on Christian college campuses everywhere is a game called “Finding the ideal, perfectly desirable, private little god for my life.” That game typically begins with the questions “What do I want and what will God let me have?” What do I want in a job, spouse, house, lifestyle, etc.? And then we go into this negotiating process with God that we euphemistically call prayer. “Oh God, let me have this, if I could just get this job then I will be able to get the apartment and the Porsche, and oh, she's lovely and if I could get her too that would make it almost ideal.” We go into this whole process of trying to get all the things that we want, getting all of our little ducks in a row. And the last question that's asked, if it's asked at all, is the question of Christian vocation.

I don't think you can find the will of God that way. I think that the only way we can really discover God's will for our lives is to begin with the kingdom question. Not, what do I want and what will God let me have? but, what does God want? What is God doing in

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history to change this world, to bring righteousness, justice, peace to a desperately needy world? How does God want to use my life and gifts to be a part of what He's doing? So instead of being the last question, the issue of Christian vocation needs to be the first question, if we're really serious about finding God's will for our lives.

*If everyone started with those questions, it sounds like we'd all want a job with the church.*

Let me respond with an example. Janet was a student of mine at Seattle Pacific who graduated last January. At graduation, I said, "What are you going to do, Janet?"

She said, "I'm going to work with refugees in a project we were told about in a class."

I said, "Well, Janet, that's a marvelous project. But you know as well as I do that they don't have any money to pay you."

And she said, "I know that. It's God's ministry vocation in my life, and I'm going to find a way to do it."

I saw her a few months later, and asked, "What are you doing?"

She said, "I'm working on the refugee project."

"How did you manage that?" I asked.

And she replied, "Well, I moved into a Christian commune and got a job cleaning houses on the side so that I could do my ministry vocation."

Increasingly, our Christian colleges are going to have to learn there is not enough money in the body of Christ or indeed in the state and civic organizations to pay everyone to be a servant for the kingdom. We are going to need increasing numbers of people like Janet who find another way to support themselves in a "tentmaking" occupation so that they can fulfill their ministry vocation. I'm not suggesting everyone do that. There are some occupations that are indeed working for the kingdom agenda.

But first of all, we should help every young person in light of their gifts, abilities, and interests, to discover how God wants to use them in ministry, whether it winds up being four hours a week, 10 hours a week, 20 hours a week, or 40-50 hours a week.

And then they can make other life decisions about where to live and who to marry, in light of God's vocation call in their lives. It makes no sense to marry somebody who's going to live in Pasadena, California, if God's called you to be a missionary in Africa. It makes no sense to buy a house in the suburbs if God is calling you to minister in the inner city. And that's why I say so strongly that I think we have an obligation to help college-age persons, whether they have gone to college or not, to discover God's ministry vocation—the way that God wants to use their lives to make a kingdom difference. And then work back from that and see whether there are ways to get paid to do it or whether they have to do it on a tentmaking basis.

**"The only way we can really discover God's will for our lives is to begin with the kingdom question."**

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*You have some fairly harsh words for the "American dream" and*

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*the affluent lifestyle that it entails. Are you saying affluence is wrong?*

What I am saying is nothing new. It's very clearly said in the Gospels, in the epistle of James and throughout the New Testament as well as the Old. And that is that God is concerned about the poor, God is concerned about justice; and in light of that fact, we as American Christians need to reevaluate our commitment to the American dream. I say this is because the values of the American dream are, in many points, diametrically opposed to what I understand to be the values of the kingdom. The values of the American dream have to do with looking out for number one. It's highly materialistic, individualistic.

While God is deeply concerned about our material well-being, it's clear in both the Old and New Testaments that that is within the context of justice for all peoples. Right now, we're living in a terribly unjust world. We're living in a world in which 800 million people with whom we share the planet live in absolute poverty. That means their annual income is less than \$90 per person per year. Their children are suffering from malnutrition; they die prematurely. Those in this category of absolute poverty lose about half of their children. Families are dying from diseases which are usually treatable. So many are completely illiterate. There is just no decency at all to this kind of existence. People are in brutalizing conditions.

And what David Barrett, who wrote the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, has helped us to discover, is that 195 million people, almost a quarter of the people who live in absolute poverty in this world, are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Now, I submit to you that we as Christians in America, who live so very, very affluently, need to ask ourselves if our theology of stewardship is adequate in a world in which 195 million of our brothers and sisters are starving to death while we're living relatively palatial lives.

So, what I'm arguing for is a commitment by Christians to the biblical agenda of the kingdom of God instead of the cultural agenda in the American dream, which tells us the way that we help the poor is to consume more so that benefits will trickle down to them. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches we're not to seek life for ourselves, we're not to look out for number one, we're to be a corn of wheat that falls into the earth and dies. We're not supposed to be ministered to but to minister. So the prosperity gospel is the gospel of Ben Franklin, but it is not the gospel of Jesus.

God does want us to live on a level of decency in our physical lives. He would love to bless us, but not just American Christians. He wants that for all the people of the world and all of our brothers and sisters of Christ. And that's not happening.

Part of the reason why folks overseas are dying, Christian and non-Christian alike, is because Christians in America and other parts of the world are consuming more than their fair share of the world's resources. We're only 5 percent of the world's people, but

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**"The call of Jesus Christ is to put the kingdom at the very center of life and then orchestrate everything else around it."**



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we're using over 40 percent of the world's resources. And we Christians spend 97 percent of our income on ourselves. The tragic thing about this is that the gospel is not reaching the world. The job of total evangelism, especially in the backward areas, is not being accomplished. And of the mere 3 percent that gets into our churches, less than 5 percent gets out into any kind of ministry—evangelism or social action.

In that kind of world I think it's time that we repudiate our commitment to the American dream, reclaim our commitment to the biblical kingdom and become, as Christ was, people for others. Not out of duty or sacrifice but out of opportunity.

Out of opportunity we can join in the adventure and celebration of what God has been doing to change this world. I've seen young people do that, having discovered that the American dream is a fraud. It's not the better way of life. It's a real burnout. People dying 10 years earlier than they should from "Type A" lifestyles. People strung-out in suburbs on Valium and alcohol, trying to make it through. How much one can consume in one lifetime has nothing to do with happiness. We're not primarily economic beings. We're primarily spiritual and relational beings made in the image of our God.

*Shifting to a more theological area, you've pointed out that belief in Jesus' soon coming sometimes tends to squelch the impulse to really get involved in the world and try to change it. Do you think that is inevitable among people who expect an imminent return of Jesus?*

I don't think it's so much the belief that Jesus is coming soon as the accompanying teachings that have been around since the turn of the century that everything has got to get worse and worse. The belief that everything has to get worse and worse has led a number of Christians of all different kinds of backgrounds, Adventist and others, to unconsciously start to believe in the impotence of the church and even in the impotence of God. That is not only a tragedy, but a heresy, because we're called to be salt, light and leaven.

What I'm concerned about is this kind of incredible, historical determinism where everything inevitably, irreconcilably has got to get worse and worse, and there's nothing that can get any better. Things become very twisted because people view disasters, like the massacres in the Middle East, with joy. I've actually heard Christians say, "Oh, isn't that wonderful! That means Jesus' coming is that much closer." So they see desperate human tragedies with a sense of jubilation, not with a sense of calling and responsibility for us to be involved and care. That is terribly twisted.

I think we have been asking the wrong question of the Scriptures quite often. Too often evangelicals have been asking the timetable question. Is this the time? We play this great American guessing game and try to outguess one another as to the date and time. We're spending too much time on the timetable and the signs and not nearly enough time on the kingdom itself.

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**"The values of the American dream are, in many points, diametrically opposed to the values of the kingdom."**

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Material in Scripture on the future of God is not primarily predictive; it's primarily ethical. So I think we need to focus on God's intention for history in order to be clear as to what our ethical kingdom responsibility is. God's intention and agenda are very clear in both the Old and New Testaments. He intends to bring into being a new heaven and a new earth—a new age of righteousness in which there is no sin, in which injustice and oppression will forever end. The instruments of warfare will be transformed into instruments of peace in this age of reconciliation, of love, and restoration of creation. The blind will see, the deaf will hear. That's the imagery of the coming kingdom. That is not to deny for a minute that we're getting closer to judgment, that we're going to experience some white water out there.

**“We work for the kingdom in small ways right now in anticipation of the day when Christ returns.”**

What I do dispute is the idea that the kingdom of God is exclusively on the other side of the apocalypse. That simply isn't biblical. I think the Bible teaches the kingdom is both present and coming, both now and in the future. We are called to work on God's agenda in history with all of our lives, not pessimistically, not fatalistically. Though there are some things that are indeed getting worse, there are also many things that are getting better. And we need to realize that God's kingdom is breaking in and we can be a part of the light, leaven and yeast of God. By the power of the Spirit of God, we can accomplish much greater things than we ever imagined.

It is not that we bring in the kingdom of God. But we work for the kingdom in small ways right now in anticipation of the day when Christ returns and the kingdom breaks out in its fullness. I just call people who are committed to celebrating the return of Christ to realize the importance of the kingdom in righteousness, justice and peace. It really can make a difference.

## **REACT**

1. What, in your setting, do you see as the practical implications of putting the kingdom at the center of life?

2. Would greater involvement in efforts to change the world detract from the Adventist mission of preparing people for Christ's return?

1. Excerpted from  
“Choosing the Kingdom  
Agenda,” *College People*,  
October 1984, pp.  
14-19.

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## ***Next Quarter's Lessons***

# **VISIONS OF THE KINGDOM**

Studies in the Book of Daniel

For readers who have not yet received a copy of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY for first quarter, 1987, here is a summary of the first three lessons.

### **Lesson 1: SPOKESMAN FOR GOD**

*Scripture:* Heb. 1:1, 2; Ex. 7:1; Jer. 1:9; Amos 3:7; Deut. 13:1-5; 2 Chron. 20:20; 1 Thess. 5:19-21.

*Theme:* God communicates to His people through prophets such as Daniel, who proclaim His will for the present and His intention for the future.

### **Lesson 2: GETTING THE GREATER WISDOM**

*Scripture:* Daniel 1

*Theme:* God's people experience His judgment in the exile, but Daniel remains faithful in the foreign environment and thus becomes an instrument through which God would communicate hope and guidance to His people.

### **Lesson 3: KINGDOM OF THE STONE**

*Scripture:* Daniel 2

*Theme:* Through a dream given to King Nebuchadnezzar and the interpretation given to Daniel, God reveals Himself to be the only true source of understanding about the future. The dream reveals that though a succession of idolatrous empires will have their day, the God of heaven will one day set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

To order your personal copy of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, see the information on page 2.

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# Sharon Cole is working up an intellectual sweat.



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Meet Dave Tan, director of physical medicine and a registered physical therapist at Porter Memorial Hospital in Denver.

"A physical therapist has to stay in touch with his patients. The therapist's hands are instruments to relieve pain and restore health. Through touch I impart an understanding of my patient's hurt and frustration with disability.

"It's more than a physical ministry, however. My role is to guide patients toward independence. With each patient there is always a choice between waiting for things to get better or working to achieve a specific goal. I take the time to explain what we can accomplish together because it truly is a joint effort and it makes a difference when there is trust. To be a physical therapist you have to have lots of patience because you're working with people who are not feeling well. They may complain because they hurt. My reward is the satisfaction of seeing a disabled person move toward increased independence and a more fulfilling life."

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