

***Good Word* Schedule**
“Revival and Reformation”
July, August, September 2013

- | | | |
|-----|---------|--|
| #1 | July 06 | Revival: Our Great Need |
| #2 | July 13 | Prayer: The Heartbeat of Revival |
| #3 | July 20 | The Word: The Foundation of Revival |
| #4 | July 27 | Witness and Service: The Fruit of Revival |
| #5 | Aug 03 | Obedience: The Fruit of Revival |
| #6 | Aug 10 | Confession and Repentance: The Conditions of Revival |
| #7 | Aug 17 | Unity: The Bond of Revival |
| #8 | Aug 24 | Discernment: The Safeguard of Revival |
| #9 | Aug 31 | Reformation: The Outgrowth of Revival |
| #10 | Sept 07 | Reformation: The Willingness to Grow and Change |
| #11 | Sept 14 | Reformation: Thinking New Thoughts |
| #12 | Sept 21 | Reformation: Healing Broken Relationships |
| #13 | Sept 28 | The Promised Revival: God’s Mission Completed. |

Guests for this series of GOOD WORD broadcasts are Dave Thomas, Dean of the WWU School of Theology and Darold Bigger, Professor of Religion and Assistant to the President at WWU. Moderator, host, and study guide author is Alden Thompson, also a member of the WWU School of Theology.

For more information about GOOD WORD contact the School of Theology at Walla Walla University by phone (509-527-2194), fax (509-527-2945), email (GoodWord@wallawalla.edu) or regular mail (Walla Walla University, 204 S. College Ave., College Place WA 99324).

Past and present GOOD WORD and PROBE broadcasts are available from our website at www.wallawalla.edu/goodword. GOOD WORD is jointly sponsored by the School of Theology and KGTS at Walla Walla University.

Theme: Revival: Our Great Need

Leading Question: Which is more likely to spark a revival, thumping those who need it, or celebrating those who are already experiencing it?

1. Coming down hard on the Laodiceans. In the letter to the Laodiceans (Rev. 13:14-15), John the Revelator is rather pointed with the Laodiceans. Now Laodicea was only one of the seven churches. Were the other churches better off spiritually? What made the difference?

Note: In early Adventism, our forebears claimed the high road of the Philadelphian experience as their own, while pointing to the lukewarm Protestants as the Laodiceans. Some twelve years after the Disappointment, however, in 1856, James White dropped a bombshell in *The Review and Herald*: Adventists are not the Philadelphians, but the lukewarm Laodiceans!

In his *Tell It to the World*, Mervyn Maxwell includes this comment about the results of that article. “With a subscription list below 2000, the *Review* received more than 300 letters over the next few months, thanking Elder White for speaking out and expressing humility and rededication. A genuine revival began and many victories were achieved.” – *Tell It to the World* (Pacific Press, 1976, 1977), p. 149.

2. The Unpleasant Discipline of the Lord. In Hebrews 12:7-13, the theme of discipline is the focal point. “Hardship is discipline from the Lord.” “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

How can we know that our hardship is from the Lord and not from the devil or from our own foolish choices? Or does it make any difference?

The last two verses in this section take a different approach, an admonition to remove as much of the “discipline” as possible for those who are struggling: “Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ‘Make level paths for your feet,’ so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.” The NIV note indicates that the “level path” line comes from Proverb 4:26 where the original passage suggests self-improvement. But in Hebrews, the admonition is in the context of making life easier for the lame.

Is this a place where one could apply the “cruel kindness” quote from Ellen White?

I inquired if this tide of woe could not be prevented and something be done to save the youth of this generation from the ruin which threatens them. I was shown that one great cause of the existing deplorable state of things is that parents do not feel under obligation to bring up their children to conform to physical law. Mothers love their children with an

idolatrous love and indulge their appetite when they know that it will injure their health and thereby bring upon them disease and unhappiness. This cruel kindness is manifested to a great extent in the present generation. The desires of children are gratified at the expense of health and happy tempers because it is easier for the mother, for the time being, to gratify them than to withhold that for which they clamor. {3T 141.1}

An important corrective for those who are pre-occupied with the hard discipline of the Lord, is the buoyant passage from Paul to the Thessalonian believers where he told them make it their ambition “to lead a quiet life.” “You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” – 1 Thess. 4:11-12, NIV

3. The foolish virgins who were left behind. In Matthew 25:1-13 is Jesus’ parable of the 10 virgins, five of which were ready, but five were not. From a pastoral point of view, what would likely be the effect of simply reading this parable to a church that is in need of revival and reformation?

Theme: Prayer: The Heartbeat of Revival

Leading Question: In the context of our desire for revival and reformation, what is the role of prayer?

In terms of teaching us how to pray, Scripture is remarkably thin. Luke 11:1 records the disciples' request to Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray." But Luke's version which follows is incredibly brief, hardly a manual on prayer:

2 When you pray, say: "Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
3 Give us each day our daily bread.
4 Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation."

There's not a squeak about revival and reformation. And if we survey the actual prayers in Scripture, i.e. the psalms, nearly half of them are complaints. But here are several New Testament passages on prayer that can instruct us:

Matt. 6:7-8. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointedly says that the Father knows what we need before we ask him. So why ask? Presumably because of what it does to us or for us.

Luke 11:5-13. Even though Jesus says that the Father knows all our needs before we ask him, he still was emphatic that we should be tenacious in our praying. The midnight visitor keeps pestering his "friend" until he gets what he wants: "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need" (vs.8, NIV).

Luke 18:1-8. In the parable of the unjust judge, the moral is the same as in the parable of the tenacious friend. In fact, in the preamble to the parable, Luke says the point of the parable is "to show them that they should always pray and not give up."

Luke 18:9-14. The parable of the Pharisee and poor man highlights the great danger of "confident" prayer. The Pharisee thanked God that he wasn't in need like the poor man; the poor man simply prayed that God would be merciful to him a sinner. The latter prayer was the one that Jesus commended.

Acts 1:12-14. In the upper room, the disciples and a number of the women "were constantly

devoting themselves to prayer.” The day of Pentecost followed with thousands of conversions.

Phil. 4:4-7. Paul gives us another example of exuberant prayer: “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God,” (vs. 6. NRSV). The result of this kind of prayer? “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (vs. 7, NRSV).

Modern writers may help us identify the danger of the wrong kind of prayer or no prayer at all. Ellen White wrote,

Those who do not learn every day in the school of Christ, who do not spend much time in earnest prayer, are not fit to handle the work of God in any of its branches, for if they do, human depravity will surely overcome them and they will lift up their souls unto vanity. – TM 169

On the eve of the nearly catastrophic 1901 General Conference, Ellen White urged the delegates: “Let every one of you go home, not to chat, chat, chat, but to pray. Go home and pray. Talk with God. Go home and plead with God to mold and fashion you after the divine similitude.” – GCB, April 3, 1901 par. 37

The result? Ellen White was euphoric:

“During the General Conference, the Lord wrought mightily for His people. Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately steppings of the Lord our Redeemer. We praise his holy name; for He has brought deliverance to His people. – *Review and Herald*, 26 November 1901, 761.

Finally, two quotations on prayer from C. S. Lewis. One is “The Apologist’s Evening Prayer,” from *Poems* (1964), p. 129; cited in Chad Walsh, *The Visionary Christian*, p. 30:

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.

Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.

The other C. S. Lewis quotation forms the conclusion of his essay, “The Efficacy of Prayer” in his collection of essays, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, 3-11:

Prayer is not a machine. It is not magic. It is not advice offered to God. Our act, when we pray, must not, any more than all our other acts, be separated from the continuous act of God Himself, in which alone all finite causes operate.

It would be even worse to think of those who get what they pray for as a sort of court favorites, people who have influence with the throne. The refused prayer of Christ in Gethsemane is answer enough to that. And I dare not leave out the hard saying which I once heard from an experienced Christian: “I have seen many striking answers to prayer and more than one that I thought miraculous. But they usually come at the beginning: before conversion, or soon after it. As the Christian life proceeds, they tend to be rarer. The refusals, too, are not only more frequent; they become more unmistakable, more emphatic.”

Does God then forsake just those who serve Him best? Well, He who served Him best of all said, near His tortured death, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” When God becomes man, that Man, of all others, is least comforted by God, at His greatest need. There is a mystery here which, even if I had the power, I might not have the courage to explore. Meanwhile, little people like you and me, if our prayers are sometimes granted, beyond all hope and probability, had better not draw hasty conclusions to our own advantage. If we were stronger, we might be less tenderly treated. If we were braver, we might be sent, with far less help, to defend far more desperate posts in the great battle. – WLN 10-11

In sum, when we most certain that God is on our side, we may be most vulnerable to arrogance and thus we can actually undermine the whole purpose of prayer.

Theme: The Word: The Foundation of Revival

Leading Question: If one turns to the Word of God to find the “how” of reformation and revival, where would we turn?

As we noted in last week’s study, the Bible gives us very little by way of a “how-to” manual for prayer. Similarly, it hardly provides us with a “how-to” manual for revival and reformation. But what it does provide are some marvelous examples. Here we will focus on three of those: 1) Hezekiah’s reform (2 Chronicles 29-31); 2) Josiah’s reform (2 Chron. 34-35); and 3) the Day of Pentecost in the days of Peter (Acts 2).

But first we should note that it would probably be wise to reduce our expectations of revival. None of the three great “sample” revivals lasted long. In short, God’s people have never had their act together for more than a few minutes at a time. John Wesley, who led out in the great Methodist revival of the 1700s, made this sobering observation:

“I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches. How then is it possible that Methodism, that is, a religion of the heart, though it flourishes now as a green bay tree, should continue in this state? For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently they increase in goods. Hence they proportionately increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. So, although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away. Is there no way to prevent this--this continual decay of pure religion? We ought not to prevent people from being diligent and frugal; we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich.” – John Wesley, cited by Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Scribner edition (1958), p. 175, citing Southey, *Life of Wesley*, ch. xxix (second American edition, II, p. 308).

Now to our three revivals.

It may be worth noting that none of the three great “revivalists” in our sample stories were devout, stable, multigenerational believers. Hezekiah’s father, King Ahaz, was a wicked idolater; the same was true of Josiah’s father, Amon, who only ruled 2 years but was known only for his great wickedness. And Peter was a converted fisherman. He had only followed Jesus for three years: **Question: Should we maybe expect less “experience” among those who lead out in revivals?**

1. Hezekiah's Passover. The story is only told in Chronicles – a book that is very keen on religious revivals because the temple in its day was so puny (see Ezra 3-4). Note these marks of the revival:

a) It was unexpected, especially given the history of his family. Immediately, in his first month of his first year he opened and repaired the gates of the temple that had been closed (2 Chron. 29:3).

b) Substitutes stepped in when the “leaders” were not ready. In this case, there weren't enough priests to handle all the sacrifices, so their relatives, the Levites, stepped in until the priests had properly purified themselves. Scripture is candid: “the Levites were more conscientious than the priests in sanctifying themselves” (29:34).

c) A good heart trumped the rules. As the people streamed toward Jerusalem to keep the Passover, many were not properly sanctified. But the Lord heard the cry of their heart:

30:18 For a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the passover otherwise than as prescribed. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, “The good Lord pardon all 19 who set their hearts to seek God, the Lord the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness.” 20 The Lord heard Hezekiah, and healed the people.

d) Thanksgiving doubled the blessing. The people were so excited by the renewal of worship that they agreed to keep the festival for another week. The Chronicler adds his own exuberant comment: 30:26 “There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.”

2. Josiah's Revival and Passover (621 BC). Some 100 years after Hezekiah, Josiah's reform reveals how a reform can disappear almost without a trace. In just 100 years Israel had fallen a long ways, and the slow road back is illustrated in 2 Chron. 34. Hezekiah had opened the doors of the temple right at the first of his reign. But here is Josiah's record:

8 years old – began his reign

16 years old – began to seek the LORD – who was his God during those 8 years?

20 years old – began to clean out the idols in Jerusalem – not until 4 years of Bible study?

26 years old – began to muck out the temple and the workmen found a copy of law

The king was horrified as he heard the words of the law – probably the book of Deuteronomy. He was hearing the law for the very first time!

When the prophetess Huldah was asked about the fate of the king and his kingdom (2 Chron. 34:22-28), she said that by his great revival he had postponed by one generation the destruction

of the kingdom, a destruction promised in the book of Deuteronomy.

Josiah responded with a call to re-commitment by the people and he held a passover that apparently rivaled or surpassed that of Hezekiah, 100 years before, at least the Chronicler couldn't resist this exuberant summary in 2 Chron. 35:17-19:

17 The people of Israel who were present kept the passover at that time, and the festival of unleavened bread seven days. 18 No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this passover was kept.

Does Scripture allow us to say that if Josiah's son had been as faithful as his father, the threatened destruction could have been postponed further? In the words of Ellen White, "The promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional" (Ms 4 1883, 1 SM 67, 1958). Jonah had learned that "truth" the hard way, even though he claimed that he already knew it – he just didn't like it! (cf. Jonah 4:2).

But in spite of good king Josiah, his reform, and his passover, he was killed in a foolish confrontation with Pharaoh Necho in 608 (see 2 Chron. 35:20-26). And the kingdom kept sliding away from God. The city Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by Babylon in 586, the "official" beginning of the Babylonian exile. In short, Josiah's reform did not last.

3. Peter and the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Two striking features are represented by the revival at Pentecost: First, its glorious climax, with 3000 being converted in a day (vs. 41). Second, its wildly erratic nature. By Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira die for telling lies. Yet the signs and wonders continue with "great numbers of both men and women" (vs. 14) being added to the church; the apostles were arrested and locked in prison by the authorities. But an angel unlocked the gate and told them to preach again in the temple which they did. They were warned and flogged but kept on preaching. Then in Acts 6, the community is torn apart again by internal disputes as the Hellenists complain that their widows were being neglected by the Hebrew Christians. That led to the selection of seven deacons and a further spreading of the Gospel. Acts 6:7 summarizes: "The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (NRSV).

Question: Is that what it takes to have a revival and a reform? If the Word of God is our guide, that's what we learn about revival and reformation.

Theme: Witness and Service: The Fruit of Revival

Leading Question: When we witness to the love of God, should we expect positive results, negative results, or is the result entirely unpredictable?

Under the heading of “fruit of revival,” the official Study Guide includes two lessons, one on witness and service, and one on obedience. In this lesson we will focus on witness and service.

In modern Christian circles, “witness” and “service” often are seen as separate activities. Witnessing in the religious sense is usually practiced by conservatives as they seek to win the world for their particular view of Christianity. With some notable exceptions (such as the evangelical action group, Sojourners), the emphasis on service is that of “liberal” Christians who seek to provide humanitarian aid to suffering humanity. A third area, concern for the earth and ecological needs, is most likely to be addressed in the modern world by secularists, those who believe we should save the world because it is the one we have to live in.

1. An Old Testament perspective. In the Old Testament, what Christians would call humanitarian aid was the primary calling of the good king. Ps. 72, for example, which sings the praises of a good king, these lines stand out:

- 1 Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king’s son.
- 2 May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.

- 4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

- 12 For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
- 13 He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
- 14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight. – Ps. 72, NRSV

Question: Is there any evidence in Scripture that Hezekiah and Josiah met those requirements?

Note: Both Hezekiah and Josiah were so concerned to reverse the effects of idolatry, that their emphasis was on religious reform, not humanitarian outreach. In Hezekiah’s case,

however, the reform did result in the priests and Levites receiving their portion of the tithe. The chief priest, Azariah, told the king, “Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty to spare; for the Lord has blessed his people, so that we have this great supply left over” (2 Chron. 31:10). And in that “religious” connection it is worth noting that in Psalm 82, where the gods of the other nations are called to account in judgment before the true God, the indictment focuses directly on human issues:

- 2 “How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked? Selah
- 3 Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
- 4 Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” – Ps. 82, NRSV

2. A New Testament perspective. In the revival of Acts 2, a mix of service and witness appear. The dominant emphasis is on witness since the apostles were so convinced that Jesus was the answer to all the world’s problems. These points are worth noting:

a) **Early Communism.** The early believers tried to take care of their own needs. They practiced a kind of early communism, holding all things in common and giving to those in need. Acts 4:34 states: “There was not a needy person among them” (NRSV). But the system was quickly overwhelmed with problems. The frightful Ananias and Sapphira event shocked everyone: “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things” (Acts 5:11, NRSV). In Acts 6, the Greek and Hebrew widows began accusing each other of unfairness, a charge that led to the appointment of the seven deacons, men who could both preach and serve, as seen by Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 and Philip’s ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. The rationale for the appointment of the deacons was so that the apostles wouldn’t have to “wait on tables” (6:2), the seven could take care of that; the apostles would devote themselves to “prayer and to serving the word” (6:4). But that distinction did not prevent two of the seven from becoming known as powerful speakers and/or Bible workers.

b) **Buoyant Witnessing.** The witnessing for Jesus was irrepressible and buoyant in the early chapters of Acts. But it often carried a sharp edge. Acts 2:46-47 could summarize the experience on a positive note: “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (NRSV).

c). **Deadly critique.** In Steven’s sermon in Acts 7, his sharp critique of Jewish rebellion proved deadly for him. This is not the ideal spoken of by Ellen White, words that “will reform, but not exasperate” (6T 122). His witness cost him his life, and it doesn’t take a sophisticated analysis of his sermon to discover why.

Steven's example of strident "religious witnessing" has too often been universalized and absolutized by Evangelical Christians, especially those of a Calvinist bent. An important corrective from Jesus, however, is his judgment story in Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats. Like the judgment scene in Ps. 82, Jesus' story focuses on serving human need. The sheep are commended for serving their Lord, and goats are condemned, not for any great and obvious evil, but for not helping those in need. The words to the sheep are worth quoting:

34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (NRSV)

It was this story that triggered a famous chapter in Ellen White's *Desire of Ages*, a chapter that tells us that the results of revival and reformation must be defined in terms of the results, and the results are measured in terms of human needs. These two paragraphs are crucial:

Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its decision as turning upon **one point**. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by **what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and suffering**. (*Desire of Ages*, 637)

Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have **known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles**. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have **cherished the spirit of kindness**; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. **Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish**. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God. (*Desire of Ages*, 638)

Theme: Obedience: the Fruit of Revival

Leading Question: How does the believer know if it is God’s voice that is asking him or her to do something?

The official Study Guide lists several biblical experiences which illustrate obedience or the lack of obedience. We can look at several of these and ask ourselves if the people involved *obviously* did the right or the wrong thing:

1. Peter at Jesus’ Trial: Matt. 26:69-75. Would anyone in their right mind say that Peter did the right thing when he denied knowing Jesus at Jesus’ trial? Here the form of obedience is clear.

2. Peter at Pentecost: Acts 5:28-32. After Pentecost, the authorities tried to stop the Apostles from preaching of the Gospel by putting them in prison. But “an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life” (5:20). Later Peter would tell them, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (5:29, NRSV). How did they know it was the angel of the Lord?

Some other prison examples are worth noting:

Peter in Acts 12. In Acts 12 we find the record that Herod killed James and imprisoned Peter. But in the night the angel of the Lord appeared to Peter and led him to safety, past several guards and through a gate that opened by itself. How would Peter know that it was the Lord who was leading him? All the guards were killed because of Peter’s escape.

Paul and Silas in Acts 16. When Paul and Silas ran into difficulty with the authorities at Philippi, they ended up in jail. In the night they were singing and praying when “Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened” (16:26, NRSV). When the jailer saw all the prisoners freed, he was ready to take his own life. But Paul and Silas reassured him, “We are all here.” By the time the night was over, the jailer and all his family had been won to Christ. Why didn’t Peter follow this method in Acts 12? In Philippi, no one lost their life and many were won for Christ.

3. Paul’s Conversion in Acts 9. Paul was thrown to the ground by a brilliant light. That was the moment of his conversion? How did he know that he should turn 180 degrees, following Jesus rather than persecuting Jesus’ followers?

4. Other examples: Did Daniel do it right and not Esther? How did Abraham know that it was God who commanded him to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22)? Even if we want to obey, the choice is

not always clear. Ellen White once commented to a brother about the difficulty of knowing how to respond faithfully to different people:

You need to educate yourself, that you may have wisdom to deal with minds. You should with some have compassion, making a difference, while others you may save with fear, pulling them out of the fire [Jude 22-23]. Our heavenly Father frequently leaves us in uncertainty in regard to our efforts. We are to sow beside all waters [Isa 32:20] not knowing which shall prosper, this or that [Eccl. 11:6]. We may stimulate our faith and energy from the Source of our strength, and lean with full and entire dependence upon Him. {3T 420.2}

Our problem is often in wanting to obey, but not knowing just how to do that. The contradictory proverbs (e.g. Prov. 26:4-5) illustrate the problem:

- 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.
5 Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes. (NIV)

The following chapter from *Beyond Common Ground* shows how this “uncertainty” can contribute in a positive way to our walk with God.

Alden Thompson, *Beyond Common Ground* (PPPA 2009)
Part II, Chapter 8
The Devotional Life

The Point: Diversity makes prayer more crucial but less visible.

Jesus says: “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” – Sermon on the Mount – Matt. 6:5-6, NRSV

Jesus says: “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” – Sermon on the Mount – Matt. 6:7-8, NRSV

The Bible says: “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” – Mark on Jesus’ prayer life – Mark 1:35, NRSV

She says: “Those who do not learn every day in the school of Christ, who do not spend much time in earnest prayer, are not fit to handle the work of God in any of its branches, for if they do, human depravity will surely overcome them and they will lift up their souls unto vanity.” – TM 169 (1892).

She says: “When men cease to depend upon men, when they make God their efficiency, then there will be more confidence manifested in one another. Our faith in God is altogether too feeble and our confidence in one another altogether too meager.” – TM 214 (1895).

They say: “I am certainly unfit to advise anyone else on the devotional life. My own rules are (1) To make sure that, wherever else they may be placed, the main prayers should *not* be put ‘last thing at night.’ (2) To avoid introspection in prayers – I mean not to watch one’s own mind to see if it is in the right frame, but always to turn the attention outwards to God. (3) Never, never to try to generate an emotion by will power. (4) To pray without words when I am able, but to fall back on words when tired or otherwise below par. With renewed thanks. Perhaps *you* will sometimes pray for *me*?” – C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Ursula Roberts, 31 July 1954, in *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 256.

This is an awkward chapter for me. The topic of prayer sets off several warning bells in my head. First, in at least two places, the Gospels warn of the dangers of advertising our prayer life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus bluntly advises a private prayer life behind closed doors (Matt. 6:5-6). And Jesus’ story of the Pharisee and the publican is hardly a ringing call to convene a prayer conference (Luke 18:9-14).

I have always been intrigued by the fact that the Gospels tell us almost nothing about Jesus’ own prayer life. Mark tells us that Jesus got up very early, went to a private place and prayed. But Mark doesn’t tell us anything about what actually happened when Jesus prayed. When the disciples asked Jesus to help them with their praying, “as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1-4), our Greek New Testament puts Jesus’ answer into a 39-word prayer. That’s all, hardly the stuff to take you through a full night of prayer. The similar prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is a bit longer: 57 words plus the later addition of the 15-word doxology.

Coming down to my own day, I remember the wry comment of Gordon Balharrie, Dean of the School of Theology when I enrolled at Walla Walla College as a first-year theology student. “Young theology students are sorely tempted to preach their first sermon on the topic of prayer,” he said. “Don’t do it. You don’t know enough about the topic to preach on it.”

Finally, I remember the comments of two devout young women who attended a prayer conference led by a well-known Evangelical. In the course of the conference the leader presumed to specify how much time one “should” spend in prayer each day. “I was making good progress in my prayer life – until I went to the conference,” one of girls told me. “The conference put my prayer life into reverse!”

All that almost adds up to a convincing argument *against* saying anything about prayer! But not quite. In fear and trembling, I do want to share a few insights that I have found

beneficial, ones that are directly connected with my discovery of the diversity in Scripture and in the church. To be quite candid, in my earlier years, my devotional life had been quite ordinary. I had been following the basic plan popularized by a number of speakers and writers, but linked most prominently in my memory with the name of Morris Venden. In short, I followed the Big Three of the devotional life: pray, study, and share.

The plan is a solid one. My problem was that for me it had been mostly external, a check list rather than an internalized process. Pray? Check. Study? Check. Share? – the toughest one... Check. I imagined God to be something like a giant Scout master with a chart. If I could tick off my Big Three for the day, God would be pleased and I could get on with life. I didn't want to admit it, but with that kind of external check-list approach I could miss my devotions and not even miss them. It was embarrassing, troubling, discouraging.

But when I began to realize the significance of the diversity in Scripture – matching the diversity in the church – a transformation was underway. I will simply lay out my conclusions under the heading of the three “conversation partners.”

Three Conversation Partners: Scripture, Reason, Holy Spirit

In my more traditional approach to prayer, my conversation partners in prayer found it easy to quarrel with each other, and for two reasons. First, if my reason told me that a particular passage of Scripture didn't apply to me, I felt guilty for rejecting the “authority” of Scripture in favor of my own reason. Second, I had been programmed as a child – probably as an adult, too – to turn to prayer as a last resort. Lost keys, for example? Turn the house upside down – exhausting all merely *human* resources – then pray. That's prayer as a last resort.

The new plan is revolutionary, peace loving. My conversation partners never quarrel anymore. Each has a clear-cut task to bring to the table and we work it through. It's a wonderful plan. Let me explain.

1. Scripture. Once I was able to say out loud that Scripture is more like a casebook than a codebook, then I could be perfectly honest with what Scripture can and cannot do. What came clear to me is the difference between a visit from a live prophet and a visit to the written record of the prophet's work in Scripture. A great gulf is fixed between the two. If a prophet were to confront me, for example, as Nathan did David with his bony finger and an announcement – “You are the man!” [See 2 Sam. 12:7, after David's sin with Bathsheba.] – how could I possibly claim that the prophetic message did not apply to me but should simply be added to the casebook? To quote an Old Testament exclamation: Such a thing is not done in Israel!

But when the confrontation is over and all we have is the written record, then the event does indeed simply become part of an expanded casebook. In David's case, of course, his guilt was clearly evident. There's absolutely no question about that. But where the casebook would come in – for Nathan, for example – is the question of how to deal with David. Heavy hand or gentle? Sermon, story, or straight rebuke? In our day, the question might revolve around email, voice mail, regular mail, or a personal visit. Which one and when? From among the cases open to him, Nathan chose to open with a parable of the rich man who stole the poor man's sheep.

So, to be perfectly blunt, Scripture can never tell me exactly what I should teach my students. The “cases” in Scripture can inform questions of content as well as questions of when and how. But nowhere in Scripture can I find a clear “Thus saith the Lord” to guide me in all my

decisions day by day. Nor will Scripture tell me what I should include in this book. It provides me with a host of examples. But the decisions do not simply jump from my Bible into the manuscript. And that brings me to the next conversation partner, Reason.

2. Reason. Several thoughtful voices have suggested that my approach to Scripture exalts reason over revelation. That is a serious matter, to be sure. But if Scripture does not “self-apply” in my daily life (as noted above), just how are applications made? The hard truth is that my head (or heart – I use the terms almost interchangeably) is the only part of my body suitable to the task. I cannot use my elbow, my chin, or my knee. I have to use my head.

But one of the “truths” that is abundantly clear in a host of passages throughout Scripture – could I say a host of “cases”? – is that my reason (heart) is suspect, seriously suspect. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” exclaims Jeremiah (Jer. 17:9, KJV). The NRSV says it is “devious” and “perverse.”

So what does one do with a deceitful, devious, wicked, and perverse heart?

Our only choice is to bring it to God, and plead, as David did, for cleansing and renewal. In Psalm 51, for example, the cries rise heavenward again and again: “Wash me.” “Cleanse me.” “Purge me.” “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:2, 7, 10).

My head, my heart, is the only part of me capable of evaluating and applying the cases I find in Scripture. Yet my heart is thoroughly incapable unless I come to God in brokenness and humility. The bitter truth of that necessity is vividly portrayed in these lines from W. H. Auden:

O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You must love your crooked neighbor
With your crooked heart.

– W. H. Auden, *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden*, via Roger Robbennolt in *Carnival Tales for Blind Ben See* (Leavenworth, KS: Forest of Peace Publishing, 1999), 111, 161.

A crooked heart is all I have. So I come to God for cleansing, for healing. Unless I do, I am in great danger of twisting Scripture, misusing it in my life and in the life of others, wreaking havoc wherever I might turn and greatly dishonoring my Savior. God’s spirit is quite capable of working through good people who do not even know him. [Paul suggests this kind of work by the Spirit in Romans 2:14 when he refers to “Gentiles, who do not possess the law,” yet who “do instinctively what the law requires.” That passage seems to lie behind Ellen White’s comment in connection with the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25: “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God” (DA 638).] But for those of us who claim to know him and claim to be acting on his behalf, the expectations are infinitely higher.

These stinging words from Ellen White are ones that I rarely share and for several reasons which you might surmise. But this is where they fit: “Those who do not learn every day in the school of Christ,” she says, “who do not spend much time in earnest prayer, are not fit to handle the work of God in any of its branches, for if they do, human depravity will surely overcome

them and they will lift up their souls unto vanity” (TM 169 [1892]).

And so we come to the third conversation partner, the Holy Spirit.

3. Holy Spirit, invited through prayer. The role of this third conversation partner is so easily misunderstood because of our tendency to use prayer as a last resort. After exhausting all human resources, we pray. I don’t want to diminish the value of urgent and even last-minute cries to God. They are thoroughly biblical and entirely appropriate in their place. But “emergency” prayer is not the same as “purifying” prayer, a concept that comes much closer to what I have in mind. Let me explain.

The purpose of bringing my crooked heart to God for cleansing or purification is so that my head (heart) might be in a better position to perceive God’s will in Scripture. Purifying prayer enables my mind, my reason, to fulfill its proper role in the three-cornered conversation. A purified heart is the only kind that has a half a chance of understanding and applying Scripture in accordance with God’s will. In emergency prayer, I usually throw up my hands and turn everything over to God, dropping out of the conversation completely. The “emergency prayer” approach might suggest that I simply open my Bible at random and expect the Spirit to let my finger fall on the right verse.

I suspect that purifying prayer is what Paul had in mind when he admonished the Thessalonian believers to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). When we are in a constant attitude of prayer we will be in a much better position to represent God’s character and will in our decisions. When it comes to our study of Scripture, “praying without ceasing” means that we will be using our heads more, thinking more, not less. Because we are in an attitude of prayer, God can guide our minds and hearts into proper attitudes and good applications.

In my conversations with other Christians I am constantly on the lookout for good metaphors to illustrate how prayer works in our lives. One friend suggested that we are like a radio playing God’s signal. I complained that a radio was too passive a model. Another friend suggested a control tower at an airport. That one works better, for it requires the “presence” of Someone in the tower, but also active decisions on the part of the pilot.

The metaphor I find most useful, however, is the Brita water filter or any kind of chemical filter across a moving stream. The idea of a water filter illustrates the difference between the life that is rooted in prayer and one that is not, for when we are not in communion with God, life goes on. We eat, sleep, talk, work, and play, regardless of whether we are in communion with God. But like the water flowing through a saturated filter that no longer filters, the life untouched by prayer keeps flowing; it simply is not purified by contact with the divine.

There is one other very “rational” part of this approach to prayer that I discovered when our two girls were young. On those relatively rare occasions when parental direction seemed necessary, I found myself saying, “Ask Jesus to help you.” Then I began wondering what I was expecting Jesus to do. Would he come with a giant 20cc syringe and inject some help?

I concluded that what would be most helpful for them – and for me, too, when I needed special help – was to ask for help and to *remember* asking for help. Somehow it is much more difficult to be nasty when I am actively praying for the other person’s good and *remembering* that I have prayed for that person’s good.

That same procedure applies when I come to Scripture with my crooked heart. If I can consistently remember that I am doing God’s work instead of my own, I will be using my mind, my heart, my reason, all the more, but under the purifying influence of God’s Spirit.

Does such an approach guarantee right answers? Not at all. Indeed, when Ellen White was counseling a brother to “educate” himself so that he would have “wisdom to deal with minds,” she concludes her counsel on a cautionary note: “Our heavenly Father frequently leaves us in uncertainty in regard to our efforts” (3T 420 [1875]).

The Results

To my grateful amazement, my devotional life has been greatly enriched by my knowledge of the diversity in Scripture and in the church. Instead of an external checklist, I now know that study and prayer is intrinsic to the life of the Christian. Only through study and prayer will I be able to address the needs that I will meet during the day. Every student, every class, is a call to prayer, a fresh situation that must be brought before the Lord. Devotions are no longer a chore. I rejoice that I have the privilege of being in touch with God as I seek to be his faithful witness.

It is also a joy to know that I don’t have to feel guilty about deciding which part of Scripture is appropriate for any particular person or situation. Nor do I have to “let go and let God” (whatever that might mean....). Instead of letting go, I hang on all the tighter, knowing that God expects me to be faithful in my witness for him.

To sum up, the Bible provides the cases, but never tells me what case I should use in any particular situation. My heart and mind must process the cases in order to make the proper application. But my crooked heart must constantly be brought in touch with God through prayer so that this deceitful chunk of humanity can be purified in God’s presence.

After I have done my homework, then I am ready to join my brothers and sisters to ponder the work of the church. If we have each done our personal work, then we will come together as the early Christians did in Acts 15. We will make important decisions when “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28).

Theme: Confession *and* Repentance: The Conditions of Revival

Leading Question: How should we consider confession and repentance: As duties or responsibilities? As requirements or conditions for salvation? Or as gifts of God?

What happens to one of God’s children who really wants to confess, repent, and to believe wholeheartedly, but seems to fall short? Where does the fault lie? Several passages of Scripture can help us.

1. **Repentance is a gift of God: Acts 5:31.** I remember how surprised I was as a young Christian when I was reading the chapter, “Repentance” in Ellen White’s *Steps to Christ*. For it was in that chapter that I discovered Acts 5:31. She quoted it. Repentance is not something we do, it is a gift of God!

2. **Grace before law – a powerful motivator: Rom. 5:6-11.** The traditional understanding evangelical of the grace/law pairing is that law condemns and grace saves. But from another perspective we can see that grace comes before law, a reminder that we can’t save ourselves; only God can do that. And when we see it in that light, then even law can be seen as good news – as it is throughout the OT. Psalm 119 is an entire psalm that sings the praises of Torah, law! The principle of grace before law is illustrated in God’s dealings with Israel. God lead Israel out of Egypt with virtually no cooperation on her part. She was resisting all the way. But the deliverance at the Red Sea convinced Israel of God’s grace and then she would see Sinai as also a gracious gift from a gracious God (cf. Deut. 4:5-8).

The most magnificent text that puts grace before law is in the New Testament, in Romans 5. Three times, Paul puts the divine initiative first: while we were “still weak” (vs. 6), while we were “still sinners” (vs. 8) “while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (vs. 10). While we were still shaking the fist in God’s face, Christ died for us. When an awareness of that grace touches my soul, my “favorite” sins somehow seem so much less inviting.

3. **“I believe, help my unbelief”:** **Mark 9:24.** The desperate father of the epileptic boy cried out the Jesus a prayer than any of us can pray. It is the starting point, a cry to help us in our unbelief.

4. **If we confess, he forgives: 1 John 1:9.** This is one of the most famous of New Testament salvation passages. If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteous.” What if we worry that our confession is not sincere? Then back to Mark 9: “help my unbelief.

5. **No condemnation in Christ.** It is very important to move beyond the chaos of Romans 7 to

the assurance in the first verse of Romans 8: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Whatever our shortcomings, he has them covered.

An insightful quote from C. S. Lewis concludes his preface to *Mere Christianity*. It helps bridge the gap between Christianity in general and Christianity in particular, and encourages believers to be specific with their needs, their requests, their prayers:

I hope no reader will suppose that “mere” Christianity is here put forward as an alternative to the creeds of the existing communions – as if a man could adopt it in preference to Congregationalism or Greek Orthodoxy or anything else. It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose the worst of the rooms (whichever that may be) is, I think, preferable. It is true that some people find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise. But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light: and, of course, even in the hall, you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be “Do I like that kind of service?” but “Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?”

When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules common to the whole house. – C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Preface #15-16 (pp. 11-12, McMillan edition)

Theme: Unity: The Bond of Revival

Leading Question: Since diversity and change are two of the most difficult issues for devout conservatives to address, how can the church find unity without significant conflict?

Our study guide for this week focuses on three passages of Scripture, all of which have a direct bearing on the question of unity: Galatians 5:13-26, the fruit of the spirit passage; 1 Corinthians 1, 3, 12, the book that best illustrates theological diversity; and Acts 15, the chapter that shows the church at work, in something very much like a General Conference setting, negotiating diversity from within.

1. Life-style Issues: Galatians 5:13-26 (Fruit of the Spirit). This New Testament passage suggests that our real issue in church unity is quarrelsome envy of each other. That comes clear at the end. But all the key elements are worth noting. The language is from the NRSV.

- a) God's call to freedom means being slaves to one another through love (vs. 13).
- b) To love your neighbor as yourself sums up the whole law (vs. 14).
- c) The alternative to love? Biting and devouring one another to the point of being totally consumed (vs. 15).
- d) Live by the Spirit and don't feed the flesh. Indeed the flesh and spirit are at war with each other to prevent us from doing what we actually want (vs. 16).
- e) Living by the Spirit means that we are not subject to the law (vs. 17).
- f) Sexual, life-style, and religious issues are among the works of the flesh, but interpersonal issues dominate: enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy. Those who do these things won't inherit the kingdom (vss. 19-21).
- g) The fruit of the spirit presents a notable ideal: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (vss. 22-23).
- h) Those belonging to Jesus crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (vs. 24).
- i) If we live by the Spirit, we'll be guided by the Spirit; we will not be conceited, competing against one another, envying one another (vss 25-26).

2. Diversity Issues: 1 Corinthians 1, 3, 12. While 1 Corinthians was a tumultuous church, that very fact makes it a rich resource for illustrating the diversity of the church. The saints at Corinth were choosing up sides behind their favorite preacher: Peter, Paul, or Apollos. This leads Paul to illustrate diversity in a variety of ways: an agricultural model (“I planted, Apollos watered,” 3:6, NRSV); the model of a building with its various materials (3:10-15), and most extensive, the model of the human body with its various parts illustrating the parts of the body of Christ in chapter 12.

Perhaps most interesting, however, is the way the book lends itself as a way of illustrating the three dominant strands of Adventist theology: the “you can do it” perfectionists (Peter), the “you can’t do it, Jesus does it for you” evangelicals (Paul), and “do the best you can” Johannine Adventists. At the end of this lesson, a chapter from *Beyond Common Ground* develops this model further. Another shorter piece illustrates the same thing, but more fully within the framework of a single book, 1 John. That was a surprising truth I discovered in our Sabbath School discussion of 1 John. I watched as different members of the class landed on their favorite verses and held to them quite tenaciously. The fact that they are all present in the same book should be instructive for us.

3. Church governance issues: Acts 15. This chapter is an important one for addressing issues of church governance/polity. But in a more subtle way it also illustrates how the church deals with change. First, let’s consider issues of church polity. It is fascinating to see if Acts 15 comes close to any one of these classic forms:

- a) Hierarchical, authoritarian rule of the bishops
- b) Presbyterian, representative rule of the elders
- c) Congregational, independent rule of the local congregation.

In the end a new prohibition is introduced, the exclusion of food offered to idols and an old requirement, circumcision, becomes optional. In our day, no one worries seriously about either – unless one happens to live in parts of Africa where both circumcision and the prohibition of food offered to idols are still seen as valid by faithful Adventists.

The crucial verse in Acts 15 is one that introduces the revised list of prohibitions in a letter sent out to the churches: “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us that....” (Acts 15:32, NRSV). That echoes the kind of polity taught by Jesus when James and John asked for top places in the kingdom. Jesus’ response is a classic:

Matthew 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NIV).

Alden Thompson, *Beyond Common Ground* (PPPA 2009)

Part 6, Chapter 20

The Adventist Church at Corinth

[Based on Sabbath sermon preached at the Walla Walla College Church on December 9, 1989]

The Bible says: “It has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:11-13, NRSV).

The Bible says: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Cor. 3:5-7, NRSV).

Whenever the church desires status in the world, worries about “looking good” before our upscale friends, plans for attractive new buildings that are properly “representative,” then the sporadic scandals, the inevitable antics of human beings who are members of the church cause us acute embarrassment. We cry out to ourselves, if not to each other, O that our church could always look nice so that nice people would want to belong!

That’s when it is particularly helpful to turn to Scripture and remind ourselves that God’s people seldom have had their act together for more than a few minutes at a time. Dip your finger into Scripture anywhere and ask the question: How were God’s people doing? Whether from Old Testament or New the answer is likely to be grim.

That could be discouraging. But in a strange back-door sort of way, discovering that all God’s people have their troubles, even the ones we thought were perfect, actually can be encouraging. I still vividly remember an occasion in the School of Theology when one of our senior colleagues whom we all admired, was not just late for a departmental appointment, he plumb forgot. He was never late. Students were not late to his classes nor did they turn in late papers. On-time was always the word. I think the rest of us were a bit startled at our almost unrestrained glee when he slipped. The proof was in! He was human just like the rest of us! It was not an angry, so-there, I-told-you-so kind of reaction. Rather, a certain sense of relief that swept over us, bonding us even closer to a colleague we had long revered.

When I leaf through the psalms, I discover a record of unrelenting trouble. And I wonder why we memorized only the nice things when we were kids: “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:11-12, KJV). “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Ps. 34:7, KJV).

But just as prominent in the Psalms, if not more so, is the solemn cry: “Thou didst leave me in the lurch, Lord.” Why did we not memorize more words like these: “Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea my soul and my belly. For

my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed” (Ps. 31:9-10, KJV). Or from another psalm: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent” (Ps. 22:1-2, KJV). That was not just Jesus’ prayer, it was the prayer of a real, live, struggling saint in the Old Testament. To be sure, the Psalmists almost always move on to faith. But they do spend a chunk of time talking about their troubles.

And isn’t that more typical of our lives? Think of the people close to you, your family and friends. Think of this past week, this past month, this past year. Do you not see more than enough pain, sorrow, uncertainty, and discouragement?

Given this seething cauldron of a world in which we find ourselves, the church is God’s gift to us, a community where we may find help, healing, and understanding. Yet is it not curious that this healing community is the source of so much strife?

Maybe it is because we see the church as the guarantor of truth. And, of course, we are easily convinced that *our* view of truth is the one the church must preserve and we act accordingly. Though we are drawn by the presence of the divine, all too often we are driven away by the presence of the human. It is easy to hurt others in the name of the truth.

But if our community is a troubled one, God has given us the story of other troubled communities from which we can learn. One of the most instructive for us, I believe, is the church at Corinth.

Drawing its membership from people with a very checkered background, the Corinthian church was checkered still. Paul reminded the saints that not many of them had been wise, powerful, or of noble birth when God had called them (1 Cor. 1:26). He ticks off a list of violent offenders against God and the human race, adding, “And such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11). But he goes on to say: “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

Washed and sanctified? Not completely. Judging by Paul’s correspondence, the Corinthians believers still were struggling with just about every category of sin known to humankind. Perhaps most alarming of all, they were choosing up sides behind their favorite preachers.

And yet, right at that point, Paul and the church at Corinth have something important to tell us, for the three favorite preachers at Corinth – Paul, Peter (Cephas), and Apollos – can serve as convenient types of three different perspectives in Adventism, three different ways of relating to God and world. These same three perspectives can be found in Christianity in general, but they have come to stand out rather vividly in Adventism in recent years because charismatic spokespersons for each tradition have wanted to say, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

Paul, however, wants to argue that each of the three traditions, each of the three preachers, has a proper place in the church. You can’t just choose one. You need all three. The church as the body of Christ or as the temple of God can only be complete when all three parts are there. That is the point of this chapter.

Now I must caution you that I am taking some liberties with the text of 1 Corinthians, a risky thing to do in the presence of numerous competent New Testament scholars. But since the New Testament is that part of the Bible that tells us most clearly about the priesthood of all the believers (cf. Peter 2:5, 9), perhaps they will allow an Old Testament student to tread carefully

upon their sacred turf.

So let us focus on some important sections of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Here Paul identifies the three key spokespersons: Peter, Apollos, and himself. Later in the same letter he comments briefly on Apollos, but says nothing further about Peter. So if we are to use these three names as "types" of three different perspectives, we will have to fill in the picture from elsewhere in the New Testament. Actually, if we were to identify the three perspectives by means of their favorite New Testament literature, we would put Peter with Matthew and James, Apollos with John. More about that below. But first we must look more carefully at the chapter in which Paul describes the relationship between himself and Apollos and how each serves the larger church in a particular way.

1 Corinthians 3. Earlier in this book (chapter 15), several "pictures" from 1 Corinthians 3 were noted under the heading of "Biblical Pluralism." Chapter 3 begins with a food model: milk is for babies, solid food for adults (1 Cor. 3:1-2). Any congregation is likely to have both.

The next picture is agricultural: Paul sows, Apollos waters, but God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6-9). In short, the work assignments are different.

The next picture is a building that uses different materials, all of which are important for God's "temple," the church (1 Cor. 3:9-17).

In 1 Corinthians 12 yet another picture, the human body, illustrates the diversity of gifts within the church.

All these contribute to our understanding of a robust biblical pluralism. For my purposes, the truly crucial verses are 3:5-7 where Paul describes himself as the one who sows and Apollos as the one who waters. In other words, Paul is the front-line evangelist, Apollos is the pastor/nurturer. The language of 1 Cor. 3:16-17 drives home Paul's argument. "All of you are God's temple," he argues. "God will destroy anyone who destroys his temple and you" – he tells the Corinthians – "are that temple." In other words, if you drive out Paul, Peter, or Apollos from the church – any one of the three – and thereby weaken the church, you are in deep trouble with God. The temple of God needs all three to be strong and whole.

But now let's live dangerously and make the application to the Adventist church. I could mention a goodly number of prominent Adventists in each category. That would make for more interesting reading. But I have resisted the temptation. In very brief form, however, the following characterizations of what it means to "obey" can get us started:

Peter & Co. say that you *must* obey and *can* obey. The perfectionist element is strong here.

Paul & Co. say you must try to obey, but you never really can. Jesus pays the price for you. Grace and substitution are particularly strong here.

Apollos & Co. say the important thing is to try. Love is what matters and the heart is won by a picture of the Father's love.

We can flesh the picture out a bit more:

Peter is optimistic, practical, and tends to think in concrete terms rather than abstract. He likes Proverbs in the Old Testament, Matthew and James in the new. Peter tells us to make a list of what needs to be done and then do it. Peter can claim to be a perfectionist because he has reduced the claims of perfection to a list of things to do and a list of things not to do. Action, not motive, is what counts.

Paul is much more pessimistic, at least about human nature, and much more introspective and sensitive to that simmering cauldron of emotions that shapes our lives. The crucial letters here are Romans and Galatians. Life is more complex for Paul. He tries his best and still cries out: “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” – “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25, NRSV). Paul can’t do it; he is absolutely dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ. God is the great judge of all; before that Great Judge, Jesus stands in Paul’s place, the substitute.

Apollos is optimistic, inquisitive, philosophically oriented, and is especially attracted to the Gospel of John. For Apollos, God is gentle and understanding, more a father than a judge. And Jesus is not so much the sacrifice which satisfies the demands of holiness up there, as God’s message of love to us down here. “He who has seen me has seen the Father,” said Jesus (John 14:8, NRSV). That nurtures Apollos’ heart and soul.

Another way of characterizing the three positions would be to say that **Peter** is theocentric – human reason is not so important as obedience to a divine command. **Paul** is not only theocentric, he is Christocentric. Obedience to a divine command is still terribly important, but it happens in Christ Jesus. Human wisdom, human effort is suspect. God is everything and He gives it all to us in Christ Jesus. **Apollos** is more anthropocentric. For him it is important to understand the *truth* about God. Human beings are not so much wretched worms waiting to be saved as they are jewels just waiting to be polished.

But now let’s cast all this into a teaching model. The goal in each instance is to effect obedience and reunion with God. How would Peter, Paul and Apollos go about the task of teaching?

Let’s imagine each of them as the piano teacher for a ten-year old boy. The task: Play a Mozart Concerto:

Peter: Peter as a teacher is happy if the student has no memory lapses and gets the notes right. “Perfect!” he exclaims. But he can only speak of perfection because the standard is a limited one. He does not expect a ten-year old to reflect all the fine nuances of great music. The danger is that the student may never even attempt to reach the higher standard.

Paul: Paul as a teacher is a very sensitive musician. “This is great music,” he says. “But you can’t possibly master it. Here, I’ll play it for you.” The substitute takes over. Great music is produced by a master and the student is captivated. But the danger is that the student may never seriously attempt to bridge the gulf between his own abilities and those of the master.

Apollos: Apollos as a teacher is especially concerned that the student’s efforts be rewarded. “Good job!” he says, when the student tries hard – regardless of how rough the music might sound. The student feels encouraged. But the danger is that he will mistake effort for mastery.

Note the weaknesses of each: With Peter, the student can view as mastery something that actually is less than mastery. With Paul, the student can allow another to attain mastery instead of attempting it himself. With Apollos, the student may be content to allow effort and good intentions to replace mastery.

A master teacher will incorporate the best of all three elements. I well remember sitting in on a music lesson when one of my daughters was just beginning with a new cello teacher. I was absolutely intrigued as I watched this master teacher blend the best from all three worlds: You can do it! (Peter). There is an awesome standard beyond your reach! (Paul). You did your best,

that's good! (Apollos).

Most Adventists can and do profit from all three perspectives. But our failure to be careful Bible students, distinguishing between the three emphases, makes us very vulnerable if a particular spokesperson for one of the three strands becomes too forthright or too narrow in public statements.

The differences in people and the differences in our relationship with God at different times in our life will often determine which emphasis is most helpful at any particular point. Three key aspects from Adventist life and lore can help to illustrate the differences:

Sin: For Peter, sin consists of deeds; a list of things to do and not to do. Paul sees sin more as a twisted nature, a distortion at the very heart of man. Apollos simply sees sin as flawed intention, a lack of love.

Mediator: How does each of the three relate to that troublesome statement from the pen of Ellen White that we “are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator” (GC 425 [1888, 1911])? Both Peter and Paul would see the absence of a mediator as a threat. For Peter, however, the threat can be overcome by perfect obedience. Paul would not know how to interpret such a statement, for he sees Christ as the essential mediator between God and man. Apollos (John) sees the absence of a mediator as a promise, not a threat, a promise of a time when we will know God so well that we will come into his presence without fear.

For me, John's view of the mediator came as a precious insight while I was a ministerial student in the Adventist Seminary at Andrews University. I was asking why I needed a mediator if the Father loved me. So I embarked on a study of the biblical concept of mediation and discovered John 14-17. In particular, John 16:26-27 records Jesus' statement: “On that day you will ask in my name. I do *not* [emphasis mine] say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”

The reason for the fundamental difference between Paul and John is that the setting in which each views the mediator is quite different. For John, the Mediator represents the Father to humankind. For Paul, the Mediator is humankind's representative before the Father. John's view makes more sense in the setting of a family; Paul's view makes more sense in the setting of a courtroom. Both concepts are thoroughly biblical, though some believers will be drawn to one picture more than the other.

Pride: Each of the three traditions is quite capable of reflecting the essence of sin, namely, a wrongful and exclusive pride. The followers of Peter are tempted to claim, “We are the historic Adventists, the only true Adventists.” The followers of Paul are tempted to claim, “We are the only ones who preach the true Gospel.” And the followers of Apollos are tempted to claim, “We are the only ones who really understand the truth about God.” In short, each of the three positions is equally vulnerable to the sinful exaltation of self.

My own insights in this matter have come by a long and circuitous route, and my thinking has been sharpened by controversy in the church. When Desmond Ford declared that there was “no biblical way of proving the investigative judgment,” I was upset with him. The investigative judgment, as I understood it, had become an important part of my theology. So I decided to search out the roots of my understanding of the doctrine. To my amazement, I discovered that my view was based on the later writings of Ellen White and was not found at all in her earlier works. Ultimately, my research led to the publication of the Sinai-Golgotha series in the *Adventist*

Review in 1981-82. [“From Sinai to Golgotha,” *Adventist Review*, 3 December 1981, 4-6 (#1 of 5); “One Law, Two Mountains,” *Adventist Review*, 10 December 1981, 8-10 (#2 of 5); “The Story of a Pilgrimage,” *Adventist Review*, 17 December 1981, 7-10 (#3 of 5); “Ellen White’s Pilgrimage to Golgotha,” *Adventist Review*, 24 December 1981, 7-9 (#4 of 5); “The Theology of Ellen White: The Great Controversy Story,” *Adventist Review*, 31 December 1981, 12-13 (#5 of 5); “Even the Investigative Judgment Can Be Good News,” *Westwind* (Walla Walla College Alumni Journal), Winter 1982: 4-7, 11 (addendum to AR series); “The Prodigal Son Revisited,” *Adventist Review*, 1 July 1982, 7-11 (sequel to AR series). An electronic copy of the full series is available on the author’s web site: www.aldenthompson.com/writings/semi-popular-and-popular-publications .] In short, I traced how Ellen White's perspective on God shifted from an emphasis on the power of God and external motivation, to an emphasis on the goodness of God, and internal motivation.

In that connection, in the initial version of the study which I presented at the West Coast Religion Teachers Conference at PUC in the Spring of 1980, I gave the distinct impression that Ellen White was moving away from one perspective of the Atonement, a price paid heavenward, toward the other perspective, a message sent earthward. I would now have to say that she was adding the second perspective (Apollos, John), while refining the first (Paul). But right at the end of that presentation, my teaching colleague, Jon Dybdahl, raised a question that set me to thinking.

“What do I say to a student,” he asked, “who says that he has a hard time worshipping a God who insists that human beings stand before the whole universe as a witness to God’s goodness? The student told me that he finds it much easier to worship a God who simply gives us salvation as a gift. What do I say to such a student?”

I sensed that I had come close to something very important to Jon. I asked him if we could talk. We did – for two hours, two precious hours. As we shared, Jon described how the message of Christ’s death on his behalf had transformed his life when he was in mission service in Thailand. I described how I had been blessed at the Seminary by John’s message of the incarnate Mediator.

Just prior to my conversations with Dybdahl I had finished reading a book by Robert Brinsmead [Robert D. Brinsmead, *Judged by the Gospel: A Review of Adventism* (Fallbrook CA: Verdict Publications, 1980).] In terms of the typology suggested here, the Australian Robert Brinsmead moved through all three strands in Adventism. First, he was an angry perfectionist; second, he was an angry anti-perfectionist and a supporter of a substitutionary theology; third, he was an angry opponent of substitutionary theology; fourth – and presently – he is none of the above, no longer a believer. in which he had imposed Paul’s courtroom setting on the Gospel of John. So I blurted out, “It’s just not fair to do to John what Brinsmead does to John.” To which Dybdahl responded, “And it's just not fair to do to Romans what Maxwell [Graham Maxwell, seen by many as someone who re-interprets the forensic passages in Scripture] does to Romans.” At that point, something like scales fell from both of our eyes, and we realized that I was drawn more to John and he was drawn more to Paul. The perspectives are different, but both are thoroughly biblical. We agreed that we should let John be John, and Paul be Paul. Now we still carry on lively discussions, but don’t have to read each other out of the church. It is a great joy and a relief.

Such an approach requires a more careful reading of both John and Paul, rather than a homogenizing of both. We all have to resist the temptation to claim support for our position from passages that may not share our perspective at all.

Is it not possible that such differences can explain why there were three favorite preachers in Corinth instead of just one? The differences are real. And Paul tells us they are legitimate.

Paul emphasizes the great gulf between God and humanity. That message reaches the hearts of those who have been oppressed by too much of Peter. It reaches those who are just awakening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, those who sense the great chasm between themselves and God. They don't need a gentle God so much as they need a high and powerful One who stands for all that is holy and good – but who sent Jesus Christ to pay the price for human sin. In Christ such a one can find peace and joy.

But some Adventists, including many who have grown up with good and gentle parents, are very much attracted to Apollos. For them God is gentle and kind. Yes, Paul sows the seed, Apollos waters, but they are particularly blessed by Apollos.

I will not attempt to critique all three positions, but given my own natural home in the Apollos perspective, perhaps I could note what I perceive to be a significant weakness in this position that I call home. To be blunt, our anger often comes up short. God smiles a lot. He even ends up smiling when he shouts. But in the world in which we live, Christians must retain the ability to be angry and get angry. When innocent women are gunned down by a man who hates women – is that not a time for great anger, for being ashamed of this race of beings called human? Apollos has a hard time getting angry enough at sin.

What of the Future?

Can the church learn to live with the differences between Peter, Paul, and Apollos? I hope so. I sense an increasing mood among us to come together, to pray, to share, to help each other in our difficulties and sorrows, to try harder to understand each other. And the variety in Scripture is God's way of meeting that very need. To sense the differences between Peter, Paul, and Apollos should not tear down the temple of God, but build it up. And our failure to take Scripture seriously places the church at risk. The study of His word is the source of our strength, the measure of our unity. And it is Scripture that also sets the limits for our diversity.

To close this chapter, I will cite a passage from the pen of Ellen White. Generally she is quoted in support of each of the three traditions. And because she wrote so much over such a wide period of time, she can be used to support any of the three perspectives, and even to pit one against the other. But in *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, she has a marvelous statement as to why we need a diversity of teachers:

In our schools the work of teaching the Scriptures to the youth is not to be left wholly with one teacher for a long series of years. The Bible teacher may be well able to present the truth and yet it is not the best experience for the students that their study of the word of God should be directed by one man only, term after term and year after year. Different teachers should have a part in the work, even though they may not all have so full an understanding of the Scriptures. If several in our larger schools unite in the work of teaching the Scriptures, the students may thus have the benefit of the talents of several.

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have borne testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Saviour? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record, and

thus have given us a connected account of Christ's earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain Scripture truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of some than of others.

The same principle applies to speakers. One dwells at considerable length on points that others would pass by quickly or not mention at all. The whole truth is presented more clearly by several than by one. The Gospels differ, but the records of all blend in one harmonious whole.

So today the Lord does not impress all minds in the same way. Often through unusual experiences, under special circumstances He gives to some Bible students views of truth that others do not grasp. It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of teaching all that should be taught.– CPT 432-33 (1913)

My students and my correspondents have had experiences with the Lord that have enriched me greatly. This world is such a complex place that I am convinced we have only begun to fight when it comes to understanding each other and the needs of those around us. One of the most exciting challenges before us is to learn from Scripture how we can better meet the needs of God's children. He wants his church to be the place where wounded, hurting people can come together, to find understanding, hope, and courage, and to remind each other that a better world lies ahead. Until that better world comes, may God grant each of us grace to help build the temple of God so that we may all worship within.

Is the Time Right?

After twenty years, perhaps the church is ready.

Adventist Today 17:4

By Alden Thompson

(2009.08.24; revised 08.28; 08.30; 09.27)

A thunderbolt struck me after Sabbath School on August 15. That morning our class focused on 1 John 2:29: "Everyone who does right has been born of him." That astonishing verse links new birth not to acceptance of Jesus Christ, but to right behavior. In short, doing right reveals a new birth, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some in our class wanted to flee to Romans 3:10, "No one is righteous – not even one" (NLT). Or to Isaiah 64:6, "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth" (NRSV) – no real righteousness except under the banner of the crucified Lord. It was indeed a lively Sabbath School.

But for me the Sabbath thunderbolt was linked to the memory of a sermon I had preached in the College Church twenty years ago, "The Adventist Church at Corinth." Preaching from a manuscript because I was naming names and wanted to get things right, I identified three kinds of Adventists, linking them with Peter, Paul, and Apollos, preachers whose followers were threatening to divide the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17). My point: all three kinds

of Adventists belong in the church and they should learn to live together instead of quarreling.

The positive response to that sermon was astonishing. Never in my life before or since have I received such an outpouring of appreciative notes and letters.

That sermon attracted so much attention, in part, because it pointed back ten years to Desmond Ford's Adventist Forum presentation on October 27, 1979 at Pacific Union College. That's when Ford threw Adventism into turmoil by declaring that "there is no biblical way of proving the investigative judgment." At a stroke, he sought to sweep away Ellen White's vivid statement that in the judgment we must "stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator" (*The Great Controversy*, 425).

The three kinds of Adventists reacted very differently to Ford's declaration. Here's a quick summary, oversimplified, but to the point:

1. The Peter crowd: "We can do it!" These are the perfectionists, the optimistic defenders of free-will, many calling themselves "historic Adventists." Back then, key names would have included Kenneth Wood, Herbert Douglass – and Robert Brinsmead, early in his experience. Matthew, James, and 1 and 2 Peter are their books. They heartily disagreed with Ford.

2. The Paul crowd: "We can't do it. Jesus does it for us." These are substitutionary people, some calling themselves evangelical Adventists. God is everything, we are nothing; Jesus takes our place. Key names would have included H. M. S. Richards, Sr., Robert Spangler, Edward Heppenstall – and Robert Brinsmead at a mid-point in his experience. Romans and Galatians are their books. They were powerfully tempted to say Amen! to Ford.

3. The Apollos crowd: "Do your best!" Key words are "larger view," "truth about God," Christian humanism. Substitution is not high on the list. Key names would have included Graham Maxwell and Jack Provonsha – and Robert Brinsmead (briefly) at a later point in his experience. Their biblical passages are John 14-17 and the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). "Standing in the sight of a holy God without a mediator" is not a threat, but a promise, based on John 16:26-27, where Jesus says he *won't* ask the Father for us. Why? Because we will already know that the Father himself loves us. They didn't agree with Ford and some just shrugged.

And my August 15 thunderbolt? The realization that 1 John contains key verses to warm the heart of each kind of Adventist, but verses, of course, that would probably trouble the others in the crowd. Hence our Sabbath morning donnybrook, for everyone was defending the verses precious to their own experience. From the NRSV, here's a quick sample:

1. The Peter crowd: "We can do it!"

3:6: "No one who abides in him sins."

3:8: "Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil."

5:18: "Those who are born of God do not sin."

2. The Paul crowd: "We can't do it. Jesus does it for us."

1:8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."

2:1: "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father."

4:10: "God...sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

3. The Apollos crowd: "Do your best!"

2:29: "Everyone who does right has been born of him."

4:7: "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."

In spite of the enthusiastic response from our church in 1989, the larger church was not

ready. When I converted the sermon into a chapter for my proposed *Inspiration* manuscript (RH, 1991), it came back. Even my best friends said the time was not right.

Actually, the missing chapter may have contributed to the furor over *Inspiration*, for without it, the diversity I celebrate in the book could easily be seen simply as a mean-spirited collection of contradictions.

But the “contradictions” are not the problem; indeed, they are the solution, a biblical illustration of Ellen White’s startling statement about our differing perceptions of truth: “Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experiences are alike in every particular.” (*Ministry of Healing*, 483).

Is now the time? I don’t know. Pray. Check out 1 Corinthians. Check out 1 John. And now the missing chapter is also there in my new book, *Beyond Common Ground: Why Liberals and Conservatives Need Each Other* (PPPA 2009).

The twenty-year gap between 1989 and 2009 intrigues me because of Ellen White’s startling comment in the midst of the 1888 turmoil: “That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God’s message for this time” (Ms 8a, 1888).

A donnybrook of a Sabbath School, but where we part as friends, all eagerly looking forward to the day when it won’t have to stop at one hour because we will have an eternity to sort things out. There all three kinds of Adventists will revel together before God’s throne, singing his praises through all eternity. I can hardly wait.

Theme: Discernment: The Safeguard of Revival

Leading Question: Why is it important to be able to tell whether a revival is genuine or false?

Lurking in the background of today’s lesson is the conviction that the truth, especially about the 10 commandments, should be as clear to anyone else as it is to a Seventh-day Adventist. Charismatics, in particular, are known for arguing that the warmth of their Spirit-driven experience is superior to the coldness of a community that keeps the law without such warmth.

What biblical examples can one cite on both sides of that issue? And what might be the truth of that quip that often makes the rounds, “If I hadn’t believed it, I never would have seen it with my own eyes”?

Solidly on the side of the 7th day Sabbath:

1. Deut. 4:13-14. The ten commandments were clearly distinguished from the additional Mosaic legislation.

2. Deut. 31:26. The additional Mosaic legislation went in a book that is placed beside the ark of the covenant containing the 10 commandments.

3. Deut. 4:22-33. God affirms that fear is the right response to his law; Moses says that the people are to turn neither to the right or to the left:

22 These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. 23 When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; 24 and you said, “Look, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. 25 So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? 27 Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the Lord our God will say. Then tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and do it.”

28 The Lord heard your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: “I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. **29 If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their**

children forever! 30 Go say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’ 31 But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess.”
32 You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. 33 You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.

4. Num. 15:32-36. God commanded that a man be stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath.

5. Luke 4:16. Jesus went into the synagogue to worship “as his custom was.”

6. Luke 23:56. While Jesus was in the tomb, the women rested on the Sabbath “according to the command.”

7. Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4. On his mission trips, Paul worshiped regularly with the believers on the Sabbath.

Loosening traditional attitudes toward the Sabbath?

1. Matt 12:1-12, Jesus defends his disciples for eating from a grainfield on the Sabbath, heals a man on the Sabbath, and declares that he is Lord of the Sabbath.

2. John 5. Jesus goes out of his way to heal a man on the Sabbath who had been ill for 38 years, and commands him to pick up his bed and carry it on the Sabbath.

3. Romans 14:5. Some judge one day to be better, others judge all days alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.

Note: Among conservative believers, many react strongly against the seventh-day Sabbath and against the idea of the non-immortality of the soul. Why? Haven’t Adventists argued that Scripture is quite clear on these matters? On the other hand, liberal believers often reject the idea of miracles completely, including the resurrection, second coming, and the idea of a prayer-answering God. Why? Aren’t these things clear in Scripture?

In 2 Kings 5, the prophet grants Naaman permission to bow in the temple of Rimmon while on the arm of his Rimmon-worshiping master. Naaman has already made the astonishing admission that there is no God anywhere but in Israel (2 Kings 5:15). Yet his master, the king, doesn’t know that yet. So Naaman put his request this way: “When my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count” (1 Kings 5:18). The prophet answered: “Go in peace” (1 Kings 5:19).

Why? The ten commandments are clear. Shouldn’t the prophet have demanded more?

Adaptation/Accommodation/Condescension/Contextualization. All these words refer to the same idea, namely, that God adjusts his teachings and commands to the ability of the people to understand. It is a difficult concept for devout conservatives, but one that is quite clearly illustrated in Scripture. In the writings of Ellen White, I know of only one explicit statement affirming that kind of “adaptation,” her comment on the horrifying custom – horrifying to us, that is – of blood vengeance, the custom lying behind the need for cities of refuge, a half-way house to a more humane approach to justice. This is Ellen White’s comment in PP 515 (1890), the only appearance of this quotation in any of her published writings. The key phrases are in bold type:

This merciful provision was rendered necessary by the ancient custom of private vengeance, by which the punishment of the murderer devolved on the nearest relative or the next heir of the deceased. In cases where guilt was clearly evident it was not necessary to wait for a trial by the magistrates. The avenger might pursue the criminal anywhere and put him to death wherever he should be found. **The Lord did not see fit to abolish this custom at that time,** but He made provision to ensure the safety of those who should take life unintentionally.

In short, when someone cannot see even important things like the Sabbath, we should not be too hasty to judge. Yes, we need discernment; and no, we don’t need to join every revival that comes along. But we do need discernment on how to deal with those who do not see things our way.

In conclusion, two additional Ellen White quotations illustrate the principle of adaptation. Given Ellen White’s reputation as a hard-liner, I find many believers surprised and blessed by both these quotes, the implications of which are significant. The first one from 3T 20-21 (1872) is in the context of health reform; the second one is counsel to a minister in 1887 who is leaving north America to minister in South Africa, a new land for him:

Health Reform Adaptation. We must go no faster than we can take those with us whose consciences and intellects are convinced of the truths we advocate. We must meet the people where they are. Some of us have been many years in arriving at our present position in health reform. It is slow work to obtain a reform in diet. We have powerful appetites to meet; for the world is given to gluttony. If we should allow the people as much time as we have required to come up to the present advanced state in reform, we would be very patient with them, and allow them to advance [21] step by step, as we have done, until their feet are firmly established upon the health reform platform. But we should be very cautious not to advance too fast, lest we be obliged to retrace our steps. In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. And if there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people. (*Testimonies* 3:20-21 [1872])

Speaking on points on which we can agree. In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would

often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus. – *Gospel Workers*, 119-120 [1915]; *Evangelism*, 200; cf. “Letter to a Minister and His Wife Bound for Africa” [June 25, 1887 = Letter 12, to Elder Boyd; almost verbatim “original” of the *Gospel Worker* quote] in *Testimonies to Southern Africa*, pp. 14-20.

Both of these quotations illuminate the wonderfully gracious quotations from Ellen White, found in 6T 120-123. Perhaps the most important for our purposes is this one:

The Lord wants His people to follow other methods than that of condemning wrong, even though the condemnation be just. He wants us to do something more than to hurl at our adversaries charges that only drive them further from the truth. The work which Christ came to do in our world was not to erect barriers and constantly thrust upon the people the fact that they were wrong. (121/122)

He who expects to enlighten a deceived people must come near to them and labor for them in love. He must become a center of holy influence. – 6T 121-122

Two additional quotations from that section of the *Testimonies* are also worth noting, most likely they were addressed to A. T. Jones, one of the best known Catholic-bashers among Adventists at the turn of the century:

In the advocacy of the truth the bitterest opponents should be treated with respect and deference. Some will not respond to our efforts, but will make light of the gospel invitation. Others – even those whom we suppose to have passed the boundary of God’s mercy – will be won to Christ. The very last work in the controversy may be the enlightenment of those who have not rejected light and evidence, but who have been in midnight darkness and have in ignorance worked against the truth. Therefore treat every man as honest. Speak no word, do no deed, that will confirm any in unbelief.

If anyone shall seek to draw the workers into debate or controversy on political or other questions, take no heed to either persuasion or challenge. Carry forward the work of God firmly and strongly, but in the meekness of Christ and as quietly as possible. Let no human boasting be heard. Let no sign of self-sufficiency be made. Let it be seen that God has called us to handle sacred trusts; preach the word, be diligent, earnest, and fervent. – 6T 122

The influence of your teaching would be tenfold greater if you were careful of your words. Words that should be a savor of life unto life may by the spirit which accompanies them be made a savor of death unto death. And remember that if by your spirit or your words you close the door to even one soul, that soul will confront you in the judgment.

Do not, when referring to the Testimonies, feel it your duty to drive them home. In reading the Testimonies be sure not to mix in your filling of words, for this makes [122/123] it impossible for the hearers to distinguish between the word of the Lord to them and your words. Be sure that you do not make the word of the Lord offensive. We long to see reforms, and because we do not see that which we desire, an evil spirit is too often allowed to cast drops of gall into our cup, and thus others are embittered. By our ill-advised words their spirit is chafed, and they are stirred to rebellion.

Every sermon you preach, every article you write, may be all true; but one drop of gall in it will be poison to the hearer or the reader. Because of that drop of poison, one will discard all your good and acceptable words. Another will feed on the poison; for he loves such harsh words; he follows your example, and talks just as you talk. Thus the evil is multiplied.

Those who present the eternal principles of truth need the holy oil emptied from the two olive branches into the heart. This will flow forth in words that will reform, but not exasperate. The truth is to be spoken in love. Then the Lord Jesus by His Spirit will supply the force and the power. That is His work. – 6T 122-123

The ultimate goal of all gospel workers is to be able to sensitively deal with human minds wherever they meet them.

As workers for Christ, we want sanctified tact. Study to be skillful when there are no rules to meet the case. Win hearts, not repulse them. In this kind of work more than in any other that can be undertaken, you need wisdom from above. Many souls have been turned in the wrong direction, and thus lost to the cause of God, by want of skill and wisdom in the worker. Tact, wisdom, and good judgment in the laborer in the cause of God increase his usefulness a hundredfold. If he can only speak the right words at the right time, and manifest the right spirit, it will exert a melting power on the heart of the needy one. – *Gospel Workers* (1892), 392

In short, all God's people need the gift of discernment. And we don't need to be hasty in our judgments.

Finally, an important passage of Scripture that points to the need for discernment:

2 Timothy 24 The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Theme: Reformation: The Outgrowth of Revival

Leading Question: If reformation is the outgrowth of revival, what are the marks of that reformation?

The official Study Guide focuses on three examples of “reformation” that followed a revival. Each one deserved a closer look:

1. Jehoshaphat’s Reformation and Victory: 2 Chron. 20. Several points are worth nothing about this experience:

a) The revival was triggered by a threatening attack from Judah’s enemies. It was not spontaneous. **Question:** How would one evaluate the effectiveness of a revival that is triggered by an urgent threat?

b) The king himself led out in the revival, inviting the whole nation to join him in fasting and prayer. The people came as he had commanded. **Question:** Is a top-down revival, called by the king, of more value than a grassroots effort? Are there any grassroots revivals in the Old Testament? Anywhere in Scripture? Is there always a “leader”?

c) The king quoted a “forever” promise to Abraham (vs. 7), that ended up being something less than “forever.” **Question:** Should the actual usage of the word forever in the Old Testament determine its meaning rather than what we take the word to mean in English? In this instance, one of the best examples of the real meaning of “forever” is found in the prophetic judgment on the house of Eli. The promise of the priesthood had been given to Eli’s family “forever” (1 Sam. 2:30); but God was taking away the promise because of the evil deeds of Eli’s sons. The new priest would serve Yahweh “forever” (1 Sam. 2:35). It is that kind of history that fed into Ellen White’s comment about “conditional prophecy.” The idea of conditionalism is volatile, but significant:

The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional. – MS 4, 1883, unpublished until *Evangelism*, 695 [1946], and then more completely in 1 SM 67 [1958]. The original response was apparently never sent to anyone.

d) Prophetic inspiration and a choral “attack.” A prophet announced to the people that the

Lord would fight for them. This was a pacifist's dream. After king and people had prostrated themselves before the LORD, all they had to do in the end was sing and the enemy self-destructed. **Question:** Can one think of an Old Testament example that would compare with Jesus' healing of the Gerasene demoniac? In the account in Mark 5, the healed demoniac pleads with Jesus to allow him to go with him:

19 But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. (NRSV)

Connected with this event is 1 of only 2 violent miracles performed by Jesus (the pigs and the figs). Here, except for the pigs, the enemy wasn't wiped out as in Jehoshaphat's day. The enemy was converted. Is that kind of revival "better" than the one in Jehoshaphat's day?

e) Lots of plunder and great fear among the nations. The plunder was so great that it took king and people three days to cart it all away. Then there was extended peace.

f) The great revival/victory was not followed by a thorough-going reformation. At the end of his record of Jehoshaphat's life, the Chronicler noted that the high places had not been taken away and that "the people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their ancestors" (vs. 33). The king himself departed from the good in allying himself with the wicked northern king Amaziah in an ill-fated ship building project, the end of which was announced by another prophetic messenger (vss. 35-37). **Question:** With such a poor record of reformation following revival, is this the best we can do?

2 Chron. 20:1 After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. 2 Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; already they are at Hazazon-tamar" (that is, En-gedi). **3 Jehoshaphat was afraid; he set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4 Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the towns of Judah they came to seek the Lord.**

Jehoshaphat's Prayer and Victory

5 Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, 6 and said, "O Lord, God of our ancestors, are you not God in heaven? Do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? In your hand are power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you. 7 Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, **and give it forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham?** 8 They have lived in it, and in it have built you a sanctuary for your name, saying, 9 'If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house, and before you, for your name is in this house, and cry to you in our distress, and you will hear and save.' 10 See now, the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel

invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy – 11 they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession that you have given us to inherit. 12 O our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

13 Meanwhile all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. 14 Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the middle of the assembly. 15 He said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you: ‘Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s. 16 Tomorrow go down against them; they will come up by the ascent of Ziz; you will find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’ Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you.”

18 Then Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord. 19 And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

20 They rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God and you will be established; believe his prophets.” 21 When he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy splendor, as they went before the army, saying,

“Give thanks to the Lord,
for his steadfast love endures forever.”

22 As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. 23 For the Ammonites and Moab attacked the inhabitants of Mount Seir, destroying them utterly; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another.

24 When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; they were corpses lying on the ground; no one had escaped. 25 When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the booty from them, they found livestock in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more. They spent three days taking the booty, because of its abundance. 26 On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the Lord; therefore that place has been called the Valley of Beracah [praise] to this day. 27 Then all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat at their head, returned to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had enabled them to rejoice over their enemies. 28 They came to Jerusalem, with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of the Lord. 29 The fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 And the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

The End of Jehoshaphat's Reign

31 So Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi. 32 He walked in the way of his father Asa and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. **33 Yet the high places were not removed; the people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their ancestors.**

34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, from first to last, are written in the Annals of Jehu son of Hanani, which are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel.

35 After this King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined with King Ahaziah of Israel, who did wickedly. 36 He joined him in building ships to go to Tarshish; they built the ships in Ezion-geber. 37 Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have joined with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made." And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish.

2. The Church at Ephesus: Rev. 2:1-7. The record of the church at Ephesus was very much a mixed bag. They were good in the attack mode: a) they didn't tolerate evildoers; b) they exposed false apostles; they hated the work of the Nicolaitans. But they were at risk of losing their candlestick because they had lost their first love. **Question:** Where can we find a "pure" reformation that follows revival?

Rev. 2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you **cannot tolerate evildoers**; you have **tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false**. 3 I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that **you have abandoned the love you had at first**. 5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: **you hate the works of the Nicolaitans**, which I also hate. 7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

3. Paul's Most Challenging Church: Corinth. The two letters to the church at Corinth that have come down to us are full of extremes. In chapter 1, Paul pointedly notes that the church is being torn apart by conflict with the believers choosing up sides behind their favorite preachers. In 1 Cor. 13, by contrast, the beautiful love chapter leaves everything in peace and light. But the most strident piece in the first letter is his rebuke of a specific instance of immorality: The church was tolerating a man who was living with his mother's wife. Paul delivers a blistering attack on the issue. But what is so remarkable is the apparent reference to restoration of the arrogant brother in 2 Cor. 2:5-11. The Corinthians had apparently followed Paul's advice and disfellowshipped the erring brother. Their action had resulted in his repentance and reformation. Paul was arguing that the man had suffered long enough. Now he should be restored:

2 Cor. 2:5 But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent—not to exaggerate it—to all of you. 6 This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; 7 so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything. 10 Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. 11 And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

To sum up, all the examples of revival fall short of the mark when it comes to reformation. The ideal is clear, but God's people so often fall short of the ideal. In a strange sort of way, however, that can give courage to us when we fall short of the ideal, as we so often do.

Theme: Reformation: The Willingness to Grow and Change.

Leading Question: Which is more striking and valuable to the onlooker, seeing changes in new converts as they become more and more like their Lord, or changes in those who have grown up in the church enjoying all its advantages?

In this week's study, we will focus on a diverse set of believers who experienced dramatic changes in their lives as they followed Jesus.

1. James and John: We want to be #1: Matthew 20:20-28. When the two brothers asked Jesus if they could be first in his kingdom, they not only revealed their own hard-driving competitiveness, but also provided Jesus with a wonderful opportunity to define the nature of his church. **Question:** From the New Testament, how do we know that James and John grew?

2. Peter and Thomas: We know better: Matt. 26:31-35; John 20:24-29. The adult study guide uses a nice turn of phrase to compare Peter and Thomas: "They both approached faith from a very human perspective. Peter placed confidence in what he could do; Thomas in what he could see." **Question:** What is the evidence in the New Testament that these men grew in grace under Jesus' tutelage?

3. The prodigal and his brother: Luke 15. When the prodigal "came to himself," he headed home; when he got home he confronted his father and his brother. **Question:** What do we know about change and growth in the experience of these three?

4. Some theology: Phil. 2:12-13. In the 2nd chapter of Philippians Paul puts together two striking comments: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure?" **Question:** Is salvation God's business or our business? **Answer:** Yes!

With some fairly complex prose, but with a simple point, C. S. Lewis comments on this passage:

Now I am going to suggest that strictly causal thinking is even more inadequate when applied to the relation between God and man. I don't mean only when we are thinking of prayer, but whenever we are thinking about what happens at the Frontier, at the mysterious point of junction and separation where absolute being utters derivative being.

One attempt to define causally what happens there has led to the whole puzzle about Grace and free will. You will notice that Scripture just sails over the problem. 'Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling' – pure Pelagianism. But why? 'For it

is God who worketh in you’ – pure Augustinianism. It is presumably only our presuppositions that make this appear nonsensical. We profanely assume that divine and human action exclude one another like the actions of two fellow-creatures so that ‘God did this’ and ‘I did this’ cannot both be true of the same act except in the sense that each contributed a share. – C. S. Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm*, p. 49-50.

5. Practical Stuff. Several striking quotations can help us explore and understand issue of growing up into Christ. These are simply listed below without comment:

Eva le Gallienne on becoming a saint. “People who are born even-tempered, placid and untroubled – secure from violent passions or temptations to evil – those who have never needed to struggle all night with the Angel to emerge lame but victorious at dawn, never become great saints.” – Eva le Gallienne (1899-1991), *The Mystic in the Theatre: Eleanor Duse* (1965)

C. S. Lewis on whole-hearted commitment: The ordinary idea which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else – call it “morality” or “decent behaviour,” or “the good of society” – has claims on this self: claims which interfere with its own desires. What we mean by “being good” is giving in to those claims. Some of the things the ordinary self wanted to do turn out to be what we call “wrong”: well, we must give them up. Other things, which the self did not want to do, turn out to be what we call [167] “right”: well, we shall have to do them. But we are hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life and do what it likes. In fact, we are very like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there will be enough left over for him to live on. Because we are still taking our natural self as the starting point. (IV.8.2)

As long as we are thinking that way, one or other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier. In the end, you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, “live for others” but always in a discontented, grumbling way – always wondering why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you have become that you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish. (IV 8.3)

The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says “Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You.

I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.” – *Mere Christianity* IV.8.4

C. S. Lewis on holiness as great fun: “Already the new [people] men are dotted here and there all over the earth. Some, as I have admitted, are still hardly recognizable; but others can be recognized. Every now and then one meets them. Their very voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant. They begin where most of us leave off. They are, I say, recognizable; but you must know what to look for. They will not be very like the idea of ‘religious people’ which you have formed from your general reading. They do not draw attention to themselves. You tend to think that you are being kind to them when they are really being kind to you. They love you more than other [people] men do, but they need you less (We must get over wanting to be needed [188]: in some goodish people, specially women, that is the hardest of all temptations to resist.) They will usually seem to have a lot of time: you will wonder where it comes from. When you have recognized one of them, you will recognize the next one much more easily. And I strongly suspect (but how should I know?) that they recognize one another immediately and infallibly, across every barrier of color, sex, class, age, and even of creeds. In that way, to become holy is rather like joining a secret society. To put it at the very lowest, it must be great fun.” – C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: “Beyond Personality” IV.11.10 [pp. 187-88 in MacMillan Edition]

Theme: Reformation: Thinking New Thoughts

Leading Question: What does thinking new thoughts have to do with Christian growth?

Our lesson this week includes several crucial New Testament passages that have a real bearing on Christian growth. Here these passages are spelled out at the beginning for prayer and discussion.

Following the three New Testament passages, two significant Ellen White quotations are included from the context of the 1888 debate over righteousness by faith.

The Texts:

Romans 12: 1-2: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (NRSV)

Philippians 4:4-8: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

2 Peter 3:18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

The Ellen White quotations:

The Danger of Becoming Conservative: Peter exhorts his brethren to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” [2 Pet. 3:18]. Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in

the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.

The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what. – *Testimonies* 5:706-707 [1889]; also in GW 297-98 and CWE 38-39.

The urgency of present truth. The message “Go forward” is still to be heard and respected. The varying circumstances taking place in our world call for labor which will meet these peculiar developments. The Lord has need of men who are spiritually sharp and clear-sighted, men worked by the Holy Spirit, who are certainly receiving manna fresh from heaven. Upon the minds of such, God's Word flashes light, revealing to them more than ever before the safe path. The Holy Spirit works upon mind and heart. The time has come when through God's messengers the scroll is being unrolled to the world. Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. Let not any minister feel under bonds or be gauged by men's measurement. The Gospel must be fulfilled in accordance with the messages God sends. **That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time.**

– From MS 8a 1888, address to ministers on October 21, 1888, with apparent reference to a telegram from the “absent and ailing” president who urged the delegates to “stand by the landmarks” – A. V. Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years* (1981), 282 = EGW1888, 133.

Theme: Reformation: Healing Broken Relationships

Leading Question: Can a broken relationship be healed without forgiveness?

Our lesson for this week focuses on five different kinds of broken relationships, and encourages to ponder ways in which our commitment to Jesus Christ can help provide healing for these broken pieces. The centrality of forgiveness to the healing process suggests the relevance right at the beginning of this striking quote from Henri Nouwen:

Forgiveness as the name of love. Forgiveness is the name of love among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all of us love poorly. We do not even know what we are doing when we hurt others. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour – unceasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family. – Henri Nouwen, *Weavings* vii.2, March/April, 1992

The five examples:

1. From fracture to friendship: Paul and John Mark: 2 Tim. 4:11. The problem with John Mark is described in Acts 15:36-41. Mark had abandoned Paul in an earlier trip; Paul kept that memory alive; Barnabas was ready to restore, Paul was not. In the course of time however, the wound between Paul and Mark was healed. Paul asked for Mark to come to him. He would be “useful” to Paul (2 Tim. 4:11).

2. From slave to son: Philemon. The little book of Philemon tells the touching story of how Paul took the initiative to restore the slave Onesimus to his master Philemon. That story can still be illuminating for us, even though we have no slaves.

3. From comparison to complement: 1 Corinthians. In several places in 1 Corinthians Paul points the believers towards ways in which they can complement each other instead of constantly falling in the trap of deadly comparison.

a) Different preachers for different purposes: 1 Cor. 1, 3. Paul’s most explicit comparison of the contested preachers comes in 1 Cor. 3:6, where he suggests that the comparisons can be resolved when the different roles of each is considered: perhaps the difference between the evangelist (Paul) and the pastor (Apollos):

1 Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is

anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

b) Different parts of the body: 1 Cor. 12. Paul uses the human body as an illustration of the fact that each person may have a different function within the body of Christ and thus be an essential part of the whole.

4. From friction to forgiveness: Luke 23:32-34, Rom. 5:6-11. Jesus himself modeled forgiveness for us. His reassuring words to the thief on the cross are a precious heritage. Paul develops Jesus' role theologically in Romans 5 where he points out that even while we were still shaking our fists in God's face, he died for us.

5. From Rancor to Restoration: Matt. 18:15-17. Jesus lays down the crucial principle of interpersonal relationships when he states that we should talk to each other when a person has been hurt. That is simply an application of Jesus' second great command.

Theme: The Promised Revival: God’s Mission Completed

Leading Question: What are we supposed to know about the timing of the Lord’s return?

Four key chapters in the New Testament address the question of *when* Jesus will return: Matthew 24, 25, Acts 1, and 1 Thess. 5. My students in History of Adventism are always curious: “How could our forebears not have seen these passages?”

Matthew 24:36-39: But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:42-44: Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Matthew 24:48-50: But if that wicked slave says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ 49 and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know.

Matthew 25:5-12: As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ 12 But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Acts 1:6-11: 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He replied, “It is not for you to know the

times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11: Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

A well-known Christian author, C. S. Lewis, addressed the question of delay of the advent and the fear motivation linked with it:

“We must never speak to simple, excitable people about ‘the day’ without emphasizing again and again the utter impossibility of prediction. We must try to show them that the impossibility is an essential part of the doctrine. If you do not believe our Lord’s words, why do you believe in his return at all? And if you do believe them must you not put away from you, utterly and forever, any hope of dating that return? His teaching on the subject quite clearly consisted of three propositions. (1) That he will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore we must always be ready for him.” – C. S. Lewis, “The World’s Last Night” in WLN, 107

“Perfect love, we know casteth out fear. But so do several others things – ignorance, alcohol, passion, presumption, and stupidity. It is very desirable that we should all advance to that perfection of love in which we shall fear no longer; but it is very undesirable, until we have reached that stage, that we should allow any inferior agent to cast out our fear.” – Lewis, WLN, 109

Reasons for the delay:

1. **Gospel must be preached in all the earth.**
2. **Character of God must be fully reproduced in his people.**
3. **Certain events must take place before the end (e.g. Sunday legislation).**

A colleague of mine once said, “Any attempted explanation of the delay very quickly turns demonic.”

What then is the point of “revival and reformation”? To earn our salvation? To hasten the end? Or should the whole process of Christian living and Christian witness be unprogrammed and spontaneous?

Arthur S. Maxwell (Uncle Arthur), once told a story of a young man who applied for the job of hired hand at a ranch. When the rancher told him that he would need to be available at any hour of the day or night in case there was a storm requiring him to put things in order. The only thing the young man said was, “I can sleep on stormy nights.” The rancher was puzzled, but decided to hire the young man anyway. In the course of time a storm was raging in the night and the rancher went to get his hired hand. He could not arouse him at all. The young man was fast asleep.

Somewhat unhappy, the rancher went out to check the barns, animals, and equipment. But wherever he went, everything was fully battened down and in order. Finally, he understood what the young man meant: “I can sleep on stormy nights.” He could sleep because everything was fully in order. **Question:** Shouldn't that be the model of the Christian waiting Jesus' return?

Is the delay more of an embarrassment now than it was in the first century? When Ellen White was challenged about the delay after 1844, her answer was intriguing, for she cited those passages which gave the impression that Jesus could have come in the first century. Here is her defense as published in *Selected Messages*, Bk 1, 66-69:

A statement published in 1851 in *Experience and Views*, and found on page 49 [page 58, present edition] of *Early Writings* is quoted as proving my testimonies false: [66/67] “I saw that the time for Jesus to be in the most holy place was nearly finished, and that time can last but a very little longer.”

As the subject was presented before me, the period of Christ's ministration seemed almost accomplished. Am I accused of falsehood because time has continued longer than my testimony seemed to indicate? How is it with the testimonies of Christ and His disciples? Were they deceived?

Paul writes to the Corinthians:

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not” (1 Cor. 7:29, 30).

Again, in his epistle to the Romans, he says:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:12).

And from Patmos, Christ speaks to us by the beloved John:

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3). “The Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly; blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:6, 7).

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

God had committed to His people a work to be accomplished on earth. The third angel's message was to be given, the minds of believers were to be directed to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ had entered to make atonement for His people. The Sabbath reform was to [68/69] be carried forward. The breach in the law of God must be made up. The message must be proclaimed with a loud voice, that all the inhabitants of earth might receive the warning. The people of God must purify their souls through obedience to the truth, and be prepared to stand without fault before Him at His coming.

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith, and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their reward. – 1 SM 66-69 [Ms 4, 1883].

A vision of the new earth. God's vegetarian kingdom is one of the most appealing of all the “new earth” promises. It is the last word for our lessons this quarter: Isaiah 11:6-9, NRSV:

- 6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
- 7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
- 9 They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.