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NEBUCHADNEZZAR  
SYNDROME



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# OUR READERS RESPOND...

## A politics-free zone

I was happy to read the article by William L. Self, "A Politics-free Zone" (November 2007). It is refreshing to see that many still believe in a separation of church and state.

As a pastor, I too get accosted from members when I present similar sermons. I grew up in the public school system, and I was never stopped from praying before a test. What the state does not want (and rightly so) is organized prayer in public schools. A union of church and state is a marriage between church and state.

—Carlos Peña, pastor, email

As always, your magazine is a pleasure to read. One article, "A Politics-free Zone," was very interesting. It is always nice to get input from others in the body of Christ.

One thing that was a concern to me was the continual mention of "the separation of church and state."

This is not what the First Amendment of the United States Constitution is about. It is about religious liberty. It means that the state cannot interfere with the church. It was a protection to keep the church from being like the Church of England. The state cannot govern the church or dictate its policies. It does not imply that the church cannot try to influence the government.

We have seen how this misinterpretation of the law has caused many problems and has reduced the liberty of

the church. This is what the First Amendment was supposed to eliminate.

—Win Alme, pastor, Casa Grande, Arizona, United States

I fear that Rev. William L. Self may destroy what he seeks to protect in his article, "A Politics-free Zone."

I was horrified to read this article described as a sermon. I read it twice to check. Apart from one paragraph of generalizations titled "Historical Lessons," there is no reference to Scripture in this article at all. Dr. Self is braver than I am to climb into the pulpit and deliver a sermon that consists entirely of his opinions. Although his opinions are very well researched and thought out, they show no foundation whatsoever in the living Word of God. The danger that he discusses in this article, that of politics hijacking the gospel, is no greater than the danger of the preacher's opinion replacing the authority of the gospel, which is happening in his pulpit already.

—Michael Hutton, Ariah Park Baptist Church, New South Wales, Australia

## Legalism and righteousness by faith

Roy Gane's article, "Legalism and 'Righteousness by Faith'" (January 2008), left me feeling very disappointed.

Dr. Gane's article simply presented another attempt to justify the righteousness by character development harvest theology that has been confusing our

people for decades. Roman Catholics teach we are saved by both imputed and infused righteousness. Just as Wesley did with his "Second Blessing," he tries and fails to make a case for the Holy Spirit infusing righteousness in us to point where we don't sin anymore and are kept from falling, not by God's grace and Christ's accomplishments, but by our obedience—implying that it is possible for us to never sin again through this infusion. The idea that people must achieve character perfection through the Holy Spirit to be saved is identical to the Catholic theologian who teaches you must have infused good works to be saved—not yours, they say, but the works of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not our Savior. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is. Good works are the result of the salvation we receive as a free gift, not the cause of it. If we can only be saved from our sins and not in our sins, we are all doomed. We will not be liberated from our carnal nature until glorification, so until then Paul's cry "Oh wretched man that I am" still applies to even the most dedicated Christian.

Even our prayers—while in church and while we are on our best behavior—are defiled and unworthy. If our prayers and worship are defiled, what does that say about our supposed obedience? There is only one way to be saved and that is by Christ's accomplishments.

—Tom Hughes, pastor, Newark and Zanesville, Ohio, United States

*Continued on page 25*

### Free Subscription

If you're receiving Ministry bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 Ministry has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all clergy of other denominations. To receive your complimentary subscription, please write to us at our Editorial Office, visit us at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org), or email us at [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org).

# The past helps us look to the future

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER  
AND  
WILLIE E. HUCKS II



Remember how you felt before you preached your first sermon? All kinds of thoughts raced through your mind—*Did I study enough? Is the sermon properly organized? Will I have good eye contact with the congregation? Or will my eyes be glued to the notes?*

That's how our team felt on March 31, 1998. It was the first broadcast of the *Ministry* Professional Growth Seminar. Not only was this the *first* broadcast, it was *live*. In addition to the hundreds gathered at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States, thousands were watching the event at hundreds of sites around the world.

Now it's ten years and many successful broadcasts later. With another broadcast coming, we hope you will participate on April 22, 2008—details on the back cover.

## Ten years and looking forward

Ten years ago we embarked on this new mission—to provide quality continuing education for the readers of *Ministry* and others who joined them. At the time we started these broadcasts, few others were doing them, and some told us that the new approach would not work. But it did work. We received phone calls and emails telling us that groups of clergy had gathered in various locations to participate in the event. Following that first airing, live broadcasts were held not only in the United States, but also from Brazil, Canada, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. We estimate that over the years more than 300,000 clergy of various denominations have participated. Ten years ago we broadcast by satellite. Today we have added Webcasting, and the future will give us new opportunities.

## Why broadcast?

Even with a broadcast technically successful, that does not answer the

question of *why* broadcast. The *why* of the broadcast is inseparably tied to the *why* of *Ministry*, *International Journal for Pastors*. No member of the editorial and production team of *Ministry* was born when the first edition of the journal was published in 1928—80 years ago. At that time the journal had a much smaller audience, for it was published for the benefit of Seventh-day Adventist ministers with its circulation mostly Canada- and United States-based. In the 1970s the journal was made available to clergy of other denominations and today more than 70 percent of the readers are not Seventh-day Adventists, which shows that the journal took an expanded mission. Several individuals deserve credit for this new venture, but former editor J. Robert Spangler deserves special mention for his vision. While our reading audience has broadened, our mission has not changed. And, today the journal goes to some 170 countries, making it truly international. Additionally, seven versions of the journal are published in languages other than English.

The satellite broadcasts likewise reach a diverse audience. These broadcasts are truly worldwide, reaching every part of the world within less than 24 hours either by live or delayed broadcasts. Pastors, chaplains, professors, students, church administrators, and key leaders participate in the event. We hope that you will join the next broadcast, as a group of outstanding individuals give presentations that will both challenge and bless us.

## Behind the scenes

Although the Professional Growth Seminar has become an important part of our ministry, we consider the production of our journal as the major ministry. What guides the editors in the selection of themes and authors for *Ministry*? Let us share briefly with you some of the operating principles.

*Privilege:* We consider it a privilege and honor to communicate with thousands of clergy. We take this honor seriously, and we want the articles to be of such quality that readers will consider the reading of the articles as time well spent.

*Biblically faithful:* We look upon the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—as the foundation of our faith—not just another source, but also authoritative.

*Jesus Christ:* As the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, we accept His promise that He will return again in such a manner that all will witness His return.

*Salvation:* Salvation is God's gift to us, and God enables us to receive that gift and live the life of faith.

*Responsibility:* With ethical living central to our calling, clergy must be faithful to God's call and must live in such a manner that will not bring harm to others.

Not every article will meet your immediate needs, but we pray that every article will be faithful to the biblical message and to the calling that God has given you. The March 2008 issue contains studies of biblical themes and invitations to consider our roles as clergy. We also pray that the upcoming satellite broadcast will be a blessing to you. ■

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

# The Nebuchadnezzar Syndrome

Laurence Turner

*Editor's note: This is an adaptation of a message delivered during the European Pastors' Council, held in DeBron, Netherlands, September 11–16, 2007.*

*He has showed you, O man, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God*  
—Micah 6:8, NIV.

A nervous theology student stands outside my door. He raises his hand to knock on the door then has second thoughts; he knows what awaits him inside. Just a few days before, he'd preached his heart out in the homiletics class to a room full of his classmates as well as to a video camera. And now, on the other side of that door judgment will be passed. For beyond that door is a monitor. And a video player. And me.

Even the most self-confident knocks timidly at the door. Once seated in front of the monitor, I run the tape for a few minutes and invite the student's self-assessment. Some have gripped the arms of their chair as if they were being executed. One held his head in his hands. One actually yelled, "That is *not* me!" Such occasions as these produce almost universal humility.

But one day a young student, full of the joy of the Lord, sat down to engage in self-assessment. He was there, experiencing his own sermon on the monitor, nodding his head. He responded with several "Amen's" to his own preaching. He was clearly blessed. Then I asked, "So how would

you assess that?" He turned to me, beaming, and said, "Excellent! Absolutely excellent!"

Switch now to another scene of proud self-assessment. King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon stands in his favorite spot—on the rooftop garden of his sumptuous palace just beside the phenomenal Hanging Gardens of Babylon. And as he stands there his eyes scan the horizon. The double outer wall of the city runs for 27 kilometers<sup>1</sup> around his capital. From the palace his eyes wander down the sacred processional way; one kilometer long, its walls covered in highly glazed, reflective blue tiles, decorated with 575 mythological beasts. And then on to the great citadel of Esagila, the temple of the high god Marduk, the ziggurat of Etemenanki rising 90 meters<sup>2</sup> into the air. A bridge 130 meters long spanning the Euphrates. Not to mention another 3 palaces and 53 temples.

"He said, 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?' " (Dan. 4:30, NIV).

And, surely, you might think, it's difficult to make any connection between *that* and ministry in the church. But the stories in the early chapters of Daniel present the significance of spirituality for leaders who are used by God. In other words, stories significant for pastors.

## The Nebuchadnezzar Syndrome

Nebuchadnezzar takes Jerusalem. Or, rather the Lord *gives* Jerusalem into his hands, as Daniel puts it. But Nebuchadnezzar can't see it because at this stage he hasn't met the Lord. Rather, he believes *his* power, *his* effort, brought him success. He's filled with the pride of self-achievement.

Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a huge awe-inspiring, frightening metal idol. Sitting atop this idol resides a head of gold. The gold of Babylon. But then the whole idol of human achievement is smashed to smithereens by a small stone. The stone of the kingdom of God. But at this stage, Nebuchadnezzar has only *heard* of the Lord. Nothing more. And the crushing of the idol of human pride means little to him.

Nebuchadnezzar's resistance to humility continues. So he builds an idol made entirely of gold. At 30 meters high, it is second only to the legendary Colossus of Rhodes, one of the wonders of the ancient world, which stood 35 meters high. Its size matches Nebuchadnezzar's pride. But as he peers into the furnace and sees the three friends walking in the flames with another figure who looks like a son of the gods, the truth begins



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to dawn on him. But nothing more.

Where does God deal His final hand? Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a tree. A tree that represents Nebuchadnezzar himself. Its size matches Nebuchadnezzar's ego. The tree is enormous—its top reached to heaven, visible to the ends of the earth and that explains Nebuchadnezzar's pride. "Is not this the great Babylon?" "In previous episodes, Nebuchadnezzar, as he besieged Jerusalem, was ignorant of God, then he heard of God when Daniel interpreted his dream of the metal idol, then he saw the workings of God when the three

friends walked alive in the flames. But here, he experiences God. And what is it that brings him to experience God? Humility.

A sobering thought for us, as pastors. Being pastors, we can lurch between two extremes. On the one hand, self-congratulation and pride. The Nebuchadnezzar syndrome. Are not these my baptismal candidates, my congregation that I have built up and nurtured? Is not this my church?

But, on the other hand, depression—we're just not achieving what the church expects of us. Few Bible studies and few baptisms, doubts about our calling, awkward members, demanding conference presidents. The antidote for both extremes of pride and depression is humility. The humility of Nebuchadnezzar and his tree.

### The tree

The tree represents Nebuchadnezzar, great suzerain of the empire of Babylon. And the first thing to hit you about this tree is its size (Dan. 4:10, 11). It is huge. Just like that massive metal idol representing human superpowers back

BEING PASTORS, WE CAN LURCH BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES. ON THE ONE HAND, SELF-CONGRATULATION AND PRIDE. THE NEBUCHADNEZZAR SYNDROME. ARE NOT THESE MY BAPTISMAL CANDIDATES, MY CONGREGATION THAT I HAVE BUILT UP AND NURTURED? IS NOT THIS MY CHURCH? BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND, DEPRESSION—WE'RE JUST NOT ACHIEVING WHAT THE CHURCH EXPECTS OF US. FEW BIBLE STUDIES AND FEW BAPTISMS, DOUBTS ABOUT OUR CALLING, AWKWARD MEMBERS, DEMANDING CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS.

in chapter 2. But the humble rock of the kingdom of God smashed the towering kingdoms of this world. For in the kingdom of God, size is not important.

Which might be what Jesus had in mind. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches" (Matt. 13:31, 32, NIV).

Note that Jesus calls the mustard plant a "tree." Now that is an exaggeration. It isn't a tree. But He calls it a tree because His eye is on the Old Testament. And particularly, perhaps, on Daniel 4 and other places where trees represent kingdoms. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he represents the kingdom of *Babylon* like a great tree with its top in the heavens and birds in its branches. In Ezekiel, the kingdom of *Assyria* is like a huge cedar of Lebanon with birds in its branches (Ezek. 31:3–6, NIV). And Jesus said the kingdom of *God* is like a mustard tree with birds in its branches. But the kingdom of God's mustard tree stands pretty

insignificant next to Nebuchadnezzar's tree, which could be seen from the ends of the earth, or Assyria's towering cedar. Just as the humble stone of the kingdom of God was dwarfed by the huge metal idol. That is the surprising thing about the kingdom of God. It will arrive in a surprising form, not as a mighty tree, but as a humble garden plant. For the kingdom of God is no crushing human empire, built on might and power, but rather, a humble venture of faith.

Many of us are pastors of small churches. So, we might be tempted to say, "Listen. I know all about

humility!" The first congregation in my ministry numbered three. Three old ladies. One to play the piano. One to take up the offering. And one to sleep through every one of my sermons. I'd just arrived with a spanking new MDiv, and I thought I was learning humility. But the story of Nebuchadnezzar is more profound, more significant than that.

The tree in his dream was "great and strong." That's what Nebuchadnezzar said. "Is not this the great Babylon?" He took in the full glory and power of his kingdom in a moment of time.

Someone else did as well. He, too, stood on a high place and saw all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. He surveyed the imperial glories of Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, China, the Aztecs, the Zulus, France, Britain, and the United States of America. He was tempted to accept the principles of the kingdoms of this world. "Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage,

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then, to me, and it shall all be yours' " (Luke 4:5-7, NJB). "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" ' " (Luke 4:8, NIV). Christ's response showed that His gospel is based not on human ambition or pride but on humble faith in God.

Which is, of course, what Nebuchadnezzar finally learns. He learns it when his pride is humbled. This experience of Nebuchadnezzar's sets the pattern for the rest of the book of Daniel. Great cities fall, huge idols are destroyed, awesome beasts are slaughtered, boasting horns plucked up. And massive trees chopped down. And they all get what is coming to them. Because they never learned the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar finally did. The gift of humility.

### The humble God

But what is the point? What is the point of humility? What is the point of humility for Nebuchadnezzar? For us as pastors? The point of humility is not, I think, simply to acknowledge God's eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and to be overwhelmed by how great He is. We might do that, of course. However, humility means more. Because one of the most prominent attributes of God, and one of the most forgotten, is God's humility, for God is a humble God. And when we exercise humility, we experience something of God. When we exercise humility, we come close to the heart of God.

Of course, the Bible does present the majesty of God. Isaiah sees the Lord seated on a throne, and the hem of His robe fills the temple. But such passages merely make the humility of God all the more breathtaking.

He had no beauty or majesty to  
attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we  
should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by  
men,  
a man of sorrows, and familiar  
with suffering.  
Like one from whom men hide their  
faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed  
him not  
(Isaiah 53:2, 3, NIV).

By His actions, Christ exemplified humility. "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet" (John 13:3-5, NIV).

Which was, finally, the lesson learned by Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar II, great suzerain of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, learned humility by taking on the form of a cow (Dan. 4:33-37). But Christ "though he was in the form of God . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:6, 7, NRSV). When Nebuchadnezzar experienced humility, he came close to the heart of God.

And this gospel of humility needs pastors of humility. Because when pastors experience humility, we too, come close to the heart of God.

Some years ago, I attended a small church on the East Coast of the United States. About 50 members. In our Sabbath School class we occasionally had a visitor. An older fellow. He wasn't a church member, but he knew the Lord. Soft-spoken. Unassuming. Would contribute quietly and thoughtfully to the Sabbath School discussion. John was his name. We normally just talked about spiritual matters in class. But after church one day, we got to talking. The Olympic Games were on at the time. I asked him if he'd seen any of it.

"Oh, a little, you know."

"Do you enjoy athletics, John?"

"Oh, yes. Did a bit myself when I was younger."

"Really? Did you ever run competitively?"

"Oh, a bit."

"So, what was your best achievement?"

"Well, I suppose," he said, "when I won the gold medal at the Olympics."

John. John Woodruff, 1936 Olympics. Berlin. Eight hundred-meter final. In a time of one minute, 52.9 seconds. John Woodruff: Sabbath School member and Olympic champion. And if I

hadn't asked an ignorant question, I would never have known.

### Conclusion

As mentioned, I teach homiletics. I'm frequently asked, "What is the most important quality you need to become a good preacher?" I never know what to say. There are so many qualities needed. But the *most* important? Recently, however, I realized what it is—humility. Humility to take preaching seriously. Humility to accept the authority of Scripture. Humility to accept that the Holy Spirit works more through the sweat of study and preparation than He does in the shower on Sabbath morning. Humility to accept that what our congregations need is not our cleverness, our trivial anecdotes, our threadbare clichés, but the fruit of our wrestling with Scripture and the fruit of our spiritual experience.

There is more to ministry than preaching. But by whatever means, as pastors, when we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, we proclaim the triumph of humility over pride and status. We need to pray for the triumph of humility in our own ministry.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8, NRSV).

Maybe that's why Micah put it the way he did. He has shown us. *He* has shown us what is good. And what does the Lord require of *us*? To do justly. To love mercy. And to walk humbly, *walk humbly*, with our God. ■

1 A kilometer is six-tenths of a mile.

2 A meter is slightly more than a yard.

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# Love God, love your people

Marguerite Shuster



Marguerite Shuster, PhD, is a professor of preaching and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, United States.

*Editor's note: This article is a version of a chapter from the forthcoming book Best Advice for Pastors and Preachers, edited by William J. Carl III. Copyright 2008 Westminster John Knox Press.*

A little while ago I received an invitation to write a chapter for a volume on the “best advice” for pastors and preachers, presumably to come out in a year or two. It was a nice invitation to which I responded affirmatively, as most of us can, perhaps, come up with some advice for other people without spending a great deal of time in the library. We may even have some things we deeply and sincerely want to say. But even that way of putting it suggests something of my latent unease about the assignment. After all, every psychologist knows the worth of advice—just about as close to nothing as one can get. Very often, in fact, it is even worse than that and pushes people in unwanted, instead of wanted, directions.

Years ago, at the very beginning of my pastoral career, I shared responsibility for a lay counseling center for the large congregation I served. A psychiatrist, a psychologist, and I met weekly with our lay counselors for supervision, and the inexperienced ones would often come in elated at the way their new clients had welcomed their helpful suggestions and admonitions. Following our own lights on this matter, we declined to advise them but simply suggested that they report back to us next week on what the clients had actually done with the instruction they had

received. Inevitably, the counselors returned with fallen countenances, dismayed that what the client had received so gladly had led exactly nowhere. So, with that sort of reality in mind, I have worked on my little section. Furthermore, I am anxious about the kinds of criteria people most commonly seem to use today to define success in ministry.

You need, I think, to have that background in order to best understand what I have prepared for you today, which is rather far from the “helpful hints” sort of thing and is a considerably expanded version of the chapter I recently submitted. I titled it, “Love God, Love Your People.” My underlying assumption in what I am working with includes the conviction that depth in the basics is indispensable and that it will trump techniques however technologically up-to-date and flashy. It will even enable what might look like an undistinguished ministry to bear good fruit in the end—perhaps more real fruit than ministries that appear very successful on the surface. I am also assuming that even those of us who know and believe that, still need to be reminded of it in the current cultural climate, for sometimes the pressures to see things in secular terms are pretty overwhelming, and we may come to wonder if we have the right priorities after all.

Thus, I intend to try to offer hope and comfort to those who are not superstars in the pulpit or elsewhere, and to write a sharp caution over what I consider to be the misplaced hopes of those who think there must be a quick fix out there somewhere. I do not intend, however, to offer you something easy. Perhaps a way of thinking about the whole of what I have to say would be to ask yourself at every turn, “What if only God, and no one else, saw what I did and who I am?”—which is, of course, the actual case if we are talking about real and complete vision. So much for my preface.

Love God, love your people. It’s not advice so much as a command of the most uncompromising sort—the structure of the Decalogue, the substance of Jesus’ summary of the law. Get that right, and the rest follows; if it doesn’t follow, what is missing will ultimately show itself to be less than essential. Get that wrong, and in the end, all the achievements apart from it—every spiffy sermon, every leap in the membership rolls—will reveal themselves for the dust that they are.

Well, what kind of encouragement is that? To many of us, such words sound all too much like prescribing a proper diet and exercise for weight loss. However sound the prescription may be, it’s hardly news. The fundamental trouble with it is

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that we either can't make it work at all, we can't sustain the effort, or (and here is the hardest part) we do sustain the effort for a long time but don't experience the rewards we expected. It's the last piece that sometimes makes us doubt the whole enterprise, rather than just doubt ourselves.

For instance, the physically fittest person I knew in my present congregation—a triathlete who buckled (that is, received a buckle for finishing) in Ironman competitions and should have lived to a ripe old age, died suddenly in her early 50s of a fast-moving liver cancer. The finest pastor I personally know, the only person able to pull me out of a terrible pit a few years ago, has had a life of frightening suffering. Cases like these show us that things just don't work out the way they should. These people did it right according to the rules, and look where it got them! So couldn't someone, please, tell us something *else* to do, something that would be a little easier and bring us the kind of results we want a little more reliably?

It would hardly do for a seminary professor like me to imply that the whole enterprise of educating clergy and then publishing articles and chapters and books or giving talks at seminars to try to help them in their ministry is fruitless. I spend a lot of time and energy on these things. I'm even seen as rather passionate about them, for as a matter of fact, I think it matters a great deal whether one's doctrine of the Trinity is orthodox, and whether one's sermon is coherently and interestingly designed. I teach both systematic theology and preaching, and I believe that those of us who spend our days working on such matters are not wasting our time. But still, if one fails to cling to the God whose nature one has so carefully articulated, or if one's engrossing sermon conveys no grace, well, then the end is worse than the beginning.

The danger of all the "something else's" we might strive to do is their tendency to usurp the place of the fundamentals, and thus become idols, something of our own construction that we can control much better than God or our neighbor in all their mysterious contrariness. For all the convenience of

idols, we tend to notice too late that, as someone noted in a sermon I heard recently, the thing about idols is that they never answer us when we cry out to them. We can control them to a certain extent, yes, but that is because they are of our own making. The wonder of God and of our neighbor is that they can both answer—but they often do not say what we want to hear.

Some of us, especially when we are young, know too little about the seeming contrariness of God and neighbor, and hence about the real difficulty of faithful ministry. In the first flush of a call or a conversion experience, love overflows in its emotional as well as its practical aspects. We are ready to go anywhere, serve anyone, at the greatest cost to ourselves. We can hardly imagine either a cooling of the ardor or a lack of striking results for our efforts. But the surer we have been, the more painful the reality that eventually sets in. Sometimes, no doubt, we avoid facing the cooling and the less-than-stellar results as we grasp frantically for tools and techniques behind which we can hide. Or sometimes, perhaps, we have been persuaded by advertising and chipper sayings and colleagues in ministry who appear to be getting better results than we are, that all we need are a few seminars, some surveys, and a generous dose of pop psychology, promotional skill, and management techniques to get our ministry on the road. We may be tempted, for these people sound so certain, but the more honest we are, the more surely we will suspect, even so, that we have somehow left our first love. What I really am talking about today at the bottom, then, is not losing our way when the path has become both faint and very steep.

Love God. The feelings do not come easily when expected direction and help seem long delayed, or when disaster has overtaken us in the midst of our most earnest efforts to remain faithful, or when energy is low and hopes have faded. It wasn't supposed to be this way, we are inclined to think. We read and hear about miraculous provision: could the stories be false? We think back to times in our own lives when God's providential care and guidance seemed incontrovertible.

(Perhaps you can cite dramatic examples of the Divine guidance, as can I.) Were we deceived? More importantly and more likely, what does it mean if we were not deceived? Unless we have some legitimate reason for supposing otherwise, and, of course, there can be such reasons, it is possible that we have committed high-handed sin, been patently rebellious and disobedient, or who knows what. But apart from that, it does not mean that we have fouled up somehow and that if only we could get it right (whatever "it" is), all would be well.

That is the fundamental mistake ingrained in us by our do-it-yourself culture and by all the CEO-style and health-and-wealth paradigms of ministry; those paradigms that teach us that proper procedure on our part will surely produce satisfying results. It is simply a mystery how anyone could read the New Testament, discern the patterns of the lives of the disciples, or contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ, and reach any such conclusion. The gospel story is not a tragedy because, and only because, it is finally about God's victory (victory in a dismaying narrative in which the protagonist has no tragic flaw).

Loving God, then—or at least the ability to persist in loving God in the hard times—has everything to do with trusting that victory in the midst of circumstances that look for all the world like defeat. It is not a blind faith; it is confidence, instead, in the resurrection. That confidence then funds—as well as directs and constrains—everything else. But it funds it all as the first fruits, the sure promise of the harvest, *not* as if the harvest had already come and the only reason we are not healthy and wealthy and wise is that we have unaccountably failed to take advantage of it.

I am arguing that an eschatological perspective is essential to faithfulness here and now. It is not a way of escaping our responsibilities in this life and this world; it is a way of retaining confidence that what happens here and now is not the whole story, so that we can regain our courage to make real sacrifices and exercise real courage. It is fascinating to me that as soon as I start to talk that way in the circles in which I usually travel, people

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fear that I am going back to some pie-in-the-sky approach that will fail to take responsibilities in this life seriously—as if we still lived in an age when that was a real danger. I am suggesting the reverse—that we now live in an age where failure to take God’s promised future seriously leaves us with nothing but this life, which gives our losses and sorrows here such ultimate importance that we are robbed of the hope that we need in

order to act responsibly and precisely in this life. If there is nothing else, today’s suffering and sacrifices can indeed feel overwhelming; it can seem that to risk present loss would be to risk everything. But if this is not the end, rather the crucial beginning, everything changes and we can better dare to be brave.

Loving God today, while trusting His final victory, involves taking the whole earthly story in all its brutal messiness seriously in our living and in our preaching. The Crucifixion was the *necessary* precursor to the Resurrection. Necessary not, perhaps, in some vague theoretical sense, for one can imagine restoration to life provided in the face of a death that came in one’s sleep, but necessary to the atoning work of the One who bore in His human body not just our weakness and mortality but our sin. Victories involve real enemies, real battles, and, almost inevitably, real pain. How, then, can we read and proclaim the gospel story by bowdlerizing it, by compiling little pink books of Bible promises that ensure our preaching will be uplifting? Not, of course, that the point is to make the opposite error and specialize in the sayings of a little black book of Bible curses. The point is that the whole counsel of God contains all the terror and complexity and failure and defeat, as well as the mysterious joys and gifts, of ordinary human life. If we really trust God, we will trust Him right there, and our preaching will not dance daintily around the difficulties. Because if God isn’t big enough for difficulties, He

isn’t big enough, and we will in the end deceive and confuse people whose lives don’t quite measure up to the idealized pictures we are so tempted to present.

We cannot truly love God if we love only carefully altered pictures of Him, from which everything marring a harmonious view has been eliminated, anymore than we can really love a spouse or close friend if we cannot tolerate the aspects of him or her that rub us the wrong way. If we try, or if we present such a picture to others, it is not God whom we love, but some idealized deity of our own design. People who have embraced such pictures will be baffled when they are confronted with a problem for which such answers do not suffice, and there is nowhere for them to go but out the backdoor of the church. Even the promise of the abundant life God offers must be presented in the way that God offers it, not as the world defines it.

Besides a sober honesty with ourselves and others about what God has done and the obstacles He has overcome and how He still continues to act, loving God also involves a certain self-sacrificial style of discipleship. Face it: love, if it is love, always involves sacrifice. Sometimes the joy of a relationship makes the sacrifice seem like nothing; at other times, commitment to the relationship sustains one in the necessary sacrifices despite sentiments that would lead anywhere or everywhere but where one must go. But a need for sacrifice there will surely be.

A longing for holiness is rather out of fashion these days, and if such a

reference makes one squirm a bit, I have made my point. Oh, yes, an ascetic impulse exists that can merge all too readily with a self-justifying and destructive masochism; one can surely fall off the trolley on that side. But today, cultural forces are more strongly arrayed to push us off the other side, the side on which every sort of self-indulgence, self-centeredness, and capitulation to the allure

of mammon is justified under the rubrics of health, self-care, and celebration of life. Students always look excited and affirming when I begin to speak of legitimate issues of self-care in my homiletics lectures, but they end up being dismayed when they find that I do not think such things are the be-all and end-all of ministry. I tell them that if they are looking for a regular and defensible 40-hour work week, I recommend working for the postal service.

True, certain pastor-search committees today will be populated by those who want a pastor—and a Jesus—whom they can “hang out” with (the precise term some folks on a recent committee I know of used); someone whom they see as being basically just like them and with whom, therefore, they are perfectly comfortable. That is fine so long as one doesn’t really need a pastor—or a God. While one understands and affirms such persons’ distastes for all the holier-than-thou presentations (and visions) of self that can make pastors simply obnoxious, one fears that the less defensible aspect of the impulse is to have a pastor whose character and preaching will make no actual demands, will lead to no real disturbance to one’s lifestyle and commitments. It may betray an underlying spiritual laziness, a refusal even to aspire to anything higher and harder. Capitulating to desires of this sort means in the end choosing to please people rather than to seek to live up to the best that one knows. And I suspect that the best that one knows involves a good

deal more self-discipline and a good deal more awe before the holy Lord than will ever be exactly popular.

This element of sternness and exclusivity in one's love for God is precisely what enables one actually to love one's people and not simply use them for one's self-aggrandizement. It can free one to keep on loving all those folks whose troubles all the good advice and good cheer in the world will never fix; indeed, it may at last teach one that most often the only help one can give begins when, because of one's trust in the Lord's adequacy, one stops needing to fix folks oneself. What they need most, of course, is a pastor who is not afraid to stick around even if it doesn't get better, for how can they be expected to find their recalcitrant suffering bearable if even their pastor cannot really tolerate it over the long haul? (I'm not speaking here of the sort of hole-in-the-bucket parishioner who is psychologically unwell and makes inordinate demands. Of course, pastors must set firm limits in such cases. I'm speaking of people who need desperately to be neither blamed nor abandoned in the midst of lives that are relentlessly hard. And unfortunately there are lots of them.)

Pastors who love their people will not leave the care of them to someone else so that they can attend to administrative tasks, as if the mechanics of the institution were more the pastor's job than the human condition of the people. And pastoral care takes time. I remember over 16 years ago, when I moved from a pastoral to an academic ministry, the words of a kindly, elderly pastor who begged me to teach my students to visit their people, for doing so is becoming a lost art. In fact, you doubtless already know that the current wisdom seems to be that such things should be delegated to lay people to free the pastor for—what? Assorted management and leadership tasks, I suppose. Obviously, I think that is completely wrongheaded, for how can one be a pastor to those one does not know? And I suspect your experience matches mine; people really do want care from their pastor, no matter how much they appreciate the ministry of others in the congregation. If you are

reluctant to abandon that personal touch or wish to retrieve it, I would encourage you in instincts that I earnestly believe to be right. Not everyone is a skilled pastoral counselor, nor should the pastor undertake the role of a psychologist offering long-term therapy, but almost everyone with any gift for ministry at all can learn to listen, if only they will, which, sometimes, is almost everything.

Loving pastors will neither feel the need to beat people up from the pulpit, as if being punitive were the measure of faithfulness, nor will they be squeamish about the hard word that is sometimes called for. Genuine love, after all, is not a squishy sort of indulgence or refusal to do or say anything that might cause someone even a moment's displeasure, but a longing for the best for those one loves. In it all, the pastor who loves the people will seek to be an agent of God's grace and mercy, genuinely wishing the people well but not confusing things going well with their being easy. In fact, to love people may often require being willing to say that given the choice between a route that requires courage and one that offers comfort, the one that requires courage has a certain moral presumption in its favor. The easy road should raise the most suspicions in a broken world like ours. A pastor I know once questioned the wisdom of a particular course of action on a difficult question that had been proposed at a denominational gathering on the grounds that the course of action was too easy—it required no courage. To his mind, that in itself put its merit in doubt. Similarly, I love the story of the rabbi who asked a parishioner how it was going, and when the man responded, "Well, OK, but it wouldn't hurt if things were to go better," the rabbi raised his formidable eyebrows and said, "What makes you think it wouldn't hurt?" What makes you think it wouldn't hurt if things were to go better? That may sound a little stern, but still, the loving thing is the true one—true not in a wooden and brutal sense, but true before God.

Now, these people whom we commit ourselves to love will surely disappoint us, even as God disappoints so many of our expectations. Sometimes they will

disappoint us because they do not make the progress we think they ought; sometimes they will disappoint us because they do not offer us the appreciation we long for; sometimes their sorrows will break our hearts. And sometimes we will be ashamed as we find them far more faithful than we are ourselves. But there they are—the painfully mixed and highly particular lot that the Lord has given specifically to us, given into our care.

Love God, love your people—honestly, without looking away from the hard parts, without expecting doing it right to work according to this world's standards. There is, after all, no very sound reason to suppose it will, for apart from the Resurrection, the gospel itself could look for all the world like a failure. So you will need others to stand with you, to tell you when you can no longer say it to yourself that the message is true—that the prayer and the Bible study and the reaching out to others are not for nothing. You will need others to listen to you, to pray for you, to care for you, to proclaim the gospel to you: do not suppose that you are supposed to do it all by yourself. But for your sanity and for the health of Christ's church, steer away from the gimmicks and the quick fixes. Find those to support you who know, as you do, that the great cloud of witnesses of Hebrews 11 all died without having received what was promised. Why? Because God has provided something better (Heb. 11:39, 40).

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared for those  
who love him  
(1 Cor. 2:9, NRSV).

Truly to believe *that* is to be made wonderfully free to obey and trust the only One who, in the end, can make it all worthwhile no matter what and thus to be genuinely free to give ourselves to our people. ■

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# Legalism and “righteousness by faith”

## Part two of a two-part series

Roy Gane



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*Editor’s note: In part one that appeared in January 2008, the author affirmed that salvation is by grace through faith alone and not by works of the law. While keeping God’s law cannot save one who has already broken it, a sinner who is saved by faith in Christ will bear fruits of obedience in his or her life. Such obedience is not legalism. Legalism is misuse of the law. One type of misuse prevalent today treats God’s Old Testament moral law as legalistic and denies accountability to it on the grounds that it cannot be kept and need not be kept by “new covenant” Christians who believe in Christ’s legal work for them. The misuse employs at least five different arguments. In part one, the author considered the first two—domineering depravity and the impossibility of full obedience. The second part deals with the other three arguments.*

### 3. Justification

*Is justification by faith only a declaration that by faith a sinner stands just before God, or does it involve something more?*

The terms *justify* and *justification*, as used in the Bible, are legal metaphors. These and accounting metaphors, such as *impute* and *reckon*, describe a real gift from God that is free to all who accept it: Christ’s righteousness in place of our sinfulness (Rom. 3:21–24; 2 Cor. 5:21). Just because salvation transactions are described and illustrated through legal and accounting metaphors does not mean that the transactions themselves are unreal. Christ has really gained righteousness for us by bearing the

culpability for our sins as our Mediator and Priest and (unlike Old Testament priests, who only bore “culpability”; Lev. 10:17) dying for those sins as the ultimate sacrificial victim (Heb. 7:25–27; 9:6–10:22; cf. Isa. 53).

Fusion of the priestly and victim roles in Christ provides substitutionary atonement, which is the basis of our salvation. Because He has died in this way for us, the deadly wages of sin (Rom. 6:23) have reached their target in Him. So if by faith we identify with His death by accepting Him as our Substitute, we have died to the claims of sin that have enslaved our lives and condemned us to death, and as He rose again, we are raised to new lives (Rom. 6:1–11; cf. 2 Cor. 5:14, 15). Christ’s substitution for us is not at all unjust because He has a perfect right to grant us a gift, in this case the gift of voluntarily dying in our place.

Christ the sinless was treated *as if* He was a sinner that sinners may be treated *as if* they had never sinned. But the substitution is not “as if”: Christ is actually our Substitute on the basis of an accomplished historical event. Therefore, the results of His substitution are not “as if”: those who believe are actually treated as righteous. This is not sterile legal fiction divorced from reality; it is a real, dynamic gift of mercy and grace in real life. When God regards those who have faith as righteous (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17) or, in other words, reckons their faith as righteousness belonging to them (Gen. 15:6), His declaration is so because His creative Word has made it so on the basis of Christ’s substitution for us.

When God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5), it is not because He is an unjust or deluded judge who declares sinners to be something they are not (Isa. 5:23; Prov. 17:15; contrast Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings. 8:32). Rather, the ungodly who believe (Rom. 4:5) in the sacrifice He has accomplished for all sinners are changed by His justifying, so that they are reconciled to Him and are no longer ungodly (cf. Rom. 5:1–11). Therefore, through Christ’s sacrifice, God is just when He justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

The righteousness that God gives on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice originates with Him alone, apart from any human works, but when the believers receive this gift, its benefits belong to them. This justification does not mean that the believers are instantly perfected and matured in character, but that they are forgiven, have turned around to journey with Christ, and possess assurance of salvation through having Christ (1 John 5:11–13).

Receiving Christ’s justification and forgiveness, with its spiritual death to sin and resurrection to

new life in harmony with God (Rom. 6:1–11; cf. 2 Kings 5:14), has a transforming effect on the human heart. The ruling power of sin is broken and the Christian serves another, divine Master. The transforming effect is partly due to overwhelming gratitude when we, who are so unworthy, are pardoned and accepted by God (see Ps. 32:1; Luke 19:5–10). But the transforming effect also flows from a new, dynamic connection to the spiritually healing presence of Christ (Gal. 2:20), who brings “the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4).<sup>1</sup> Justification is received by faith, apart from works. But it inevitably affects works because the holy divine nature is love (1 John 4:8), and therefore, faith works through love (Gal. 5:6).<sup>2</sup>

Having spiritually died to sin and risen to newness of life in Christ, justified Christians, who keep on receiving justification as they need it day by day, become sanctified servants of righteousness because they are under grace rather than the condemnation of the law (verses 12–23). Sanctification is the experience of holiness that begins with belonging to God at conversion (1 Cor. 6:11), and this holiness grows in love as the character is transformed throughout one’s lifetime (1 Thess. 3:12, 13), always powered by God through His Spirit (Rom. 5:5; cf. 8:4–27).<sup>3</sup>

While justification and sanctification are theologically distinct, they are experientially interlinked from the time of conversion. Both have ongoing aspects, are essential aspects of salvation, and are gifts of God’s grace.<sup>4</sup> Like justification, sanctification is always, at every stage, dependent upon God. This growth in holiness and love does not mean that Christians need Christ less and less as they become better persons in and of themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars are recognizing that while Martin Luther emphasized the depth of human depravity and denied that human beings can do anything to

merit salvation,<sup>6</sup> making “sin great is inseparably connected with exalting and praising grace.”<sup>7</sup> Thus Luther taught that depravity is remedied by the powerful reality of the justification transaction: “When a human being is united with God, he or she becomes a participant not only in the human but also in the divine nature of Christ. . . .

“Faith, in turn, justifies precisely because it ‘takes hold of and possesses’ the present Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

“According to the Reformer, justifying faith does not merely signify a reception of the forgiveness imputed to a human being for the sake of the merit of Christ, which is the aspect emphasized by the Formula of Concord.

THIS JUSTIFICATION DOES NOT  
MEAN THAT THE BELIEVERS ARE  
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ASSURANCE OF SALVATION THROUGH  
HAVING CHRIST (1 JOHN 5:11–13).

Faith as real participation in Christ means participation in the institution of ‘blessing, righteousness, and life’ which has taken place in Christ. Christ Himself is life, righteousness, and blessing, because God is all this ‘by nature and in substance.’<sup>9</sup>

Ellen G. White agreed with Luther when she wrote: “A soul that depends on Christ with the simplicity that a child depends upon its mother is justified, for it becomes one with the Substitute, who was justification and redemption. Herein is love, that the heart and will are knit together in Christ Jesus.”<sup>10</sup>

On the dynamic and inseparable experiential relationship between justifying faith and resultant works (which are

never part of the basis for justification), Luther wrote in his “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans”: “Faith . . . is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1 [:12, 13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit.

“Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. . . .

“And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to

God, who has shown him this grace.

“Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.”<sup>11</sup>

However, from the Formula of Concord on, subsequent revisionists lost Luther’s crucial cluster of interlinked concepts and settled for a weaker “gospel” in which justification does not lay an adequate foundation for a life of sanctification. John MacArthur reacts to

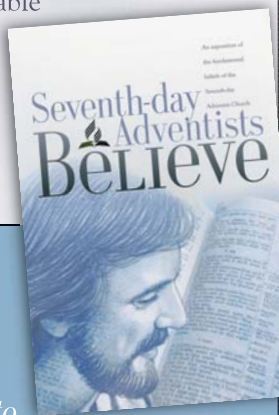
the result that flourishes today:

“Biblical justification must be earnestly defended on two fronts. Many today misuse the doctrine to support the view that obedience to God’s moral law is optional. This teaching attempts to reduce the whole of God’s saving work to the declarative act of justification. It downplays the spiritual rebirth of regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17); it discounts the moral effects of the believer’s new heart (Eze. 36:26–27); and it makes sanctification hinge on the believer’s own efforts. It tends to treat the forensic element of justification—God’s act of declaring the believing sinner righteous—as if this were the only essential aspect of salvation. The inevitable effect of this

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approach is to turn the grace of God into licentiousness (Jude 4). Such a view is called *antinomianism*.<sup>12</sup>

## 4. Old Testament law

*Does justification by faith nullify the Ten Commandment law of the Old Testament and establish a new law of love?*

Mistakenly viewing God's Old Testament moral law (including, but not limited to, the Ten Commandments) as legalistic, many Christians have thrown off their need for accountability to this law because they think that adequately keeping it is impossible anyway.<sup>13</sup> Such an approach is attractive because it brings an exhilarating feeling of liberation. However, such a position results in cheap grace and practical antinomianism masquerading as "righteousness by faith" and winds up undermining a genuine life of faith. The consequences in real lives can be devastating, as many can testify.

While Paul clearly separates salvation by grace through faith from the invalid attempt to gain salvation by one's own works (see Rom. 3:20–28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8, 9), he by no means establishes a parallel dichotomy between faith working through love (Gal. 5:6) and an invalidated body of Old Testament moral and ethical law. Rather than voiding the OT law through faith, Paul establishes the law (Rom. 3:31) and finds it indispensable as a holy, just, and good standard of righteousness and revealer of unrighteousness (Rom. 7:7–13; with v. 7 citing the OT law of Exod. 20:17). Echoing Christ's affirmation that all of God's Old Testament revelation is based on the principles of love for God and other human beings (Matt. 22:37–40), Paul expresses the essential unity between OT moral law (as exemplified by some of the Ten Commandments, which he quotes) and love (Rom. 13:8–10).<sup>14</sup>

Many Christians today nurture the notion that God's Old Testament commandments are opposed to our assurance of salvation. But although these laws can never provide assurance for those who have broken them, they are an essential part of the process that leads to assurance of salvation because they reveal God's will and thereby point

out the sinner's need for forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice. Lack of knowledge regarding God's will does not enhance solid assurance. Imagine how you would feel if you did not have the divine law to show what God expects of you. Would your ignorance give you greater confidence? Hardly!

While we have assurance of salvation through having Christ (1 John 5:12), it is also true that Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, NRSV). It is impossible to separate our relationship to Christ from obedience to Him because the only saving relationship with Him is to have Him as our Lord and Master. As our Lord, Jesus commands us to "love one another" (John 13:34, NRSV). While He renewed this command for New Testament Christians and (in the same verse) amplified its significance by His incomparable example of self-sacrificing love ("just as I have loved you"), this principle was at the heart of His Old Testament law (Lev. 19:18) and summarized many of the more specific laws (see Matt. 22:39, 40).<sup>15</sup>

Love as a summary by no means invalidates what was being summarized, namely, instructions that show how the principle of love is worked out in various life circumstances. It is true that many examples and applications of love in Old Testament laws are culturally conditioned to meet the needs of an ancient agricultural people, but through these examples we can see moral subprinciples of love that can help us too.<sup>16</sup> To disregard these subprinciples by considering them as obsolete is to willfully compromise Christ's overall principle of love and to arrogantly assume that we know how to fulfill divine love in various situations of life without further divine guidance. Can love provide an adequate moral compass if it is defined by modern or postmodern subjectivity rather than divinely revealed subprinciples?<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Judgment

*Finally, does a pre-Advent judgment negate salvation by grace through faith?*

God's judgment by no means neutralizes salvation by grace through faith.



The pre-Advent, demonstrative phase of the judgment process is not about who has sinned, for all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Rather, it is about those who have been and remain forgiven, “securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard” (Col. 1:23, NRSV). The judgment is investigative, but not in the sense that it is for God’s own information, for He already knows everything (Isa. 46:9, 10; Luke 16:15). Rather, records of works (e.g., Dan. 7:10) serve as evidence of human faith (or lack thereof) that can be investigated and witnessed by God’s created beings, who cannot read thoughts of faith.<sup>18</sup> For God’s faithful people, the judgment is for their benefit (v. 22) as an essential and concluding part of their salvation. It vindicates them as the ones who are truly loyal to God and the rightful heirs of His kingdom, against the claims of rebels who oppress them (see the larger context of Daniel 7). The judgment demonstrates that God is just when He justifies the right people: those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

A faithful Christian who has made a covenant with God by Christ’s sacrifice (cf. Ps. 50:3–6) and has a balanced, biblical view of sin, justification, and obedience will not have an unhealthy fear of the demonstrative phase of God’s judgment before Christ’s second advent, which involves consideration of works (Eccles. 12:14) as evidence for living faith that is “working through love” (Gal. 5:6, NRSV; cf. James 2:26).<sup>19</sup>

For those who think they must or can go on continually sinning until the second coming of Christ, salvation and accountability to God for victory over committing sins are mutually exclusive. So to retain assurance of salvation, they must deny the judgment and the time prophecies of Daniel 7–9 that support its pre-Advent context.<sup>20</sup> Because Ellen G. White strongly believed in the pre-Advent judgment as a pillar of distinctive Seventh-day Adventist teaching,<sup>21</sup> they must also deny the special nature of her ministry.<sup>22</sup>

The true gospel and the pre-Advent judgment are inextricably linked (cf. Rev. 14:6, 7, NRSV: “an eternal

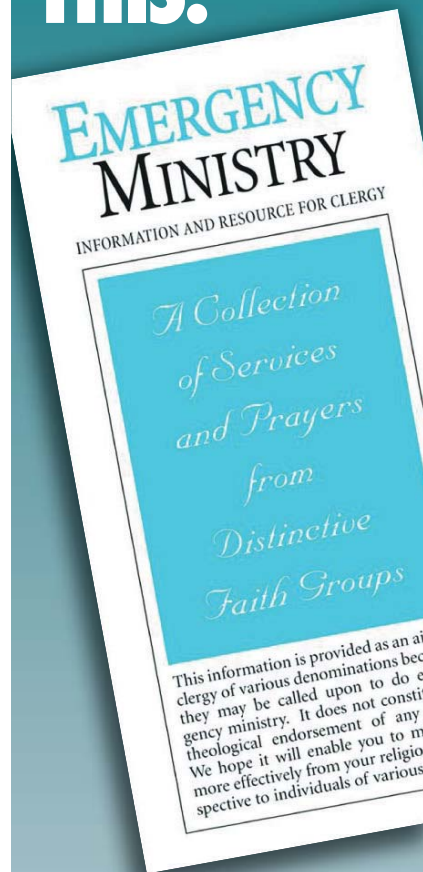
gospel . . . ‘the hour of his judgment has come’”).<sup>23</sup> Throwing out the judgment and accountability to God’s law is not a sign of a higher level of faith and gospel assurance; it is symptomatic of a perversion of the gospel. Paul spoke of “the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all” (Rom. 2:16, NRSV). Lest anyone think this doesn’t apply to born-again Christians, he affirmed that “we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10, NRSV).<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

Salvation by grace through faith in Christ and His once-for-all sacrifice is the greatest gift we can ever receive. However, we have found that an unbalanced, unbiblical approach to “righteousness by faith” is based on a legalistic approach to God’s law and has a theological domino effect with far-reaching implications. By accepting all of the biblical evidence, we can enjoy a balanced understanding and solid assurance based on Christ, our Lord. **M**

- 1 See Carl Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). “The forgiveness of sins is the actualization of the divine presence in the living Christ in the midst of human beings who cannot on their own cross the bridge that leads to fellowship with God,” 83. “Regeneration and new obedience result from the justifying work of God,” 98. Cf. Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1955), 114. “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.”
- 2 “Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned. More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. . . . Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works—works of righteousness, obedience.” Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1908), 62, 63.
- 3 On sanctification as both (1) a new relationship and status and (2) as moral growth in goodness, see Ivan Blazen, “Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary

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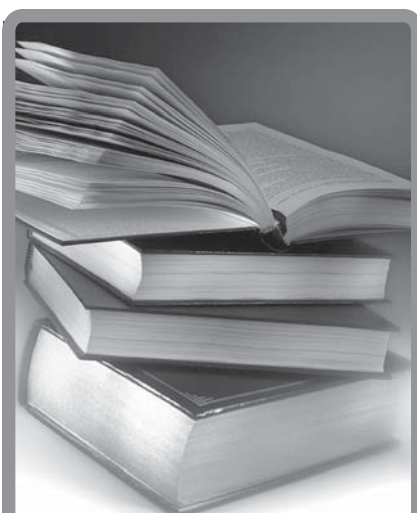
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Reference Series 12, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 295–298. On sanctification as growth in love, see George Knight, *I Used to be Perfect: An Ex-Legalist Looks at Law, Sin, and Grace* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1994), 46, 92.

4 Knight, *Perfect*, 37–51.

5 As some Seventh-day Adventists have mistakenly taught, with damaging consequences, as pointed out by Colleen Tinker, “In Adam or in Christ: Where are you?” *Proclamation!* 7/4 (2006): 11.

6 Robin Leaver, *Luther on Justification* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 44–52; Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 142–153.

7 Althaus, *Martin Luther*, 142.

8 Tuoma Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 8; cf. Leaver, *Luther Justification*, 62: “Christ dwells in believers through faith. For Luther, justification is not a naked imputation nor a simple declaration that the sinner is accounted righteous. Rather, a man is justified in, through, and because of a union with Christ that comes about by faith. Christ and the believer are united as Bridegroom and bride becoming ‘one flesh,’ or ‘one cake.’ The believer does not live by his own spirit but by the Spirit of Christ, who dwells within him. . . . Luther’s classic statement is to be found in his larger commentary on Galatians: ‘Living in me as He does, Christ abolishes the Law, damns sin, and kills death; for at His presence all these cannot help disappearing. Christ is eternal Peace, Comfort, Righteousness, and Life. . . . Abiding and living in me, Christ removes and absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me. This attachment to Him causes me to be liberated from the terror of the Law and of sin, pulled out of my own skin, and transferred into Christ. . . . Since I am in Him, no evil can harm me’ ” (citing *Luther’s Works* American ed. [Philadelphia: Fortress and Concordia, 1957], XXVI, 167 “*Lectures on Galatians*,” 1535).

9 Mannermaa, *Christ Faith*, 16, 17.

10 Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God: Messages Especially for Women* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1998), 185.

11 Leaver, *Luther Justification*, 55, citing *Luther’s Works*, XXXV, 371 “*Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*,” 1522; cf. Althaus, *Martin Luther*, 246–250.

12 J. F. MacArthur Jr., “Long before Luther (Jesus and the Doctrine of Justification),” in *Justification by Faith Alone: Affirming the Doctrine by Which the Church and the Individual Stands or Falls*, ed. Don Kistler; rev. ed. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2003), 2, 3 (emphasis added).

13 Dale Ratzlaff writes, “The old or first covenant which included the Ten Commandments was in force only until the death of Christ.” “The Continental Divide of Biblical Interpretation,” *Proclamation!* 6/3 [2005]: 10. “*Christians are released from the law as a guide for Christian service.*” Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, rev. ed. (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 1995), 201. Ratzlaff argues that the standard of morality called for in the “new covenant” is higher than and supersedes

that of the “old covenant” and that “the moral principles of the new covenant cover all the moral laws of the old,” 231; cf. 232–234. So “The freedom of the Gospel does not give Christians the liberty to sin,” 234. Christians live a moral life for Christ in harmony with the overarching principle of love. But because Christ fulfilled the moral requirements of the “old covenant” law for us, it is no longer binding on Christians, 233, 234. Regarding the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, Ratzlaff concludes that God does not require Christians to observe seventh-day Sabbath rest, which is too difficult anyway because of all the rules involved with it, 307–309.

14 Regarding the ongoing relevance of Old Testament law for Christians and compatibility between the law and grace, see Daniel Block’s clear and penetrating three-part series, “Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians,” *Ministry* 78, no. 5 (May 2006): 5–11; *Ministry* 78, no. 7 (July 2006): 12–16; *Ministry* 78, no. 9 (September 2006): 15–18.

15 On Leviticus 19:18 at the heart of the Pentateuch, see Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 34, 35; cf. 343–348.

16 On modern applicability of biblical laws, see *ibid.*, 305–310.

17 On absolute moral compass versus postmodern subjectivity, see *ibid.*, 312–314.

18 Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, MI: Diadem, 1999), 245; Roy Gane, *Who’s Afraid of the Judgment?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2006), 105.

19 For a balanced, biblical view of justification by faith in relation to the judgment, see Ivan Blazen, “Justification by Faith and Judgment According to Works,” Biblical Research Institute, <http://www.adventistbiblicalex.org/documents/justification%20by%20faith.htm>; cf. Ivan Blazen, “Salvation,” 290–292. “In the judgment God looks for justification with its fruit, not in the sense of ‘faith plus works saves,’ but of justification as the source of sanctified living,” 291.

20 Dale Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-Day Adventists* (Glendale, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996), 167–182, 215, 216, 225, 226, 235–240.

21 See, e.g., Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), 409–411, 417–433, 479–491. For this judgment as a basic Seventh-day Adventist teaching, see Fundamental Belief statement 23.

22 Dale Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine*, e.g., 355.

23 On the relationship between the gospel and the judgment, including answers to objections raised by Ratzlaff, see Gane, *Who’s Afraid of the Judgment?*, 103–114.

24 John 3:18 says literally, “He who believes in Him is not judged” (NASB; cf. NJB). However, several English translations recognize that in this context “judged” refers to the condemnation part of the judgment process: “He who believes in Him is not condemned” (NKJV; cf. NRSV, NIV).

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# Assisting parishioners through grief

## Part one of a two-part series

Larry Yeagley



Larry Yeagley, BA, now retired, has served as a pastor and chaplain. He lives in Gentry, Arkansas, United States.

**A**s pastors, how often we feel totally helpless in assisting parishioners through grief. I remember the first time I was assigned a pastorate, substituting for its regular minister. Two weeks later a church member's uncle died, and I was to do the funeral and comfort the family. I didn't have the slightest idea how to proceed, but I reached for Andrew Blackwood's book<sup>1</sup> on funerals and speedily read the whole book. I prayed all the way to the home of the bereaved. When the funeral was over, the funeral director said, "Young man, if you need any advice on funerals and how to comfort the grieving, just drop by and we can chat." I was crushed by embarrassment.

From that point on I began reading every new book on grief, and then I attended a five-week course on counseling at a nearby hospital. J. William Worden offered a weekend intensive class at the University of Chicago. He pushed all of us to practice grief counseling principles via role-playing. Therese A. Rando taught a day-long seminar at a Michigan hospice. I traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the first national hospice convention where I was privileged to have a personal visit with Dr. Cicely Saunders, founder of St. Christopher's Hospice in London. Every chance I had, I pushed myself to learn how to comfort those who mourn. I was determined that I would never again be embarrassed as I was at that first funeral service. With so many resources at my fingertips, most of them requiring a very

little outlay of money, I had no excuse to remain incompetent at comforting those who hurt.

Pastors need to be competent in grief counseling because even though our society is filled with helpers of all stripes, most people turn first (and sometimes solely) to their pastor for help, often long before they would be willing to enter into other types of professional treatment or therapy.<sup>2</sup>

Pastoral competency depends not just on academic learning but also on knowing the parishioners. Pastoral visitation reveals many things about members that determine the nature of grief support. Pastors who say they don't do pastoral visits are like doctors who treat patients without knowing their health history.

### What is grief care?

First, let us understand what grief care is all about. Therese A. Rando describes grief care as a series of processes rather than tasks or outcomes. "As compared to tasks, they [grief care processes] offer the care giver more immediate feedback, the ability to intervene more quickly and appropriately, the specific targets for intervention, and improved assessment of the mourner's current experience."<sup>3</sup>

I have used Rando's processes as a template over which I could place the current experience of a grieving person and thus determine their progress or the area where they are stuck. The following is a paraphrased version of Rando's processes:

1. Admit that the loss happened and attempt to comprehend how it happened.
2. Allow the full experience of pain and talk about the major and secondary losses.
3. Think about the relationship and review memories both positive and negative.
4. Admit that the physical relationship can no longer be and write a new life script.
5. Allow yourself to have a relationship of memory.
6. Develop new plans that do not include the lost relationship.

You can quite easily assume that a person is adjusting to a loss quite well. All parishioners who lose a loved one should have frequent contacts with family and friends after the loss. After our 22-year-old son died in 1980, most of my work colleagues assumed that I was doing well because I had been conducting bereavement support groups for four years before his death. They didn't see the conflicts that were churning within me. One day I was visiting a 22-year-old man as he lay dying in the intensive care unit. After he died, sorrow welled up in my heart, and tears swelled

up, but I kept my composure until the young man died. I ran from the room and went outside and leaned against a pillar. The head nurse made no faulty assumptions but came to my side and blended her tears with mine. Yes, I looked much tougher, but she sensed my pain. That day she became a source of healing that enabled me to work effectively in the intensive care unit for years.

### Listen! Listen! Listen!

When pastors ask me what I do for grieving people, I say, “Listen, listen, listen.” Listen without interrupting, giving advice, or trying to take away the pain. Pain mellows when experienced and expressed to a patient listener. Over the past 30 years I have listened to people expressing their sorrow without trying to fix the person speaking. Countless times they have responded by saying, “Thank you so much for listening to me. I guess I had to get it all out in the open. I feel better already.” Another common response is, “It’s so good to know that what I’m feeling is normal and that I’m not going crazy.” My response is, “Someone I read said that grief is craziness, but you’re not going crazy.”

Pastors should not try to defend God or answer the *why* questions of grieving parishioners. They don’t expect answers. They simply want to express their sorrow and anxiety.

I co-lectured with a professor of New Testament theology at an American Cancer Society convention. He said he almost canceled the speaking appointment because his wife died of cancer three months earlier. He spent those months trying to find out why this happened to him. He said, “I searched the Bible from cover to cover to find an answer to the *why* question, but I didn’t find an answer. If an answer is there, I should have been able to find it. I’m a professor of New Testament theology. I finally concluded that the Book was not written to answer that question. It was written to tell us how to get out of the mess we are in. But I came up with questions for which I found answers. Does God take my suffering seriously? If so, what has He done about it? What is He doing

## PASTORAL COMPETENCY DEPENDS NOT JUST ON ACADEMIC LEARNING BUT ALSO ON KNOWING THE PARISHIONERS.

about it? What will He do about it? The Bible answers those questions, and the answers give me assurance.”

I think about my professor friend every time a grieving person sits in front of me and asks, “But why?” That person wants the freedom to ask that question without being judged or lectured.

### Changing the focus

In early grief, many people focus almost exclusively on the illness, accident, or manner of death. They rehearse this many times. This process is important because this helps them to admit that their loss has really happened. There comes a point when they need to change the focus from the manner of loss and begin focusing on the relationship. The relationship should be revisited piece by piece, not all at once. They need to admit that each piece cannot be cared for at once. To write a farewell to each piece, speak a farewell, or act out a farewell can be very helpful. Over a period of time this exercise moves them from a relationship of presence to a relationship of memory. This process cannot be rushed. It takes time.

A woman in Texas acted out a farewell to sleeping with her husband. She said, “Last night I slept on my side of the bed. For six months I’ve been sleeping on his side of the bed. I don’t know if I smelled him on that side or what, but I know he won’t be there with me anymore. So I slept on my side.”

An elderly woman seated next to her said, “I said farewell to my husband taking care of the finances. This week I went to the bank and changed the names of the accounts. Now I’m learning to take care of the business.”

A young woman whose husband committed suicide said, “I said Goodbye

on Sunday. We always picked up the Sunday paper from the porch, made a cup of coffee, and went back to bed to read the paper together. After breakfast we went to the botanical gardens and enjoyed the flowers together. On Sunday I told him he wasn’t there to do these things with me, but that was his choice. I read the paper in bed, had my breakfast, and then went to the gardens and enjoyed the roses. He isn’t going to be there anymore, but I’m going to go on enjoying life. I know I have finally found my feet.”

These three were moving through the process because they focused on the death or divorce, then changed their focus to the relationship that used to be but could no longer be. They were moving toward adjustment because they could talk without interruption or judgment.

Some people are helped by creating a memorial to their loved one. That’s why we see crosses and flowers along the highway where a death occurred. Donations are sometimes given to a memorial fund at the church. Pastors must counsel with the family about how they wish the money to be used.

I often hear people say to a grieving person, “It’s been over a year now. You should be over it.” But time cannot be considered the best indicator of adjustment. The most reliable indicator is movement. The movement can be large or ever so small, but movement shows reason to rejoice. A pastor looks for movement and affirms a person for progress. A pastor expresses hope that the movement will continue.

(Part two will appear in the May 2008 issue of *Ministry*.) ■

- 1 Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Funeral* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1942).
- 2 See William R. Miller and Kathleen A. Jackson, *Practical Psychology for Pastors*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 2.
- 3 Therese A. Rando, *Treatment of Complicated Mourning* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1993), 44.

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# To act justly

Reinder Bruinsma



Reinder Bruinsma, PhD, is the recently retired president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Netherlands, Huis ter Heide, Netherlands.

*Editor's note: This is an adaptation of a message delivered during the European Pastors' Council, held in DeBron, Netherlands, September 11–16, 2007.*

*O people, the LORD has told you what is good,  
and this is what he requires of you:  
to do what is right, to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with your God.*

—Micah 6:8, NLT

Listen. The Lord has told you this so many times; this is what He *requires*. It is not an option; you must do what is *right*. As Peterson paraphrases in *The Message*: “Do what is fair and just . . .”

Micah 6:8 has become one of the best-known Old Testament verses, quoted often, even today. An international movement of Christians refers to themselves as people who have adopted the Micah Challenge, in which they dare international leaders to “halve absolute global poverty by 2015!” They want to act justly in today’s world of injustice. They want to heed the words of Micah.

## Micah, the prophet

About Micah himself, there is not much to say—no introductory passage about his background or calling. We are told only that he comes from Moresheth, a village some 20 miles south of Jerusalem. And we know that he was a contemporary of Isaiah. Micah addresses mostly the people in the southern kingdom, mainly

during the reign of Jotham and Ahaz. With his book structured somewhat differently from most other prophetic books, it contains a cycle of criticism and accusations, on the one hand, and promises of hope and healing, on the other hand. We find this in most prophetic writings; here it is not just one cycle, but it is repeated three times.

However, each time the message is the same: God hates sin (pious behavior cannot make up for it). He hates the rich whose only aim is to get more. He hates dishonesty and violence. He hates the false prophets who proclaim only what people like to hear. He hates the priests who just do their job for money and status.

Micah addresses one issue in particular: the poor being deprived of their property, especially their land. That is serious. That goes against the basic principles of Israelite society. It upsets the entire social fabric. As a result, many are left behind and many are mistreated, especially women and orphans.

Micah has a word from the Lord for the guilty: God does not much look at external pious deeds. He does not weigh and count the sacrifices you bring that give you such a self-righteous feeling. He is not primarily interested in the cultic elements of religion, especially when they have taken on a life of their own.

He wants you to act justly, to do *mishpat*. That is, to practice the requirements of God’s laws as they relate to other people. This means in actual practice that we are to give back to people what is their due, to deliver the downtrodden and the oppressed, to focus upon what is ethical and relational.

Additionally, He wants us to love mercy—*chesed*. This emphasizes covenant faithfulness. We must exercise mercy, not from a sense of duty, but because we *love* doing so. We also are to walk humbly, that is, wisely and circumspectly.

## Act justly—today

What do we make of Micah’s message about justice and integrity? What are the implications for us? Surely, we are not doing too badly. We aren’t criminals. We have not stolen land from poor people. Most of us do our share for the poor through our taxes and through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). Many of us let our vote in local and national elections at least partly depend on the ethical principles of those we vote for. Right?

What do these words “to act justly” mean? First of all, we are asked to *act*. Not merely to preach, write articles, read books, dialogue,

have seminars—but to act. Theory must be put into practice. Acting justly—this presupposes intention. It often demands courage, the willingness to stick your neck out. It means that we refuse easy solutions, avoid procrastination, and not wait until every obstacle is out of the way before we act.

### Global response

Amid all this is the call for justice. Justice often runs contrary to human interests. It is not primarily about success or profit; rather, it is primarily about principles and people. Acting justly impacts all domains of life: globally, nationally, regionally, and within our churches and families.

We hear a lot about the Christian pursuit of global justice. Perhaps we don't hear enough about it. Global poverty and inequality are a terrible shame. How can we sleep peacefully when hundreds of millions do not have enough to eat? How can we take a vacation when hundreds of millions have no adequate health care and no decent roof over their heads? How can we feel at ease while our part of the world becomes ever more affluent as other parts remain trapped in poverty?

Even if we do not see the poverty, God does; even though we do not hear the cry of hungry children, God does. Even though we may forget the millions who must find shelter under a few rusty sheets of metal, God doesn't, not for a moment.

It is no coincidence that the Scriptures refer to poverty more than 2,100 times. And remember, the only time Christ directly condemned people was when, in Matthew 25, He condemned those who overlooked and ignored the weak and the dispossessed.

Bono, the lead singer of the famous rock band U2, doesn't produce the kind of music I enjoy. But his interest in the poor is a shining example. He is so right, when he said, "God is in the slums, in

the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of the mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. . . . God is in the debris of wasted opportunities and lives."<sup>1</sup>

This is not just directed at governments and at multinational corporations. It is not just for President Bush and Gordon Brown, the British prime minister—although it is also for them, whether they realize it or not. Politicians do have a heavy responsibility.

Some 50 years ago President Eisenhower said, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired

WHAT ABOUT US AS A CHURCH—  
LOCAL CONGREGATION OR VARIOUS  
CONFERENCE ORGANIZATIONS? DO  
WE ACT JUSTLY? DO WE KNOW WHAT  
IT MEANS TO SHARE OUR RESOURCES?  
OR DO WE ONLY LOOK AFTER OUR  
OWN FIELD? OUR OWN CHURCH?

signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."<sup>2</sup>

But it is also a message for each one of us, in particular those who profess to be disciples of Christ. To act justly means that we understand that some things are totally and absolutely wrong; to understand that some things are simply nonnegotiable; to understand that the life we have is a gift from God, and we must be good stewards of that gift; to understand that the resources of this earth must be shared in a fair and equitable way.

We must also be consistent, which means more than merely signing letters for the worldwide watchdog group Amnesty International. It means we must also refrain from investing our savings in funds linked to companies that oppress people or fabricate

weapons. And, of course, we must support agencies that help people in need.

### Close to home

But acting justly must also touch us closer to home. What about us as a church—local congregation or various conference organizations? Do we act justly? Do we know what it means to share our resources? Or do we only look after our own field? Our own church?

Do we look after the weak and the vulnerable in our congregations? Can our pastors and employees be sure that they are always treated fairly? Do we vote in our church boards for what is right, or do

we compromise and often choose the cheapest, easiest, or least controversial? As a pastor, am I sure that acting justly is always my main concern? Or am I sometimes tempted to support the people with means and status, rather than simply doing what is right?

Am I, as an administrator, known as someone who acts fairly and straightforwardly? Who keeps his promises? Who looks after the interests of my workers?

Do our workers always get what they are entitled to? Or do we sometimes conveniently fail to inform them of some of their rights and privileges?

As an individual, in my family, toward my spouse, my children, my friends, do I act justly? Can they rely on me? Do I always do what is right and fair?

Remember, this is not just *advisable*. This is what God *requires* of you and of me.

Also, acting justly is not always just making sure that justice is served. Acting justly is not detached from what follows: *chesed*, which is mercy and loving-kindness. God is not interested in mere outward obedience to a set of rules. He has, indeed, given *rules*, and these cannot be set aside simply when we feel like it. But Christ taught us to look at *principles* and to always apply justice blended with mercy.

As an administrator I have never felt that the letter of church policy is the ultimate answer to every question. In some situations a strict application of policy would not be fair. In some cases it would be wrong to go by the letter of the policy book. Acting justly demands not just sternness and determination but also intelligence and loving mercy.

What about King Solomon and the two prostitutes? Both women had given birth. One baby died, but both claimed to be the mother of the one who lived. Solomon had to make a decision. He had to act justly. He did.

Read the story. What possible policy book or rule could he have followed there? None? There were no written rules for such a situation. Instead, he used wisdom, and a judgment that couldn't be codified. And he did it with mercy and justice.

### Conclusion

Micah's message, though written in another time and another place, remains the same. It says to us, to religious people, to people who practice rituals and have traditions and rules and polices: don't forget the oppressed, the needy, the poor, and the hurting among you.

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Mic. 6:6, 7, NIV).

No, He wants justice, mercy, and loving-kindness to flow from those who profess His name. ❏

1 Paul J. Carling, "Prophets in the Plains," Saint Luke's Parish, <http://www.saintlukesdarien.org/sermons/02262006.html>.

2 Jone Johnson Lewis, "Dwight Eisenhower," Wisdom Quotes, <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/001471.html>.

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## If you pastor more than one church—we want to hear from you

Here at the *Ministry* magazine editorial offices, we are planning another issue featuring and recognizing the work of pastors who have more than one church. In order for this issue to be valuable to ministers around the world, we need your participation. You are invited to prepare an article for *Ministry* magazine. Here are some suggested topics you may consider:

- Training lay leaders to effectively work with you
- Designing sermons to meet the needs of different churches
- Addressing family life in a multichurch district with special emphasis on children
- Organizing the evangelistic outreach in a district
- Coordinating boards and committees in a district
- Working with the communities in the district
- Creating a spirit of cooperation among the churches
- Recognizing the needs of the pastor's spouse and children for continuity as the pastor preaches in a different church each week

If you pastor several churches, you will no doubt have other topics in mind.

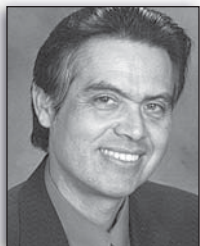
### Next steps:

- Email, write, or call and discuss with us the topic or topics you are suggesting.
- Once we have agreed on the specific topic, we will ask you to proceed with the writing.

**We need to hear from you by MAY 30, 2008.**  
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# Broken vessels

Gilbert Vega



*Gilbert Vega, PhD, is senior pastor of the Loma Linda Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, Loma Linda, California, United States.*

**W**hile in conference administration, I received many résumés from individuals seeking positions. Most were average; some were eye-catchers. They seemed to have the perfect résumé—a combination of good grades and extracurricular activities.

But while good grades and other achievements are noteworthy—for God expects us to put forth our best efforts in all we attempt—God is not necessarily impressed by such stellar achievements. God does not always look for the best résumé. Quite to the contrary, I glean from the pages of Scripture that He often seeks the underachiever; the laughingstock of the “in crowd,” the person voted “least likely to succeed.” A few examples will reinforce my point: Moses, chosen by God even though a killer and an outlaw; David, used mightily by God even though an adulterer and conniving liar; Peter, self-obsessed and foulmouthed; and Paul, a cruel and fanatic zealot.

You get the picture—not your typical models of spiritual living. Nevertheless, we should not be surprised—God is like that. In fact, He said that He did not come to seek the stellar righteous but those who had really made a mess of their lives—full-blown disasters. Jesus said that He had not come to seek those who were not ill, but those who were. One can read about these individuals in His words: outcasts, underachievers, pariahs, untouchables, and rejects.

## Jars of clay

Because God has traditionally sought out such individuals, the church at Corinth had a fair share of them.

“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (1 Cor. 1: 26, 27; 2 Cor. 4:7, NIV).

Paul was exceedingly pleased at how God was willing to use underachievers to usher in and enhance His kingdom. He had done it in Corinth by the use of humble individuals, whom He likened to “jars of clay.” Clay vessels are easily broken and shattered into many pieces; a very fitting picture of our sensitive egos and human nature. But, it is precisely those who have been broken up that He uses to mend others.

Some may look at their lives and see a lot of brokenness. Going to sleep at night is not easy because of sobbing and weeping. Many a night sleep hardly comes at all. There are visible bruises and sore spots that attest to repeated falls and spills. Life has become so broken up that hopelessness is all that’s left. Life has turned out to be totally chaotic. Dreams have vanished. Wounds are deep. Grief is intense. A sense of failure pervades all around. Inner voices seem to confirm the conclusion that something that shattered cannot be mended—it should only be discarded.

Hold it! Not yet! Someone fixes broken vessels! Anyone in despair needs to go to Him before making radical decisions. “So I went to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him” (Jer. 18:3, 4, NIV).

Yes, the Lord can fix any broken vessel. He does it by re-creating them. There is no need to cast that shattered vessel aside; all that needs to be done is to take it to the Master Potter. He will turn it into a new vessel. Let’s look at one such case in history.

## Moses

Moses was despondent in the desert, demoralized and wasting away. He could not see any purpose for his elite education and how it was compatible with his role as a lonely shepherd. Erudite learning—wasted on sheep; military training—of no value in the parched



hills of Midian. At the age of 80, he held a shepherd's rod—when he could have held the scepter of Egypt.

Yes, Moses perceives death approaching—along with his last breath; it would also be the demise of his dreams. However, one day the God of the brokenhearted appeared to Moses. Since the failures of individuals are God's opportunities, God had in Moses a fine specimen. Though he had been cast aside by society in its continual search for new heroes, he had not been overlooked by the God of the down-and-out. Even though his résumé included such condemning terms as "criminal" and "outlaw," God was interested in Moses. God sends him on a crucial first assignment. Moses cannot believe it—he is too old, out of touch and irrelevant, yet Yahweh still believes in him. Reluctantly, he takes on his new challenge. Unbeknownst to him at that time, his greatest feats were still in the future.

His achievements are incredibly awesome and unique. None of them can be replicated. Four events denote his unique role in history:

- He was God's human instrument to change the mind-set of the mighty Egyptian Pharaoh.
- He was God's human instrument to turn a group of slaves into a nation.

BUT WHILE GOOD GRADES AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS ARE NOTEWORTHY—FOR GOD EXPECTS US TO PUT FORTH OUR BEST EFFORTS IN ALL WE ATTEMPT—GOD IS NOT NECESSARILY IMPRESSED BY SUCH STELLAR ACHIEVEMENTS.

- He spoke face to face with Yahweh and received from Him the Ten Commandments.
- He was God's chosen penman to record the foundational books of the Bible—the Pentateuch.

Not bad for one who had spent the best years of his life on the hills of Midian tending sheep.


### Conclusion

When someone has experienced defeat and dejection, ridicule and rejection, brokenness and bareness, that person becomes more sensitive to the voice of God. They can relate to others in a way that would have been impossible had that individual not gone into such depths of anxiety. Thus, the more brokenness one experiences, the more useful one can become in the hands of the Lord.

It reminds me of a story that took place in an ancient land. A man had the

daily chore of bringing water to the palace of a nobleman. He did this by filling two large jars of water that he hand-carried from the well to the home. However, one of the jars had a small crack and would not hold all of the intended water—part of it would drip on the side of the road. Thus the other perfect jar assumed an air of superiority, whereas the broken one felt ashamed of its imperfection. One

day it spoke to the workingman and apologetically stated how much of a failure she felt at not being able to fulfill her expected role of holding water. The water carrier proceeded to point out to the broken jar the beautiful flowers that lined the side of the path where her drips of water had been falling. Furthermore, he added, "Because I knew of your condition, I planted flower seeds along the path, and they have grown abundantly and beautifully. I have even taken some to the palace of our lord. That was only possible because I knew that everyday you would water my flowers."

Do not worry about your résumé. Find the God of the brokenhearted. He will change you, and, consequently, your résumé. 

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## LETTERS *continued from page 3*

Professor Gane's article, "Legalism and 'Righteousness by Faith'" is timely and insightful. I was delighted with Dr. Gane's superb presentation of righteousness by faith. The penitent believer can truly rejoice that saving grace is a "legal" declaration of acquittal from condemnation while at the same time he realizes that genuine justification by faith works by love and is made manifest in

obedience to all the commandments of God.

—John W. Peters, pastor, email

### Letters to the seven churches

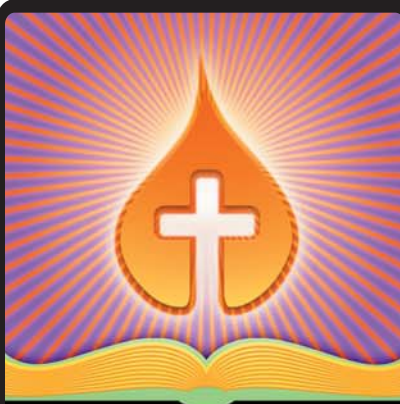
Being a Lutheran minister, the book of Revelation never was among my favorite parts of the Bible. But Clinton Wahlen's article, "Letters to the Seven Churches: Historical or Prophetic?" (No-

vember 2007), really made a difference for me. I will read Revelation in a new way from now on. Thank you very much.

—Tor-Ole Bjerke, Lillehammer, Norway

I really appreciated Clinton Wahlen's article, "Letters to the Seven Churches: Historical or Prophetic?" It was good to see a structure of Revelation that I had

*Continued on page 26*



**ACTS 100**  
acknowledgment • communion • training • service

**Seven reasons to study the Bible**

You may wish to help your church members understand the importance of intense Bible study by sharing these seven reasons for motivating deeper study:

- 1. It is commanded.** "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).
- 2. It reveals the way of salvation.** "And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).
- 3. It gives assurance to the believer.** "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27, 28).
- 4. It is profitable.** "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).
- 5. It will give great peace.** "Great peace have those who love Your law, / And nothing causes them to stumble" (Ps. 119:165).
- 6. It will endure forever.** "But the word of the Lord endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:25).
- 7. It will judge you in the last day.** "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

—William H. Schweinfurth, *The Treasury of Bible Lists* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001).

\*All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

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not seen before of the letters to the seven churches being a part of two major visions of Jesus—what you have seen and is (Revelation 1–3) and that from Revelation 4 onwards, what is yet to come. As argued, Revelation is both historical and prophetic in both sections.

Every pastor knows that each church has its unique strengths and challenges as depicted in the seven churches highlighted in Revelation 2 and 3. As a natural church development coach, I have used these letters as a basis of church analysis, asking the church to decide which of the churches of Revelation it is most like. Then we are able to work on the remedy because Jesus can meet the needs of any church as He is Lord of the church. Perhaps that is another reason why there are seven different churches.

I accept the historical progression of the churches as a broad sweep. But from my analysis Laodicea only describes most churches in the West. There are more Christians and Adventists in other parts of the world where the church is not at all Laodicean. They are on fire or under persecution and have other problems which would help them identify with another of the seven churches in Revelation. Perhaps this makes the Revelation more prophetic?

—Glenn Townend, *president of the Adventist Church in western Australia, Gosnells, Western Australia*

### A successful pastorate

I read Loren Seibold's "The Best Pastor I Know" (January 2008). This pastor will be greatly blessed for being about our Father's work. He's doing a wonderful job of loving God's sheep without regard to boundaries. I wish we all would do that!

—Kay Strickland, *email*

I appreciate Loren Seibold's uplifting recognition of the nonparochial pastor. What a blessing it is to overcome the parochialism in which some of us

were raised, a blessing to us as well as the larger community.

Jesus' nonparochial ministry has inspired me, both as a pastor and a hospital chaplain, to see the whole community as my place of ministry. Yet, I recall with great sadness the response of a pastor to an invitation to join the local coalition of churches: "I'm not interested, if I don't have the opportunity to try to convert them, I have nothing to say to them." As the convener of that coalition I did my best to help him see the opportunity to serve a larger community, to join with others to increase the impact of Christians in the community through cooperative youth ministries, joint holiday services, and a Christian presence at community events. He just couldn't see it, though it was clear that he and his church had much to offer and that the coalition would have appreciated their participation.

The extrovert gene is not a requirement for embracing the larger community in ministry; I don't have that gene. The community has welcomed and appreciated the blessings they've experienced as I've learned to be an instrument of grace in their lives.

—Glenn Sackett, *chaplain, Porter Adventist Hospital, Denver, Colorado, United States*

### The matchless charms of Christ

Shawn Brace's article, "Whatever Happened to the 'Matchless Charms of Christ'?" (January 2008), reminded me of an article I read a number of years ago in the *Youth Instructor* entitled "The Monarch Butterfly." The theme of the *Youth Instructor* article was, as I recall, that what should be preached are the unsearchable riches of Christ. Just like the monarch butterfly is described as the most beautiful of all butterflies, so Christ as the most beautiful of all truths should be preached as such. I agree with Brace when he says, "by God's grace, present Christ in all His loveliness."

—Rollin Shoemaker, *email* ✉

# Dateline



## Calls for greater emphasis on fundamental human rights

**New York City, New York, United States**—The Seventh-day Adventist Church's representative to the United Nations (UN) called on December 10, 2007, for "a greater emphasis on fundamental human rights, both in society and in the church."

**Jonathan Gallagher** spoke at the launch on Human Rights Day in New York of a year-long UN program designed to reaffirm rights and freedoms ahead of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights.

"Sadly since 1948 and the implementation of the Universal Declaration we have seen much good talk and theory, but we still have many problems in the area of human rights. All around the world people are suffering because their basic rights are being trampled on. In no area is this clearer than in religious freedom, with persecution and intolerance still high on the agenda of violations that need to be halted."

Gallagher pointed to ongoing denials of freedom of religion in a number of countries. "While we celebrate what has been achieved over the past sixty years since the Declaration, we can't be blind to the increasing challenges to the right to freedom of belief and worship," Gallagher said. "As a church we remain totally committed to freedom of conscience, and call on everyone to work together to make sure human rights are valued in practice, and not just in theory."

Speaking at a pre-launch meeting on December 6, **Jean-Pierre Lacroix**, deputy permanent representative of France to the UN, whose mission is co-sponsoring the program, said that while "the Declaration was not the final point, and everything was not

yet achieved," the anniversary was "an opportunity to reaffirm the universality of human rights." At the same meeting **Craig Mokhiber**, deputy director of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, commented that the proposed program was "not so much a celebration but more a need for recommitment." He added that there was "an ongoing assault on human rights," and that if this was not tackled, then "the 60th anniversary will be more like a funeral for human rights." [PARL News]

## Evangelism Councils

Recently two major evangelism councils were held in the United States.

One council was held in **Huntsville, Alabama, United States**—**Oakwood University** held its 28th annual **Pastoral and Evangelism Council** December 2–5, 2007. The event drew pastors, church administrators, and a growing number of church members from throughout North America, the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa.

The keynote speaker on Sunday night was **Cleophus LaRue**, professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, United States. The programming for the next

three days included a number of plenary sessions that addressed contemporary issues that the church faces, as well as 16 breakout sessions covering various topics, such as preaching, media as an evangelistic tool, financial freedom, children's ministries, and Hispanic ministries.

**WestPoint of Evangelism** was also held December 2–5, 2007 in **Simi Valley, California, United States**. Under the direction of **Lloyd Wyman**, the council participants came from various western parts of the country and Canada. **Duane McKee**, at that time president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Arizona, was keynote speaker. McKee has led out in various national and international outreach programs. Numerous seminars were presented by evangelists and specialists in topics of interest to evangelists.

## Health emphasis in Pakistan

**Farooqabad, Pakistan**—The Health Department for the Adventist Church in Pakistan, in association with the **Pakistan Adventist Seminary** and college church, at the end of 2007 organized a Health and Temperance Emphasis Week.

Under the theme, "Heart of God," health was promoted through speech contests, different races, games, and poster competitions emphasizing the need of abstaining from tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, and advertising the benefits of healthy eating.

According to **Samuel Nazir**, director of the Health Department, plans are under way to conduct similar health programs in Pakistan's rural areas. [TED News Staff/TED News] ❏



Mike Tucker, presenter, Westpoint of Evangelism.

## BOOK REVIEW

***The Seven Rules of Success***, by Wayne Cordeiro, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006.

*The Seven Rules of Success* is a modern day application of biblical principles that can bring genuine and lasting success at a level that is not superficial or mundane but systemic and fundamental to those who implement them.

The author, Wayne Cordeiro, chose “Listen Well” as the pivotal starting point, since many people have problems with listening not only to each other but most importantly to God, who is the ultimate Guide in living. He contrasts Martha’s worrying to Mary’s willingness to receive instructions and be obedient to the divine counsel.

The second and the sixth chapters deal effectively with two issues, greed and peer pressure—a challenge for many. In a world where dissatisfaction rules supreme and people are obsessed with getting more at all costs, “Be Content” is a worthy theme for discussion. So also is the need to “Stand By Your Convictions.”

“Living With Integrity” and “Avoiding Self-righteousness,” rules three and four respectively, were creatively crafted using two unlikely individuals: Nicodemus and Judas Iscariot. Nicodemus did not accept Jesus at first because he was unsure of His identity, and went by night to discover who Jesus really was. Judas, on the other hand, accepted Jesus at first—only to lose faith in Him and eventually betray Him. Cordeiro is able to highlight the beauty, benefits, and blessings of living with integrity.

In using the example of Judas to teach avoiding self-righteousness, Cordeiro is wonderfully convincing—showing that self-righteousness is dangerous. He also challenges his readers to allow others to be lightning rods for them so that they can discharge the pernicious feelings of being noble, while one is really not noble.

His contribution to conflict resolution

in the home, church, and community is timely in light of the fact that the world is filled with tension and conflict. He rightly states in rule five that forgiveness is a choice that liberates the one who has been wronged—enabling them to move on. If, however, that person chooses not to forgive, they become just like the one who was the perpetrator of the crime.

Cordeiro concludes his book with a seventh rule that promotes maintaining healthy relationships. He insists that one must choose not to take offense, and when offense does occur, one should be first in diffusing anger, in speaking words that heal, and in doing good. If one implements these powerful but challenging concepts in the family, community, and the church, the world in which we live would be a better place.

—Reviewed by R. Danforth Francis, the ministerial secretary for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in western Africa.

## BOOK REVIEW

***Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise—Commentary on the Book of Daniel***, by Zdravko Stefanovic, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007.

**Reviewed by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez**

Zdravko Stefanovic has produced a commentary based on the original Hebrew and Aramaic text of the book. He has also provided his own translation. He dates the book to the sixth century B.C. The target of the commentary is Bible students in general, and more particularly college and seminary students studying Daniel.

The organization of the book is simple but effective. The book of Daniel is divided in two sections (chapters 1–6, and 7–12). After a general introduction, each chapter is carefully analyzed. In the first section, the commentary deals with the text along three carefully interrelated sections. There are “Notes,” with exegetical comments and historical information. The comments on the Hebrew text are very enriching and useful. The

information about ancient Near Eastern religious practices and historical issues serve as background for the study of Daniel. The “Exposition” is easier to follow and provides a careful interpretation of the text. We also find a “Historical Application” and a “Summary of the Teaching.” This last section applies the message of the text to us and is characterized by theological insights. In the case of Daniel 7–12, we find in each chapter sections on “Applications” (applications to church history or historicism and to the individual), and an appendix summarizing the way preterists and futurists read those prophecies.

In general, Stefanovic stands in the traditional Adventist historicist reading of Daniel. The historicist emphasis is an area that needs to be strengthened in future revisions of the commentary. He does not clearly inform us about his views on the judgment in Daniel 7, on the nature of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 and its possible connection with Leviticus 16, and on the fulfillment of the prophetic periods mentioned in Daniel. He decided to illustrate the historicist interpretation by summarizing the views provided by Mervyn Maxwell and William Shea in their respective commentaries, without clearly identifying his personal position with those of the two writers. In some cases the conclusions reached in the “Notes” sections do not support the historicist position (e.g., on page 310 the term *vision* in Daniel 8:13 refers to the vision recorded in 8:10–12).

Perhaps the lack of clarity is based on Stefanovic’s methodology. His approach to Daniel is textual and thematic or exegetical and expository. He is not primarily interested in addressing the question of the interpretation or application of the apocalyptic prophecies. He has left that to historicist, futurist, and preterist interpreters. That methodological decision seems to be based on the distinction he makes between the fulfillment and the application of apocalyptic prophecies. According to him, the fulfillment can only refer to the way the text itself interprets the symbols (e.g., the ram in Daniel 8 is Media-Persia). Once we leave the biblical text, he seems to be arguing that we can only speak about applications but

not about the historical fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel. Therefore, he suggests that, as evidenced by the different approaches to Daniel, the visions of Daniel could have different applications (historicism, futurism, preterism). We wonder whether Stefanovic would consider all of them equally valid, a type of postmodern approach. If that were to be the case we would be back to the apotelesmatic principle, presented in a slightly different garb, and consequently it would have to be argued that apocalyptic prophecies do not have only a single fulfillment or application. Those are some of the questions that need to be clarified in future editions of the book. For now, those looking for the historicist views in this commentary would have to read primarily the sections summarizing the positions of Maxwell<sup>1</sup> and Shea<sup>2</sup> or their commentaries.

—Reviewed by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD, director of the Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

- 1 C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1981).
- 2 William H. Shea, *Daniel* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2005).

### Reviewed by Frank Hardy

Zdravko Stefanovic suggests on page 423 certain parallels between Daniel 8 and 11. Done well, such structural comparisons can be valuable. But in this commentary we find some shortcomings. The reason why has to do with another suggestion found on pages 395 and 396. There Stefanovic argues for “relative vagueness” in dealing with Daniel 11. The concept is that one should not be overly concerned with the details of this particular prophecy. It is a mistake to think so.

The principle of “relative vagueness” works against Stefanovic in any number of ways. For example, on page 419, he says, “Verse 21 calls the religious power that succeeded the Roman state ‘a contemptible person.’ “ When did this succession occur? If the “Prince of the covenant” of 11:22—cut off in A.D. 31—is Christ, is there an inconsistency here? On the surface it appears that the papacy is being introduced before Christ dies on the cross.

Stefanovic’s treatment of 11:21, with all its implications for the structure of the chapter and our understanding of other passages, is consistent with three things: (1) it sees Daniel 11 as a reflection of Daniel 8, which in and of itself could be good; (2) it is harmonious with the principle of “relative vagueness”; and (3) it is not inconsistent with the type of emphasis found in most futurist and preterist (literalist and intertestamental) commentaries. Identifying the eschatological villain as the papacy is a profoundly historicist position, but the degree of emphasis Stefanovic places on the villain figure of 11:21 and the idea of following this one individual through to the end of the chapter could be seen as deferential to the views of other schools of interpretation, capably summarized in separate sections throughout.

This illustrates a problem that runs through Stefanovic’s treatment of Daniel 10–12. I wish I could offer a warm recommendation for this attractively published volume. There are certainly good things to say about it. But in my opinion the negatives weigh heavily against the positives.

—Reviewed by Frank Hardy, PhD, founder of [www.historicism.org](http://www.historicism.org), a scholarly research resource site on the book of Daniel.

## RESOURCES




Have you ever wished you could take a trip to the land of the Bible? Walk through the streets of Jerusalem? Worship on the Mount of Olives? Stand next to the Great Pyramid at Giza? Enter into the tomb of one of the oldest pharaohs? Climb Mount Sinai? The opportunity has come to experience the lands of the Bible in front of your own computer or television with the new *Journey Through the Holy Lands With Michael G. Hasel* DVD.

In March 2007, Michael G. Hasel, PhD, director of the Institute of Archaeology at Southern Adventist University, led a tour to Israel and Egypt with university President Gordon Bietz, PhD, and 24 other participants. They

were accompanied by Stratton Tingle and Jon-Michael Brown, a professional film crew, whose job was to record the comments at each location they visited. Later, segments were edited, and graphics and maps were added as well as biblical passages accompanying each location. The result is a multimedia interactive DVD that has been developed as an educational resource for schools, churches, and individuals interested in the stories of the Bible. “As we were thinking of strategies to share the exciting discoveries and insights archaeology makes for the Bible, we got the idea of producing a virtual tour where people could be on location as these connections are made,” Dr. Hasel said. “The beauty of a project like this is that one can always add more locations and comments as tours are conducted in the future.”

The places visited include locations in Jerusalem, such as the Mount of Olives, the garden tomb, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Western Wall of the Temple, also known as the Wailing Wall. Travel continues to the regions of the Dead Sea where Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan, set in the Wadi Qelt and Jericho. Proceed to Qumran, where the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls were found. In Egypt, climb into one of the oldest pyramids, and experience the huge stones used to build the pyramids at Giza. Witness ancient religion and temple architecture at Saqqara and become fascinated with the story of the sphinx. You will not want to miss the incredible experience of sunrise on top of Gebel Musa, the mountain many believe was Mount Sinai. These are just some of the amazing locations that you can experience for yourself through this interactive DVD tour of the Holy Lands. Whether in the classroom, church, or home, these inspiring locations help to bring the Bible alive.

For information on how to receive this interactive DVD series, please contact Justo Morales. Write to:

Institute of Archaeology  
PO Box 370  
Collegedale, TN 37315  
Call or email: 423.236.2027  
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# Teaching that transforms

JAMES A. CRESS



Preaching that does not transform behavior has failed, whether we are preaching to our established members or to potential converts.

Mike Bellah says, "More than anything else, this generation needs biblical teaching. Our minds need to be renewed with expectations born not in the culture, but in the Word of God. . . . Potential believers need to know that all truth is not relative, and experience is only one test of truth—often misleading in the short run."<sup>1</sup>

We are good at exposition, but are we as good at transformation? Far too often we assume that because something has been stated well, it has been thoroughly comprehended. This is not the case.

## Repetitive instruction is essential

Michael Green argues that the instruction of new members through preaching must be more than just proclaiming truth. It must take root in the heart and be lived out in the life.

We tried to do this in a variety of ways. One was by having carefully planned courses of sermons: sometimes topical, sometimes following the church's year, sometimes expository. We tried to be sensitive to what the needs were at the time. Gradually we learned how foolish we were to dart from subject to subject each week. We needed to go on teaching on a particular topic until it is learned and acted upon. With this in mind, we organized a nine-month course, examining what it meant to be an alternative society in a world that is falling apart. We spent a whole month on each of nine aspects of this theme, and teaching took place at all levels in the church. The team preached on each topic for a whole month. The fellowship groups and prayer meetings discussed its application. Slide-tape sequences were produced for each topic. And we even made a loose-leaf guide book to the whole nine-month series, with opportunities for members to add materials of their own.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking specifically to grounding new believers into the church, Ellen White admonished Adventist preachers: "If those who knew the truth and were established in it were indeed in need of having its importance kept ever before them and their minds stirred up by the repetition of it, how important that this work is not neglected for those newly come to the faith."<sup>3</sup>

## Information, alone, is insufficient

However, a reliance on knowledge alone—conveying correct information into the comprehension of the new believer—may contribute to the church remaining a closed community more than we have realized. If we conclude that information alone disciples individuals, then we are in danger of spiritual haughtiness similar to that of the Corinthians who concluded that superior wisdom equaled superior spirituality.

I have known dozens within the church whose theological comprehension was accurate but whose lives did not reflect the life-changing differences the gospel expects. Clearly something was needed beyond accurate theology. They needed not only a knowledge of "the truth," they needed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—*the Truth!*

## Transformation is required by the gospel

Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings say, "If we have nothing more than textual proofs for our distinctive beliefs, we will not begin to earn a hearing, for the world wants to know what meaning and relevance our message has for their lives."<sup>4</sup>

John R. W. Stott puts it well:

In addition to integrity, our preaching of repentance and of Christ's lordship requires realism. It is not enough to call people to repentance in vague terms, as if conversion could take place in a kind of mystical vacuum out of which all real life has been sucked. When John the Baptist preached his baptism of repentance he insisted that people responding must "bear fruits that befit repentance." Nor did he leave it there. He went on to specific issues. The affluent must share their surplus wealth with the deprived. Tax collectors must replace extortion by probity. And soldiers must never use their power to rob people, but rather be content with their wages (Luke 3:8, 10-14). . . . We need to spell out in realistic and concrete terms the contemporary implications of repentance, conversion, and the lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

So what is the role of instruction for new converts and its relationship to assimilating the new believers into the life of the church? The answer is simple, yet direct and challenging. Our preaching must transform believers—whether established members or new converts—into worthy citizens of the church (experiencing the fellowship of the saints), worthy citizens of society (living in the world as salt and light), and worthy citizens of the soon approaching kingdom (preparing to meet the Lord).

This is teaching that transforms. ■

- 1 Mike Bellah, *Baby Boom Believers* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1973), 143.
- 2 Michael Green, *Freed to Serve: Training and Equipping for Ministry* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1983), 124.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), 334.
- 4 Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings Jr., *Adventures in Church Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1983), 33.
- 5 John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 118.

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.



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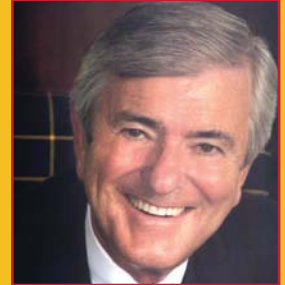
**James Earl Massey** is the son and grandson of ministers. For 22 years Dr. Massey was the senior and founding minister of the Metropolitan Church of God, a large multicultural, mission-oriented congregation in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A. He was also elected for a five-year period to be the speaker on the "Christian Brotherhood Hour"—a weekly international program which broadcasted on more than 140 radio stations. More than 140 colleges, universities, and seminaries have invited him to preach or lecture. James Earl Massey has authored 25 published books and in 2006 *Christianity Today* named him one of the "25 Most Influential Preachers of the Past 50 Years."



**Laurence Turner** is Principal Lecturer in Old Testament Studies and Director of Research Degrees at Newbold College, Bracknell, England. Dr. Turner's main area of research and publishing has been the book of Genesis, on which he has published three books and contributed to major reference works and journal articles. He is very highly regarded as an expository preacher and enjoys expounding the Old Testament in a contemporary Christian context. In addition to Old Testament, Dr. Turner teaches homiletics at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and is regularly invited to preach internationally.



**Jo Ann Davidson** lectures at the Andrews University Theological Seminary. She has the distinction of being the first woman lecturer in the Theology Department. Articles she has written have appeared in the *Adventist Review*, *Signs of the Times*®, and the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*. Her column, "Let's Face It," which has a woman's slant on theology, appears regularly in the journal *Perspective Digest*. She has also authored the published book *Jonah: The Inside Story*. Dr. Davidson is a highly sought-after speaker for large national and international Christian conventions and continues to find great fulfillment in her various roles as wife, mother, daughter, sister, auntie, teacher, musician, student, and active Christian.



**Lloyd John Ogilvie** has long been recognized as having a remarkably distinguished ministry. He was the 61<sup>st</sup> chaplain of the United States Senate in Washington, D.C. Dr. Ogilvie has authored more than 55 books and has been the recipient of many prestigious awards including being named in the 1996 Baylor University's worldwide survey as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English-speaking world. Recently, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, established the Lloyd John Ogilvie Preaching Institute and the Lloyd John Ogilvie Chair of Preaching.

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