

Good Word Schedule
“The Teachings of Jesus”
July, August, September 2014

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Theme: Our Loving Heavenly Father

Leading Question: What qualifies Jesus to tell us about the love of a heavenly Father?

For this first lesson in the new quarter, the author of the official study guide has carefully crafted a title with distinct elements: Our – Loving – Heavenly – Father. And we'll look at all four of those. Now the overall theme for the quarter is "The Teachings of Jesus," and next week's lesson focuses on "The Son." So why should we need a Son to tell us about the Father? Wouldn't a more direct revelation of the Father be superior? Why should the Son come to tell us about the Father?

1. Father. The Old Testament occasionally uses the term Father with reference to God, but the dominant mode for referring to God in the Old Testament is Yahweh. When Jesus and the writers of the New Testament teach us about the Father, they have not only stepped away from the unspeakable name "Yahweh," but have come all the way down to something like "Daddy." The Aramaic *abba* is probably best translated as "Daddy." So what are the gains and losses in the use of the term "Father"?

Note: This brief narrative from Carl Burke suggests why the word "Father" can be problematic when addressing God. He is describing a conversation he had with a ghetto youngster at a summer camp:

"Mister," came the query, "what's God like?"

The question came during a summer camp as the two of them made their way to the evening campfire circle. Burke notes that his own response came "without the slightest hesitation, and with the authority of a theological education, plus several years' experience as a pastor, and above all, with the confidence that was expected of an 'adult leader.'"

"God," was Burke's answer, "is like a father."

The boy's response came slowly and with much venom: "Hah," he said, "if he's like my father I sure would hate him" (*God is for Real, Man*, New York: Association Press, 1966, p. 10).

2. Heavenly. What is the point of emphasizing a "heavenly" father when we are in fact on earth and struggle to understand heavenly things?

Additional question: What is likely to go missing in our understanding of God if he is only *abba*, "Daddy," and not our "heavenly" Father?

3. Loving. When we describe our "heavenly Father" as "loving," what would that love look like and feel like?

Note: In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis describes four different kinds of love, noted in English on the cover of my paperback edition as eros, affection, friendship, and charity. While the Bible never formally discusses the first two under the heading of their Greek labels, it does know about erotic love and affection or family love. But the more familiar New Testament terms *philia* and *agape* are much better known. Brotherly love (*philia* as in philadelphia) generally would be seen as the warmer kind of love; charity or *agape* love would move more toward principled love that responds as an act of the will, not as an emotional response to something or someone who is attractive to us. So the question remains: what do we mean when we describe our heavenly Father as “loving”?

4. **Our.** What do we mean when we describe the “loving heavenly Father” as “ours”? Is that simply in the sense of possession?

Note: In connection with a discussion of chastity, C. S. Lewis, includes comments on our use of the “possessive” pronoun “my,” which would have some parallel connections with the plural “our.” The discussion is found in C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* [1942] (Screwtape to Wormwood) [21:3-5]:

The man can neither make nor retain, one moment of time; it all comes to him by pure gift; he might as well regard the sun and moon as his chattels.” [21:3]

Much of the modern resistance to chastity comes from men’s belief that they “own” their bodies – those vast and perilous estates, pulsating with the energy that made the worlds, in which they find themselves without their consent and from which they are ejected at the pleasure of Another! [21:4]

We produce this sense of ownership not only by pride but by confusion. We teach them not to notice the different senses of the possessive pronoun – the finally graded differences that run from “my boots” through “my dog,” “my servant,” “my wife,” “my father,” “my master,” and “my country,” to “my God.’ They can be taught to reduce all these senses to that of “my boots,’ the “my” of ownership. [21:5]

The article which follows from *The Signs of the Times* is dated (July, 1988), published when my father was still alive. But the point is still clear.

“Father”
Signs of the Times, July 1988
By Alden Thompson

Our Father which art in heaven . . . (Matt. 6:9, KJV)

Father . . . (Luke 11:2, RSV, NIV)

“We want to learn to pray,” said one of Jesus’ disciples. “Can you help us – like John helped his disciples?”

“Sure!” responded Jesus. “When you pray, start like this: ‘Dear Dad.’”

I can already hear the editors’ pained sighs and see their heads shaking in disbelief – maybe even hands thrown high in despair. Such language would fill the mail bag with a rich harvest of anger and indignity. “Dear Dad”? Never.

And they would be right, of course – quite aside from the publishing dictum that “Editors are always right.” I would have to agree that “Dear Dad” is going too far – at least, I would agree in my heart. And, in practice, I don’t think I could ever pray, “Dear Dad.”

My earthly father and I are on good terms. I called him “Daddy” when I was a youngster, then switched to “Dad” somewhere along the line. That’s still the way it is. He has taught me a great deal about God by word and example. We share similar values. I think he’s pleased about that.

Not that we never disagree. We do – often. And when it comes to prayer, he is more formal than I, even though neither of us would feel comfortable with “Dear Dad.” Last I heard, he was still using “Thee, Thou, Thy, and Thine” when he prayed. I’ve made the switch to “You and Yours” – after being half and half for a while.

But the fact that I call him “Dad” and feel reasonably comfortable in disagreeing with him, even to his face, is a shift from older patterns of family authority. And the trend continues – I can’t imagine an old-time authoritarian putting up with the good-natured indignities which my daughters toss my direction. I like to think that I still have some “authority.” But let’s face it, I seldom use it convincingly. I would rather negotiate, persuade, and convince rather than command. Dangerous? I don’t think so, but it may be too early to tell.

Nevertheless, I must admit that the easy-going spirit of freedom which dominates our age (and is reflected in my own home in a modified form) makes it easier to flaunt authority of any kind. The undertow catches even those with staunch religious ties. Religious practice is affected. Conversation drowns out memorization. Prayer becomes more spontaneous and chatty, worship less formal, less awe-inspiring. Cathedrals melt down into ordinary churches. Everything is less dignified, more earthy.

All that is a mixed blessing. We may be able to talk to God now. But where is the overwhelming sense of awe and grandeur that worshipers used to feel in the presence of their Maker?

I firmly believe we need to recover that sense of awe and grandeur. At the same time, however, Scripture has forced me to conclude that Jesus taught his disciples to address the Sovereign Master of the universe in very personal terms.

It would seem brazen – possibly even blasphemous – to open the Prayer by addressing

God as “Dad” or “Daddy.” Yet either of those words probably come the closest to capturing the flavor of the Aramaic “Abba,” the word for “father” which Jesus undoubtedly used in his Palestinian homeland. It’s a warm, personal term, one used when family members feel good about each other.

But who would dare begin the Lord’s Prayer by saying, “Dear Dad up there in heaven”? Modern translators haven’t chanced it. I wouldn’t risk it myself – even if I were out in the desert all alone. The force of training and tradition is just too powerful.

Yet even the more traditional word “Father” presents a dilemma: human parents often bear only a faint resemblance of the Father in heaven. Carl Burke captures the essence of the problem when he describes a conversation he had with a ghetto youngster:

“Mister,” came the query, “what’s God like?”

The question came during a summer camp as the two of them made their way to the evening campfire circle. Burke notes that his own response came “without the slightest hesitation, and with the authority of a theological education, plus several years’ experience as a pastor, and above all, with the confidence that was expected of an ‘adult leader.’”

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The gulf between heaven and earth makes it difficult enough to be personal with God and call him “Dad.” On top of that, all the dads on earth complicate the picture through their erratic and thoughtless behavior. Is that why some in our modern world would prefer to pray to “Mother?” We can’t discuss that complexity here, except to say that earthly mothers can be just as erratic as earthly fathers.

Jesus obviously faced a monumental challenge when he came to teach us the truth about his Father in heaven. And even though he used the Aramaic equivalent of “Dad,” given the Prayer’s remarkable blending of the earthy and the sublime, most of us probably will stay with the traditional “Father.” It fits.

But even if we blurt out a word that doesn’t fit so well, the Lord will understand. He has a good vocabulary. And good ears.

Theme: The Son

Leading Questions: Why is it so hard today for some to see Jesus as God incarnate and why was it so hard for the Jews in Jesus' day?

Why it is hard in our day...

The bulk of this lesson will focus on the second question: Why was it so hard for the Jews of Jesus' day to see him as God incarnate? But the personal experience of the author of the study guide calls for at least a brief glimpse at the similar question applied to our day. The author (Thompson), did not grasp the truth of the incarnate God until his second year at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He is a fourth-generation Adventist, a product of Adventist Schools and a graduate in Theology from Walla Walla College. But at seminary, he was driven by a haunting question: "If the Father loves me, why do I need a mediator?"

He designed a special two-hour seminar to explore that question and discovered John 14-17. The joyous answer in its simplest form is stated in John 14:9: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." That is amplified in John 16:25-27 with the stunning statement that the time will come when Jesus will not speak on our behalf to the Father because we already know that the Father himself loves us.

Why had it taken me so long? I concluded that the mental picture of Jesus' pleading his blood to the Father on my behalf had given my sensitive mind the impression that Jesus was on my side more than the Father was and somehow Jesus had to convince the Father – the "real" God – to let me into the kingdom. If Jesus pled hard enough and long enough, the Father would finally capitulate and let me in the back door! In short, I was tussling with the picture of a distant and hostile God. But when I discovered in the Gospel of John that God himself – the incarnate God – had come to earth on our behalf, I was convinced that the Father really did want human beings in his kingdom after all.

It should also be noted here that our Jehovah's Witnesses still do not accept the full divinity of Jesus and Seventh-day Adventists did not begin to grapple with that question until Ellen White's *The Desire of Ages* was published in 1898, more than 50 years after the 1844 Disappointment. Many of the early Adventists had been members of the Christian Connection, an association of non-trinitarian Christians. James White had been particularly hostile toward the doctrine of the trinity, even speaking in print about "that old trinitarian absurdity." In *A Search for Identity*, George Knight gives a glimpse of the tumult within Adventism when Ellen White wrote in *The Desire of Ages*: "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived" (p. 530).

Knight cites M. L. Andreasen's reaction to that statement: "I remember how astonished we were when *The Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things that we considered unbelievable, among others the doctrine of the Trinity which was not then generally accepted by the Adventists." Andreasen actually went to see Ellen White at her home at

Elmshaven to see if she had actually written that statement. To him it seemed “revolutionary.” “We could hardly believe it.... I was sure Sister White had never written” the passage. “But now I found it in her own handwriting just as it had been published” – *Search*, 116-117.

If accepting the truth of the incarnate God is difficult today, it was also difficult in Jesus’ own day. And that’s the question to which we now turn.

Why it was hard in Jesus’ day...

If one looks at the messianic expectations of the Jewish people at the time of Christ it is clear that everyone expected a messiah, but not the kind of messiah that Jesus was preaching and teaching. On at least two counts, Jesus’ Jewish audience took exception: 1) That the messiah was God incarnate; 2) That the messiah was to suffer and die. In that connection we will also want to look at the question of messianic prophecies.

1. Messiah as Son of David and Son of God? According to all four of the Gospels, Jesus considered himself to be the son of David. John the Baptist’s father Zechariah, announced a deliverer from “the house of his servant David” (Luke 2:69); the angels told the shepherds at Bethlehem, that a “savior,” “the Messiah,” “the Lord” was to be born in the city of David. But where in the Old Testament or New is there a clear indication that the Messiah was to be anything more than the human descendant of David?

Note: To take just one “messianic” prophecy pointing to the Son of David, Jeremiah 30:9 tells of a day when the people would serve “the LORD their God and David their king.” Furthermore, this king would deliver them from their enemies. In a well-known messianic passage, Isaiah 9:2-7, the “child” who would rule the kingdom is described by a number of honorific names: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6, NIV). But this was not enough to lead the Jewish people of Jesus’ day to see Jesus as the suffering God incarnate. Indeed, Isaiah 9 would have fueled the popular expectation of a ruler who would smash their enemies (cf. 9:4-5), and the picture would be further muddled by the fact that this deliverer would be called “Everlasting Father.”

2. Suffering Messiah. Jesus applied Isaiah 53, the suffering servant song, to himself, but no one accepted that label until after his death and resurrection. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter as recorded in Mark 8 and Matthew 16 is instructive. Responding to Jesus’ direct question, Peter confesses that Jesus was the Christ (= Messiah), the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Jesus pronounces him blessed – but then proceeds to tell of his upcoming suffering. Peter begins to rebuke Jesus, but Jesus immediately rebukes Peter: “Get behind me Satan!” A crucial question could be: Where in the Old Testament is the death of the Messiah predicted? A related question could be: “Where in the Old Testament could one learn that the passover lamb was to be seen as a symbol of the dying messiah?”

3. Fulfilled Prophecies about the Messiah. Predictions of a coming deliverer can be found in each section of the Hebrew canon. These explain why everyone was expecting a Messiah or Deliverer at the time of Jesus. But the crucial question that Jesus asked in connection with all

these predictions was: What kind of deliverer? In the tabulated analysis below, the primary predictions of a coming deliverer are noted along with their supporting texts: Shiloh, Star out of Jacob, Prophet like Moses, Child, Branch, Anointed One, and Son of Man. Most of these are technically not “messianic,” a label that properly belongs only to those that speak of the “Anointed One.” In the classic work analyzing these terms, however, Sigmund Mowinckel was deliberately inclusive, because all the titles contributed to the feverish expectation of a coming deliverer that pervaded Jesus’ world in Palestine. Thus he entitled his book, *He That Cometh*.

In addition to the passages that clearly point to a coming deliverer, another whole set of passages have often been misleadingly seen as “predictions.” Though applied to Jesus by New Testament writers, these passages are of no use as “predictions,” but were applied to Jesus’ mission after the resurrection. These passages would fall under the heading of “midrash,” a popular rabbinic method of interpreting and applying Scripture, a method that reads back into Scripture truths already known from other sources. Often, especially in Matthew, these passages are not explicitly labeled as “predictions” but are said to “fulfill” the words of the prophet. Matthew 2:14-15 provides a good example: When Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to Egypt, Matthew says that this “fulfills” the words found in Hosea 11:1: “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” In this instance it would be easier for the modern reader to translate the Greek word *pleroō* as “fill full” rather than “fulfill.” This would follow the lead of Matthew 5:17 where Jesus is said to “fulfill” the law. “Filling full” yields a different nuance to Jesus’ six antithetical comparisons which can be seen as “filling full” what the Old Testament had said.

Thus Matthew’s reference to Jesus’ Egyptian sojourn could be said to “fill full” the prophet’s words from Hosea 11:1 that clearly refer to Israel’s sojourn in Egypt. No Old Testament reader could possibly guess in advance that this passage would apply to Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus as they went to Egypt. But in the world of midrash, it could readily be applied to that later event.

In light of all these variations, it is helpful to see the “prophecies” applied to Jesus under these four headings: 1) Those that clearly predict a coming deliverer as noted above; 2) Those developed and presented by Jesus himself that pointed to his suffering (e.g. Isaiah 53), a message no one wanted to accept until after the resurrection; 3) Those midrashic-style citations that were applied to Jesus after the resurrection, though such applications are rarely, if ever, clear in the Old Testament itself; and 4) Prophecies applied in later Christian centuries, primarily the time prophecy of Daniel 9.

Referring to the “predictions” of the incarnate Lord, C. S. Lewis offers this reflection: “My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins.” – C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, IV.15

What follows is an attempt to plot the “messianic” prophecies about Jesus into the four categories noted above. Chapter 7 from *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God?* follows, developing the argument in narrative form.

Four Categories of “Messianic” Prophecies

A. Perceived by the Old Testament person (general in nature)

1. Law of Moses:

- a. Shiloh: Gen. 49:9-10
- b. Star out of Jacob: Numbers 24:17-19
- c. Prophet like Moses: Deut. 18:15ff

2. Prophets

- a. Child: Isaiah 9:2-7
- b. Branch: Isaiah 11:1-9; Jer. 23:5ff; 33:14ff
- c. Anointed One: Isaiah 61:1-4

3. Writings

- a. Son of Man: Daniel 7:13-14
- b. Anointed one, Son of David: Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, 110 (Royal Psalms)

B. Presented with fresh impetus by Jesus: Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53

1. Direct quotations in the NT (cf. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 187):

- a. **Matthew about Jesus’ healing miracles:** “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Matt. 8:17//Isa. 53:4).
- b. **Jesus to Peter and the disciples about his coming passion:** “And he was counted among the lawless” (Luke 22:37//Isa. 53:12).
- c. **John after Jesus’ prediction of his death:** “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:38//Isa. 53:1)
- d. **Ethiopian eunuch and Philip:** “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter... (Acts 8:32-33//Isa. 53:7-8).
- e. **Paul to the Romans:** “Those who have never been told...” (Rom. 8:21//Isa. 52:15)
- f. **Peter to the Diaspora:** “He committed no sin...” (1 Peter 2:22//Isa. 53:9)

2. Allusions and applications in the NT: (cf. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 187):

- a. **Jesus to Peter, James, John on the Son of Man:** “He is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt” (Mark 9:12//Isa. 53:3, 7)
- b. **Peter at Pentecost:** “Being therefore exalted...” (Luke 2:33//Isa. 52:13)
- c. **Paul to the Romans:** “Many...made righteous” (Rom. 5:19//Isa. 53:11).
- d. **Paul to the Philippians:** “He emptied himself...; God also highly exalted him...” (Phil. 2:7, 9//Isa. 53:3, 11, 12; 52:13)
- e. **Peter to the Diaspora:** “By his wounds...; you were going astray like sheep” (1 Peter 2:24-25//Isa. 53:5-6).

C. Discovered and applied by the disciples in the light of the event (midrashic method):

John 2:17 (Ps. 69:9); 15:25 (Ps. 69:4); 19:28-29 (Ps. 69:21).

D. Discovered and applied in later Christian centuries: 70 weeks of Daniel 9.

See history of interpretation in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 4:65-70.

For further study: Mowinckel, Sigmund. *He That Cometh*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958; North, Christopher. *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*. London: Oxford University Press, 1948; Thompson, Alden. “The Best Story in the Old Testament: The Messiah,” in *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God?* Paternoster 1988; Zondervan 1989; Energion 2011).

The Best Story in the Old Testament: the Messiah

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light ...
For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... (Isaiah 9:2, 6)

My choice of best story in the Old Testament is not a specific episode like the worst story, but rather a great theme which springs from deep roots in the Old Testament and finally bursts into bloom in the New. Certainly one of the most insistent and obvious claims of the New Testament is that Jesus of Nazareth came as the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic hope, John has recorded how Jesus chided his Jewish hearers: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me" (John 5:46). And after the resurrection, Jesus expounded to the disciples on the Emmaus road the *real* meaning of the Old Testament: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Not too long afterwards he appeared to the eleven disciples and said: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45).

So the claim of the New Testament seems to be clear enough, but having said that, a couple of interesting and potentially distressing observations must not be over-looked. First, the Jewish Community as a whole has not accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope. From the Jewish point of view, Christianity is a breakaway movement which has pinned its hopes on a messianic pretender. Never mind the fact that the Christian movement has been reasonably popular and successful; the point is that Judaism has rejected the claim of the New Testament that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic hope.

The second observation that we must not neglect is that Jesus own disciples so radically misunderstood his mission. The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, in particular, highlight the contrast between Jesus' grasp of his mission and that of his disciples. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Matthew 16 where Peter openly proclaims to Jesus: "You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus was pleased with Simon's confession, though he warned the disciples that the time was not yet ripe to share this conviction (Matt. 16:20). Then he opened to them the real nature of his mission: "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matt. 16:21). Peter's response? "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." To which Jesus replied: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Matt. 16:23).

Now one might think that conversations like that should have been clear enough, yet apparently the disciples either could not or would not believe. Returning to Luke's description of the Emmaus Road conversation, we learn that the followers of Jesus were stunned and disheartened by Jesus' death: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). To be sure, after Jesus had appeared several times to the disciples following the resurrection, they

caught a fresh vision of their risen Lord, a vision both in the physical and spiritual sense, and the book of Acts records the powerful impact of that post-resurrection experience. So the disciples finally did believe, no question about that, but the point I want to make is, that during Jesus' ministry they did not believe aright nor did they understand. Regardless of what later Christians may accept or believe, all the evidence suggests that even Jesus' closest associates apparently did not grasp the true meaning of the messianic prophecies or the real meaning of the sacrificial system. In the light of this New Testament evidence, it is likely that even John the Baptist did not really understand what he was saying when he said of Jesus: "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36). Later, John himself, languishing in prison and deeply torn by doubt, gives utterance to his uncertainty in a pathetic appeal to Jesus: "Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3).

This agonizing question put by John is one which every Christian should seek to answer for himself, and not simply in a superficial way. Should Jesus' messianic claims, rejected by the Jews and so thoroughly misunderstood during the years of Jesus' earthly ministry, be so glibly and lightheartedly accepted by those of us who come many years later in the Christian tradition? Should we not also participate in the searching agony of our forefathers as we attempt to make that Christian message our very own?

Speaking now from my own experience, I can say that a little agonizing over Jesus' messianic claims can result in a real blessing, to say nothing of solving a number of problems of interpretation along the way. But I must share with you the route of my pilgrimage so that you can better understand why this best story turns out the way it does.

"MESSIANIC" PROPHECIES

As a young Christian in a conservative Christian environment I was exposed to a fair amount of traditional Christian material. I suspect that anyone who has been an active participant in a conservative Christian community is well aware of the manner in which messianic prophecies have been handled. I will not cite any specific sources, but will simply summarize the general impression that had become part of my own outlook. First, I learned of the hundreds of amazing prophecies which pointed forward to the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The chances of anyone other than Jesus of Nazareth fulfilling these prophecies was said to be one in millions. Second, the Jewish people had every opportunity to accept Jesus. Not only were the prophecies explicit, leaving them without excuse, but also the sacrificial system pointed them directly to their promised Savior. Still, they rejected him.

The residual effect of that two-fold emphasis led imperceptibly to the conclusion that the first century Jews were simply stubborn and the disciples were at least blind, if not stupid. But the other side of the coin is even more dangerous from a spiritual point of view, for my suspicions about the Jews and disciples implied that "we Christians" were not stubborn like they were, and since we clearly understood the prophecies, we were certainly much brighter than the disciples. Now please pardon this rather too-vivid picture. I have probably over-stated the case, but I do think that something like the above scenario does lurk rather ominously in the background of those of us who have grown up with traditional Christianity.

When I first began to look seriously at these Christian claims, I had considerable difficulty in suppressing my uneasiness, for as I began looking at some of the New Testament

“prophecies” I found them less than convincing. The thought crossed my mind more than once: “If this is what the Christian claim is based on, Christianity is in deep trouble.” Some of the “proofs” cited in support of Jesus’ claims seemed to be so very convincing to the New Testament writers, yet, quite frankly, they made very little sense to me. How could that be? Was Christianity built on a foundation of wood, hay, and stubble, after all? As I recall, I was enjoying a good Christian experience at the time, so there was no immediate danger of my world falling apart, yet I found it very uncomfortable to think that this good experience might possibly be built on sinking sand instead of on solid rock. I thought of the hundreds of years of Christian tradition and of the many noble and helpful Christians that I had known personally. But I also thought of those who had rejected the Christian tradition in favor of a skeptical or even atheistic position. All these thoughts went tumbling through my head.

But before we look at the solution which I have since found so helpful, let me give you a more specific glimpse of the kinds of difficulties that began to gnaw at my certainties. For sake of convenience, we may note several “prophecies” from the Gospel of John, all of which are cited from Psalm 69.

1. “Zeal for thy house will consume me” (John 2:17). This statement is one that the disciples “remembered” after they had watched Jesus’ cleansing the temple. The original reference is found in Ps. 69:9.

2. “They hated me without a cause” (John 15:25). Jesus applied this statement from Ps. 69:4 to himself as he described the hatred which the world has against him and his Father. The quotation from the psalm is prefaced with the following words: “It is to fulfill the word that is written in their law.” The relationship of this word “fulfill” to our word “prophecy” is one that we will discuss later in the chapter; it can be the source of considerable difficulty.

3. Jesus is given vinegar “to fulfill the scripture” (John 19:28). This comment by the gospel writer that the vinegar offered to Jesus was to “fulfill” scripture, seems to be a direct reference to Psalm 69:21. In contrast to the previous two examples, the Old Testament passage is not actually quoted, yet the inference is clear enough.

Now if you want to experience the same kind of difficulty that I did, go directly to Psalm 69, read it through in its entirety, noting how each of these quotations or allusions is used in the original psalm. Incidentally, you may have noted that the three quotations I have cited are of three slightly different types: the first is attributed to the disciples, the second directly to Jesus, while the third is a comment supplied by the gospel writer himself. Similar examples could be noted almost at random from throughout the New Testament, though it is in the Gospels and Acts where one finds the most interest in the “fulfillment” of prophecy.

Looking specifically at Psalm 69, we must ask what the likely conclusion of the Old Testament readers would have been if they were hearing or reading this psalm in the Old Testament context. Would they have seen this psalm and these phrases as “prophecies,” that is “predictions” of Jesus’ mission? Frankly, I do not see how they could possibly have done so. The psalm is simply a lament by an individual, who is not named in the psalm, although the title

does identify it as a “Psalm of David.” That phrase could easily imply Davidic authorship (the traditional interpretation), but the original, Hebrew could just as easily mean a psalm “to” David, “for” David, “about” David, or “in honor of” David. Many scholars who would not hold to Davidic authorship in the strict sense do think that the speaker was at least one of Israel’s kings in the Davidic line.

For the purposes of our discussion, let us assume that this is a psalm written by David himself. Would the Old Testament reader have seen the true Messiah in this psalm? The New Testament writers obviously did, and we shall return to that in a moment. But for Old Testament readers, the matter would not have been at all clear. In the first instance, the psalm is written by someone who considered himself to be a sinner: “O God, thou knowest my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from thee” (Ps. 69:5). The New Testament claim for Jesus is that he was without sin (cf. Heb. 4:15), so on that point alone we have a definite cleavage between the Old Testament passage and the New Testament fulfillment; at least that is what it appears to be at first glance.

What is even more striking as we compare the content of this psalm with Jesus’ experience, is the remarkable contrast in attitudes towards one’s enemies. Certainly the Christian would accept the attitude of Jesus on the cross as the Christian ideal: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). But if you want to singe your polite Christian ears, read Psalm 69:22-28. Such venomous words are hard to imagine on the lips of our Lord. We shall approach the problem of violent language more directly in our next chapter. But for our purposes here, it is sufficient to note that there is a great gulf between the experience described in the psalm and that of our Lord. When the psalmist was given vinegar to drink (Ps. 69:21), he erupted into violent curses; when Jesus was given vinegar to drink, he prayed for his tormentors.

So there is the problem: the Old Testament psalm was written by a sinner who was still struggling with vengeful feelings towards his enemies. Furthermore, the psalm itself gives no clue that it was pointing forward to a future Messiah. Is this the kind of foundation on which Jesus’ messianic claim was based? It was at this point that I began a serious search to see if perhaps there might be other prophecies which were more worthy of the name. Of course, there is also the matter of the integrity of Jesus and the New Testament writers. When Jesus himself makes statements that I have difficulty in accepting, that is indeed a question I must face if I take my Christian experience seriously.

Rather than let the solution to the above problems emerge gradually in the course of the chapter, I think it would be helpful to outline briefly my suggested solution. Then we can look at the various parts in greater detail. In short, I believe God’s people have appealed to different reasons at different times to establish the same belief in the Messiah. Thus the “prophecies” of the Messiah can be divided into four basic categories:

1. Those prophecies that were evident to the reader of the Old Testament as pointing toward to one who was to come. These could be recognized as messianic prophecies by any honest reader.
2. Those prophecies which Jesus applied to himself and his mission as a result of his own self-understanding and from his own study of Scripture. According to the evidence we have, application of these prophecies to the Messiah in the way that Jesus

understood them was something fresh and original or, at least, his emphasis was different from that of known Jewish teachings about the Messiah.

3. “Prophecies” which were discovered and applied as the events themselves took place or shortly thereafter, a type of “prophecy” which was exceptionally popular in the New Testament era and is frequently found in the New Testament itself.

4. “Prophecies” that were applied to Jesus’ mission in later Christian centuries.

Before we look at each of these categories, it would be well to remind ourselves that, in the course of human experience, finding new reasons for old beliefs and practices is nothing unusual. To cite a rather mundane example, note all the various reasons one could give in support of vegetarianism: ascetic (meat tastes good, therefore should be avoided); health (a vegetable diet leads to better health); humanitarian (be kind to animals); ecological (it is wasteful to feed grain to animals and then eat the animals); religious (animals are sacred so should not be killed, much less eaten). It is unlikely that anyone would hold all those arguments at the same time, or with equal intensity. Furthermore, quite different emphases will be found at different eras in history and in different parts of the world. Applying this observation to the interpretation of Scripture, a similar process can be seen at work as God’s people find new reasons for supporting old beliefs. I think there is no place where that is more evident than in the promises and prophecies of the Messiah. This point will become clearer as we look at examples for each of the four categories.

1. Messianic Prophecies understandable to Old Testament believers

This category is the most basic one, for without a substantial foundation at this level, no one would have expected a Messiah at all. With our twentieth century orientation, we are inclined to think that if a prophecy is really a prophecy, it should be seen as such in advance of the event or person it foretells. That is so obvious to us that even to make the point seems unnecessary. Yet that is precisely the cause of the difficulty, for the New Testament uses the language of prophecy, foretelling, and foreseeing with reference to persons and events that can really be recognized only by hindsight. We shall return to that point below, but here we must look at some of those prophecies which, in Old Testament times, had the potential to kindle the messianic fires in the hearts of God’s people.

Just a comment first, however, on the more technical usage of the terms “Messiah” and “messianic.” In our discussion in the last chapter, we noted that the Hebrew word *mashiah* simply means “anointed one.” In the course of time, however, Israel applied it more specifically to the king as *the* anointed one. Finally, the people began to look to the future and the *ideal* anointed one. So, technically speaking, “messianic” refers to those prophecies which pointed to a coming royal figure, a descendant in the Davidic line. In traditional Christian interpretation, however, the word has taken on a much broader meaning so that almost anything in the Old Testament can fall under the heading “messianic” if it points forward in any way to the coming Redeemer. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Norwegian scholar, Sigmund Mowinckel chose a neutral title for his basic scholarly study of the “messianic” prophecies of the Old Testament: *He That Cometh*. Thus he could legitimately discuss not just the “messianic”

prophecies, but the full spectrum of Old Testament types which point forward to Christ: king, prophet, servant, and son of man. His title is simply the echo of John the Baptist's searching question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). The more technical meaning for "Messiah" and "messianic" will explain why I have sometimes used quotation marks to set off these terms: I am simply attempting to get the best of both worlds, the traditional and the technical.

Turning now to specific prophecies, we look first to the initial section of the Hebrew canon: the law of Moses, the Pentateuch. Here, Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17 stand out as the most important verses pointing forward to one who is to come. Both are rather cryptic and their broader implications are not at all clear to us, but Jewish interpreters clearly accepted these as "messianic" even though they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Genesis 49:10. The classic King James Version of Jacob's blessing on his son Judah is quite familiar to Christian ears: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." From Judah, someone was to come who would be the focal point of the people's hope. The passage says very little more than that, but it is enough.

Numbers 24:17. In Balaam's prophecy about Israel the KJV phraseology is again familiar: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob I and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." Here was someone who would one day smash Israel's enemies. Although the term "Messiah" does not appear, this passage was "messianic" for the Jews, and is part of the reason why the Jews and Jesus' own disciples were looking for a heavy-handed Messiah who would smash the enemies of the nation.

In connection with the evidence from the Pentateuch, we should touch on the question of the sacrificial system. Was not this a clear picture of the person and work of the Messiah? A picture, yes, but apparently not a clear one. Where in the Old Testament can you find an *explicit* interpretation of the sacrificial system as applying to the person of the Messiah? Nowhere. Our interpretations of the sacrificial system are from the New Testament. The book of Hebrews is, of course, a powerful exposition of the meaning of the sacrificial system in terms of the mission of Jesus the Messiah. But significantly, the book of Hebrews was written after the death of Jesus, not before. Likewise, the imagery of Jesus as our high priest is primarily the result of inspired reflection on the completed work of Jesus in the light of the sacrificial system. The idea of a royal priest is suggested by Psalm 110:4, but the development of that idea takes place after the cross.

As I have reflected on the way that conservative Christians have dealt with the sacrificial system, I have concluded that we have perhaps confused the type and the antitype, the shadow and the reality (cf. Heb. 10:1). I mean that we have treated the Old Testament sacrificial system almost as though it were clearer than the real event in Jesus Christ. No wonder that we are quite mystified by the Jewish rejection and the dullness of the disciples. If we assume that the sacrificial system was crystal clear, then it loses its value as shadow and becomes the real thing. That is most unfortunate, for the blood of goats and bulls can never be as meaningful as the death of our Lord on the cross.

As for my own view, I do believe the Old Testament believer could gain many of the essential principles of God's plan of salvation from a study of the sacrificial system. Some of the

great men of God may even have caught glimpses in the sacrifices of the death of the one who was to come. Yet interestingly enough, not even one of the Old Testament writers has seen fit to pass along those insights to us; our book of Hebrews is in the New Testament, not in the Old.

I think you will already begin to see the significance of this conclusion for the interpretation of the experience of the disciples and the Jews: they had not yet linked the “royal” prophecies with the “suffering” ones. That was something that God in the flesh must do in their presence. Even then it was very difficult to give up old cherished ideas. But is that not precisely the great danger that faces us every day? We all too easily fall into merely traditional ways of thinking and fail to agonize for the fresh and invigorating vision of truth which comes from a total commitment to our God.

The Pentateuch contains one more “messianic” prophecy that we should note, namely, the promise in *Deuteronomy 18:15-19* of a great prophet like Moses who would come some day in the future. The promise was given by Moses to the people as he prepared them for his own departure. The passage does not say when or how such a prophet would come. The Lord had simply promised the people that the prophet would be like Moses and would come from among their brethren (Deut. 18:18).

It is instructive to note how the New Testament deals with this promise of the prophet. According to the record in the Gospel of John, the people did not necessarily identify “the prophet” with the “Christ” (Messiah), for they asked John the Baptist first if he were “the Christ,” then if he were “Elijah” and then if he were “the prophet” (John 1:21, 25). In other words, they had three distinct figures in mind. Yet John's Gospel also suggests that when Jesus had fed the five thousand, the people were ready to accept him as “the prophet” while also being ready to proclaim him king (John 6:13-14). After the death of Christ, there is also at least a hint in Stephen's speech that this prophecy of a prophet was applied to Jesus, though the identification is not explicit (Acts 7:37). But in any event, the promise of a prophet was clearly part of the fuel that kindled the people's hopes for the future.

Turning to the prophetic books, we now find messianic prophecies in the precise sense of the word. The prophets were writing in the days of the kings, at a time when the people as well as the prophets had begun to realize that none of their kings had lived up to God's great ideal. Through the prophets, God began to direct the hopes of the people to that ideal future king from the house of David. Here, then, are the true promises of the Messiah, the anointed one who would redeem his people. Let us note a sample of some of the more notable passages.

Isaiah 9:2-7. This prophecy speaks clearly of the throne of David (vs. 7), thus indicating its proper messianic character. But from the standpoint of the New Testament and its claims for Jesus, the most fascinating part of this prophecy is the list of titles given in verse 6: “For to us a child is born ... Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day had great difficulty in accepting Jesus' claims to divinity. They were thinking of a great leader in the Davidic succession, but tended to regard him as a *human* figure who would introduce the Kingdom of Yahweh. When Jesus claimed to be *both* this human *Messiah* and *God*, they were startled. Yet here in Isaiah is a key reference suggesting that the child who was to come would indeed be the mighty God.

Isaiah 11:1-9. This prophecy describes how the “shoot from the stump of Jesse” would introduce the great and peaceful kingdom of the future. The Spirit of God would be upon him (vs. 2) and he would judge the poor in righteousness (vs. 4). The climax? The earth would be full

of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea (vs. 9). With a prophecy like that, who wouldn't long for the coming of the Messiah?

Jeremiah 23:5-6. Jeremiah lived through the tragic demise of the southern kingdom of Judah and saw the last kings of Judah killed or deported to Babylon. He had every reason to be disheartened. Nevertheless, this man of God pointed to a great future king from the line of David; Yahweh will raise up for David a righteous Branch (vs. 5) and this is the name by which he will be called, "Yahweh is our righteousness." The idea of a human king taking the name of Yahweh to himself must have been a troublesome thought for traditional Jews. Yet this passage is part of the evidence which lay behind Jesus' claim that he and his Father were one (John 10:30). Or to paraphrase another famous saying: "If you have seen me, you have seen Yahweh" (John 14:9).

The emphasis on the royal figure who was to come, the proper messianic figure, may at least partially explain why the royal psalms (i.e. psalms which speak of the king) were such fertile ground for other "messianic" prophecies. The psalms repeatedly speak of the king as the anointed one, and often bring the anointed one into very close relationship with Yahweh himself (cf. Ps. 2:7). Psalm 110, a very popular New Testament "messianic" psalm, though apparently, not one that was so viewed by the Jews, also makes that famous declaration: "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4). The Old Testament itself does not develop this idea of a priest-king, but the suggestion is there and was destined to be developed in great detail in the light of the cross of Christ.

From the third section of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, one other passage should be mentioned in connection with the Old Testament "messianic" evidence, namely, *Daniel 7:13*. Here, the other-worldly figure of the "son of man" appears. "Son of man" was a title that the New Testament writers often used for Jesus. In fact, it was one of Jesus' favorite titles for himself. The precise meaning of "son of man" in the New Testament has been much discussed and we shall not even touch on that discussion here, but we should note that the "son of man" in Daniel 7:13 is a celestial being who comes from heaven. Hence the imagery of Daniel 7 helps to prepare the way for the claims of Jesus that he was indeed of heavenly origin.

Now after this brief survey of Old Testament evidence, it should be clear enough that the messianic hope at the time of Christ rested on a solid basis. Indeed, the evidence from the New Testament itself testifies that everyone was looking for the Messiah. So in the first century AD, the question most certainly was not *whether* a Messiah was coming or not. That was a foregone conclusion; the Messiah *was* coming. Rather, it was quite a different question that Jesus brought to the attention of his listeners: "What *kind* of Messiah are you expecting?" The Gospel of John describes how the people were ready to take Jesus and make him king after he had fed the five thousand (John 6:14-15). But when Jesus revealed the spiritual nature of his kingdom, they turned away in droves (John 6:6).

A superficial reading of the "messianic" prophecies could indeed suggest the popular conception that the Messiah was to be a conquering king who would smash Israel's enemies. But such a conclusion could come only from a superficial reading of Scripture. When we make a total commitment to righteousness, to truth, to God, the Scriptures come alive with a mysterious glory which quite eludes the casual reader. And that is precisely what happened in Jesus' experience. As he grew in his knowledge of God, the radical nature of his mission was dawning ever more clearly upon him. At the age of twelve the depth of his understanding was already a cause of amazement to the learned rabbis (Luke 2:47). But the time was not yet right; Jesus returned to his

home and was subject to his parents (Luke 2:51).

In that home in Nazareth many things must have happened which helped prepare Jesus for his mission. The biblical record is mysteriously silent about these years in Nazareth, but knowing what we do about men of spiritual power, we can be sure that Jesus was deeply immersed in a growing relationship with his heavenly father. The quality of his prayer life and the depth of his study must have been incredible, for when he finally stepped to the threshold of the world to announce his mission to the universe, the crowds “were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one who had authority” (Matt. 7:29). What gave his words that ring of authority? His relationship to his Father, to be sure, but our question must now be not just *how* he taught, but *what* he taught, and that is the matter to which we now turn, for Jesus brought fresh insight and a new emphasis to the messianic prophecies which the disciples simply could not accept, even though they did believe that Jesus was the Messiah. It is this unbelievable aspect of Jesus’ ministry that we find developed in the second category of “messianic” prophecies, namely, those that Jesus himself brought to the attention of the people.

2. Messianic prophecies which became clear as a result of the teaching of Jesus

The outstanding example in this category of “messianic” prophecies is none other than Isaiah 53, the prophecy of the suffering servant. For those of us who have been steeped in the New Testament understanding of Jesus’ life and message, one of the most obvious and significant aspects of his experience is his suffering and death. Yet before his death this was just the point that virtually everyone around Jesus refused to accept, including those who accepted him as the promised redeemer.

In my own study of the “messianic” prophecies, it came as a real shock to realize that it was Jesus himself who brought the ministry of the suffering servant into focus as one of the “messianic” prophecies. Yet after the shock had worn away, I began to realize that this was the only logical conclusion that I could draw from the New Testament evidence. The Jews were inclined to reject Jesus completely; the disciples and the crowds (at least for a while) wanted to make him king; but no one wanted to accept him as the suffering servant.

Jesus must have realized the immense challenge that faced him in the form of the popular concept of the Messiah. To help the people realize that the Messiah must first suffer before he could rule was no easy task. In this connection it is fascinating to note how Jesus dealt with some of the biblical data touching on his mission. In particular, his treatment of Isaiah 61 during the synagogue service of Nazareth is remarkable. As he read the familiar words of the prophet, the anticipation of the people must have been building towards the expected climax: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). But then came a real surprise, for the assembled congregation must have been waiting for the next line: “The day of vengeance of our God” (Is. 61:2). That was what they all longed to see and hear. Instead, Jesus sat down, saying: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). The congregation’s reaction was at first favorable to his “gracious words” (cf. vs. 21), but then the true implications began to emerge and this congregation turned into a ferocious mob, intent on murder (vs. 29). Going against established tradition is hard work, and dangerous. But Jesus

knew all about that and he carried on.

Before we move beyond Jesus' mission and his own self-understanding, a further word about Isaiah 53 might be helpful. In the first instance, the passage itself nowhere links the servant with the royal "Messiah." The servant is obviously close to Yahweh, but he is not identified as a royal figure. For this reason, scholars have debated endlessly as to the original intent of the prophecy. Again, we cannot go into detail here; for our purposes, it is simply important to know that Jesus himself was apparently the first to link publicly this famous passage with the role of the Messiah. But in this connection something remarkable emerges from Jewish sources, for there is clear evidence that the Jewish community did, in fact, interpret Isaiah 53 messianically, but their messianic interpretation bears almost no relationship to the biblical passage. In fact, they have taken this marvelous passage telling of the servant's lamb-like willingness to suffer on behalf of his people, and have turned it completely on its head, rephrasing it so that it becomes a hymn praising a warrior Messiah who makes the other nations suffer. That was just the messianic view in Jesus' day. When the community of God's people could take the very passage which should have opened their eyes to a spiritual kingdom, transforming it to serve their own preconceived ideas, we can appreciate the tremendous challenge facing Jesus as he sought to break through to their hearts and share the good news of a Messiah who gently cares for the suffering sinner. The people wanted no part in such a Messiah, so they destroyed him as a threat to their established tradition. But in so doing, they unwittingly brought to fulfillment those very prophecies which Jesus had brought to light and which have become so central to the Christian understanding of the Messiah.

The fuller meaning of Jesus' self-sacrifice began to emerge among Jesus' followers after the resurrection. As the Christian community reflected on Jesus' earthly experience, they began to see the Old Testament in a radically new light. They began to interpret the Old Testament with renewed enthusiasm. That is why our study of the post-resurrection development of the messianic theme is so crucial. For us the word "prophecy" always implies foresight, but the kinds of messianic prophecies I have included in the third category seem to involve a generous portion of hindsight. It is to these "prophecies" that we now turn.

3. Prophecies discovered and applied in light of the events themselves

This category of messianic prophecies is undoubtedly the most prominent and most popular with the New Testament writers, but it is probably the most difficult one for the modern reader to comprehend. In my own study of messianic prophecies I struggled to make sense out of this type of "prophecy" and to maintain the integrity of the New Testament writers. In the course of my education, even in connection with the Bible, perhaps especially in connection with the Bible, it had been deeply drilled into my head that I must read according to the author's intent. I learned that I must never cite an author as proving the point that I am attempting to make if he himself obviously has something quite different in mind. My problem threatened to become acute when I tried to apply this rule to the New Testament writers and discovered that when they cited the Old Testament authors, they often departed far from the obvious meaning of the Old Testament passage. So I was faced with two alternatives, equally unattractive. First, I could force myself to believe that the Old Testament authors actually said what the New Testament writers claimed for them. In other words, the New Testament writers were always right and their

interpretation would take precedence over what I thought the Old Testament writers originally meant. The other alternative seemed to be to admit that the New Testament writers were wrong in citing the Old Testament in the way they did. In such a case I seemed to be admitting that the New Testament writers were unreliable, and therefore the point that they were arguing, namely, that Jesus was the promised Messiah, was open to question.

As I have suggested earlier, it was at this point that I began to look for more substantial prophecies. The more important of these I have already noted in category one. That, at least, helped to buy a little time as I continued to struggle with the New Testament authors. I was so long in solving the problem for myself and yet the solution now seems so very simple, that I am sometimes perplexed as to how I can best share the good news. But the news is so good that I must at least attempt to share it.

The solution to this third category lies in two parts. First, in an understanding of how God has worked through his inspired writers, and second, in an understanding of some of the popular forms of argument employed by Jewish writers in and around the first century AD. Both of these aspects merit further discussion.

In the first instance, I discovered that I had fallen victim way of thinking about God and his word that had contributed to my difficulty. My thinking went something like this: God is perfect, the Bible is God's word, therefore the Bible is perfect. Now I would hasten to add that the Bible is perfect for the purpose for which God intended it, but that is a far cry from being perfect in the same sense that God is perfect. God's word must be compared with the incarnation: the perfection of divinity clothed with the imperfection and weakness of human flesh. I had tended to think that the logic and rhetoric of the human writers was in fact God's logic and rhetoric. It is not. Scripture reflects the logic and rhetoric of human beings who are speaking God's message under the guidance of his Spirit, but they are also very much under the influence of their own limitations of language, character, knowledge and ability. The Spirit controls the process to the extent that from the writings of these inspired men the sincere seeker for truth can indeed learn what he needs to know about God, but the bits and pieces, especially when taken in isolation and apart from God's intention to communicate the truth, can be very misleading. If an inspired writer is a highly educated individual and has a good grasp of language, he will write accordingly. If, by contrast, a writer comes from an unsophisticated background, he will reveal this background by his homely language, his earthy illustrations and his rough logic. The Spirit does not obliterate these human elements.

How does this apply to our understanding of "messianic" prophecies? In just this way, that the New Testament writers were men of the first century, and since God chose to reveal his will in the first century, he inspired men to give his message in the accepted thought forms of the first century. Here is where the second part of the solution comes in, for when I began to realize the kind of thinking and the kind of logic that was prominent in Jewish sources of the early Christian era, I began to recognize something terribly familiar, namely, precisely those problem arguments that I had found in the New Testament. In short, the New Testament writers were using standard and accepted Jewish methods of treating Scripture when they seemingly departed into such flights of fancy. Remarkably, there is no evidence in the New Testament that the Jewish opponents of the Christian community argued against their methodology; they were quite accustomed to that. They argued, rather, with the Christian conclusion. They were not prepared to accept the suffering servant as their Messiah, even if the Christians used all the right methods

in proving their point. But we need to illustrate this conclusion from the New Testament and from Jewish sources, something that I think we can do fairly quickly and briefly.

The one feature of Jewish methodology that is particularly pertinent for us is the tendency to read later events back into earlier narratives. Without the knowledge of these later events, no one would have dreamed of them on the basis of the earlier narratives. But once the events became known, Jewish rabbis loved to “discover” them in the earlier passages. In the rabbinic discussions, then, it became customary for the rabbis to debate among themselves just which events were “foretold” in which narratives. To illustrate this way of treating Scripture, we could turn almost at random to any of the ancient Jewish commentaries on Scripture, a type of commentary known as Midrash. Many of these commentaries are available in English translation and provide a fascinating insight into Jewish methods of interpreting Scripture.

For our purposes, a glimpse at the Midrash on Genesis 15:17-18 should serve quite well. [See Midrash Rabbah on Genesis, XLIV, 21-22 (English translation published by the Soncino Press, London)]. In interpreting the phrase, “Behold a smoking furnace and a flaming torch,” Simeon Ben Abba said in the name of a yet more famous rabbi, Rabbi Johanan, that in this vision God had revealed four things to Abraham: Gehenna (hell), the kingdoms that would oppress Israel (Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Media, Rome), Revelation, and the Temple. The Midrash then records the rabbinical discussions about the fuller implication of the suggested interpretation. Now if we look at the original Genesis context, none of these four things is at all explicit. The verses immediately preceding (Gen. 15:13-16) do speak of subjugation to a nation which turned out to be Egypt. But in the light of later Jewish history and theology, the rabbis went far beyond the biblical narrative, expanding on the “smoking furnace” to include the negative elements of hell and oppression, while interpreting a “flaming torch” as referring to the positive aspects of Revelation and the Temple. All of this was by way of hindsight, yet the rabbis commented on the passage in such a way as to suggest that Abraham could see this complete picture.

From this same section of the Midrash, a fascinating variation on this Jewish methodology can be illustrated, namely, the use of an individual word occurring in one passage to expand the content of another verse where the same word appears. For example, Rabbi Joshua claimed that this experience of Abraham indicates that God had revealed the dividing of the Red Sea to Abraham. How did he arrive at that remarkable interpretation? The key lies in the Hebrew word for “pieces” (*gezarim*) which appears in the phrase: ‘and a flaming torch passed between these *pieces*’ (Gen. 15:17). This is the same Hebrew word which appears in Ps. 136:13. The KJV translates it as “parts” (*gezarim*) in the phrase: (O give thanks) . . . “to him which divided the Red Sea into *parts*.” Rabbi Joshua assumed that the content of the verse in Psalm 136 (dividing of the Red Sea) must have been included in the earlier experience of Abraham since the biblical narrative uses the same word (*gezarim*) in both passages. He concluded, therefore, that God had revealed the dividing of the Red Sea to Abraham. Remarkable!

These examples are quite typical of rabbinical interpretation of Scripture. And since the New Testament writers were thoroughly immersed in this first-century Jewish culture, they could use these methods without hesitation. Whenever I read through early Jewish sources, I think I detect a certain excitement as the rabbis make fresh “discoveries” in what, to us, almost seems like a sacred game with words. But they were quite serious. So were the New Testament writers.

Given this Jewish background, I can now appreciate the way in which some early Christians excitedly mined the Old Testament for fresh “prophecies” of this Messiah whom they

had already accepted on quite other grounds. These “prophecies” were not the foundation of Jesus’ messianic mission; they were simply later confirmations of something his followers already believed. To be sure, the apostles used these methods in their evangelism, for they were working largely with Jews. Now if we can understand this early Judeo-Christian environment, we no longer need to fault the integrity of the New Testament writers, nor will we fault God for using men who employed such strange methods. God has always used men within their own environment to speak to their contemporaries. It is our responsibility to understand them so that we can understand God’s message to them and through them, a message which he has intended for us also.

When we recognize that the “messianic” prophecies of categories 1 and 2 formed the basis for the disciples’ convictions, then perhaps we can more readily grant them the privilege of using the category 3 prophecies, prophecies which carried a fair bit of weight in their own day, but which seem so strange from the standpoint of our way of reasoning. But let us look now at how the New Testament actually uses this Jewish methodology to establish the messianic claims of Jesus.

Peter’s speech on the day of Pentecost provides us with a good example of the apostolic method of dealing with the Old Testament messianic “prophecies.” In Acts 2:23 Peter refers to “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” that the Jews would deliver up Jesus to be crucified. Then he refers to a Davidic psalm, Psalm 16, saying that David was speaking “of him,” that is, of Jesus (Acts 2:25). Turning back to Psalm 16, I find nothing at all that would indicate to Old Testament readers that this psalm was pointing forward to the Messiah. It appears simply to be a psalm of thanksgiving for the fact that God has preserved his own. True, the psalm is royal and Davidic, thus linking it loosely with the messianic tradition, but for us to accept that the psalmist wanted his readers to think of *the* Messiah is hardly a conclusion that we can draw on the basis of the Old Testament. Yet Peter makes the statement: “David says concerning him” – and by “him,” Peter clearly means Jesus the Messiah. Now judged by our way of thinking we might be inclined to say that Peter was wrong. But such a conclusion does not take in to account the accepted methods of Peter’s day. Peter was not wrong; he was simply, making use of the Jewish methodology described above which allows the inclusion of later events in earlier passages. Peter can actually go on to say that David was a prophet (Acts 2:30), and that he “foresaw” and “spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, and that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31). He uses all the language of prophecy. And that can cause us great difficulty if we do not realize how earlier passages can be made to “prophecy” in the light of later events simply by the use of good Jewish methodology. In other words, it is essential that we recognize how the word “prophecy” could be very much expanded in the first century after Christ so that it could refer, not just to foresight, but to hindsight as well. Such an understanding of “prophecy” provides the clue for understanding the great number of messianic citations in the New Testament which simply do not seem to be predictions in their original Old Testament setting. I would include here the citations out of Psalm 69 in the Gospel of John which we noted earlier. The original passages were not predictions, but the first century methodology made it possible to turn them into such. New Testament writers “found” many such “prophecies” and obviously did not hesitate to use them for the New Testament is full of them.

In this connection it would be well to note how conservative Christians have often reacted against the conclusions of modern scholars who initially may have had nothing more sinister in

mind than simply to call attention to the fact that the Old Testament passages do not say to us what the New Testament writers understood them to say to them. A modern scholar might say: “Psalm 16:10 does not really predict the resurrection of Christ.” To which the conservative response has often been: “Yet it must, for the New Testament says it does.” Without an understanding of the Jewish methods behind the New Testament quotations, the choice would appear to be between scholarship and piety: if we accept the scholarly point of view, we must reject the New Testament; to accept the New Testament point of view, we must reject the scholarly position. Such a stark dichotomy can be avoided if we understand, first, how God has worked in Scripture, and second, how first century Jews interpreted the Old Testament.

I should further emphasize that a belief in the resurrection of Christ does not at all depend on the use of a particular Old Testament text. The resurrection stands on the basis of the New Testament narrative just as we noted earlier that the Virgin Birth is established on the basis of Matthew, not Isaiah. To be sure, the New Testament writers constantly bring these additional passages into use, but they must be seen as additional proofs for a Jewish audience, not as primary evidence for twentieth century readers. We need not sacrifice a single cardinal point of faith; we simply need to be careful that we use the reasons that are most likely to be cogent for our day when we seek to establish those teachings that are important for the Christian faith. As noted earlier, at different times and in different places, different arguments have carried more weight. We must still recognize that these different arguments have been used by men of God, men who were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet if we are truly guided by the Spirit today, we will not force someone to accept an argument as primary evidence when that argument could be effective only in a quite different culture. When I finally came to understand that point, I made my peace with the writers of the New Testament. They have been good friends of mine ever since.

Before we turn to the fourth and last category of prophecies, we should note how the understanding of a particular word in the New Testament can provide a more specific explanation for a number of passages that have been called “prophecies” by Christian interpreters. The key word is “fulfill,” one that is particularly prominent in the Gospels. We have already noted the use of this word in several contexts, most notably in connection with the Virgin Birth and Isaiah 7:14//Matt 1:2-23. But for purposes of illustrating the use of this word, I would like to suggest a comparison between Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15.

The verse in Matthew describes the flight of Jesus and his parents into Egypt. The passage concludes with the following statement: “This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son’” (Matt. 2:15). At first glance the modern reader might suspect that Matthew is referring to an Old Testament prophecy of the first type, namely, one that clearly predicts the coming of the Messiah to the Old Testament reader. But when we turn to Hosea 11:1, we discover something quite different, for there the passage is clearly referring to the departure of Israel from Egypt at the time of the Exodus. How could that experience predict the coming of Christ to the reader? In the first instance, we must recognize that, at least in part, Matthew is again using typical Jewish methodology in reading later events back into earlier passages. Note, however, that in this instance Matthew does not use the term “prophecy,” though many later Christian interpreters have not hesitated to do so, contributing to the confusion that we have already discussed. But even though the background of Jewish methodology can be helpful in understanding Matthew’s general approach, the really significant

clue to understanding this type of “prophecy” is found in the word “fulfill.” Behind this word lies a Greek word *pleroo* which means “to fill full” as well as “to fulfill.” Selecting the first meaning of the word instead of the second, we could roughly paraphrase what Matthew is saying as follows: “Those ancient words of the prophet describing how God brought his son out of Egypt have now been filled full of fresh new meaning in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.” Thus, instead of a prediction which is brought to pass and so “fulfilled,” this way of understanding Matthew sees rather an old stories whose words are filled full of fresh new meaning, meaning which, quite literally, had never been thought of before.

This usage of the word “fulfill” can be illustrated also from Matt. 5:17 where Jesus says that he has not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. He then proceeds to show just how he has come to fill the law full of meaning. The law says, for example, “You shall not kill.” But when we fill the law full of its true meaning we learn that we should not even hate (Matt. 5:21-22). By understanding the word “fulfill” in this way, we can view many of the Old Testament passages, not as predictions which were fulfilled, but as words that have been filled full of a new and even quite different meaning in the new situation in Jesus Christ.

Briefly summarizing the implications of our discussion of this third category of messianic “prophecies,” we note the following points. First, we must recognize that God works with human beings within their own environment; his inspired spokespersons reflect their human background and training. Having recognized this, we can then move on to the second point, our understanding of the environment of the first century after Christ. It should be clear from our discussion that rabbinical interpretation of Scripture was often based on methods which seem quite foreign to us. This is particularly noticeable in the tendency to read later events back into earlier narratives. This Jewish background is the explanation for the remarkable “proofs” sometimes cited by New Testament writers. A third and more specific point, is the usage of the term “fulfill.” Against the general background of Jewish methodology, the New Testament writers often spoke of later experiences filling old words full of new meaning. Thus “fulfill” does not really refer to a prediction coming to pass, but to an old narrative coming to life in a new way.

With this look at the New Testament era, we are now prepared to move further afield and note the even later “discoveries” of additional messianic “prophecies.”

4. Prophecies understood as messianic in later Christian centuries

In this last category of “messianic” prophecies we will simply note a couple of “prophecies” that have been much used through several centuries of Christian interpretation. One such prophecy is the so-called *Protevangelium* (first gospel) of Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, but thou shalt bruise his heel.” This classic KJV rendering is very familiar to Christian ears. In the light of the New Testament imagery of the “seed” (Christ) and the serpent (Satan), this passage has been taken as intimating the great cosmic struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, the conflict between Christ and Satan. The hints are there in the passage, but neither the Old Testament nor the New picked up this passage and applied it to Christ; the application was to come after the close of the canon to Scripture.

One other later discovery of significance is the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Modern

scholarship has tended to deny that Daniel was written in the sixth century, preferring a date close to the time of the Maccabean revolt (c. 165 BC). Such an approach tends to see Daniel not as genuine prophecy, but as history written as prophecy. Conservative Christians, however, have insisted that the book is indeed prophecy, though even so their interpretations have varied considerably. The arguments need not detain us here for our primary purpose is to look at the history of interpretation of Daniel. In this connection, we note that the prophecy of Daniel 9 came to be seen by many Christians as the most important of all messianic prophecies, a prophecy not just of the coming of the Messiah, but of the time of his coming as well. Sir Isaac Newton, for example, in his commentary on Daniel declared that this prophecy was the “cornerstone” of the Christian faith.

The basis for this interpretation and the considerable variation in dates adopted by different interpreters provide fertile ground for research, but for our purposes it is sufficient to note that the key phrase is found in Daniel 9:27, rendered by the KJV as follows: “And in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” When applied to Jesus Christ, this passage is taken to refer to the death of Christ on the cross and the end of the sacrificial system.

Now even though Christians have claimed that this prophecy is a chief “cornerstone” of the faith, the history of interpretation indicates that it only *gradually* took its place as a cornerstone, for certainly there is little evidence in Scripture or in the early Jewish writings to suggest that this prophecy was used to predict the time or the mission of Jesus. About two hundred years after the birth of Christ, Clement of Alexandria (d. 220) and Tertullian (d. 240), two fathers of the Christian church, did apply the prophecy to the incarnation and death of Christ, but these early interpreters tended to see the prophecy ending at or around AD 70, the time of Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans. The history of the interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 is a fascinating one, but for our purposes we simply need to emphasize the fact that here is a prophecy which the Christian community “discovered” many years after Jesus’ earthly ministry. Nevertheless, it has brought a great deal of comfort and encouragement to God’s people.

So at the end of our survey, we can affirm that the messianic hope is one that has remained constant through the ages, first in the Old Testament as God’s people looked forward with increasing eagerness to the one who was to come. Then, in the person of Jesus Christ, at least some of the Jewish community recognized the One who had come as their Redeemer. Many rejected this gentle man who said that he had come to die for their sins. But many found in him the source of life. These have carried the good news throughout the world, and the word is still being spread abroad today. We may not find equally convincing all the reasons that have been used through the ages to establish the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was the embodiment of the Old Testament hope. But we should be able to see how God has used many and varied ways to build faith in the hearts of his people.

Recognizing that God has indeed used a great variety of ways in working with man has made it possible for me to build my house of faith on more solid rock. Now when the winds blow, I don’t have to be afraid. That has not only been a great relief, but a cause for great joy. Perhaps that is also one of the reasons why I like to think of the hope of the Messiah as the best story in the Old Testament as well as in the New, and indeed anywhere else you might care to look. It is good news that is worth sharing.

Theme: The Holy Spirit:

Leading Question: What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from Jesus and the Gospels?

1. How should we understand John 7:37-38:

37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” 39 Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Note: God’s “spirit” is everywhere present in the Old Testament, though it is not always a “personal” spirit as Christians would say of the Spirit as seen in the New Testament. In Genesis 1:1, for example, the “spirit” of God was moving – but that same word could be translated as “breath” or as “wind.”

2. How do we compare the teachings of Jesus and Gospels with what we can learn from the Old Testament about the Holy Spirit or the “Spirit of God”?

Note: John’s Gospel is most explicit in teaching that the Spirit would be given only after Jesus was glorified.

John 7:39: The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 14:26: The coming of the Spirit (the Comforter) was still future, and would fulfill a teaching function.

John 16:7: The Comforter cannot come until Jesus departs.

John 16:13: The Spirit would guide the disciples into all truth.

3. Why did the early Adventist community resist seeing the Holy Spirit as God?

Note: The resistance to seeing the Holy Spirit as a member of the Trinity was part of a larger 19th century impulse against the Trinity. Prior to the emergence of the Seventh-day Adventist church as a formally organized community of faith, many early Adventists had belonged to the Christian Connection, an anti-trinitarian movement. And this feeling lingered on. LeRoy Froom cites a letter from R. A. Underwood (May 5, 1930), in which Underwood tells of giving several camp meeting presentations on the Holy Spirit as a

“Person of the Godhead.” But “the ministers by vote asked him not to speak further on the subject.” – LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D. C.:Review and Herald, 1971), p. 266

A 2002 Review and Herald book, *The Trinity*, authored by Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John Reeve, explores the issues from a biblical and historical perspective, documenting the change in Adventist thinking. In recent years, a strong anti-trinitarian backlash has developed in some conservative Adventist circles. These opponents of the Trinity revert to the early Adventist position and do not hesitate to cite the anti-trinitarian Adventist pioneers in support of their case.

Theme: Salvation

Leading Question: What do Jesus and Gospels tell us about salvation before Jesus died on the cross?

Given the strong emphasis on substitutionary theology in evangelical circles, a position which sees the death of Christ as essential in the salvation process, it is instructive to note the teachings of Jesus on the theme of “salvation,” teachings which would have been given *before* he died to pay the price for our sin.

The tantalizing nature of this question is further enhanced by the realization that none of Jesus’ listeners believed that the Messiah would come to suffer and die. At least that is the perspective presented in the synoptic Gospels. That question is explored in the second lesson for this quarter, the lesson on “The Son.”

Key passages from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) reveal that Jesus could promise salvation to individuals without any reference to a “transaction” involving the death of Christ:

Mark 2:5 (NRSV), Jesus to the paralytic:

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

Luke 18:9-14: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (NRSV)

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 15: Lost Coin, Lost Sheep, Lost Boy: None of these salvation stories include the element of substitution or transaction:

And yet, John’s Gospel could refer to the “lamb” as crucial to God’s way of dealing with sin and salvation. At least two passages can be cited:

John 1:29 (NRSV), quoting the words of John the Baptist:

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 11:49-51 (NRSV), quoting the words of Caiaphas:

49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! 50 You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” 51 He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation.

Mysteriously – the Gospels do not tell us how it happened – Jesus discovered Isaiah 53, the so-called “suffering servant song” and applied the theme of suffering to his own ministry. And yet that application was not clearly seen and accepted until after his death and resurrection. These words are so familiar to us that we easily forget that they struck Jesus’ listeners as a jarring impossibility. Jesus’ interaction with Peter is perhaps the clearest example. After Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Messiah, a confession for which Jesus praised him, Jesus proceeded to tell of his coming death. Peter reacted sharply to Jesus and Jesus even more sharply to Peter:

Matthew 16: 21 (NRSV): From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

So how did these moving words become rooted in Christian theology? That is a tantalizing question that may take an eternity to understand. But they have indeed become a powerful part of the Christian message of salvation:

4 Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth. – Isaiah 53:4-7, NRSV

In the Old Testament itself there seems to be no evidence that the sacrificial lamb was understood as a type of the coming Messiah. In time, that truth would be forever anchored in the faith of the church. But initially it was so unexpected. Here again, the words of C. S. Lewis, as cited in Lesson #2, are worth repeating:

My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins. – C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, IV.15

Theme: How to be saved

Leading Question: Before his death, what did Jesus teach about how to be saved?

In recent decades, Protestant evangelists have developed a liking for simple rules to lead people to Christ and salvation. Campus Crusade’s “Four Spiritual Laws” are a good example. We can look at this simple framework as the backdrop for the question of what Jesus actually taught about the “how” of being saved. Here are the four laws in simplified form:

Law 1: God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

Law 2: Man is sinful and separated from God.

Law 3: Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin.

Law 4: We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

Let’s ponder four passages from the Gospels and see if they yield a simple step-by-step plan for salvation. The first two passages are more gracious and simple, the last two more rigorous:

1. Matthew’s call: Luke 5:27-32 (NRSV)

Luke 5:27-32: After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” 28 And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

29 Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. 30 The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; 32 I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

2. The sinful woman who anointed Jesus at Simon’s house: Luke 7:36-50 (NRSV):

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. 37 And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. 38 She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to

himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.” 40 Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “speak.” 41 “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” 44 Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” 48 Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50 And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

3. The Parable of the Wedding Garment: Luke 22:1-14 (NRSV):

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

4. Hating one’s own family: Luke 14:15-24 (NRSV)

25 Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26 “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a

tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Note: It is unlikely that Jesus would directly contradict the command to honor one’s parents. So what do his strong words mean? Does the context help? However one interprets this passage, the demands that it lays down are extraordinary. Does the story of Zachaeus (Luke 19:1-10) help balance out this stark picture?

Luke 19:1-10 (NRSV):

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” 8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” 9 Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

The One Clear Step: After perusing these stories about the “way” to salvation, could one summarize by saying that “repentance” is the common ground for them all? Is “repentance” a big enough word to encompass everything?

Repentance As the Gift of God: Acts 5:29-31 (NRSV). If we are ever tempted to think that our acts of repentance, our steps toward God, are works of our own devising, Peter’s message in Acts 5 is a striking reminder of the divine initiative in any “plan” of salvation. In short, repentance is God’s gift, not our work.

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.[d] 30 The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Theme: Growing in Christ

Leading Question: What does Jesus tell us about growing in him?

If, as suggested in the notes to last week's lesson, "repentance" is the crucial element in God's plan of salvation, then what comes next? How does the believer grow "in Christ"? For Paul, the idea of being "in Christ" was crucial. Note 2 Cor. 5:17 (NRSV): "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

In that same connection, Paul's letter to the Colossians presents a tantalizing paradox: Not only are we to be "in Christ," but Christ is also to be "in" us. Note how the two ideas lie very close to each other in Colossians 1. The key phrases in 27 and 28 are in bold type (NRSV):

24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. 25 I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. 28 It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, **so that we may present everyone mature in Christ**. 29 For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

That dual concept of being in Christ just as Christ is in us, is reflected in the teachings of Jesus himself, especially in John's narrative of the vine: "Remain in me as I also remain in you" (John 15:4). That vine narrative is one of several Gospel images that can help us understand how to grow in Christ. Three have been selected here as illustrations: the vine, persistent prayer, and the cross.

1. Maintaining the Connection: The Vine: John 15. A study suggestion: In John's narrative of the vine, trace the interplay between the ideas of being in Christ and Christ being in us and how those ideas affect our spiritual growth.

2. Prayer: Staying With It. Luke records two parables that teach the importance of persistent prayer, the story of the midnight friend (Luke 11:5-13) and the parable of the unrelenting widow (Luke 18:1-8). In the story of the midnight friend, the importance of persistence in prayer is not stated explicitly, though it is implied. But in the story of the unrelenting widow, Luke spells out the point of the parable: "Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart (Luke 18:1).

Both of these parables, however, contain an element that is potentially misleading, for in dealing with the topic of prayer, one assumes that the parable should teach not only about prayer, but also about God, the one to whom the prayer is directed. But if that were to be the case in these two parables, the resulting picture of God is not an attractive one, for the friend is reluctant to get out of bed and the judge only responds because the widow has made a nuisance of herself. Is God reluctant and/or unjust? Hardly. But each parable does teach a simple truth about prayer: Stay with it! Apparently there is something about persistent prayer that transforms the one who prays.

The classic scholarly perspective on parables teaches that a parable focuses on one particular point. By contrast, an allegory can assign meaning to every aspect of a narrative. In the case of the two parables in Luke, persistence would not be clear if the one to whom the prayer is directed is too eager to help. Thus the midnight friend and the unjust judge do not teach us about God, but about the need for human persistence.

For many, however, it is difficult to allow a parable to leave such a “negative” view of God. In their exuberance for God, devout believers are easily tempted to over-interpret the parables in order to avoid the impression that God may be reluctant. The struggle over these two parables was vividly illustrated for me in one of my classes a number of years ago when three students gave strikingly different responses to the parable of the midnight friend (Luke 11:5-13). One student was an optimist who saw good news everywhere; another was one who was angry with God but was not brave enough to confront God with her anger; a third one was simply puzzled, and went searching for answers. All three students were bright and alert; it was not a question of intelligence, but of temperament and imprinting. Here is the text of the parable, followed by the comments of the three students: the Exuberant, the Angry, the Puzzled:

Luke 11:5-8 (NRSV): And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 7 And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

The responses:

A. The Exuberant: “To me, God is the midnight friend who persistently knocks on my heart until I let Him in.” – Note that the point of the parable has been completely re-written. The picture of a God who knocks on the door of our heart is thoroughly biblical: “I stand at the door and knock,” is the word to the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:20). But that is not the point of the parable in Luke 11.

B. The Angry: “Sadly, I did NOT understand the Luke texts. I didn’t get the point at ALL. I’m very sorry. I’ll ask you today in class.” – In this case, the student was tussling mightily in her walk with God. She was deeply religious, but was

struggling with the haunting picture of a reluctant God, one who would not allow her to express her anger. Thus she could not bring herself to be honest with the text. She feared the response of a harsh and vengeful God.

C. The Puzzled: “I am honestly not sure about this one. Our friend will not help us because of the friendship but because of the boldness? Is Jesus asking that we be more bold? I went and got my *Clear Word* and it says that even though a friend may hesitate because of the inconvenience, he will do it because of the friendship. He will help you out whenever he can because of the friendship.”

Here is the actual quotation from the *Clear Word*:

Luke 11:8, *Clear Word*: “Though your friend will hesitate to wake up his family to give you what you need, if you keep asking, he’ll get up and get the bread you need because he’s your friend. The two of you are such close friends that no matter how often you ask, it won’t affect your relationship.”

In Luke’s narrative the point is just the opposite:

Luke 11:8, NRSV: “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.”

Note that the puzzled student was correct in her initial interpretation of Luke’s parable, but was led down a different path by the *Clear Word*. Because of his own personal experience, Jack Blanco, the author of the *Clear Word*, deleted the very part of the parable that was intended to teach persistence.

3. His Cross and Ours. All three of the synoptic Gospels record Jesus’ dialogue with Peter over the identity of the Messiah (Matt. 16:15//Mark 8:29//Luke 9:20). Peter gives the right answer in all three, but only Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ rebuke when Peter tried to contradict Jesus’ teaching about the suffering messiah: “Get behind me, Satan.” And given Peter’s strong reaction against the idea of a suffering Messiah, it is striking that all three Gospels record Jesus’ answer with its explicit reference to the cross, not just his, but ours. And Luke, whose version is otherwise identical with that of Matthew and Mark, adds a single word, “daily”:

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross *daily* and follow me.

Perhaps the most important and most difficult question that this lesson poses for us today is this one: What does the idea of a *daily* bearing of the cross have to do with our growing up in Christ?

Theme: Unity: Living Like Christ

Leading Question: When we say that we are to live like Christ, what does Jesus himself tell us about that?

The troubling backdrop to the leading question is the specter of perfectionism, always a haunting element in any free-will theology. The dilemma can be glimpsed through two opposite statements, each containing a deadly, but often hidden, element:

1. You have to be perfect. The deadly element: If you cannot reach the ideal, you cannot be saved.
2. You don't have to be perfect. The deadly element: Since the ideal cannot be reached, you simply shrug and lose motivation for doing what is right.

A strong substitutionary theology, typical of Calvinist systems, doesn't really solve the problem, for while it removes the specter of an impossible perfectionism, it easily slips into the weakness of the second point above: You don't have to worry about doing what is right because Jesus pays the price for your sins in any event.

Before looking at the teachings of Jesus, let us sharpen the Adventist focus by noting two Ellen White quotations which typically have heightened the anguish noted in point one above. These are the quotations:

Living in God's Presence without a Mediator. "Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil." – GC 425

Character of Christ Perfectly Reproduced in His People. "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own." – COL 69

Short answers to these troubling quotations would run something like this: In the light of John 16:25-27, one can see the prospect of standing in God's presence without a mediator as a promise, not as a threat. And if one can view the character of Christ as being perfectly reproduced in his people as a corporate entity, not as individuals, then the problem of an

impossible perfectionism vanishes. For those struggling with issues related to the Adventist understanding of the “Investigative Judgment,” an article follows at the end of this lesson, “ Even the Investigative Judgment Can Be Good News.”

It’s not likely, however, that we will ever totally resolve the tension between the impulse to rely on God’s grace while not tending to the business of holy living and the impulse to earn our salvation through good works. But if we can help each other in our respective weaknesses, the church can indeed become a showcase of effective grace to the universe.

A quote from a secular source on the value of ideals might also help us keep our wits about us when we address the question of good behavior from within a believer’s religious perspective. The quote is from Carl Shurz (1829-1906), a German-American politician, journalist, and reformer. It was given to me by the late Arthur Patrick, the Australian scholar of Adventism:

Ideals are like stars. You will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But, like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you can choose them as your guides. And following them, you reach your destiny.

When I have given that quotation to students who were being destroyed by their idealism, some of them have gotten really angry. They don’t want to abandon their idealism!

But now let’s look to several passages in the Gospels to ascertain what Jesus taught that might help us toward the goal of living like Jesus:

1. The goal: Love one another. John 13:34. Is that a goal that we want to abandon or cherish, regardless of its difficulty?

2. The Good Samaritan: Helping those who are not one of us. Luke 10:25-37. It was the devout Jews who avoided the wounded man. Only the Samaritan showed compassion. Is that a worthy goal for the believer?

3. The Ultimate Test: How we treat those in need. Matthew 25:31-46 (the parable of the sheep and the goats). Ellen White’s comments on this parable in *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 70, are a wonderful commentary on this remarkable parable:

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

Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have **known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles**. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have

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

Two significant features of the judge’s commendation are worth noting. 1) Those who are commended are unaware that they have done anything worthy of praise. In short, they were not trying to “work” their way into the kingdom; and 2) Those who were condemned, are not judged for any great evil, but for failing to do good.

Finally, when we are seeking to be like Jesus, these words from Jesus in Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount, i.e. the Sermon on the Plain, are worth noting:

Luke 6:27 (NRSV):“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Even the Investigative Judgment Can Be Good News”

By Alden Thompson, *Westwind*, pp. 4-7, 11, Winter 1982

“From Sinai to Golgotha,” Part 6

(cf. *Adventist Review*, December 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 1981; July 1, 1982)

Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version

In a world of sin, the specter of judgment raises both our hopes and our fears. Scripture portrays the human family as playing several roles within the framework of the judgment concept: the role of the plaintiff, who cries out against oppression, injustice, and the suffering of innocent people; the role of the accused, who stands before the divine tribunal as one guilty of contributing to the agony and pain in the world; and the role of the witness, who has experienced

salvation and speaks on behalf of the goodness of God and His law. An adequate doctrine of judgment should account for all three elements.

In the Adventist community, recent discussion has centered on the concept of the investigative judgment – its biblical foundation and its impact on Christian experience. A complicating factor is the variety of ways in which the imagery of the heavenly courtroom can be interpreted. Some interpret the symbols very literally, while others tend to think in more abstract terms. The result is a certain tension that the Adventist community simply must learn to live with.

As is the case with many Christian doctrines, the biblical foundation of the Adventist doctrine of judgment is not found complete in a single context, but requires a synthesis of biblical data in the light of the Adventist experience. Furthermore, the community's understanding of the doctrine has been a growing one, revealing shifts in emphasis and the integration of new elements. Leviticus 16, Daniel 7 to 9, Zechariah 3, and Revelation 14 are key passages. The book of Job also contributes to the larger picture, providing the cosmic setting highlighting the motives of the adversary.

But of paramount importance in Adventism is the way in which the believer has experienced judgment. If God is seen as both distant and reluctant, we may feel overwhelmed by the sense of our own unworthiness. The gulf between God and the sinner may seem too deep to bridge and God may be viewed as throwing down impossible demands.

If we find ourselves trembling and shaking before a reluctant God, we are hardly in a position to witness joyfully and confidently to His goodness. Yet, that is the ultimate goal of the judgment. In the words of Ellen White, “Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God” (Isaiah 43:12) – “witnesses that He is good and that goodness is supreme” (*Education*, 154).

The only time that I could conceive of going to court gladly would be to witness for a good friend, one that I know and trust. In the context of the investigative judgment, that friend is God. To see the investigative judgment culminating in such a witness does not detract from the seriousness of the judgment for human beings, but rather enables us to look through the process of judgment to its goal and to sing the praises of the God who has redeemed us.

But, is it really possible to envision a joyful conclusion within the framework of the investigative judgment? If we take seriously Ellen White’s growing experience, we can indeed. In the course of her experience, she traveled the road from fear to love, from command to invitation, from Sinai to Golgotha. Such a shift in emphasis in no way lessens the ethical demands of God's law. A response out of love actually intensifies our sense of responsibility because it flows from within.

This article describes the shift in emphasis in the concept of the investigative judgment that is reflected in the writings of Ellen White, a shift which enables the believer to live in the assurance that God is both willing and able to save those who come to him.

Perhaps a quick synopsis of the two different emphases would provide a simple comparison between the Sinai and Golgotha views of the investigative judgment.

From a Sinai perspective, the judgment accentuates the gulf between a holy God and a sinful people. The thought of standing in the presence of a holy God without a mediator brings terror just as it did for ancient Israel (cf. Exodus 20:18, 19).

By contrast, a Golgotha perspective emphasizes the union between God and the believer. The believer has fully recognized his own status as a sinner, but has also fully accepted the

sacrifice of Christ on his behalf. As a result, the believer no longer sees God simply as Judge, but as Father; he no longer trembles in God's presence as the accused, for he stands acquitted in Christ Jesus. The fear of judgment is gone. God has claimed him as His own.

No longer preoccupied with his own survival, the believer now recognizes that judgment has a much greater purpose, namely the vindication of God and His law against the attacks of Satan. Confidently, the believer now stands in court as a witness to the goodness of God and His law.

In Ellen White's experience, the roots of that more positive view of judgment go back to a vision of 1880. Its fruit appeared in mature form in *Prophets and Kings* (1915/17). We shall look at the details shortly, but the 35 years between point to a significant question, namely, why was the "better" explanation so long in coming? My own conviction is that the early Adventists would never have believed it. I would use a similar argument in explaining the long "delay" before God sent His Son. Among the ex-slaves at Sinai, the gentle man from Nazareth would have been trampled in the dust. Sinai had to come before Golgotha; the impact of sin made it necessary.

But a shift in emphasis in the understanding of the investigative judgment also requires a willingness to see God in a particular way, as a God who is not afraid to allow the universe to put His law and His government to the test. Now for some reason, I have had no great difficulty accepting the idea of God putting His law and government on trial before the universe. Yet, I have occasionally wondered why some Adventists, and very loyal ones at that, simply did not get very excited about the idea. I caught a clearer glimpse into that kind of thinking in connection with the Sabbath School lessons on Job a few quarters ago. Some of the believers were very uncomfortable with the way Satan talked with God (cf. Job 1:9-12; 2:3-6). Such talk was inappropriate and ought not to have been allowed! They firmly believed in the Bible but they did not know what to do with the book of Job.

Behind that kind of thinking lie two significant convictions that play a powerful role, especially in the lives of religious people: First, that sinners cannot exist in the presence of a holy God, and second, that created beings dare not question God. Both statements are terribly true, terribly dangerous, and very easily misunderstood.

The first statement has biblical support (e.g., Exodus 33:21-23; Deuteronomy 4:24; I Timothy 6:16; cf. Revelation 6:17) and expresses the fundamental truth that sin and holiness are ultimately incompatible. The second statement likewise has biblical support (esp. Romans 9:9-23; cf. Isaiah 45:9-11) and expresses the fundamental truth that God is the ultimate authority.

Why then are such statements so dangerous? Because a guilty conscience can distort them, imagining horrible things about God, things which the mind can come to believe as truth. Thus, the incompatibility of holiness and sin can be exaggerated to the point where God is seen as angry and disgusted with this race of rebels, annoyed that He has to have any contact with sinners at all, and demanding that every sin be fully punished.

As for God's ultimate authority, an over-emphasis can lead to the total exclusion of human freedom. Thus God becomes, at best, a benevolent dictator, at worse, a cruel despot.

The natural results of sin tend to encourage both exaggerations. That is precisely why sin is so sinister and devastating. We see the first clear example in the experience of Adam and Eve where their own sense of guilt drove them to hide from God and even to blame Him for their failure, though there had been no display of "divine wrath" (cf. Genesis 3:8-13). Even fully

repentant sinners have difficulty believing that God wishes full restoration as the cry of the prodigal son poignantly reveals: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants” (Luke 15:19). Most assuredly, sonship does not depend on worthiness, yet the adversary plays on the guilt feelings which naturally follow sin, tempting us to believe that God has turned His back on us in anger.

Thus, there is a fierce struggle within as we long to be with God and yet fear His presence. We are torn between the cry of Jacob: “I will not let you go, unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26), and the cry of Peter: “Depart from me for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). Only a new world and a new heart will still that battle forever. In the meantime, God seeks to convince us that sin is indeed a dangerous enemy, but that He loves us even when we sin.

In Scripture, we find interesting traces of that tension between the human longing to be reunited with God and the human horror of coming into His presence at all. Some passages suggest that seeing God is not possible (cf. Genesis 3:8-13), while others clearly demonstrate that not only is it possible, but that it has already happened, though the human participants were amazed that they had survived. Jacob exclaimed: “I have seen God face to face and yet my life is preserved” (Genesis 32:30). A similar reflection appears in that fascinating passage describing the meeting between God and the elders of Israel: “They saw the God of Israel... and He did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank” (Exodus 24:10, 11). The biblical passage hints that by all rights He should have laid hands on them. But no, “they beheld God, and ate and drank.”

One way of resolving the tension between these two feelings is to emphasize the role of the mediator as our protection against the wrath of God. In Jesus Christ we find peace with God, for He paid the price of our sin. The wrath of God which we deserve has been poured out on our substitute. Thus, we keep our distance from God the Father, but find in Jesus Christ the friendly face of God. Such a view emphasizes the sovereignty and authority of God and is often attractive to those who keenly sense the gulf between God and man.

The emphasis on the sovereignty of God finds its most thorough development in John Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, a teaching which Adventists clearly reject. We believe it is our privilege to serve God out of love and by our own free choice.

A typical Calvinist would not be very enthusiastic about the “Great Controversy” story, at least not in the way Ellen White told it in her later years, for God is much too approachable and much too willing to put Himself and his law on trial before the universe. Interestingly enough, early Adventists would have sided very easily with the Calvinists when it came to their view of God. God, as they saw Him, would never open Himself to scrutiny; He is to be obeyed, not questioned.

But I am convinced that God was preparing Adventists to reach quite another audience than the Calvinists, namely modern skeptics who cannot believe that a good God has willed all the strife and trouble in this world. Adventists have been called to stand in that noble tradition of believing skeptics who are concerned about God’s reputation and are not afraid to say so, even to God Himself. Like Abraham, for example: “You can’t do that. You are the judge of all the earth!” (Genesis 18:25). Or like Moses: “If you do that what will the Egyptians say?” (Exodus 32:12). To be able to talk with God like that, however, one has to be on very good terms with Him. God must be known to be friendly, fair and open. But that is exactly what our forefathers had difficulty believing. It would take time before they could see the friendly face of God and

even then, the possibility for confusion would not entirely disappear.

And that brings us to our modern problem as we attempt to resolve the tension between a reluctant God and a friendly one. In my own experience, the tension focused on the first chapter in *Steps to Christ* and the one on the investigative judgment in *The Great Controversy* (pp. 479-90). In *Steps to Christ* I learned that the view of God as a “severe judge” was a deception of satanic origin. It was Satan who “pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men” (SC 10-11).

But when I turned to *The Great Controversy* and read about the investigative judgment, I was in trouble again, for I was tempted to believe that God was, after all, looking for a way to keep me out of His kingdom, rather than trying to get me in: every word and deed is recorded with “terrible exactness” (GC, 481); every case is closely investigated and when any are found with a sin unrepented of, “their names are blotted out of the book of life” (GC, 483); even things that we have forgotten “will bear their testimony to justify or condemn” (GC, 487). The impression one can get from these passages is that even diligent effort in seeking forgiveness can all be for nought if we happen to “forget” a sin that we have committed at some point in our life. Now I know that the passages cited do not actually say that, but they do give that impression. I now recognize that these passages refer to cherished sins, an emphasis that puts quite a different complexion on the whole matter. But even then, whenever we think of the investigative judgment as the last hurdle before we can be saved, uncertainty can still haunt us.

An important first step for resolving the difficulty in my own experience came while I was a seminary student at Andrews University. I decided I must settle in my own mind the matter of the mediator: Why did I need one if God loved me? The answer came from John 14-17 where I discovered that the purpose of the mediator was to introduce us to a friendly God, not to protect us from a reluctant one. As Jesus put it: “If you have seen me you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). But perhaps even more significant in the Adventist context is John 16:26-27, where I found a fresh possibility for interpreting Ellen White's statement that “we must stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator” (GC, 425): “In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you.” In the context of Ellen White's original statement I still detect a trace of fear, but on the basis of John's Gospel I would say that fear is unnecessary. As long as we are afraid, the mediator is there, for God knows the powerful impact of sin and guilt. But the goal of Christian experience is to live once again in God's presence without fear. That is a promise, not a threat.

The next step in my search for a solution to the experiential difficulties connected with the investigative judgment came in the spring of 1980. After preparing a study document on the development of Ellen White's theology, I commented to a colleague: “The only missing piece in the Golgotha picture is eschatology. That is one place where fear still lurks. Wouldn't it be interesting if we could see how Ellen White would re-write *The Great Controversy* again if she had the chance?”

Of the five books in the Conflict series, *The Great Controversy* was the only one that was not written or totally re-written after 1888. The standard edition today (1911) differs only slightly from the 1888 edition, i.e., some historical quotations were changed and references were added. (See Arthur White, *Ellen G. White, Messenger to the Remnant*, Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1954, p. 58.) I suspected how Ellen White would have told the story, but was concerned how far we could go without prophetic authority.

And then I found it – with the aid of a student who wrongly quoted a passage from *Prophets and Kings*. In checking his quotation I suddenly realized that here was an entire chapter dealing with the investigative judgment: “Joshua and the Angel” (pp. 582-592). With great eagerness I read it through, looking for traces of the reluctant God. I found none. The whole chapter is the story of the investigative judgment written from the perspective of a loving God who wants to save sinners. Further research revealed some fascinating background.

The seed that was to bear such rich fruit was apparently sown in 1880. As told in *Life Sketches*, Ellen White inquired in vision, “Where is the security for the people of God in these days of peril?” In response, God referred her to Zechariah 3:1-2 and declared that Jesus was our security against Satan: “Jesus will lead all who are willing to be led” (*Life Sketches*, 324). Prior to this vision Ellen White apparently had not realized the significance of Zechariah 3:1-2 for the Great Controversy story. [The printed Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White lists no occurrences of the text before 1880.] But now God had sown the seed; it would be only a matter of time until it would germinate and bear fruit.

The *Index to the Writings of E. G. White* lists four passages where Ellen White comments significantly on Zechariah 3:1, 2; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, 467-476 (1885), *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 116, 117 (1896), *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 166-170 (1900), and *Prophets and Kings*, 582-592 (1917). All four of the contexts discuss the text in the setting of the “Great Controversy.” *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (p. 117) states that Satan accuses us, not in some obscure courtroom, but “before the universe.” *Christ’s Object Lessons* (p.168) indicates that, not only is Satan accusing the believers, but God himself. Furthermore, when Christ speaks for his people, he confesses them, not before a reluctant Father, but “before the universe” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 170). Clearly the Father and the Son are united in their love for man and in their desire to rebuke the adversary.

But what I find most fascinating about Ellen White’s use of Zechariah 3:1-2 is the way she takes the article in the *Testimonies* and further refines it 30 years later for use in *Prophets and Kings*. In effect, she softens those aspects that could discourage and expands on those that encourage. The result is a masterful integration of the investigative judgment into the picture of a loving God. And it happens in her very last book.

When compared with the *Testimonies* article, the account in *Prophets and Kings* reveals one addition and one deletion that are particularly significant. The addition is found in *Prophets and Kings* (p. 589) as part of the Lord’s rebuke of the adversary. After claiming His people as His own, the Lord declares: “They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them.” What an encouragement! We may slip and fall, but if we have given our hearts to God, He will rebuke the adversary. No reluctance here to save those who are still suffering growing pains; their hearts are with God and He claims them as His.

The significant deletion is a more delicate matter, for it is terribly true – but if seen from the viewpoint of Mt. Sinai it could so easily be misunderstood. *Prophets and Kings* omits two paragraphs from pages 471-72 of *Testimonies*, vol. 5. Both paragraphs admonish the Christian to strive to overcome every defect. That, of course, should be the goal of every Christian. But the one sentence that could cause problems runs as follows: “No sin can be tolerated in those who shall walk with Christ in white” (p. 472). If that statement is seen as describing the Christian’s deep desire to obey Christ, then all is well. But if it is linked with a view of God which sees Him

looking for excuses to catch sinners, then the Christian who slips and falls will flee in terror. So even though the statement is certainly true, no doubt Ellen White's heightened concern for struggling sinners led her to delete it when she was preparing the material for *Prophets and Kings*.

Once we recognize that God has justified us in Christ, then we can joyfully go into judgment prepared to witness for God and His law. That joy, I have found, is the strongest motivation possible for obedience, for now I want to obey *because* He has saved me. It is no longer a matter of earning salvation or of simply avoiding punishment. Obedience is the fruit of salvation.

Now whenever I find someone struggling with the investigative judgment, I recommend without hesitation the chapter on "Joshua and the Angel" in *Prophets and Kings*. The "Great Controversy" story has come a long way since it was first published in 1858, but what a testimony it is to God's care for His people. He was preparing the way for His people, not only to find acceptance in Him, but also to demonstrate the goodness of God and His law to a skeptical world. God would have liked to have given the full message right at the beginning, but the beams of truth had to come gradually or His people would have turned away from light.

Because of the fallen human condition God has been willing to use both commands and invitations, fear and love; but there is no question as to which He prefers. He has shown us His love "that we may have confidence in the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17). "Perfect love casts out fear" (verse 18). In the sunshine of that love, even the investigative judgment is good news, for we stand no longer accused, but acquitted in Christ Jesus. Before the universe we are witnesses to the goodness of God.

Theme: The Church

Leading Question: What does Jesus us tell us about the Church?

In the NT, the Greek word for “church” is *ecclesia*, an assembly of people “called out.” The OT Hebrew equivalent is *qahal*, “assembly” or “congregation.” But what sets the NT apart is the understanding that the *ecclesia* is a community “called out” from “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6, KJV). It is chosen by God and the people and has no ethnic component. The passages below illustrate key points in what might be called Jesus’ doctrine of the church.

1. The Rock: Matthew 16:13-19. In Roman Catholic teaching, Jesus here sees Peter as the rock on which the church is built. For Protestants “this rock” is Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah. Here are the key lines.

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

2. Unity: John 17. In Jesus’ famous prayer for the unity of the church, this key line stands out:

John 17:11 (NRSV). And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Question: The clear focus of Jesus’ prayer is “unity.” But there is little in the prayer itself that can help us address the question of “diversity” within the church. That question is dealt with more effectively in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. There Paul notes how the different preachers favored by factions within the church all have their part to play. At the end of this lesson a book chapter from *Beyond Common Ground* (PPPA 2009) addresses that issue more fully. Here are the key lines that speak of Paul and Apollos:

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

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul further develops the idea of diversity by using both an agricultural model and an architectural model. “You are God’s field, God’s building,” he argues in 3:9. And the pivotal “church” lines come in 3:16-17. Though sometimes used as a “health reform” passage, it is clearly a reference to the community of believers with the “you” in the plural, a feature not always clear in many translations. Here it is given in the NIV which does make that distinction clear:

1 Cor. 3 (NIV): 16 Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

In chapter 12, the image of the human body provides another powerful illustration of unity in diversity. In that connection, two remarkable quotations from Ellen White are often overlooked, but are crucial if we are to allow real differences of perspectives within the church. One quotation is from *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, 432-433, in the chapter, “The Bible Teacher.” and is quoted in the book chapter at the end of this lesson. The other citation forms the two opening paragraphs in the chapter entitled “In Contact with Others,” from *Ministry of Healing*:

Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light are to another most difficult and perplexing.

So frail, so ignorant, so liable to misconception is human nature, that each should be careful in the estimate he places upon another. We little know the bearing of our acts upon the experience of others. What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil. – *Ministry of Healing*, 483

2. Restoration: Matthew 5:23-24. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus argues that resolving conflict between believers is the essential preparation for worship:

Matt. 5 (NRSV): 23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

3. Conflict Management: Matthew 18:15-18. Believers have a responsibility to go directly to each other to resolve their difficulties. The procedure is laid out in this well-known but seldom-practiced passage:

Matt. (NRSV): 15 “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

4. Authority: Jesus as the model: Matthew 20:24-28. For all who are drawn to a hierarchical model of the church, Jesus’ response to James and John when they asked for high places in the church should be the ultimate cure. It is remarkable that Jesus as Lord and head of the church never once demanded to be worshiped. He is the ultimate servant model. He did not come to be served, but to serve.

Matt. (NRSV): 24 When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 26 It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The Adventist Church at Corinth

Based on Chapter 20 of *Beyond Common Ground* (PPPA, 2009), pp. 228-39

By Alden Thompson (slightly revised)

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

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

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

always look nice so that nice people would want to belong!

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

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

When I leaf through the psalms, I discover a record of unrelenting trouble. And I wonder why we memorized only the nice things when we were kids: "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Ps. 91:11-12, KJV). "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34.7, KJV).

But just as prominent in the Psalms, if not more so, is the solemn cry: "Thou didst leave me in the lurch, Lord." Why did we not memorize more words like these: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed" (Ps. 31:9-10, KJV). Or from another psalm: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Ps. 22:1, 2, KJV). That was not just Jesus' prayer, it was the prayer of a real, live, struggling saint in the Old Testament. To be sure, the Psalmists almost always move on to faith. But they do spend a chunk of time talking about their troubles.

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

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

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

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

Drawing its membership from people with a very checkered background, the Corinthian church was checkered still. Paul reminded the saints that not many of them had been wise,

powerful, or of noble birth when God had called them (1 Cor. 1:26). He ticks off a list of violent offenders against God and the human race, adding, “And such were some of you.” (1 Cor. 6:11). But he goes on to say: “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Corinthians 3. Earlier in this book (chapter 8), several “pictures” from 1 Corinthians 3 were noted under the heading of “Biblical Pluralism.” Chapter 3 begins with a food model: milk is for babies, solid food for adults (1 Cor. 3:1, 2). Any congregation is likely to have both.

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

The next picture is a building that uses different materials, all of which are important for God’s “temple,” the church (1 Cor. 3:10-17).

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

All these contribute to our understanding of a robust biblical pluralism. For my purposes, the truly crucial verses are 3:5-7 where Paul describes himself as the one who sows and Apollos

as the one who waters. In other words, Paul is the front-line evangelist, Apollos is the pastor/nurturer. The language of 1 Cor. 3:16-17 drives home Paul's argument. "All of you are God's temple," he argues. "God will destroy anyone who destroys his temple and you" – he tells the Corinthians – "are that temple." In other words, if you drive out Paul, Peter, or Apollos from the church, and thereby weaken the church, you are in deep trouble with God. The temple of God needs all three to be strong and whole.

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

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

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

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

We can flesh the picture out a bit more:

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

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

Apollos is optimistic, inquisitive, philosophically oriented, and is especially attracted to the Gospel of John. For Apollos, God is gentle and understanding, more a father than a judge. And Jesus is not so much the sacrifice which satisfies the demands of holiness up there, as God's message of love to us down here. "He who has seen me has seen the Father," said Jesus (John 14:9). That nurtures Apollos' heart and soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most Adventists can and do profit from all three perspectives. But our failure to be careful Bible students, distinguishing between the three emphases, makes us very vulnerable if a particular spokesperson for one of the three strands becomes too forthright or too narrow in public statements. One of the best examples is Desmond Ford, who was heavily involved in the Adventist campmeeting circuit, blessing Adventists right and left with his preaching, until his Adventist Forum presentation at Pacific Union College (Oct. 27, 1979). At that fateful meeting he declared that there was "no biblical way of proving the investigative judgment." Immediately the church was polarized. Careless statements on all sides made matters worse. And some were entirely too eager to paste the label of "new theology" on anything that sounded new, different, or even remotely similar to something Ford might have said. That made teaching or writing very difficult in the church and we are not yet out of the woods on that score.

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

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

Mediator: How does each of the three relate to that troublesome statement from the pen of Ellen White that we "are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator" (*The Great Controversy*, 425)? Both Peter and Paul would see the absence of a mediator as a threat. For Peter, however, the threat can be overcome by perfect obedience. Paul would not know how to

interpret such a statement, for he sees Christ as the essential mediator between God and man. Apollos (John) sees the absence of a mediator as a promise, not a threat, a promise of a time when we will know God so well that we will come into his presence without fear.

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

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

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

My own insights in this matter have come by a long and circuitous route, and my thinking has been sharpened by the controversy in the church. When Ford declared that there was "no biblical way of proving the investigative judgment," I was upset with him. The investigative judgment, as I understood it, had become an important part of my theology. So I decided to search out the roots of my understanding of the doctrine. To my amazement, I discovered that my view was based on the later writings of Ellen White, and was not found at all in her earlier works. Ultimately, my research led to the publication of the 6-part Sinai-Golgotha series in the *Adventist Review* in 1981-82. In short, I traced how Ellen White's perspective on God shifted from an emphasis on the power of God and external motivation, to an emphasis on the goodness of God, and internal motivation.

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

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

I sensed that I had come close to something very important to Jon. I asked him if we could talk. We did – for two hours, two precious hours. As we shared, Jon described how the

message of Christ's death on his behalf had transformed his life when he was in mission service in Thailand. I described how I had been blessed at the Seminary by John's message of the incarnate Mediator.

Just prior to my conversations with Dybdahl I had finished reading a book by Robert Brinsmead (*Judged by the Gospel*, 1980) in which he had imposed Paul's courtroom setting on the Gospel of John. So I blurted out, "It's just not fair to do to John what Brinsmead does to John." To which Dybdahl responded, "And it's just not fair to do to Romans what Maxwell does to Romans." At that point, something like scales fell from both of our eyes, and we realized that I was drawn more to John and he was drawn more to Paul. The perspectives are different, but both are thoroughly biblical. We agreed that we should let John be John, and Paul be Paul. Now we still carry on lively discussions, but don't have to read each other out of the church. It is a great joy and a relief.

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

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

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

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

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

What of the Future?

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

To close this chapter, I will cite a passage from the pen of Ellen White. Generally she is

quoted in support of each of the three traditions. And because she wrote so much over such a wide period of time, she can be used to support any of the three perspectives, and even to pit one against the other. But in *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, she declares that we need different teachers and the different books in the Bible “because the minds of men differ.” Here is the full quote:

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

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have borne testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Saviour? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record, and thus have given us a connected account of Christ's earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain Scripture truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of some than of others.

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

So today the Lord does not impress all minds in the same way. Often through unusual experiences, under special circumstances He gives to some Bible students views of truth that others do not grasp. It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of teaching all that should be taught. – *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, 432-433

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

Theme: Our Mission

Leading Question: What does Jesus tell us about “our” mission?

Before looking specifically at what Jesus gives us as our mission, we should focus briefly on the difference between New Testament and Old Testament perspectives. To oversimplify, the OT mission emphasized one’s home base while the NT mission emphasized a world outreach.

A seminal but largely neglected article on the Old Testament role is found in the fourth volume of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,” pp. 25-38. A key point in that article is that God had envisioned Israel as a witness for him at the crossroads of the world. As the nations would pass through, they would be attracted by Israel’s witness and prosperity and many would ask to become part of Israel. The raw material for that article is drawn largely from the Old Testament prophets. It makes a fascinating counterfoil to God’s plan for his people after the resurrection of Christ.

From a modern perspective, one could describe the mission of the church under three headings:

1. Soul: evangelism, ministry to human spiritual needs
2. Body: ministry to human physical needs
3. Earth: ecology, seeking to preserve our earthly home

In general, conservative churches tend to focus on the first (evangelism); liberal churches tend to focus on the second (humanitarian aid); secularists focus on the third (ecology) because this is the only world they believe in.

The Adventist world pours considerable resources into the first two, but relatively little into the third. Should we make a serious effort to “serve” the earth, a literal translation of the human destiny as tantalizingly suggested in Genesis 2? Both in verse 5 and in verse 15 the word “serve” appears with reference to the human environment. In 2:5 the text says that there was no one to “serve” the earth – the KJV has “till” – and in 2:15 the man was placed in the Garden of Eden to “serve” and keep it – the KJV has “dress” and “keep” it. Surprisingly, the same theme recurs in Revelation, the last book of the Bible:

Revelation 7: 3 (KJV): Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

Now let’s note some Gospel passages that can guide us in shaping the mission of the church:

1. Salt and Light: Matthew 5:14-16. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that his followers should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. How might these ideas help shape our mission?

2. Feed my sheep: John 21 (NRSV). In his last serious conversation with Peter, Jesus commanded him: “Feed my lambs” (v. 15), “Tend my sheep” (v. 16), and “Feed my sheep” (v. 17). Is that also Jesus’ mandate to the church?

3. Wait Until You Have Been Clothed with Power: Luke 24:46-48. After returning from Emmaus, Jesus met with the disciples in the upper room and told them to stay where they were until they received power. How does that apply to us nearly 2 millennia later?

4. Help the Least in the Kingdom: Matthew 25:40. When Jesus commended the puzzled disciples for ministering to the needy, he said that they had done their service to him.

5. Go Make Disciples: Matthew 28:19-20. One of Jesus’ last commands to his disciples was for them to go everywhere with the Gospel and make disciples.

How should the church negotiate the various tensions that emerge from a thoughtful perusal of the above passages? The tension between #4 (helping the needy) and #5 (evangelizing the world) is particularly acute. Can the church simply allow each person to serve where they believe they can best serve Christ with joy? Should duty trump the joy of service, or can the joy of service transform a mere sense of duty that is also a delight in the Lord?

Theme: The Law of God

Leading Question: What does Jesus tell us about “the law”?

“Law” is an enormous topic to cover in just one lesson. Indeed last quarter all 13 lessons focused on law. But here we want to focus in particular on what Jesus teaches on law, and we will limit our attention to just one Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew

To set the stage, however, we should note three OT passages and one from the last book of the Bible. These can provide a framework within which we can look at what Jesus says.

1. Law as Gospel: Deut. 4:5-8. In the NT the burdensome nature of law lies close to the surface. In Acts 15:10, for example, Peter refers to God-given laws as “a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear.” By contrast, Moses tells Israel that even their neighbors will be impressed with their wonderful God-given laws. He quotes them as saying, “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” (vs. 6). In short, in the Old Testament, law is gospel, good news.

2. Clear distinction between decalogue and the other laws: Deut. 4:13-14. In vs. 13, Moses lays down the enduring nature of the decalogue: God speaks to all the people, he refers to the law as covenant and as 10 commandments and he writes the law on two stone contrast. But in vs. 14, he speaks only to Moses, not to all the people, and he changes the vocabulary, speaking of statutes and ordinances instead of covenant and ten commandments. In Deut. 31:26 he directs that this “book” of the law be placed beside the ark, not in the ark with the decalogue, a clear indication that the decalogue stands in a category all its own.

3. Ultimate goal: Law written on the heart: Jer. 31:31-34. In Jeremiah 31 the new covenant is said to be written on the heart. Furthermore, no one will tell anyone what to do because obedience will have become natural and automatic. Note that the new covenant is a promise to OT people and would be better translated as “renewed” covenant. In other words, the traditional comparison of OT as old covenant and NT as new covenant is not biblical!

4. Commandments of God and Faith of Jesus: Rev. 14:12. In the last book of the Bible, the commandments of God and faith of Jesus are affirmed in one breath. In short, God’s law is something enduring.

Given that framework, let us now turn to the Gospel of Matthew and look at Jesus’ teaching about the law:

1. Broadening the spirit of the Law: Matthew 5. All six of Jesus' famous antitheses move from the external to the internal. Two of these refer specifically to laws in the decalogue: murder vs. murderous anger (vss. 21-22) and adultery vs. the lustful heart (vss. 27-28). Do such comparisons lessen the power of law, or increase it? In what sense do these comparisons "fulfill" the law, to borrow Jesus' words in 5:17?

2. The whole law focuses on how we treat people. Matthew 7:12. When Jesus gives his most succinct summary of law, he focuses on the second great command, not the first. And his formula is indeed concise: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."

3. Some laws are more important than others: Matthew 22:37-40. In response to a question from Jewish leaders, Jesus clearly speaks of a first command and a second one. He also says that all the law and the prophets "hang" on these two commands. In short, some laws are indeed more important than others.

4. Some laws are adaptations to imperfect situations: Matthew 19:8. Scripture gives us only one explicit statement of the "accommodation" of law to human need: the law of divorce. "Originally it was not so," Jesus declared.

5. Sell all and give to the poor: Matthew 19:16-22. In contrast with God's plan for Zacchaeus who only had to give a fraction of his goods to the poor, the "rich, young ruler" was asked to give all. Keeping the commandments simply was not enough. What might this suggest for the internalization of all law?

The idea of law as an accommodation to human need is suggested in a series of Ellen White quotations. She makes it clear that law is not simply an instrument of condemnation, but was and is intended to be a blessing to humankind.

Ellen White's Commentary on the Nature of Law
From *Inspiration* (RH 1991), 135-136
Adaptation and Restoration of the Ideal Law of Love

BEFORE SIN IN HEAVEN, THE ANGELS WERE VIRTUALLY UNAWARE OF LAW. "But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy" (TMB 109).

BEFORE SIN ON EARTH, THE LAW WAS WRITTEN ON HUMAN HEARTS. "Adam and Eve, at their creation, had a knowledge of the law of God; they were acquainted with its claims upon them; its precepts were written upon their hearts. When man fell by transgression, the law was not changed, but a remedial system was established to bring him back to obedience" (PP 363).

AS HUMANKIND FELL AWAY FROM GOD, THE LAW WAS ADAPTED TO NEED: "If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai, or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses" (PP 364).

THE DECALOGUE APPLIED THE PRINCIPLES OF LOVE: "The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellowman; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). In the ten commandments, these principles are carried out in detail and made applicable to the condition and circumstances of man" (PP 305).

ADDITIONAL LAWS ILLUMINED THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DECALOGUE: "The minds of the people, blinded and debased by slavery and heathenism, were not prepared to appreciate fully the far-reaching principles of God's ten precepts. That the obligations of the Decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the principles of the Ten Commandments" (PP 310).

ALL THE LAWS WERE FOR THE GOOD OF THE PEOPLE: "The object of all these regulations was stated: they proceeded from no exercise of arbitrary sovereignty; all were given for the good of Israel" (PP 311).

THE LAW IS AGAIN INTERNALIZED: "The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone, is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart" (PP 372).

Theme: The Sabbath

Leading Question: What does Jesus teach us about the Sabbath?

In this lesson we will focus on what Jesus tells us about the Sabbath in the Gospels. On either side of the Gospels, the Sabbath is very much alive. In the Pentateuch, the full decalogue is given in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5; Isaiah 58 calls the people to true Sabbath keeping, and Nehemiah 13:15-22 reveals the strong-arm tactics used by Nehemiah to recover a sense of Sabbath sacredness.

On the other side of the Gospels, that is, in Acts and the epistles, there is no rhetoric urging Sabbath keeping. In the book of Acts, however, it is clear that attending services on the Sabbath was still an important habit practiced by the apostles. In the book of Acts there are at least five references to the continuing rhythm of Sabbath worship.

- Acts 13 describes the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia, a ministry that took place on Sabbath. Acts 13:44 says that almost the whole city came together on Sabbath to hear the word of the Lord preached.
- Acts 15:21 describes the work of the first general conference for the new Christian community and the proclamation that went out from that conference referred to the regular Sabbath reading of the law.
- Acts 16:13 tells how Paul and Silas came to Philippi and went outside the city gate on the Sabbath, seeking the place where they assumed that the believers would be meeting. They were right. Lydia and others came there to worship on the Sabbath.
- Acts 17:2 tells how Paul and Silas worshiped with the believers in Thessalonica on the Sabbath day.
- Acts 18:4 tells how Paul worshiped every Sabbath in the synagogue at Corinth.

The Gospel record of Jesus' activities on Sabbath is sandwiched between these Old Testament and New Testament Sabbath bookends. And here we find a Jesus who seems intent on reforming attitudes toward Sabbath keeping. Luke 4:16 tells us that Jesus made it a habit to worship in the synagogue on Sabbath. But that was not his *real* Sabbath work. Mark 2 and Matthew 12 describe the conflict over Sabbath keeping when Jesus' disciples plucked and ate grain on the Sabbath.

The essential background for understanding Jesus' Sabbath behavior is the Jewish effort to recover a sense of sacredness for the law, including the command to keep the Sabbath. After the

destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and the exile to Babylon, Israel finally came to their senses and realized that the nation had gone into captivity because they had abandoned God's law. In the course of time, Jewish leaders set out to build a fence about the law, adding additional commands to protect the "real" commands of the decalogue. So, with reference to the Sabbath, they developed a list of 39 major categories of Sabbath breaking. When the disciples walked through the grainfield, plucking and eating, they broke four of those major commands: Harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food.

Loosening that kind of rigidity became the focus of Jesus' Sabbath activities. In a number of instances, Jesus deliberately set out to perform miracles on the Sabbath, miracles that could have been performed on any other day. But Jesus wanted to teach that it was indeed lawful to minister to human needs on the Sabbath. John Brunt's little book, *Day for Healing* (RH, 1981), describes just how Jesus went about it. It is a shame that the book is out of print. The lowest used book price on bookfinder.com at the time of this writing is \$99.99!

A closer look at just one of these miracles, the healing at the pool of Bethesda (KJV; NRSV = Bethzatha), reveals Jesus' purpose. John 5 tells us that the man healed at the pool had been there for 38 years. Surely he could have waited one more day to be healed. But no, Jesus came deliberately on the Sabbath to heal him. In the Old Testament, God commanded that a man be stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). But here is the incarnate God commanding a man to "pick up his mat and walk" *on the Sabbath day* (John 5:8)!

Adventists urgently to take seriously Jesus' Sabbath activities as we seek to discover the meaning of the Sabbath for our day. Adventist Sabbath keeping habits have tended simply to reflect the Sunday keeping habits of their Christian neighbors. Thus, on the European continent, the Adventist practice of Sabbath keeping has reflected the more relaxed attitude toward Sunday keeping typical of their neighbors. By contrast, British Sabbath keeping is more restrained, just as British attitudes toward Sunday keeping has been more restrained and restrictive.

But those days are long since passed. The idea of sacred time on a particular day of the week has virtually vanished in our culture, whether on the Continent, in Britain, or in the United States. If no one is keeping Sunday sacred, how will Adventists know how to keep the Sabbath? That is the challenge facing Adventism. So let us learn from Jesus and re-discover the Sabbath for our day.

Theme: Death and Resurrection

Leading Question: What does Jesus teach us about death and resurrection?

Given what is happening in our culture today, Jesus' attitudes toward death and resurrection have become urgent matters. Secularists who have no hope of a future life have no reason to be concerned about either death or resurrection. This world is all there is. By contrast, Christians take both death and resurrection very seriously because they believe in a real future, in some respects like the present, but in others quite different.

The challenge for the Christian community today is that many Christians who believe in a real future for the redeemed also believe in a continuing future for the lost in an eternally-burning hell. Ever since Augustine (d. 430), the idea that a sovereign God must burn sinners forever has been deeply rooted in both Catholic and Protestant traditions. By the nineteenth century, however, when Adventism was born, a multi-faceted religious ferment was stirring in the western world. On the left, agnosticism (previously virtually unknown) had burst upon the scene as a live option. At the same time, on the sectarian right, small splinter groups of devout believers – most notably Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses – ironically revealed that they shared some concerns with the new agnostics, in particular, the rejection of eternally burning hell.

Of special interest to Seventh-day Adventists is Ellen White's autobiographical perspective on the issue. In the 1840s when her devout Methodist mother began studying the possibility that there was no eternally burning hell, young Ellen White reacted with alarm. Writing some thirty years later in her autobiography, she recalled her urgent words to her mother:

“‘Why mother!’ cried I, in astonishment, ‘this is strange talk for you! If you believe this strange theory, do not let anyone know of it; for I fear that sinners would gather security from this belief, and never desire to seek the Lord.’” – *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:39

In my own experience, discovering that reaction from the young Ellen White was a startling event, for I was much more familiar with her strong rhetoric against the doctrine of eternally burning hell from her writings in the 1880s. In particular, these two quotes from *The Great Controversy*, had made a vivid impression on me:

“The errors of popular theology have driven many a soul to skepticism who might otherwise have been a believer in the Scriptures. It is impossible for him to accept doctrines which outrage his sense of justice, mercy, and benevolence; and since these are represented as the teaching of the Bible, he refuses to receive it as the word of God.” – GC 525 (1888, 1911)

“How repugnant to every emotion of love and mercy, and even to our sense of justice, is the doctrine that the wicked dead are tormented with fire and brimstone in an eternally burning hell; that for the sins of a brief earthly life they are to suffer torture as long as God shall live.” – GC 335 (1888, 1911)

In Ellen White’s view, it was the doctrine of an eternally burning hell that had driven many thoughtful people into agnosticism. From her perspective, the alternative for devout people was insanity. When I query my students after having them read her autobiography in the *Testimonies* (1:9-112), they universally sense that Ellen White was headed for insanity rather than agnosticism. In short, the doctrine of the non-immortality of the soul literally brought life and health to her.

This is not the place to fully document the cultural movement from belief into agnosticism. For those who wish to pursue it further, let me recommend a remarkable book by the American historian, James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1985). The back cover blurb is revealing:

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, atheism and agnosticism were viewed in Western society as bizarre aberrations. Shortly thereafter, unbelief emerged as a fully available option, a plausible alternative to the still dominant theism of Europe and America.

Another major event took place in the middle of the 20th century, namely, the publication of a little book by a well-known French New Testament scholar, Oscar Cullmann. In *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* – recently re-issued by Wipf and Stock (2010) – Cullmann argues a simple thesis: from a biblical perspective, resurrection, not the immortality of the soul, is the proper counterpart to creation. According to the Bible, argues Cullmann, the body was created good and will be resurrected. From the perspective of Greek philosophy, matter is evil; only the soul is good and must escape from matter at the end of life. Cullmann is persuasive: the idea of an immortal soul is a Greek intruder into the world view of the Bible and is incompatible with the true biblical doctrines of creation and resurrection. One of Cullmann’s more telling arguments is his simple contrast between Socrates’ calm acceptance of death as a friend, and Jesus’ strong cries and tears. Jesus saw death as an enemy.

As a result of Cullmann’s book, new publications defending hell simply vanished for several decades. All that began to change in 1988, however, when InterVarsity Press published *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*. In his dialogue with the “liberal” David Edwards, noted evangelical John Stott openly sided with those who reject natural immortality and the doctrine of an eternally burning hell. Suddenly, the defenders of hell began to emerge and continue to publish to this day.

Two other recent events should be noted. 1) LLT Productions has published a full-length DVD

in defense of conditionalism. “Hell and Mr. Fudge” tells the story of Edward Fudge who once believed in an eternally burning hell, but who has now become the most thorough-going defender of conditionalism. His books, *The Fire that Consumes* and *Hell: A Final Word* are now widely known and available. 2) Rob Bell’s book, *Love Wins* is a passionate defense of conditionalism. Unfortunately, because of his links with the so-called “emerging church,” Bell’s book has not been widely praised by some who could support his position. Still, the book has certainly played a part in the burgeoning discussion of the doctrine of hell.

So how can a Sabbath School class explore the issue? In the Gospels, the story of the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11 should be essential reading as would also the final chapters of each Gospel that deal with Jesus death and resurrection.

Theme: Second Coming

Leading Question: What did Jesus teach about his second coming?

Studying the biblical evidence for the second coming can yield startling results. Where, for example, can one go in Jesus' Bible – the Old Testament – to learn about the second coming? In *Nave's Topical Bible*, the only Old Testament passage under "Jesus Christ, Second Coming of," is Job 19:25, "I know that my Redeemer liveth...." But the OT context indicates that the application of Job 19:25 to the second coming is secondary. The first application would see the *goel* (KJV "Redeemer") as the near kinsman who would come to defend Job's integrity, just as Boaz was the *goel* (KJV "Redeemer") who came to defend Ruth's rights (see Ruth 4:4-6).

So where did the idea of a "second coming" originate? One could hardly expect the idea to be clear in the Old Testament, since those who heard Jesus preach didn't even understand that the Messiah was divine or that he would die after his first coming. Only after the resurrection did those beliefs come clear. How can one grasp the Second Coming if one doesn't see the First?

What one does find in the Old Testament, however, is the hope of restoration. Isaiah 65:17-25 speaks of new heavens and a new earth, one in which the wolf and lamb would feed together and the lion would eat straw like the ox. But Isaiah 65:20 clearly states that death still reigns in that new heavens and new earth. There would be no premature death, but death still comes to those who have lived a full life. Isaiah 66:22-24 also speaks of the new heavens and new earth; but again the marks of evil remain vivid in the form of the dead bodies of the rebels.

Isaiah's vision of a vegetarian kingdom in Isaiah 11 uses some of the same imagery as Isaiah 65; it envisions a world no one had ever seen. But it reveals the Old Testament hope at its best.

The phrase "Day of the Lord" in the Old Testament is also revealing. Here are the key references:

Isaiah	2:12; 13:6, 9
Jeremiah	46:10
Ezekiel	30:3, 18
Joel	1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14
Amos	5:18-20
Obadiah	15
Zephaniah	1:7, 14-15
Zechariah	14:1
Malachi	4:5

From an Adventist perspective the passages in Joel are particularly interesting for the "Day of the Lord" was clearly a grasshopper plague in Joel's own day. But that wasn't the end of it. "Day of

the Lord” in the Old Testament, while it was always a local day of disaster, already began to point to the ultimate Day of the Lord and the return of Yahweh.

Joel 2:31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. 32 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved;

And here one begins to see the idea of multiple applications. The celestial signs marking this day were signs of a local “day” which were re-applied to later events in expectation of the final “Day.” In Acts 2, Peter applied Joel’s prophecy to the events surrounding the death of Jesus:

Acts 2:16 (NRSV): No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Our Adventist pioneers applied these same signs to events in the 18th and 19th centuries, i.e. to events in their day: Lisbon earthquake (1755), dark day (1780), and falling of the stars (1833). Finally, in Revelation 6, the same celestial signs are applied to the second coming:

Revelation 6:12 (NRSV) When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

Adventist pioneer, Uriah Smith, was so focused on a strict historicist interpretation that he could only see the traditional historicist applications. But in the Bible, these are all repeatable signs. In Revelation 6 they clearly refer to the second coming.

A study of the use of these heavenly signs in the Old Testament reveals that these signs were

almost always linked with the idea of the “Day of the Lord,” a local judgment which then could be seen as a type of the final Day of the Lord. Here is a succinct list of both OT and NT passages with their applications as indicated by the context;

Isaiah	13:10	(Babylon)
	24:23	(earth)
Jeremiah	15:9	(Jerusalem)
Ezekiel	32:7	(Egypt)
Joel	2:10, 31	(Zion)
	3:15	(all nations)
Amos	8:9-10	(Israel)
Habakkuk	3:10-11	(earth)
Matthew	24:29-30	(Jerusalem/Advent)
Mark	13:24	(Jerusalem/Advent)
Luke	21:25-28	(Jerusalem/Advent)
Acts	2:20	(Pentecost)
Rev.	6:12	(Advent)

Given the tantalizing nature of the Old Testament evidence for a “second coming,” it is remarkable that the doctrine is so clear and emphatic in the New Testament. The traditional passages are all clear:

Acts 1:10 (NRSV) While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

1 Thess. 4:16 (NRSV): For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

From the Gospels, one thinks immediately of this passage from John:

John 14:2 (NRSV): In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

But there is another lesson from Jesus that believers have often overlooked: You can’t know when he is coming! That is especially true of Matthew 24-25 which first lists the signs of the end, then proceeds to say that the coming will be a surprise. Here are the key texts, including one from Acts and one from 1 Thessalonians, all of which state that the day will come as a surprise:

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

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

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

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

Acts 1:6-11: 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11: Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is

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

The practical application of these passages from Scripture is spelled out with clarity by C. S. Lewis in his essay, “The World’s Last Night”:

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

Should one be fearful of the coming “Day”? Perhaps. As Lewis put it in the same essay:

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

The value of being prepared is also seen in this quote from Thomas Merton who was asked how the Shakers, who believed the world would end at any moment, could still build such marvelous furniture. Merton said: “When you expect the world to end at any moment, you know there is no need to hurry. You take your time, you do your work well.” – from Rodney Clapp, “Overdosing on the Apocalypse, *Christianity Today*, October 28, 1991.

The message for our day is clear. Be prepared. Jesus could come today.