

Good Word Schedule
“Education”
October, November, December 2020

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Scheduled guests for this series of GOOD WORD broadcasts are Dave Thomas, who teaches systematic theology in the Walla Walla University School of Theology, and Brant Berglin, who teaches New Testament courses at WWU. Moderator, and study guide author is Alden Thompson, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament and Biblical Studies in the WWU School of Theology. But because of complications stemming from Covid-19, we are beginning the quarter with a monologue. If circumstances change, then Dave and Brant will come on board.

For more information about GOOD WORD contact the School of Theology at Walla Walla University by phone (509-527-2194), fax (509-527-2253), email (GoodWord@wallalla.edu) or regular mail (Walla Walla University, 204 S. College Ave., College Place WA 99324). Past and present GOOD WORD and PROBE broadcasts are available from our website at www.wallawalla.edu/goodword. GOOD WORD is jointly sponsored by the School of Theology and KGTS at Walla Walla University.

– prepared by Alden Thompson, School of Theology, WWU

Theme: “Education in the Garden of Eden.”

Leading Question: What can the Garden of Eden teach us about what how we are to go about education today?

Our new series of topics for this quarter focus on the topic “Education.” Seventh-day Adventists are a remarkable and nearly unique community of believers in today’s world, for we are a people who believe in God as creator, in the incarnation of God on earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and in his return in the clouds of heaven. In short, we are a faith-based, miracle-believing people, but still have founded a full spectrum of K-16 schools. The total number of institutions at the end of 2018 are as follows: 6106 elementary schools, 2598 secondary schools, and 119 colleges and universities. The 119 Universities include six medical schools, led by Loma Linda University in California. The others are found in Peru, Philippines, Mexico, Argentina, and Nigeria.

The study guide will provide a more specific Adventist orientation. Ellen White, the charismatic co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist community spearheaded the drive for Adventist education. Her book *Education*, first published in 1903, is still cherished by Adventists as laying down principles that guide in the operation of Adventist schools.

But our on-line discussions and our radio-presentations will be focused on Scripture, following the material published in the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide. And this first lesson focuses on Education in the Garden of Eden, with particular attention to Genesis 2-3.

The biblical passage that appears at the head of our studies for this quarter is Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

“Fear” in this setting is not related to fright, but to reverence. And the text itself describes “knowledge” of the Holy One as “understanding.” Ideally, this understanding should take into account the wide variety of literary genres in the Bible. But among devout conservatives, the *distinctions *between* genres is too easily obscured because all of them are typically presented under the heading of “revelation,” as if they all provided divinely-guaranteed information “revealed” to humanity in the pages of Scripture.

Such an approach, however, too easily obscures the diversity of material in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. In two biblical books, for example, Psalms and Proverbs, almost none of the content is given by “revelation,” that is by dreams, visions, or voices. The various psalms consist of complaints, praise, and even diatribes against God’s enemies. These are of human origin, not divine, even though they are preserved for us by the action of the Holy Spirit, and thus can clearly come under the heading of “inspiration.” The sentiments are presented in the

words of human beings in their relationship to God, and often include concepts that seem far from any kind of divine ideal.

In Proverbs, we do not find visions and prophetic voices, but words that are clearly presented as a product of disciplined human intellect, “wisdom,” in other words. These human words can come under the heading of “inspiration,” but they do not originate in “revelation.”

That begins to explain why the secular nature of tertiary education can be a real threat to faith-based education. For in the university, one does not just learn information, but also grapples with facts, theories, and hypotheses. In the secular university one learns to *challenge* authority, not simply to acquiesce to authority. But the believer has to ask the question: is it appropriate for believers to *challenge* that which has been vouchsafed to the community by “inspiration”?

My own doctoral studies took me into the so-called skeptical tradition in the Old Testament, best represented by Job and Ecclesiastes. Those books, along with the stories of Abraham and Moses, taught me that it was alright for me to ask my questions. Abraham was not afraid to challenge God when he felt that God was stepping out of line. Before the destruction of Sodom provides the example:

Genesis 18:23 (NRSV) Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

Similarly, Moses confronted God over his threat to destroy Israel at Sinai and promising to make Moses a great people instead:

Exodus 32:9 (NRSV). The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. 10 Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

11 But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” 14 And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Note the astonishing statement that the Lord “changed his mind” (KJV = “repented”) after Moses confronted him! Indeed in the KJV, God repents more than anyone else!

Such a freedom to confront God correlates with Ellen White’s perspective in her earliest counsel on education (1872):

“There are many families of children who appear to be well trained while under the training discipline; but when the system which has held them to set rules is broken up, they seem to be incapable of thinking, acting, or deciding for themselves. These children have been so long under iron rule, not allowed to think and act for themselves in those things in which it was highly proper that they should, that they have no confidence in themselves to move out upon their own judgment, having an opinion of their own. And when they go out from their parents to act for themselves, they are easily led by others' judgment in the wrong direction. They have not stability of character. They have not been thrown upon their own judgment as fast and as far as practicable, and therefore their minds have not been properly developed and strengthened. They have so long been absolutely controlled by their parents that they rely wholly upon them; their parents are mind and judgment for them. *Testimonies* 3:132-133 (1872)

So with that background, let’s look at Genesis 2 and 3 and ask some exploratory questions that might help us link the Garden of Eden experience with today’s world of education. The official study guide cites Genesis 2:27-23 and 3:1-6:

Genesis 2:7 (NRSV): Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the

man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,
 “This at last is bone of my bones
 and flesh of my flesh;
 this one shall be called Woman,
 for out of Man this one was taken.”

These are the queries we must direct at this excerpt from Genesis, all of which have a bearing on the theme of “education”:

1. Were there any assigned tasks?
2. Were there any named challenges?
3. Were there stated limitations or prohibitions?
4. What about relationships: divine/human? Human/human?
5. What about the role of authority and authority figures?

This entire narrative all happened in a perfect world. Our world is no longer perfect. Is there any way in which our answers might be adapted to our imperfect world?

The second passage, the one from Genesis 3 introduces the couple (and us) to the entrance of sin:

Genesis 3:1-6 (NRSV): Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Now that sin looms large as a transformative factor, let's revisit our questions and note the implications of the entry of the serpent into the narrative:

1. Were there any assigned tasks?
2. Were there any named challenges?
3. Were there stated limitations or prohibitions?
4. What about relationships: Divine/human? Human/human? Demonic/human?
5. What about the role of authority and authority figures?

Question: In the remainder of Genesis, what clues could confirm the conclusion that one of the most tragic results of sin was the effect it had on human attitudes toward authority?

Comment: Our first parents were “driven” from the garden. Fear of the divine was already evident before they were evicted. By the time of Abraham, the ultimate gift to the gods had come to be seen as the sacrifice of the first-born. Abraham could confront God over issue of the innocent and the guilt being destroyed together. But when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he complied without a whimper.

Only a last-moment intervention saved Isaac when God provided the sacrifice and set God's people on the long road to the ultimate sacrifice provided by God, God's own son.

In the author's book, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* the second chapter, “Behold it was very good and then it all turned sour” (appended below), retraces the steps from creation to the (near) sacrifice of Isaac. That distortion of authority still haunts every classroom today:

Chapter 2, from *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?*

By Alden Thompson

[Gonzalez, FL: Energion Publications, 2011]

**Behold it was very good and then
it all turned sour**

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. – Genesis 1:31

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.... – Genesis 6:5

When I step back and try to picture the sweep of the entire Old Testament, and, in fact, of the whole Bible, I see something very similar to the scene suggested by the chapter title: a glorious idea that has somehow gone terribly wrong. I would hasten to add, however, that for all the wrongness and evil to which the Bible testifies, a generous portion of good still remains. And what is more, out of the wreckage

of this beautiful creation God has conceived something even more beautiful and awe-inspiring: a plan of redemption, a theme that we shall look at more closely in chapter 7.

Because the Bible presents such an intricate tapestry, woven with the evil as well as the good, the horrible as well as the magnificent, a distorted view of the whole is quite possible. In fact, Christians have often shown a tendency to focus on one element or the other. Some have so greatly praised their Maker that they have neglected to take seriously the tragic consequences of sin. On the other hand, some have been so deeply scarred by sorrow and tragedy, that even the glories of a this-worldly sunset can scarcely quench the longing for a better world. The difference between these two emphases can be clearly seen in the contrasting hymn titles: “This is my Father’s world” yet “I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home.”

Any alert citizen of planet earth can testify that life is composed of the bitter and the sweet, the good and the bad, but it is a rarer gift to be able to enjoy this world while longing for a better one. To claim that this world is absolutely filthy is false. Nor can any sober person say that this little corner of the universe is a beauty spot which has no rival. For the Christian, a balanced view is vital: the thorns must not be allowed to ruin the roses, nor should the roses obscure the thorns. That is a principle which is significant not only for daily living, but equally for understanding the Old Testament.

In Chapter 1, I noted briefly that one can use two rather different emphases in interpreting the Old Testament: the “high road” approach and the “low road.” “High road” refers to an emphasis on the “goodness” in the Old Testament, particularly in the lives of the men of God. The most straightforward example of this approach is found in Hebrews 11 where men of great variety and diverse experiences are all marked with the label “faith.” By contrast, “low road” refers to the approach which calls attention to the great depths to which humans had fallen, including those people that God claimed as his own.

Because the “low road” approach has been so helpful in enabling me to come to grips with the Old Testament, I tend to emphasize that way of reading the biblical accounts. The “high road” has marvelous potential for immediate inspiration, and perhaps that is why it has tended to predominate in Christian circles. But such an approach does not really prepare one for actually reading the Old Testament stories. In other words, one could become so accustomed to a “high road” diet that reading the Old Testament itself could lead to indigestion! I think that both approaches are possible and useful, yet in actual practice it is difficult to follow them both with equal enthusiasm.

Perhaps one reason why the “low road” approach has been neglected stems from the recognition that the discovery of the shadow side of the Old Testament characters has not always produced positive results. In fact, the sins of the saints have often been turned against Scripture and its God and have been used as weapons to attack the authority of the Word of God. Nevertheless, the “low road” approach is in some ways a two-edged sword which can cut either way. For example, one could turn to any nineteenth century devotional writer who is defending the Bible against its detractors. To the statement, “If your God condones things like that, then I want no part of your religion,” he can answer, “But it is precisely that point that vindicates the word of God, for here we have a realistic picture of fallen humanity accompanied by a picture of a God who stoops to help.” So what is taken as a great hindrance to faith by one man is seen as a pillar of faith by another. The psychological and sociological reasons behind those two opposite reactions to the same evidence are undoubtedly complex and cannot be explored here. But I do think it is important to recognize that there is much in the Old Testament that offends refined tastes. When we ignore those aspects, we lay the groundwork for the loss of faith. We must take them seriously and show how God can bring about his purposes even out of that kind of situation.

The “high road” approach has often led to the aggravation of one more point of tension in the interpretation of the Old Testament, namely, that between those who see the religious experience of the Old Testament as evolving naturally, and those who see it as stemming from divine revelation. Much of the modern scholarly study of the Old Testament is based on the assumption that every aspect of man’s experience is evolving, following principles of natural development. In such circles, then, it has become quite standard procedure to describe Old Testament people as developing from the primitive towards the sophisticated, from superstitious beliefs to a mature, intelligent faith. In accordance with such a scheme, those parts of the Old Testament judged to be primitive are said to be most ancient, whereas the more “developed” parts of scripture are said to be of later origin. Thus the stories of Genesis 2 and 3, for example, are said to be early and primitive because God is depicted very much like a man: he walks in the garden, forms man of the dust of the earth, he operates on Adam and builds Eve. By contrast, Genesis 1 is said to be the very latest (and greatest) theology in the Old Testament, written towards the end of the Old Testament period, because God is depicted as transcendent, quite removed from the mundane affairs of life; he creates by his word and does not get his “hands” dirty with the dust of man’s creation.

A PARTIAL REVELATION OF GOD

Such an approach to the Old Testament has often been so completely foreign to conservative Christians that we have failed to take it as a serious effort to explain some difficult aspects of the Old Testament. Conservative Christians have often tended simply to quote the New Testament view of the Old Testament and to use the “high road” approach for purposes of affirming faith in God and in his word without seriously attempting to explain the Old Testament. The specter of an evolutionary approach to the Old Testament has often made it impossible for conservative Christians even to listen to scholarly discussions about the Old Testament, to say nothing of actually participating in the dialogue.

At the risk of sounding terribly conservative to some of my scholarly friends and dangerously liberal to some of my conservative friends, I would like to propose, as a first step towards understanding the Old Testament, that we simply accept the scheme of “history” which the Old Testament itself suggests. I don’t think that is asking too much, regardless of whether one assumes a scholarly or a devotional approach to the Old Testament, or whether one happens to be liberal or conservative.

Now if we do let the Old Testament speak for itself, a rather surprising picture emerges; surprising, at least, for one who has been accustomed to taking an exclusively “high road” approach to the Old Testament. Perhaps a brief summary can serve as an outline of the discussion which follows:

1. God creates a perfect world and calls it good (Genesis 1).
2. Man exercises his free will to turn against God. (Genesis 2-3).
3. After the “fall,” God’s beautiful world is marred by repeated outbreaks of sin and tragedy:
 - A. Cain murders his brother (Gen. 4:1-16)
 - B. Cain’s line develops into a hateful and hated race (Gen. 4:17-24)
 - C. Noah’s generation rebels, leading to the Flood (Gen. 6-8)
 - D. Noah’s son Ham mocks his father (Gen. 9:20-28)
 - E. The Tower of Babel shows humanity as still being rebellious (Gen. 11).

F. Abraham's own family worships other gods (Josh. 24:2)

4. With Abraham, God begins a fresh attempt to reveal himself to mankind, to people who now know very little of God's plan (Genesis 12).

This prologue to the Old Testament is extremely important for understanding what follows, for it sets the stage for all the degenerate and "primitive" acts which follow. Beginning with Abraham, God seeks to reestablish his way in human hearts, hearts which have fallen far from the natural purity and knowledge of the first human pair.

Now right at this point I would like to note a more serious problem that arises out of the "high road" emphasis, namely, the assumption that virtually the full content of the "gospel" was both known and essentially preserved from the time of creation through the line of the "sons of God" (the patriarchal line). Whatever the reasons for that view, it causes real problems when one observes the behavior and ethical standards held at various points throughout the Old Testament period. Christians have always claimed that what one believes about God has a direct impact on the way one lives. In other words, good theology leads to a noble life. If that principle holds true, as I think it must if Christian theology is to make any sense at all, then how could it be that the Old Testament saints had in their possession virtually the complete "gospel" while their behavior falls far short of such a theology? All the evidence from Genesis suggests that Abraham did not consider it wrong to take a second wife. His loss of faith was wrong, something that he himself came to realize according to the Genesis story. But the principle of polygamy is never discussed. In the Jacob story it is even more evident that polygamy is an accepted way of life. By reading between the lines in the light of later Christian standards we can certainly surmise the tragedies caused by polygamy, but Genesis does not moralize about it. To cite further examples, Exodus does not moralize about slavery, nor does the Old Testament grant an "enlightened" status to women.

This tension between theology and ethics evaporates if we read the Old Testament in its original setting and do not insist on finding full-blown New Testament standards everywhere in the Old Testament. In fact, the New Testament itself contrasts the many and various ways of the Old Testament with the way of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2) and speaks of the shadow pointing to the reality (Heb. 10:1). Perhaps we could even borrow another famous New Testament phrase: "seeing through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). A type is never as clear as the reality, nor is the shadow as clear as the subject itself. Why then should we insist that the Old Testament be as clear as the New in its picture of God? For all practical purposes, the New Testament contradicts the claim of a complete Old Testament revelation while confirming that the Old Testament believer had quite adequate evidence on which to base faith (cf. John 5:46-47).

The point of all this is to emphasize that if one is going to understand the Old Testament, one must let the Old Testament speak for itself, something which conservative Christians have had considerable difficulty in doing.

Returning then to our survey of the Old Testament story, I would like to suggest, in keeping with the evidence from Genesis, that Abraham's actual knowledge about God was most likely quite limited. He was a great man of faith who acted on the evidence which he had. And though his knowledge of God was limited, and though he was occasionally unfaithful to that knowledge, he rightly stands as one of the great heroes of faith. The story in Genesis 22 of his willingness to offer up Isaac, the son of promise, stands out as one of the great testimonies to his relationship with his God. Yet right here within this great

story of Abraham's faith lies a problem for us if we take the "high road" approach. Biblical narratives detailing the later history of God's people clearly establish that human sacrifice was forbidden. If Abraham already knew that such "killing" was wrong, then why should we commend his faith for his willingness to do what he believed to be wrong? Such an approach puts Abraham and us in an inconsistent position. What would hinder God from coming to me now and asking me to "sacrifice" my child? And how would I know that it was the voice of God if he had clearly indicated to me by other means that such sacrifice was wrong? Would he expect me to disobey him in order to obey him? Not at all.

The explanation lies in the recognition that Abraham was most likely surrounded by a culture which assumed that the sacrifice of the heir was the highest possible gift that one could offer to the gods. It was only that cultural background which made that particular test possible. But interestingly enough, if we interpret the story rather freely, we find in it the very heart of the gospel story, for, in effect, God comes to Abraham and tells him: "Abraham, I appreciate your willingness, but you really cannot offer your son. Only I can offer my son. I will provide the sacrifice – there it is behind you." Is that not what God says at the cross? "No merely human sacrifice can ever be adequate – I will provide the gift that brings peace." Did Abraham see the full story? Through a glass darkly, yes, but probably not in detail. I think that is the message of Genesis 22.

A great number of perplexities that crop up in connection with the patriarchs simply vanish when we recognize that these men had entered a world that had been greatly distorted by sin so much so that the truths which God had originally entrusted to the human family had disappeared or had become greatly distorted by contact with pagan culture. It does not take a great deal of imagination to see how an original promise of a Messiah who must die for our sins could have become distorted into the practice of human sacrifice. No proof can be cited for such a development, of course, but such a possibility would certainly be in keeping with the known human tendency to transform the gift of God into a matter of our own works and pride.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD: RISE AND FALL

If we follow the Old Testament story further, we note that the period of drastic loss of the knowledge of God highlighted in Genesis 3-11 is not the only one of decline and degeneracy. The descendants of Jacob migrated to Egypt where they became enslaved for hundreds of years. The biblical account makes it clear that when the time came for God to deliver "his" people, their spiritual condition was low indeed. While the knowledge of God had not been completely lost, the book of Exodus does suggest that most of the people had virtually lost sight of the God who had revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No wonder Moses' position as leader of these people was often quite tenuous; they were always on the verge of deserting this "new" God for the old ones of Egypt. And when this rough lot of ex-slaves finally arrived at Sinai, the laws which God gave through Moses provide clear evidence that these people, cowering in mixed fear and awe about the mountain, were so deeply involved with cruel customs that instant abolition of such customs was out of the question. The best that could be done in some instances was a slight "humanizing" of some of the more barbaric aspects. And I use the term "humanizing" intentionally, for I think the laws of the Pentateuch must be seen, in the first instance, as revealing the kind of people God was dealing with, and then only in the second instance, as revealing the character of the God who had chosen these people. The thunder and smoke, the heavy hand, and the

strange customs seen at Sinai, are often cited by God's detractors as evidence against him. Because of the "high road" approach, many Christians also find these aspects troublesome even though they choose for other reasons to remain within the community of faith.

Later Old Testament writers make it clear that when human beings forget God, they also forget their fellow creatures, sinking to cruelty and abuse. So when God seeks to awaken a knowledge of himself in the hearts of people thus degraded and alienated from him, he does not seek simply to make them more "religious," but also to make them more human. Judged by the cultures around ancient Israel, the laws given to Israel show remarkable signs of "humanization." God took this people, in spite of the many barbaric and cruel customs which they had adopted and began to draw them to him. He wished to show them a better way. But if human beings are to be treated as real human beings who possess the power of choice, then the "better way" must come gradually. Otherwise, they will exercise their freedom of choice and turn away from that which they do not understand. I shall return to this point later, for it is a crucial one, but now I simply want to make clear the "rise and fall" of God's people as the Old Testament itself describes it. Up to the time of the Exodus, it is mostly "fall," and that is why the "low road" approach can be so helpful.

Before taking up the question as to why God allowed man to fall so low, I should perhaps draw attention briefly to some other "low" points in the progression of the Old Testament narrative. Have you read the book of Judges lately? Maybe you haven't been brave enough. In chapter 6 we will discuss in some detail one of the frightful stories at the end of the book of Judges, but the whole of that period is one of apostasy, rebellion, and degeneration with very few glimmers of light. If unstable characters such as Samson and Jephthah were the best that God could find for his judges, you can imagine the condition of the rest of the people. At the beginning of the settlement period, even that fine young man Joshua, one who generally occupies a position of honor on the "high road," sometimes acts in a shocking manner, at least when judged by our standards of right and wrong. Take the story in Joshua 10 as an example. When five Canaanite kings had been captured, Joshua commanded his men of war: "Put your feet on the necks of these kings." With a few words about the Lord's continuing presence and assistance, he then killed the kings and hung the corpses on five trees until sundown (Josh. 10:22-27). What would a modern Christian church do with a military leader who treated his enemies in such a way? Reflection on such questions simply emphasizes how far these great men of ages past were from holding the kinds of standards that we would consider right. Yet these were God's men and God chose to use them. What does that tell us about God? Either that God is very cruel – or that he is very patient. I much prefer the latter alternative, for that is the kind of God I find revealed in Jesus Christ. With that deep Christian bias which I readily admit, I choose the alternative which best fits the larger picture.

Glimpses of two other periods in the history of Israel should be sufficient to give at least the flavor of the Old Testament story. The key names are Hezekiah and Josiah during the period of the monarchy, and Ezra and Nehemiah from the post-exilic period. During the approximately four hundred years of Israel's monarchy, her religious experience was wildly erratic. Some great and good names do stand out, including those of Hezekiah and Josiah, both of whom initiated great religious reforms. Hezekiah's reform and Passover preceded Josiah's by about eighty years and are described at some length in 2 Chronicles 29-31. Why does the Chronicler give this story so much space? Perhaps because in Hezekiah's day, the Passover was quite a novel idea, so novel, in fact, that the priests could not consecrate themselves in time. Levites had to be drafted to help administer the sacrifices (2 Chron. 29:34). The Passover itself had to be delayed for a month so that everything could be done as the law

required. The people were so taken with this “new” thing that everyone agreed to extend the feast for another seven days (2 Chron. 30:23).

Now one might think that such a glorious Passover would establish the pattern for generations to come, but how does the biblical record describe conditions when Josiah came to power a few decades later? The Chronicler’s detailing of Josiah’s own development is most illuminating and deserves a closer look.

As told in 2 Chronicles 34, Josiah’s religious experience grew as follows: he was only a lad of eight when he began to reign (v. 1), but he apparently did not begin to “seek the God of David” until he was sixteen (v. 3). What had he been doing for religion before this? Use your imagination. The Bible doesn’t say. After *beginning* to seek the God of David at the age of sixteen, he finally decided to do something concrete to establish the faith; he began to break down the idols and destroy the pagan altars, but that didn’t actually take place until he was twenty (vv. 3-7). One would think that by now he must have been a devout worshiper of the true God and would have had most aspects of the faith firmly under control. Not quite, for it was only when he was twenty-four years of age that he decided to restore the temple, the official place of worship (v. 8). While the temple renewal was underway, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law (v. 14). The Bible itself does not clearly identify the book that was found, but many scholars think it was the book of Deuteronomy or at least part of it. In any event, Hilkiah brought the book to the king’s secretary who in turn rushed it to the king. Whatever the precise contents may have been, the king was greatly surprised and shocked (v. 19). Can you imagine both the priest and the king being ignorant of the book of the law – and that so soon after Hezekiah’s great reform? And if the king and priest were ignorant, what was the condition of the average citizen?

I can well remember my reaction when the events of 2 Chronicles 34 finally made an impression on my mind. My “high road” picture of faithful kings, priests, and prophets, who held high the “banner of truth,” needed to be remodeled to fit the picture that the Old Testament itself gives. What a struggle it was for God to reveal himself to those people, people who so easily and so quickly fell so far.

Our last snapshot picture from the Old Testament comes after Israel had been dragged into Babylonian captivity, the just reward for her sins as the biblical account so dearly states. Nebuchadnezzar’s final capture and destruction of Jerusalem is usually dated at 586; the first feeble group of returning exiles apparently headed back for Judah in 536, but morale was a problem. After a half-hearted attempt to rebuild the city and the temple, local opposition discouraged the people and they simply let the temple remain in ruins. Finally, around 520, under the inspiration provided by the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, a drive was begun which resulted in the completion of the temple.

We have no biblical narrative which describes what took place during the next few decades. All we know from the biblical account is that when Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 458/57, the state of religion was appalling. He and Nehemiah worked together to restore the city walls and the faith of the people. But a most sobering insight is provided by the last chapter of Nehemiah. Ezra had now passed from the scene and Nehemiah has had to return to the court of the Persian king, though the biblical account does not explain why. Upon his return to Jerusalem some twelve years later, which would probably be no earlier than 425, Nehemiah was appalled by the conditions he found. Some of the very reforms that he and Ezra had established earlier had been reversed entirely. Read the story yourself in Nehemiah 13 and you will discover further evidence of the “low road” on which Israel so often traveled! In Nehemiah’s absence, the people had given over part of the temple to one of Israel’s avowed enemies, Tobiah the Ammonite; the priests and Levites had simply been left to fend for themselves; the Sabbath had been

disregarded; and the Israelites were still marrying foreign wives, contrary to God's law. That last point was precisely one that Ezra and Nehemiah had "reformed" earlier.

Nehemiah's response to this multiple threat was vigorous and passionate. In his own words: "I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God" (Neh. 13:25). Tough lines, but perhaps not too surprising considering the circumstances.

Descriptions of the history of Israel often suggest that the Babylonian captivity cured Israel once and for all of the worship of pagan deities and turned her to the religion of law, an emphasis that is altogether too clear by New Testament times. But even that religion of law was not easy to come by. The evidence from the Old Testament suggests that virtually throughout her history, even after the exile, God's people were mostly traveling the "low road." One could hardly accuse Israel of worshiping God wrongly when she was not even worshiping Him at all! But that must have been the case more often than we have been inclined to admit.

After tracing the above scenario, we must now ask the question as to why God would allow such frightful degeneration. Why would he create a world and then let it slide away from him? Why would he choose a people and then not keep them close to him? Those questions have often been asked and they are the right ones to ask. The problem of evil and sin is an ominous cloud over our world. When God's children either cannot recognize or cannot understand his activity among men, they turn away from him. I do not presume to know the full answer, but I would like to suggest a way of interpreting God's activity that has helped me to see the Old Testament and the New Testament as part of a consistent revelation of a good God.

A COSMIC STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

The claim of both the Old Testament and of the New is that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and the source of everything good. How could such a God be the architect of this world with its sin and tragedy? The Bible does not really attempt to answer that question in a philosophical manner, but there are some hints in Scripture that point in the direction of a possible explanation of the course that this world has taken. When these hints are drawn together, a picture of a great cosmic drama begins to emerge. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is perhaps the best known popularization of this drama, but the elements are present in Scripture, and Milton himself draws heavily on scriptural imagery. As the writings of C.S. Lewis attest, the motif is still popular in our modern era.

The drama centers on the great struggle between good and evil, between God and the Enemy of the good. The Old Testament treatment of this drama will be discussed more specifically in the next chapter, but the hints appear very early in the biblical narrative. The serpent of Genesis 3, although more crafty than any of God's other creatures, is somehow also God's opponent, raising questions about God's manner of dealing with man. He claims that God arbitrarily has withheld something good from man. Traditional Christianity has attributed personal qualities to this serpent and has depicted him as the Great Opponent of God, usually under the name of Satan or simply the Devil.

The suggestion of a great cosmic struggle between this Adversary and God is further amplified in the book of Job. The Adversary accuses God of favoritism, implying that God virtually has bribed Job to serve him; remove the hedge and Job's allegiance would simply evaporate. In short, the book of Job sets a drama in which the Adversary attacks the very heart of God's ways with man. If God is to prove his

case, he must throw his man Job to the lions, so to speak. Job suffers, argues, talks back to a silent God, but never abandons his faith in God's justice. Thus, through Job's endurance, God's character stands vindicated.

Two additional Old Testament passages, Isaiah 14: 12-15, the famous "Lucifer" passage, and Ezekiel 28:11-19, both suggest further elements in the traditional Christian interpretation of the cosmic struggle. In particular, the aspect of selfish pride is prominent in both of these passages. It requires only a small step to arrive at the two great points of tension in this cosmic drama: the selfishness and pride of the Adversary over against God's self-sacrificing love, a contrast that has been much developed in the Christian understanding of the mission of Jesus.

The New Testament intensifies the focus on this cosmic drama. When the "seventy" returned from their successful mission, Luke records that Jesus exclaimed: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). In addition, both Matthew and Luke record the personal confrontation between Jesus and the Adversary (Matthew 4; Luke 4). Both accounts hint at a cosmic significance when the devil offers the world to Jesus if he will fall down and worship him.

Much additional New Testament evidence could be cited, but for purposes of defining the cosmic struggle, the final book of the New Testament is one of the more important New Testament points of reference. Revelation 12-14, and 20, in particular, throw the struggle into bold relief; the dragon and Michael are at war (Rev. 12:7). The dragon is defeated and cast to earth where he pursues those who are faithful to God's commands (Rev. 12:17). The dragon carries on his warfare through the beast of Revelation 13. The beast and his allies attack virtually every part of God's realm. As the struggle climaxes, its religious character becomes more evident, for another beast follows in the authority of the first, demanding that all should *worship* the image of the beast or be killed (Rev. 13:15). Thus the human family is inevitably drawn into the struggle. Those who refuse the demands of the beast are described as saints who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12).

Throughout the book of Revelation the theme of judgment is prominent, a judgment which is ultimately for God and his holy ones and against the dragon and his demons. Revelation 14:6 declares that the hour of judgment has come and in the chapter which describes the final demise of the devil and his angels, Revelation 20, judgment is committed to the saints (Rev. 20:4). The language of confrontation simply dominates the book.

Now it is perhaps noteworthy that where this cosmic struggle is given any kind of content, the enemy accuses God of being arbitrary: in Genesis 3, God is accused of arbitrarily withholding something good from man. In Job, God is accused of arbitrarily favoring Job. Yet interestingly enough, these same passages suggest that God actually grants remarkable freedom: in Genesis, the power of choice and the right to rebel; in Job, the right of the Adversary to viciously attack Job, Job's family, and Job's possessions. In short, the biblical writers seem to present the evidence for a freedom-loving God who has no fears of granting freedom also to his creatures and even to the Adversary himself. But in the context of the great cosmic struggle, when the Adversary accuses God of being arbitrary, the only possible way of putting the accusation to rest is for God to do precisely what he did in Job's case: he must throw Job to the lions. Refusal to let Satan attack Job would simply have left the accusation all the more believable, and the reputation of God's government all the more in doubt. But now let us apply the above suggestions to the interpretation of biblical history as a whole. If the course of history can be seen to be taking place within a great cosmic struggle in which God is accused of governing in an arbitrary manner,

then we have a hint as to how we might understand his willingness to create a good world – but then watch it fall into serious decay. Who would be the mastermind of that decay? The Adversary.

The suggestion that the Adversary is in some sense the master of this world as well as the mastermind behind its pain and agony, appears in the book of Job. At least when the sons of God gathered together, the Adversary reported that he had come from the earth. This may also be the origin of the references in the gospels to “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). The devil’s willingness to “concede” rulership to Jesus (for a price!) as noted in the temptation accounts also implies a certain demonic lordship over creation. Placing this demonic control in a framework similar to that provided by the book of Job, we can imagine that a good world has been thrown to the lions. Thus, the entire creation must endure a Job-like experience at the hands of the Adversary.

If God’s ultimate authority is to be established, then the full impact of demonic rule must be allowed to develop. The “benefits” and “blessings” of demonic rule must be allowed to develop for all to see, if God’s lordship is to be finally regained. So just as God had to remain silent during Job’s agony, just as he allowed Satan to destroy Job’s innocent children, just as God allowed circumstances to deteriorate to the point where Job’s wife could say: “Curse God and die,” so it is with the world which God has created. Demonic forces must be granted the right to rule. Man must be granted the right to rebel without the threat of immediate and sudden punishment. And so we have the tragic sequence of Genesis 3-11, a somber reminder of the devastation caused by rebellion, but at the same time, a testimony to a God who loves freedom so much that he even grants us the privilege of ruining our lives and the lives of others.

Yet God has not abdicated completely his responsibilities and control. Just as he set limits on Satan’s attack on Job, so he has put some limits on the spread of evil. And just as God finally broke his silence with Job, so he also came in a special way to Abraham to renew the knowledge of God and to lead Abraham into a new relationship as an example of what a divine-human relationship could mean. But if God is the kind of God who loves freedom, then he cannot force us to grow towards him. Growth can come only as we choose to respond to the divine invitation. That is why the Old Testament stories provide such a mysterious blending of good and evil. In some of the narratives the distinction between good and evil is clear enough: human beings simply failed, revolting against what they knew to be right. But in other cases, divine wisdom apparently saw that man was not yet ready for the next step upward. Reforms cannot be hasty, otherwise all can be lost. For freedom’s sake, God had been willing to let the demons have a fair crack at his creation; now God must defeat the demons, the false deities who had inundated the earth.

If we apply this suggested interpretative framework to Abraham’s situation, we can see that if God had moved too quickly in his attempt to win the heart of Abraham, Abraham would have had plenty of other “gods” to choose from. He was by no means bound to serve the God who had called him from Ur of the Chaldees. There must have been many things that God desperately wanted to tell Abraham, but he didn’t dare. Abraham was not yet ready to move from milk to meat!

Thus when the larger picture of a cosmic struggle forms the background of the Old Testament, I find it much easier to understand the activities of God. It now seems strange to me that the Old Testament God has the reputation of having a short fuse. A God of incredible patience is a much more accurate description. Judged by New Testament standards, life in the Old Testament was often at a very low ebb. Yet God was there – working, inviting, winning.

We must not assume, however, that the upward path was a continuous one once God had come to Abraham. The graph actually looks much more like a roller-coaster ride! Freedom means we may grow or fall, depending on whether we respond to the divine invitation or turn from it. When one of God's children chooses to turn away, the memory of the divine presence can very easily fade completely. Very little time is required to obliterate even important traditions from the human experience. I have known families who have become alienated from the Christian community and have turned away, taking their children with them into isolation. Given a few years of such isolation, the children have no memory of that which had at one time been so important to their parents. So it is with the rebellions and apostasies in the Old Testament. The example cited earlier of the loss of the knowledge of God between Hezekiah and Josiah is almost the rule rather than the exception, more typical than remarkable, though still very much a tragedy.

To summarize the argument of this chapter, we can say that God did create a good world. In this world he placed free creatures. They chose to rebel and align themselves with the Adversary. His attacks on God set the stage for demonic rule, a rule which a freedom-loving God chose to allow as necessary evidence in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The Old Testament gives ample evidence of the impact of the demonic rule. At the same time, however, it testifies to God's patient interest in his own people, a people through whom he hoped to demonstrate to the world that there is a God in heaven who is the source of everything good. God had much that he wanted to show and tell his people. As soon as they were ready, he passed on the good news. The tragedy was that they were so seldom ready. Yet God was still willing to watch and wait. That is the glory of the Old Testament and the glory of our God.

Theme: “The Family”

Leading Question: From an educational perspective, where can one go in the Bible to find the ideal family setting and the ideal family in action?

In both Testaments, but especially in Old, one is likely to learn more about family models by contrast than by comparison. In our age, we have moved to an individualistic model rather than a communal model. And from what we find in Scripture, we are likely to learn more by contrast, that is, how *not* to behave as a family, rather than by seeing a family in an ideal setting and putting the ideal into action.

But to answer our leading question, “Where do we find the ideal in the Bible?” let’s go to one key passage in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6, and to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament, Eph. 5:21 – 6:4.

Old Testament:

Deut. 6:1-9 (NRSV): Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, 2 so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Question: To what extent does repetition get the job done?

Comment: Memorization often forms a solid foundation for further reflection and action. But mere repetition will not necessarily lead to principled thinking and action. But later in the same chapter the ideal comes closer to realization in narrative form:

Deut. 6:20-25 (NRSV): 20 When your children ask you in time to come, “What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?” 21 then you shall say to your children, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. 23 He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. 24 Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. 25 If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.”

Comment: Two things are worth noting in this part of Deuteronomy 6: 1) obedience was a matter of healthy survival in their new land. In short, obedience has nothing directly to do with salvation; 2) the narrative form is more likely to find a permanent home in the minds of both parents and children.

New Testament:

Ephesians 5:21 – 33 (NRSV): 21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. 33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Ephesians 6:1-4 (NRSV): Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: 3 “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Here one finds explicit counsel for both parents and children. And it is in a form that is much applicable to us. In general, it's better to go to the New Testament virtue lists where the traits are universally applicable to individualistic as well as communal cultures and the "fruit of the Spirit" passage leads the way:

Gal. 5:22-26 (NRSV): By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Question: Does good parenting produce good children.

Comment: Any devout and careful parent would be grieved if the children did not turn out well. But there is encouragement from many of the stories in Scripture. One of the more striking cluster of examples comes the monarchy in Judah: The wicked king Ahaz raised Hezekiah, one of Judah's best kings. But then good king Hezekiah raised Manasseh, one of the most evil kings and Manasseh who reigned for 55 years, the longest of any king in Judah. His son Amon was also wicked, but only reigned 2 years. Yet this "wicked" father-grandfather duo raised Josiah, again one of Judah's best kings. In short, even the best of parenting is no guarantee of good results, and the worst of parenting does not necessarily doom a child to bad results.

Finally, let's consider Old Testament examples of how *not* to raise children:

Abraham and Sarah: both told lies and both encouraged bigamy with Hagar

Isaac and Rebecca: both showed favoritism

Jacob: polygamy and favoritism

Eli: his boys did not turn out well

Samuel: his boys did not turn out well

David: after his affair with Bathsheba, his family fell apart

In sum. It's much easier to tell others how to be good parents than to be a good parent yourself.

Theme: “The Law *as* Teacher.”

Leading question: What is the role of “law” in education?

Given the secularizing impulse in higher education, it may seem surprising to see a lesson with the title, “The Law *as* Teacher.” The author of the standard study guide develops a view of law which will be helpful for some, but less so for others. Here we will seek to develop a broader view of law that can be more inclusive.

For most of us, the word “law” is not a particularly helpful word. I don’t think I have ever heard anyone say, “It’s the law” in a friendly tone voice. Let me use “required” seat belts as an example, and I’ll start with some questions: When did you first start buckling up? And what made you do it? Or maybe you are one of the few remaining renegades who insists on a life of unfettered freedom....

I don’t remember when or why I started wearing them. Typically I’m fairly obedient in practical matters – I only rebel when someone tells me I *have* to do something. Initially I buckled up more faithfully when I was driving than when I was a passenger. But since the winter of 1963 I wear a seat belt all the time. I was a passenger without one and popped my head through the windshield. I can still rub the scar on my forehead and feel it in the middle of my scalp. It’s a convincing argument in favor of seat belts.

But if seat belts are such a benefit why doesn’t everyone wear them? Of course they restrict our freedoms and of course they’re uncomfortable. And yes, one can even cite examples of accidents where it was more dangerous to wear a seat belt than to be without. Still, the evidence in favor of seat belts is overwhelming.

So the people we have elected to govern us decided to help us wear our seat belts. The first efforts were gentle and kind, buckles in the shape of hearts with a “loving” message: “Buckle up – we love you!”

Didn’t work. Let’s try a harder line: “Buckle up! It’s the law.” Stronger words, but still not much muscle. Sometimes the hard rhetoric was softened just a bit: “Buckle up! It’s *our* law.”

But only when it turned expensive – “Click it or ticket!” – did the habit begin to catch on. When I checked the fines a few years ago, in Washington State, where I live, the fine is \$101 for riding without a seat belt. Next door in Oregon it only costs \$94. But in both states the authorities issue tickets with no qualms of conscience. Still, I am amazed at how often the report of a fatal accident includes the line: “The driver was not wearing a seat belt.”

Now let’s bring God into the picture. Should God be concerned about such things as seat belts? Why not, if God, like John, wants us to “prosper and be in health” (3 John 2)?

So God sets about the task of helping us protect ourselves and others. In short, to *make* us be good. Well, *make* is a bit strong. *Encourage? Entice? Coax?*

You see the problem. Paul lays it out – his dilemma, ours, and God’s: “What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21).

But now let's come to our leading question, the role of law in education. Does "law" help people think or just help them obey to avoid punishment? In typical evangelical theology, law is an instrument of condemnation and points to the need of grace. But that doesn't go very far in helping us see law as good news or to see law as a catalyst for exploratory thinking.

So let's look at some Old Testament passages that can paint a more positive view of law, starting with Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

Deut. 4:5-8 (NRSV): 5 See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. 6 You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" 7 For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? 8 And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

In short, even Israel's pagan nation recognized the great value of the laws given to her. And if we look at a remarkable passage that follows the giving of 10 commandments in Deuteronomy 5, we glimpse two crucial factors: the role of fear, and the purpose of law:

Deut. 5:22-33(NRSV): These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. 23 When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; 24 and you said, "Look, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. 25 So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die. 26 For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? 27 Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the Lord our God will say. Then tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and do it."

28 The Lord heard your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. 29 If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! 30 Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' 31 But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." 32 You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. 33 You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you,

so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess.

Some people are squeamish about allowing God to use abject fear as part of his tool kit. But at the early stages of growth and development, fear is essential. If a youngster is at risk from a moving vehicle, the parent does not hesitate to scare the kid half to death. It is the difference between life and death.

And note that the laws are intended for Israel's good in their new land. It has nothing to do with eternal salvation, but with living the good life here.

Question: Is it possible to love the Lord with all your mind with an emphasis on law?

Comment: Interestingly enough, the official study guide designates Deuteronomy 6:5 as the memory text for this week: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (NKJV). All three of the New Testament equivalents add to that list one that is missing from the Deuteronomy passage, namely, "mind":

Matthew 22:37: Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your *mind*."

Mark 12:30: And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your *mind*, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

Luke 10:27: So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your *mind*, ' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' "

Note: The exploratory note, so crucial in the educational process, is not stressed in the OT. The *mind* is central in the New Testament passages. That's worth pondering.

Grace before law. While typical evangelical theology sees law as condemning and grace as saving, one can certainly argue that from a "motivational" perspective, grace comes *before* law. One of the best examples is Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Did they deserve deliverance. No. But God delivered them "by grace." This touched their hearts so that when they got to Mt. Sinai they could appreciate the law, in all its thunderous glory.

The New Testament parallel comes in Romans. Note how God acted graciously toward his wayward children even while they were running in the opposite direction. I have italicized the crucial words:

Romans 5:6-11 (NRSV): 6 For while we were still *weak*, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we *still were sinners* Christ died for

us. 9 Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In sum, grace is wonderful gift of God and so is his law. Indeed Jeremiah 31 tells of a time when that law will become so much a part of us that we will intuitively respond to God's invitation:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NRSV): The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

For better or for worse, I have been blessed/cursed with a rebel soul. I hate to be told what to do. God's promise is that someday I will live in a kingdom where nobody will tell anybody what to do because the law is written on the heart.

What follows is the chapter 4 from my book, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?*, “Strange People Need Strange Laws.” It addresses a number of the questions raised in this lesson.

Chapter 4, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?*

By Alden Thompson

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Strange People Need Strange Laws

“And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances sorighteous as all this law which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:8, NRSV)

“Whoever curses his parents must be put to death”; “If you take a second wife, be sure to treat the first one fairly”; “Don't boil a baby goat in its mother's milk”; “Don't let a Moabite join the church.”

Reading the Old Testament laws makes for fascinating reading – and disturbing, as well. Yet the Old Testament says that all these laws came from God. What kind of God would give laws like that?

Before we attempt to answer that question, let's take a closer look at the laws noted above so that we can make sure that we understand the problems.

1) *The death penalty for cursing one's father or mother* (Ex. 21:17). Most of us would have no difficulty in agreeing that honoring one's father and mother is an essential concept. But if that relationship should break down, we would probably have second thoughts about the death penalty. Then, again, does this law constitute a clear basis for capital punishment for one who accepts the Old Testament as the word of God? Some Christians have not been at all reluctant to appeal to passages similar to this one in support of capital punishment. Maybe we need to think again.

2) *Fair and equal treatment for a first wife when a second one is taken* (Ex. 21:10). No one would quarrel with the principle of fairness, but as expressed in this law, it is directly linked with bigamy. How can the great God of the universe give a law that condones bigamy? Yet the Old Testament clearly indicates that this law, too, came from God (cf. Ex. 21:1). Is God in favor of bigamy?

3) *Prohibition against boiling a baby goat in his mother's milk* (Ex. 34:26). Frankly, I have never been tempted to transgress this command, nor do I know many Christians who have. Of course, if one were to follow orthodox Jewish interpretation and use this command as the basis for not eating meat and milk together, life would become rather more complicated. Nevertheless, however one might attempt to interpret the law in a contemporary context, the fact remains that the biblical text itself provides absolutely no rationale for the law. Since most of us thrive on rational explanations, this unexplained law (along with many similar ones in the Old Testament) merits a place on our list of strange laws.

4) *Prohibition against allowing Ammonites and Moabites into the congregation, even unto the tenth generation* (Deut. 23:3). In this instance, the biblical passage does give a reason for the law, namely, that Moab and Ammon did not properly welcome Israel when she was coming into Canaan from Egypt. Perhaps a little punitive action would be justified under the circumstances, though to Christians who have accepted the New Testament's universal welcome to all nationalities (Gal. 3:29), this kind of exclusiveness seems rather strange. But that is not the primary reason why I have selected this law as an example of a strange Old Testament law. The curious thing about this law is that the history of its enforcement is so patchy. To be sure, Israel's whole experience was rather patchy, a point that I have emphasized before, but does that give license to break the law "officially"? The law is included in the Pentateuch, but a major exception crops up during the period of the Judges, namely, in the story of Ruth the Moabitess. Now scholars are by no means agreed as to when the story was written; some think it was very early, others quite late. Since it appears in the third section of the Hebrew canon, we at least know that it did not become authoritative until relatively late. Ruth is included in the royal Davidic lineage (Ruth 4:18-22) and her name also appears in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). Thus there is clear evidence that at least this one Moabitess was quite cheerfully accepted into the official community – ten generations or no ten generations. But to complicate the picture further, this very law became the focal point of the great post-exilic reforms under Ezra and Nehemiah. They insisted that the Jews put away all their foreign wives, Ammonites and Moabites included (Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13:23-27). Clearly, then, 'official' attitudes towards this law varied considerably. If we are inclined to think that an unchanging God gives only unchangeable laws, this law is indeed a strange one.

But after looking at these examples of strange laws, we must remind ourselves that Israel's great lawgiver, Moses, apparently found none of them strange or even burdensome. His buoyant appreciation of the entire body of Israelite law is found in Deuteronomy 4:1-8. In particular, note his claim that one of the great landmarks of Israel's experience lies in the fact that her God is near, ready and willing to be

consulted. Furthermore, no other nation has received statutes and ordinances so righteous as the law which Moses has set before them (Deut. 4:7-8). So Moses thought of law as a great idea; good news, in fact. By contrast, Christians often have difficulty seeing law as good news, a matter which we must consider if we are to understand the function of law in the Christian community.

GOD'S LAW – ITS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

As we begin to look at Christian attitudes towards law, we should take one more glance at the Old Testament and remind ourselves, that, even though Moses' attitude towards law was positive, the people under his direction were often less enthusiastic. They have our sympathies, for law does have a peculiar way of irritating human beings. Even the most docile and obedient souls must surely prefer to do what they want to do instead of what they have to do. Thus, when commanded or forbidden, we find it more difficult to perform or refrain, even though our natural inclination might have been to do precisely what the law indicated. I suspect that all of us have experienced this sudden withering of noble intentions when an injudicious command or an ill-timed reminder is laid on top of a good intention which had already issued from our own free will. Observant parents also soon learn that for encouraging rebellion in an otherwise good child, there is nothing quite like an admonition to do what the child was already doing or intending to do!

To illustrate another type of problem that we experience in connection with law, we could cite the example of speed limits. Now I don't mean those notorious and nonsensical limits which we sometimes meet and which seem to persist even though their very absurdity suggests they must have originated in some bureaucratic mix-up. I am referring to those necessary limits which all serious-minded drivers agree are necessary for the preservation of life. Drivers need the official reminder that a more leisurely pace is preferred in urban areas. But who among us hasn't chafed against a reasonable and necessary limit, simply because we are under the pressure of an urgent appointment? When it is our children who are walking to school on dangerous roads we become quite vocal about the need for tougher speed laws. But when it is our urgent appointment that we are attempting to meet, the risk of killing or maiming a child somehow seems so very remote.

These then, are some of the human problems that we must face in connection with law, problems which God must cope with as he seeks to show us a better way of life. It is so easy to lose sight of law as good news and to focus instead on its potential to irritate. The New Testament itself is quite aware of this negative aspect of law. Paul, for example, in Romans 5-8, often seems ambivalent when he speaks of law, being aware of its negative potential as well as the positive. On the negative side, "Law came in, to increase the trespass" (Rom. 5:20); and "the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me" (Rom. 7:10; cf. also 7:13). But on the positive side, Paul says, "The commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12), "I agree that the law is good" (Rom. 7:16), and "I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self" (Rom. 7:22).

One of the more uncomfortable functions of law is simply its role in pointing out sin (Rom. 7:7; cf. 4:15). Even though 1 Tim. 1:8-11 says that the law is for the disobedient rather than for the obedient, still, an awareness of law as the sinner's accuser hardly warms the heart of the saint! The answering grace of Christ strikes a much more responsive chord.

In addition to the "natural" irritating and accusing aspects of law, the Jewish distortion of law also complicates our ability to view it positively. The gospels bristle with the tension between Jesus'

attitude towards law and that of his Jewish antagonists, Instead of focusing on the mass of laws, Jesus sought to develop a healthier attitude towards law as a principle. Thus, when he was asked which was the greatest command, he simply said that there were two commands: “Love God,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40). By seeking thus to establish the priority of law as the basis for principled behavior, Jesus saw himself, not as an opponent of law, but as its defender. To cite his well-known words from the Sermon on the Mount: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matt. 5:17). In other words: “I have come to fill the law full of the right kind of meaning.”

But perhaps the greatest significance of Jesus’ statement about the two great commands lies in the fact that it provides a framework within which we can come to grips with all the individual laws of both Testaments. Note in particular: “On these two commands depend all the law and the prophets.” All other commands are simply commentary on these two great commands and can in some way be subsumed under them. Paul refined this point a step further when, after mentioning several of the individual laws from the decalogue, he says, simply: “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). Thus law is not really ten commands, or even two, it is one principle, love. When we love, we are fulfilling all that is in the law. Love can never be rebellion against law or its negation; it is the embodiment of law in every act of life. An echo of this positive view of law can also be found in the book of James where the law is described as the “law of liberty” (James 2:12).

We can conclude, then, that the New Testament gives ample evidence for viewing both laws and law as good news. But how can we understand and apply law in Christian experience so that we perceive it as something helpful rather than as something destructive and oppressive?

GOD’S LAW – A GRACIOUS GIFT

In attempting to answer that question, we need to look first to the body of laws in the Old Testament. Trying to make sense out of such a diverse mass is no easy task. There scarcely seems to be a way through that would not risk hopeless entanglement en route. The New Testament certainly provides plenty of evidence to demonstrate that such entanglement had become very much a reality, not just in the Jewish community, but in the Christian community as well. In the Gospels the argument about law repeatedly focuses on Jesus’ attempts to establish a more “human” approach to the Sabbath. In Acts, the famous Jerusalem conference provides at least a partial glimpse of the agony of the early Christian community as they wrestled with the problem of law: which of the commands of God were still valid for Christians who were not Jews (Acts 15)? The day of divine imperatives was clearly not past, but the “which” and the “how” were still very much discussed.

Given our difficulties in living comfortably with law, it is interesting to note the hints in both Testaments that God’s ideal would be to eliminate the imperative in favor of the indicative. The clearest statement of this ideal is found in the New Covenant promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here God looks forward to the time when the law will be written in the heart and it will no longer be necessary for each man to command or teach his neighbor, for everyone will know the Lord. Thus in the mature experience the imperative has been entirely transposed into the indicative. No external code threatens to arouse the natural combativeness of the human heart, for the heart is in harmony with the divine will.

But given conditions in a distorted human environment, the external law is a gracious condescension to the needs of immature creatures, just as uncultured and uncouth children need more

overt and explicit directions in the schoolroom, so human beings need more specific instructions to compensate for their lack of maturity. We can illustrate this process of greater specification by means of a simple diagram, based largely on the implications of Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 22:36-40 as discussed above:

The Law Pyramid

1 Command	Love
2 Commands	Love to God Love to Man
10 Commands	Commands 1-4 (Decalogue) Commands 5-10
Many Commands	The additional commands in law and prophets which are applications of the 10, the 2, and the 1.

Just as a maturing craftsman becomes less and less dependent on external instructions as the principles of his trade become more and more a part of him, so it is with the Christian and so it was with ancient Israel. With increasing maturity, the need for explicit law becomes less and less necessary. Conversely, as degeneration occurs, the need for explicit application of the great principles becomes more and more necessary. One of the more notable instances where Scripture actually defines this process involves the law on divorce. Jesus said that the law of divorce became necessary because of “your hardness of heart,” but originally it was not so (Matt. 19:8). The greater the hardness of heart, the greater the need for more specific application of law. But this willingness of God to condescend to man’s need and to give that more specific guidance is in no way a punishment for man’s hard heart. Rather, it is simply another one of God’s gracious acts on behalf of his children.

GOD’S LAW – ITS PURPOSE DISTORTED

Yet in spite of God’s good intentions, the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition shows that this gracious condescension of God to the needs of people can very easily be misunderstood and misapplied. Even well-intentioned and conscientious people can relate to law in such a way that it leads to distortion of God’s original purpose. The apostle Paul vigorously attacked one of the most dangerous distortions of law, namely, that obedience to law is a means of winning divine favor and gaining eternal life. Paul is quite certain that the law is good, but he never says that law is a means for obtaining favor with God. Law is a marvelous guide, but an impossible savior.

Another distortion is more subtle, stemming from a misunderstanding of God’s character. The logic of this distortion goes something like this: God does not change (cf. Mal. 3:6). These are God’s laws. Therefore these laws do not change. In support of that conclusion one could even cite the words of Moses (Deut. 4:2) and John (Rev. 22:19): don’t add and don’t take away! If we adopt that view, then we face two alternatives: either that all laws are cumulative (the orthodox Jewish approach), or that laws apply for a specific pre-determined dispensation or period of time. The latter alternative is the one that has sometimes been adopted by Christians with the resulting interpretation that the corpus of law is applicable from Sinai to the cross. Then at the cross, either all the law, or all law except the decalogue, is abolished (cf. Col. 2:14 in popular interpretation).

The problem with that latter approach is that it conflicts with the evidence from both Testaments. The record of Jewish and Gentile behavior as recorded in the book of Acts and especially in connection with the Jerusalem conference certainly indicates that the early Christian community did not see the cross destroying “at a stroke” the provisions of the Old Testament law codes.

But the testimony of the Old Testament is even more telling, for here, within the same so-called dispensation, clear evidence can be cited that the laws given by God were not eternal. We have already cited the example of Ruth the Moabitess, but an even more striking example can be noted, namely the law concerning eunuchs. Deuteronomy 23:1 seems to state unequivocally that only a complete and virile male could belong to the community. But Isaiah 56:3-5 gives quite a different thrust, for there the prophet reports the word of the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.” This latter passage seems to be so much more in keeping with the Christian spirit, that we are inclined almost immediately to proclaim it as the more mature “law.” The difference between Deuteronomy and Isaiah can scarcely be denied, but what possible reason could there be for the earlier law? The answer to that inquiry may stem from the great danger which Canaanite religion posed for Israel early in her experience. We now know from sources outside the Bible that Canaanite religion was violent and depraved, at least when judged by biblical standards. One of the customs that apparently prevailed was the practice of male castration, and that, in connection with the “official” worship practices! There was real danger that Israel would attempt to imitate Canaanite practice. Hence the need for strong prohibitions, including categorical statements about male castration. With the passage of time and a diminishing of the direct threat from Canaanite religion, the necessarily harsh provisions of an earlier age could be superseded by more appropriate commands. Of course, the Isaiah passage does not explicitly say: “This is a new provision to take the place of that old one.” Yet that seems to be just what happened. Jesus is perhaps using a similarly cautious approach in the famous story of the adulterous woman (John 7:53-8:11). He does not say that the law of stoning has been abolished, but rather: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

The facts of the matter are that divine laws are no more enduring than that human situation which makes them necessary. The beauty of the divine condescension is precisely that God recognized the human condition and molded his revelation accordingly. Different people in different cultures need to have the great enduring principles of divine government applied in different ways. But therein lies a particular problem that we must realize, for the greater the specificity in the commands the greater will be the likelihood of apparent conflict between such commands and the need for exceptions. In a sinful world, conflict can develop even at the level of the two great commands, love to God and love to man, for when a human command from colleague, parent, or magistrate runs counter to our responsibility to God, the two commands are superficially in tension. But only superficially, for the higher law of God (self-sacrificing love) is enduring and that must always be the final court of appeal. It is never “necessary” to break the law; God’s law is the law of life and it is eternal. To be true to that law is to be true to God himself and that is where our loyalties must always lie.

We must admit, however, that not all cases of apparent conflict can be easily resolved. The great issues of war and peace, life and death, and the complications raised by tyranny and oppression make the modern study of ethics very pertinent indeed. Nor will it do to solve the problems with a mere appeal to a specific statement of Scripture. Each passage of Scripture, each instance of biblical law, must be studied within its larger context to determine just how and why the larger principles of God’s eternal law are to

be applied in a distorted human context. Each bit and piece of God's revelation will tell us something about God and something about the people with whom he is dealing. Furthermore, the great variety of conditions and circumstances in which God meets mankind means that we have a great wealth of material for understanding both God and humans. If we approach our problems today with an awareness of what has gone before, asking for the guidance of the Spirit, we will discover what God would have us be and how he would have us live.

STRANGE LAWS FOR STRANGE PEOPLE?

Perhaps a further word would be appropriate in connection with the rather more rigorous nature of Old Testament law. In particular, the death penalty was quite common. Conservative Christians have sometimes been reluctant to admit the great contrast between Old and New, perhaps because the image of an unchanging God is more congenial, at first glance, than the image of a God who condescends to enter the human arena. But if the New Testament can testify to a God who became flesh, cannot the Old Testament bear witness to a God who stoops even further in order to reach humanity? The Old Testament people were often violent; God had to meet them there and help them from there. The Old Testament reveals "approved" customs that are nothing short of barbaric, but we can also detect the hand of God as he works through these customs to lead his people to higher ground. The human race had chosen the steep downward path away from God; the journey back must be via the same tortuous route. Going down is always so quick and easy; retracing one's steps upwards is so painful and so slow. But the God of the Old Testament would not negate the law of life. Growth comes by choosing the right. Step by step, God led his people at a pace which they could manage. The strange laws for these strange people are a marvelous testimony to a kind and patient God and provide a fitting background for the God who would one day reveal himself in Jesus Christ. Just as the New Testament would find Jesus and Mount Zion much more attractive than the terrors of Sinai (cf. Heb. 12:18-24), so we also will probably be more comfortable with Jesus of Nazareth than with the thunder and smoke of that desert mountain. But a closer look reveals a great God who knew that his first task was to impress that riotous mob of ex-slaves. And they were impressed, so much so, that they ran and hid and said that enough was enough. But perhaps their reaction was similar to that mixed fear and pride that a little boy has of his strapping big brother. Junior is afraid, but who wouldn't be delighted to have that kind of brother to beat off the neighborhood bullies? So it was with Israel. They were afraid, but God had made his point and they were his.

Let us take a quick backward glance, then, at the four sample laws mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and summarize some of the implications that have surfaced in the course of our discussion.

1) *Death penalty for cursing one's father or mother (Ex. 21:17)*. The value of honoring one's parents is clear enough, but the background of the Israelites included the death penalty. Was God in favor of the death penalty? Is he still? Any straightforward answer could easily be misleading. We must say, of course, that God is in favor of life; death is the result of sin. Maybe all that we can say with certainty is that God apparently was willing to make use of the death penalty when dealing with ancient Israel. Israel would not have accepted a God who did not enforce such "standard" norms of justice. I suspect that the use of the death penalty was an accommodation to the condition of mankind at that time. Whether or not it should still be used today is a question which is still open for us to decide. Our prayer must be that we will make that decision under the guidance of the Spirit.

2) *Fair and equal treatment for a first wife when a second one is taken* (Ex. 21:10). Through the early patriarchal accounts the custom of multiple wives is evidently accepted without any qualms. It is not surprising, then, that God would include instructions as to how best to cope with a multiple-wife situation. Once we recognize the principle of accommodation to human need, we need not conclude that God is actually in favor of bigamy. Perhaps it might be instructive, however, to explore the possibility of applying this very command today within those cultures where bigamy and polygamy are practiced. Does this command suggest that where a multiple wife situation already exists, the status quo is in order? That is not an easy question to answer, but perhaps some agony of soul would be more appropriate than to conclude too hastily that the ultimate in Christian standards should be enforced in every place at all times. The problem will always be, however: How do we make the transition to the better way?

3) *Prohibition against boiling a baby goat in his mother's milk.* (Ex.34:26). Fairly recent discoveries have suggested that this law is directed against Canaanite fertility practices. It would then be in the same category as the law against a castrated male noted above (Deut. 23:1), When the threat posed by Canaanite religion had passed, the law would also be irrelevant. Certain activities are wrong only because of the way that they might be understood in a given culture. There are basic principles in the law which certainly transcend human culture, but those basic principles also suggest that when we are within a particular culture we must avoid those things which would be offensive or which could possibly lead to a dangerous misunderstanding.

4) *Prohibition against admitting Moabites and Ammonites into the congregation* (Deut. 23:3). I have already noted how attitudes towards this law blew hot and cold. The potential threat of foreign influence against the true faith varied greatly from age to age. The most evident enforcement of this command took place in the post-exilic period during the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Although the enforcement of the command at that time seems exceptionally harsh to us, we now know from sources outside the Bible that pagan influences threatened to compromise fatally the Jewish faith. Ezra and Nehemiah responded with vigor and enthusiasm, making use of this law as part of their reform.

Another point that we would do well to remember in connection with this law is that the Christian view of all being one in Christ has so conditioned us that we find it difficult to adjust to the more tribal and exclusive attitude in the Old Testament. Yet in a culture where tribal loyalties reign supreme, it is not surprising to find a persistent attitude of harshness towards one's enemies. The Old Testament denounces not only Moab and Ammon, but Israel's other enemies as well. Given these conditions, what is really so surprising is the appearance in the Old Testament of the story of Ruth, the Moabitess, the ancestress of David and of Jesus. Even in the Old Testament, the higher law of love sometimes superseded those harsher commands which were a necessary adaptation to the needs of a people who had fallen far from God's ideal.

But after speaking so much of adaptation, of God's condescension to the needs of fallen human beings, I must strike a blow on behalf of permanence and continuity, qualities which seem to apply much more to the decalogue than to the subsidiary commands in the Old Testament. Defined carefully, the commands of the decalogue have a high degree of permanence. This higher priority for the decalogue has found confirmation in the Christian tradition and seems also to be confirmed in the Old Testament, for the tables of stone were placed within the ark of the covenant, while the additional Mosaic legislation was placed in the side of the ark. We must recognize, however, that simply because the decalogue has a higher degree of permanence for fallen man, the ethical questions which we face today are not thereby automatically solved. In fact, one of the primary implications of the approach to law suggested in this

chapter is the absolutely crucial role it assigns to the human interpreter of law. The point is sufficiently important to merit another whole book, but I shall content myself here with a few comments on some of the more significant aspects.

GOD'S LAW AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

Conservative Christians have sometimes been reluctant to grant human reason a prominent role in the decision-making process because to do so would imply that we are walking "by sight" rather than "by faith." Such an approach, however, tends to place faith in opposition to reason, a most unfortunate conclusion, for the two should be walking hand in hand. Perhaps we can take some steps towards solving the difficulty by looking first at the decision-making process, and second, by seeing that process as a focal point in the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Looking at the decision-making process, I find it helpful to note three basic elements in every decision: 1) The driving motive force behind the decision, usually love or selfishness or a mixture of the two; 2) The data base for the decision, including an awareness of relevant Scriptural contexts and a knowledge of the key factors in the modern context that have rendered a decision necessary. Additional information from many sources can be extremely important for substantiating and clarifying the data base. Thus the full spectrum of the modern sciences as well as the more classical disciplines can greatly enhance our understanding both of the biblical record and of the contemporary scene; 3) The actual decision-making process, the reaction of the motive-force with the data. The process moves from recognition of the problem, through the data-gathering and evaluation, and finally to the conclusion and execution of the decision.

Now the first element, the motive force, is in many ways the determining factor for the decision, for it determines the degree of honesty and intensity with which one gathers, interprets and applies the data. If the motive is pure, we are much more likely to make a right decision. Yet, crucial as our motives are, the stark truth is that we are powerless to change or purify them. That is something that only the Spirit can do as we seek a clearer vision of God. Recognition of that sobering fact should lead me as a Christian to set my mind on the Spirit, rather than on the flesh (cf. Rom. 8:5). That is the only way that my decisions can be truly Christian.

But having set my mind on the Spirit, what does that do for the data gathering? Since I have now sought God's guidance in my decision-making I should be *more* thorough in collecting and evaluating the data. Far from negating my human responsibilities, being Spirit-led enhances and intensifies them. God gave me this mental machinery and he expects me to use it. I come to him so that he can purify my heart, my motives; that is something quite beyond me. But I do have capabilities for collecting and gathering data, for deciding, and then acting upon my decision, If the Lord is guiding my motive force, the whole process will be guided by him. And the beauty of this whole process is that God remains God and man remains man, I do not negate the purpose for which God created me, nor do I usurp the role that divine power must play in my experience.

Several distortions of this process are possible. First, I may fail to seek the Spirit, in which case, selfishness will dominate my motives and my decisions. Second, I may be operating on a legalistic basis in which no living decision-making process is necessary nor is the guidance of the Spirit really needed; I just obey the law! But since no specific set of laws can really be adequate or foolproof in this twisted

world, such a method leads either to a horrendous and hopeless multiplication of laws (the rabbinic method), or to a cruel disregard for human need, or both. The classical biblical illustration of this distortion is the Jewish approach to the Sabbath. Jesus sought to show that the Sabbath was made for man and that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. In short, Jesus taught that human needs must be cared for through the Sabbath, not neglected because of the Sabbath.

The third distortion is one that is quite common among those who “let the Lord lead.” I firmly believe that I must let the Lord lead me, and I have attempted to describe how I see him leading in the decision-making process. But it would be dereliction of my human responsibility to expect him to lead me as though I were a blind man, totally dependent on him not only to provide the motive force, but also to collect my data and to make my decision. I am totally dependent on him to cleanse my motives, but it is my responsibility to collect and evaluate the data under the guidance of the Spirit. I am sympathetic with those who believe that it is important that the Lord make their every decision and I do not wish to be overly critical. But I do think that when we take that approach, we are virtually stepping to the sidelines in the great cosmic struggle. That is why I see the decision-making process as being so crucial in the great struggle between good and evil. Let me explain further.

If the cosmic struggle is all about freedom, then I must exercise my freedom to choose for God. If I surrender my proper role in the decision-making process, even if I surrender it to God, then I am forsaking the arena at that point. Even the apparent vote for God that I am casting at that point is, in reality, a vote in favor of the Adversary. He has said all along that God does not really want me to think; that God would rather make all the decisions for me. But I refuse to support the Adversary! The God that I serve asks me to surrender my will to him, but never to relinquish my humanity. When I surrender my will, my humanity is vivified and renewed. My life becomes a living sacrifice in which my every act tells for or against God in the cosmic struggle. That is the great challenge in Christian living.

A glance at Job’s experience can be helpful in this connection. He had to live and act for God even though he had no *visible* sign of God’s presence. So it is for us. My choice for God when all is going well and when I feel him near is not nearly so significant as my choice for him when I feel God-forsaken. The world so often appears God-forsaken and deserted. God is so often silent when we cry out to him in desperation. But if in that loneliness, if in that awful silence, I can still choose to set my mind on the Spirit instead of on the flesh, then I can play a part in the vindication of God and his government. The knowledge that I can play even a small part for the great God who made me and one day wants me to be with him adds an element of excitement to this life that I wouldn’t want to be without.

Of course, God has not always remained silent. Scripture is part of the evidence that he has been active on our behalf. And this very evidence in Scripture can shore up my confidence when God seems silent. In fact, I suspect that it was Jesus’ awareness of Scripture that made it possible for him to move from his feelings of God-forsakenness to the point where he could say, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

That final serenity, that deep awareness of God’s immediate presence is something that we all crave. God will grant it to us some day, But in the meantime, the war rages on, and we must have an understanding of God which will enable us to live for him with vigor and enthusiasm – even when he is silent. Every day brings myriads of decisions. God has given us the privilege of making our own decisions. He expects us to make our own decisions, but with our minds set on him. Whether he seems near or far, life goes on. We must simply choose to set our minds on the Spirit, and then use all of the talents that the Lord has given us, and use them to his glory.

In this chapter, I have attempted to discuss law in a way which will enable us to understand both the consistency of law in principle and the variety of law in application. That fascinating combination of consistency and variety is what keeps the whole body of law in Scripture alive for us today. Not that all the laws apply with equal validity. By no means! But law remains alive in the sense that we can see how God has dealt with man in the past and thus can learn how he deals with men today. And, as with all our study of Scripture the mind must be set on the Spirit if we are to understand aright. But having done that, the very nature of the biblical law should alert me to the great danger of simply following specific laws. My mind and my heart must always be alert, so that in every situation, my life and my decisions will lead to the fulfillment of that greatest of principles, the principle of love.

Speaking of that principle of love brings us to the capstone of our discussion of law: the relationship between Christian experience and the law. The question can be simply put. How can love take the sting out of the imperative? I may understand a great deal about God's activity in the past. I may even find that understanding to be a great help in the daily decisions that I must make. But sooner or later, I must come face to face with uncomfortable duty, with unwanted but necessary responsibility, with the divine imperative. Does God have a way of helping me to see my "duty" in a way that does not arouse my natural hostility to the imperative? He does. Let us see how.

I have mentioned several times that God's willingness to reveal his law is part of his gracious activity on our behalf. But since laws come in the imperative mode they can so easily get our backs up. We simply don't like to be told to do something, even if it is for our own good. But as I have reflected on the way that God has dealt with man, I have discovered that he is quite aware of the nasty barbs that accompany law. If we will look at the larger picture of God's gracious activity we can see just how sensitive he has been to our need.

GRACE BEFORE LAW

This beautiful aspect of God's way with man can be summarized in the phrase: "grace before law." Now that may sound strange to those of us who are accustomed to thinking of law as something which condemns, something which must be followed by the good news of saving grace. In that way of thinking, law is, of course, bad news. Furthermore we if that is the way I insist on looking at law and grace, I will never make peace with law; it will always rub me up the wrong way. What then does "grace before law" mean? Just this. When God comes to human beings, his first approach is not law, but grace. Before we ever do anything for him or even in response to him, grace is there as his free gift. The classic New Testament passage in this respect is Romans 5: "While we were still weak" (vs. 6), "while we were yet sinners" (vs. 8), "while we were enemies" (vs. 10), "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (vs. 10). We did nothing to merit such a gift. While we were yet shaking our fist in God's face he did something that could touch our lives and make us whole. Once our lives have thus been touched by his goodness, we are able to recognize that this great God also wants to show us how to live and that his law is part of his plan for our life. But now, the sting has been taken out of law because we have first been touched by grace. As the Gospel of John records: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). If we let ourselves be touched by his love, we cannot help but love him and then the natural result is to follow in the path that he has given us for our happiness.

Now since this is a book about the Old Testament, I should hasten to add that the familiar picture of grace before law in the New Testament is paralleled in the Old, and right at the focal point of the Old Testament record, Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The amazing story of God's deliverance of his people shows that they had not one shred of merit to offer him. Even their faith was very much smaller than that of a mustard seed. But God delivered them from Egypt. He rolled back the waters of the sea. Then and only then, did he bring them to Sinai and the law. But it was the memory of God's mighty deliverance that placed that smoking mountain in perspective. Even though the people did not always see the full glory of the law nor recognize God's gracious purpose in speaking with them, there was at least one man who did. The man who was right at the heart of it all, the man who led Israel out of slavery and through the sea, that man Moses, did see the glory and beauty of the law. His heart had been touched by the grace of God so he could exclaim:

“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:7-8).

Yes, all those strange laws in the Old Testament were still good news. They did not represent God's ideal, for God was not dealing with ideal people. His great desire for them, as for us, is to be able to inscribe his law on the heart. Then we will no longer face that potential aggravation which is always lurking in the imperative. Then we can revel in the new covenant experience, an experience which enables us to live from the heart and with joy.

In the meantime, whenever I find myself chafing under the divine imperative, I find it so very helpful to retrace the steps from Sinai back to the Red Sea and there catch a fresh vision of the great God who first delivered his people and then brought them to Sinai. Or in terms of the New Testament, I find the sting of the imperative simply vanishing in the knowledge that while I was still his enemy, he died for me.

Theme: “The Eyes of the Lord: The Biblical Worldview”

Leading question: What is a “world view”?

The official study guide has selected Proverbs 15:3 (NKJV) as the “Memory Verse” for this week: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Is that passage intended to convince someone of the biblical worldview? Probably not. But we need to back up a step and look for a definition of “worldview.”

Among thoughtful evangelical Christians, James Sire is a scholar who has been active with InterVarsity Fellowship. His *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (InterVarsity, 4th edition, 2004), has been widely disseminated and well-received.

His Table of Contents is a helpful prelude to his actual definition of “worldview”

1. A World of Difference: *Introduction*
2. A Universe Charged With the Grandeur of God: *Christian Theism*
3. The Clockwork Universe: *Deism*
4. The Silence of Finite Space: *Naturalism*
5. Zero Point: *Nihilism*
6. Beyond Nihilism: *Existentialism*
7. Journey to the East: *Eastern Pantheistic Monism*
8. A Separate Universe: *The New Age*
9. The Vanished Horizon: *Postmodernism*
10. The examined Life: *Conclusion*

And this is his definition of “worldview”:

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) and the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.” – James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, p. 17

I’m still not sure what a “worldview” really is or how one slips into a particular world view or from one worldview into another. But I am tempted to see the story of Jesus as a powerful motivating force in our decisions. Paul met his Lord on the Damascus Road and it transformed his life. Have we met that same Lord with the same effect?

In my experience, the transforming power of John 14-17 played a key role in my understanding of Jesus and of God, for it was absorbing those chapters that suddenly opened the

windows of heaven and I realized that God himself came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. And if God himself cared enough to come to earth to save me, that is a God I could serve forever.

An essay by C. S. Lewis is one that I have found very moving. “On Obstinacy in Belief” (1955) was published in a collection of essays entitled, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, here are some excerpts:

To love involves trusting the beloved beyond the evidence, even against much evidence. No man is our friend who believes in our good intentions only when they are proved. No man is our friend who will not be very slow to accept evidence against them. Such confidence, between one man and another, is in fact almost universally praised as a moral beauty, not blamed as a logical error. And the suspicious man is blamed for a meanness of character, not admired for the excellence of his logic. -- WLN 26

Our relation to those who trusted us only after we were proved innocent in court cannot be the same as our relation to those who trusted us all through. -- WLN 29

Our opponents, then, have a perfect right to dispute with us about the grounds of our original assent. But they must not accuse us of sheer insanity if, after the assent has been given, our adherence to it is no longer proportioned to every fluctuation of the apparent evidence. They cannot of course be expected to know on what our assurance feeds, and how it revives and is always rising from its ashes. They cannot be expected to see how the *quality* of the object which we think we are beginning to know by acquaintance drives us to the view that if this were a delusion then we should have to say that the universe had produced no real thing of comparable value and that all explanations of the delusion seemed somehow less important than the thing explained. That is knowledge we cannot communicate. But they can see how the assent, of necessity, moves us [29/30] from the logic of speculative thought into what might perhaps be called the logic of personal relations. What would, up till then, have been variations simply of opinion become variations of conduct by a person to a Person. *Credere Deum esse* [believing that God exists] turns into *Credere in Deum* [believing in God]. And *Deum* here is this God, the increasingly knowable Lord. – C. S. Lewis (1955), in *The World's Last Night*, 13-30

Perhaps the best response to the “worldview” question is our own testimony, whether it was a Saul-of-Tarsus extravaganza or a placid and unobtrusive affair, both can be effective witnesses to a God who produced “A Universe Charged With the Grandeur of God,” to quote James Sire.

Theme: “Jesus as the Master Teacher”

Leading question: At what age is a child likely to begin questioning the divinity of Christ or the existence of God?

When schools are founded by devout Christians, it is because they want to nurture their children in the faith that is so precious to their parents. As we think of Jesus’ method and message in the light of the challenges of our secular world, is there any way to tell when a child might become vulnerable to doubt?

Just as the book Ecclesiastes in Scripture represents someone who is full of questions, and the book of Proverbs represents someone who seems to have no questions at all, so our children today will bring different experiences into school and will be effected differently by what is presented to them.

Several years ago, when John Brunt was academic Vice President at Walla Walla University, he wandered by my office in the old WWU Administration Building. He had been listening to Garrison Keillor on the radio as he was driving in his car. Keillor repeated a poem that really struck home to Brunt. He had the presence of mind to pull over and record the title of the book. When he got it he had to share it with someone. So he came to my office. Both he and I had friends who had lost their faith in God when they were in Graduate School. The poignant truth of the poem also struck me and I have since memorized it. I will reproduce it as the backdrop for our discussion of the Master Teacher:

Stephen Dunn, “At the Smithville Methodist Church”
in *Local Time* (NY: William Morrow, 1986), 53-55)

It was supposed to be Arts and Crafts for a week,
but when she came home
with the “Jesus Saves” button, we knew what art
was up, what ancient craft.

She liked her little friends. She liked the songs
they sang when they weren’t
twisting and folding paper into dolls.
What could be so bad?

Jesus had been a good man, and putting faith
in good men was what
we had to do to stay this side of cynicism,
that other sadness.

O.K., we said. One week. But when she came home
singing “Jesus loves me,
the Bible tells me so,” it was time to talk.
Could we say Jesus
doesn’t love you? Could I tell her the Bible

is a great book certain people use
to make you feel bad? We sent her back
without a word.

It has been so long since we believed, so long
since we needed Jesus
as our nemesis and friend, that we thought he was
sufficiently dead,

that our children would think of him like Lincoln
or Thomas Jefferson.

Soon it became clear to us, you can't teach disbelief
to a child,

only wonderful stories, and we hadn't a story
nearly as good.

On parents' night there were the Arts and Crafts
all spread out

like appetizers. Then we took our seats
in the church

and the children sang a song about the Ark,
and Hallelujah

And one in which they had to jump up and down
for Jesus

I can't remember ever feeling so uncertain
about what's comic, what's serious.

Evolution is magical but devoid of heroes.

You can't say to your child

"Evolution loves you." The story stinks
of extinction and nothing

exciting happens for centuries. I didn't have
a wonderful story for my child
and she was beaming. All the way home in the car
she sang the songs

occasionally standing up for Jesus.

There was nothing to do
but drive, ride it out, sing along
in silence.

Question: What is it that makes a faith that is so precious to children, slip away when they become adults?

Comment: Among Jesus disciples and followers, two stand out as people who struggled with their doubts and said so: Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night (John 3:1-21), and the disciple Thomas. Now John seems to have taken a special interest in Thomas, an honest man, not given to easy faith. John mentions him in three separate contexts, all three of them pregnant with issues of doubt and faith.

The first focuses on the tomb of Lazarus. When Jesus said that he wanted to go to Judea again, his disciples responded, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you

going there again?” (John 11:8). In light of that grim question, Thomas declares, “Let us also go that we may die with him” (vs. 16). In the words of R. H Strachan, cited by William Barclay, “There was not expectant faith, but loyal despair.”

This is the same Thomas who asked for clarification after Jesus had said that he was preparing a place for them and that they knew the way. Thomas blurted out, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (John 14:5)

Then in John 20 we find the narrative that earned the label “doubting” for Thomas. Jesus had appeared to the disciples in the upper room and convinced the disciples who were there that his presence (and his resurrection!) was real. But John tells us that Thomas wasn’t with him and when the other disciples told him he famously said: “Unless I . . . put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (vs. 25).

But the next verses are crucial:

John 20:26-29 (NRSV): A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

With only a gentle rebuke, Jesus made room in the kingdom for the doubter – but who praised those who could believe without proof.

The remainder of this week’s lesson focuses not so much on Jesus’ actual teaching methods as on the content of his message, especially as reflected in the writings of Jesus’ followers:

John 1:1-18: Jesus is the Word made flesh

2 Cor. 5:16-21: God reconciled us to himself through Christ

Philippians 2:1-11: Jesus emptied himself of his divine powers to live among us

Hebrews 1:1-4: God spoke through the prophets, but Jesus is better than the prophets

The content of these passages is important, but they usually become believable after a person has answered some basic questions first. What is important for teachers and students today is to know that God is quite willing to be questioned; doubt is not a major obstacle to faith. Indeed, as George MacDonald suggests, doubts are essential to finding the truth:

To deny the existence of God may...involve less unbelief than the smallest yielding to doubt of His goodness. I say *yielding*; for a person may be haunted with doubts, and only grow thereby in faith. Doubts are the messengers of the Living One to the honest. They are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but have to be, understood.... Doubt must precede every deeper assurance; for uncertainties are what we first see when we look into a region hitherto unknown, unexplored, unannexed. – George MacDonald, *365 Readings*, #152, pp. 66-67

Theme: “More Lessons from the Master Teacher”

Leading question: Did Jesus as “Master Teacher” always follow the rules?

In this lesson we want to look at some of the creative, even unorthodox, methods used by Jesus, the “Master Teacher.” But before we look at examples from the Gospels, we should look at a remarkable “education” quote from Adventism’s charismatic founder, Ellen White:

God never designed that one human mind should be under the complete control of another. And those who make efforts to have the individuality of their pupils merged in themselves, and to be mind, will, and conscience for them, assume fearful responsibilities. These scholars may, upon certain occasions, appear like well-drilled soldiers. But when the restraint is removed, there will be seen a want of independent action from firm principle existing in them. **Those who make it their object to so educate their pupils that they may see and feel that the power lies in themselves to make men and women of firm principle, qualified for any position in life, are the most useful and permanently successful teachers.** Their work may not show to the very best advantage to careless observers, and their labors may not be valued as highly as are those of the teacher who holds the minds and wills of his scholars by absolute authority; but the future lives of the pupils will show the fruits of the better plan of education. (1872: 3T 133)

What we discover in the Gospels is that Jesus was a Master Teacher who specialized in creative and unorthodox methods. We could even call him “The Teacher of Unexpected Surprises.” Let’s explore what that means in the light of some intriguing examples from the Gospels. And we have to realize that this particular topic offers huge possibilities:

Four crucial questions:

1. What he said
 - a. People are more important than specific laws, even God-given laws
 - b. Equality of ethnic groups (Jew/Gentile), Equality of the sexes (male/female)
equality in economic status (slave/free)
2. How he said it: Statements, commands, stories
3. What he did (modeling)
4. How he did it: Quietly vs. publicly

Three crucial choices:

1. Challenge the prevailing culture
2. Affirm the good things in the culture, that which is enduring
3. Tightening the commitment to law, while loosing the grip of specific laws.

Let's look at some examples:

1. He touched me: the healed leper. In our day, touching a leper may not be good hygiene, but in Jesus' day, the prohibition was much more serious.

Luke 5:12-13 (NRSV): Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." 13 Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately the leprosy left him.

In short, Jesus was unafraid of contamination. In broad daylight, he healed the leper. He could, of course, have healed him from a distance. He could have just spoken a word. But Jesus touched him. The memory of that touch may have been more powerful than the healing itself.

2. Healing a wild and possessed foreigner. One day Jesus took his disciples into unclean territory. The "Decapolis" ("The Ten Cities") was a district on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. This was not Jewish country. Jesus went there to heal a demon-possessed wild man. When he sent the demons into a herd of swine, the people of the area were alarmed and begged Jesus to leave them. The healed man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus said no:

Mark 5:18-20 (NRSV): 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Jesus will return to Decapolis and we will glimpse the effect of the healed man's witness. But first Jesus visits another foreign territory, Tyre and Sidon. The story is recorded in Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30.

Blending the two accounts together yields this story: Jesus went to Tyre for rest and renewal, but didn't tell anyone. Somehow, a Canaanite woman with a demon-possessed daughter discovered him – but she had to overcome no less than five hurdles before she received her heart's desire. Normally we think of gentle Jesus, eager to help. But here the five hurdles make him seem so distant: Overcoming secrecy was the first; second, Jesus wouldn't say a word to her. A third hurdle was overcoming the disciples' hostility. "Send her away," they urged Jesus. A fourth hurdle was Jesus' seemingly cool attitude: "I am only sent to the lost sheep of Israel," he said. The final hurdle was Jesus' off-putting statement about not giving the children's food to the dogs. "But even the dogs get the crumbs from the master's table," this foreign woman urged.

With that, Jesus threw open the windows of heaven: "O woman, great is your faith," he said. And her daughter was healed.

What a teaching moment for Jesus as he nudged his male disciples toward a more receptive attitude toward foreigners and women! He started out so brusque and distant. But in the end, his intention became clear.

Coming back from the territory of Tyre and Sidon and his remarkable treatment of the Syro-Phoenician woman, Jesus took a detour to the Decapolis region, the very place where Jesus had commanded the healed demoniac to go back and tell what Jesus had done for him.

Mark 8:1-10 tells how a great crowd gathered to hear Jesus, some 4000 men plus women and children. As told in Mark 6:32-34, Jesus had already fed more than 5000 Jewish men; here he feeds more than 4000 Greeks who came from the Decapolis, the fruit of the man's witness.

The man had desperately wanted to go with Jesus. But Jesus refused his request, sending him back to be a witness. It worked. The people responded by the thousands.

On balance, as we ponder the wide variety ways that Jesus worked with people, it nearly defies description. He could be gentle, he could be firm, almost to the point of rudeness. As I was preparing for this broadcast, I tracked down this little sign that I saw near the trail on top of Mt. Howard in the Wallowa blues. Originally coming from a cable car entry in the little village of Chateau d'Oex in Switzerland, it carried the same message in three languages:

In English it said: "Please do not pick the flowers." In German it said: "It is forbidden to pick the flowers." In French it said: "Those who love the mountains leave them their flowers."

My first impulse was to put the German version at the bottom of a preferred list. But then I realized that a German would not see it that way at all! Similarly, in the methods and message of Jesus, he could be both tough and gentle, illustrating a truth that the Apostle Paul put into words: "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV).

We could look at a host of other examples, all illustrating different aspects of Jesus' ministry. The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4), the good Samaritan on the road who stopped to help a man who had been robbed (Luke 10), the stories of the lost coin, lost sheep and the lost boy in Luke 15. In short, Jesus knew how to be effective.

Theme: “Worship *in* Education”

Leading question: Why should worship belong to a discussion of Adventist Education?

In the secular world, the goal of education is to train one’s critical capabilities, to learn how and when to ask the right questions, and to nurture one’s sense of curiosity. That stands in sharp contrast with a typical view of worship where one loses oneself in the sense of the divine presence. Speaking of music and art, Albert Camus made this striking comment:

“Truly fertile Music, the only kind that will move us, that we truly appreciate, will be a Music conducive to Dream, which banishes all reason and analysis. One must not wish first to understand and then to feel. Art does not tolerate Reason.” – “Essay on Music” (1932), from “Music” [#9] in Robert Andrews, ed., *Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 611.

Music is such a contentious issue in worship circles because the true worshiper wants to be overwhelmed with a sense of God’s presence. And because we are all so different, different kinds of music move us quite differently, from all the way from adoration to disgust! As soon as one begins to think critically about music, the sense of God’s presence vanishes.

The author of this Study Guide (Alden Thompson) sees himself as a rather odd duck in “conservative” circles. As I said at the beginning of one of my books, “I’m a very devout person, but also very curious. Had I been at the burning bush where Moses met God, my shoes would have come off immediately. But then I would have been bursting with eagerness to ask a question: ‘How did you do that?’” – *Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White grew from fear to joy and helped me do it too* (PPPA 2005), 7.

In attempting to address the challenges facing Adventist education, this comment/question was included in Lesson #1: “In the university, one does not just learn information, but also grapples with facts, theories, and hypotheses. In the secular university one learns to *challenge* authority, not simply to acquiesce to authority. But the believer has to ask the question: Is it appropriate for believers to *challenge* that which has been vouchsafed to the community by ‘inspiration’?”

In this lesson, we will point to biblical material that can enable us to both worship and explore more wholeheartedly. And from an Adventist perspective, I want to cite Ellen White’s quotation about John Wycliffe. Found in her class work, *The Great Controversy*, this quotation fired my enthusiasm for education:

Wycliffe received a liberal education, and with him the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom. He was noted at college for his fervent piety as well as for his remarkable talents and sound scholarship. In his thirst for knowledge he sought to become acquainted with every branch of learning. He was educated in the scholastic philosophy, in the canons of the church, and in the civil law, especially that of his own country. In his after labors the value of this early

training was apparent. A thorough acquaintance with the speculative philosophy of his time enabled him to expose its errors; and by his study of national and ecclesiastical law he was prepared to engage in the great struggle for civil and religious liberty. While he could wield the weapons drawn from the word of God, he had acquired the intellectual discipline of the schools, and he understood the tactics of the schoolmen. The power of his genius and the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge commanded the respect of both friends and foes. His adherents saw with satisfaction that their champion stood foremost among the leading minds of the nation; and his enemies were prevented from casting contempt upon the cause of reform by exposing the ignorance or weakness of its supporter. – *The Great Controversy* (1888, 1911), 80.

Interestingly enough, the 1888 and 1911 versions are identical. The earlier parallel in *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 86 is less polished, but gives the same thrust. These are the only passages in Ellen White’s published writings where Wycliffe is so praised. It would seem that this quotation inspired me, but not many others. See the *Adventist Review* article at the end of this lesson, “Whatever Happened to John Wycliffe?”

We can focus on Daniel, chapters 1 and 3, the stories of Daniel and his three companions in the court of the pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar. These three are described in Daniel 1:4 along with their educational mandate:

Daniel 14 (NRSV): “. . . young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king’s palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”

No fear of education here, even pagan education. Could we call them the prototype for John Wycliffe? And in the case of the Judean captives, they were immersed in *pagan* literature. And they mastered the material – ten times better than anyone else. Here’s the verdict of Scripture:

Daniel 1:17 (NRSV): To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time that the king had set for them to be brought in, the palace master brought them into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, 19 and the king spoke with them. And among them all, no one was found to compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they were stationed in the king’s court. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Question: What are the major differences between our secularism and the paganism in Daniel?

Comment: Any view Scripture which expects to find “inerrant” knowledge in Scripture, is at risk from pure secularism. Nebuchadnezzar at least believed in a “god” or “gods.” Modern secularists do not. The Biblical world was a world full of believers. Our modern world is not.

Question: Does the Bible ever discuss, support or attack inerrancy?

Comment: The question never would have occurred to them. As far as the biblical perspective is concerned, it is a moral framework that provides stability. Within that framework, one could tell different stories with different supporting facts. But the really big issues never moved. In the New Testament we have four different Gospels, not one. In the Old Testament you have two different accounts of Israel’s history, one in Samuel/Kings, the other in Chronicles. There is no fear, nor horror in discovering the differences between the accounts. The differences are assumed to be essential and helpful.

Question: What else is important to “worship” and “education” in Scripture.?

Comment: Celebration of God’s goodness is crucial. Psalm 8 and Psalm 19 are two wonderful psalms that celebrate the goodness of God. Educators can revel in these psalms.

Question: Do believers in the Bible always celebrate? Don’t they ever have questions?

Comment: The psalmists are full of questions, even doubts. But they are believers’ doubts. Almost half the psalms are complaints. Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” was not just a cry from the cross. It was a real cry of a real person in the Old Testament! And Psalm 73 is one in which the psalmist admitted that his faith in Yahweh was at risk! The flow of the whole psalm is fascinating. It shows that one can ask the questions but still believe! The Bible gives us a safety net so that we can scream and shout, even rail at God – but still believe!

Psalm 73:1-28 (NRSV):

- 1 Truly God is good to the upright,
to those who are pure in heart.
- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
my steps had nearly slipped.
- 3 For I was envious of the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- 4 For they have no pain;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
- 5 They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not plagued like other people.
- 6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them like a garment.
- 7 Their eyes swell out with fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
- 8 They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.

9 They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues range over the earth.
10 Therefore the people turn and praise them,
and find no fault in them.
11 And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
12 Such are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.
13 All in vain I have kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
14 For all day long I have been plagued,
and am punished every morning.
15 If I had said, "I will talk on in this way,"
I would have been untrue to the circle of your children.
16 But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I perceived their end.
18 Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
19 How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!
20 They are like a dream when one awakes;
on awaking you despise their phantoms.
21 When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
22 I was stupid and ignorant;
I was like a brute beast toward you.
23 Nevertheless I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me with honor.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
27 Indeed, those who are far from you will perish;
you put an end to those who are false to you.
28 But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
to tell of all your works.

Question: Is there anything else that educators should remember when it comes to including "worship" in their work?

Comment: Gratitude is crucial. The English poet and artist, Daniel Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) is credited with saying, “The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.” For the believer, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is a wonderful gift worth celebrating. Not only did Jesus teach us about God, he was and is God and thus models “God” for humanity to see.

1 John 1:1-4 (NRSV): We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— 3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Finally, most importantly of all, God died for us. Philippians 2 tells it well.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NRSV):

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

“The Fear of Education, or Whatever Happened to John Wycliffe?”

Alden Thompson, *Adventist Review*, 16 February 1989, 14-15.

I’m not sure just when it happened, but somewhere in my youth the story of John Wycliffe kindled a fire in my bones. Scholarly and articulate, fearless and devout, he was a key forerunner of the reformation and the first to translate the Bible into English.

Adventists will recall Ellen White’s ringing praise of Wycliffe in *The Great Controversy*. Observing that he was “noted at college for his fervent piety as well as for his remarkable talents and sound scholarship,” she goes on to tell how his “thirst for knowledge” drove him to “become acquainted with every branch of learning” (GC, 80).

That’s potent medicine for a young Christian headed for college and intrigued by the interplay of books, ideas, and people. Ellen White’s characterization of Wycliffe still quickens my pulse. Here’s more from the same paragraph: “A thorough acquaintance with the speculative philosophy of his time enabled him to expose its errors; and by his study of national and ecclesiastical law he was prepared to engage in

the great struggle for civil and religious liberty. While he could wield the weapons drawn from the word of God, he had acquired the intellectual discipline of the schools, and he understood the tactics of the schoolmen. The power of his genius and the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge commanded the respect of both friends and foes. His adherents saw with satisfaction that their champion stood foremost among the leading minds of the nation; and his enemies were prevented from casting contempt upon the cause of reform by exposing the ignorance or weakness of its supporter.”

As the story is told in *The Great Controversy*, Wycliffe’s enemies got their revenge after his death by exhuming and publicly burning his bones, scattering the ashes on a nearby stream.

From stream, to river, to sea – the spread of those ashes symbolize the spread of the truths for which Wycliffe fought. The truths live on; so does Wycliffe’s story. But where are the champions to fight in his place?

That’s a sobering question for Adventists. What are we doing for our own talented young people in whose hearts the Lord has planted an insatiable “thirst for knowledge”?

Can we nurture and inspire young Wycliffes at our Adventist schools? I should hope so. I can’t think of a better reason for our existence. But I worry about our bright students, for many will have to cope with a certain intellectual and spiritual loneliness in the church.

In 1872, in her very first counsel on education, Ellen White observed that “close reasoners and logical thinkers are few” (3T 142). I fear that those “few” are always at risk in the church, viewed with suspicion because they know too much or think too much. And our schools are viewed as the culprits.

The logic goes something like this: Education teaches people to think. Thinking people ask questions. Asking questions destroys belief. If the church can’t believe, there’s no church....

I don’t know that I’ve heard it put quite that bluntly, but that’s the drift. The reasoning is flawed, for thinking and asking questions is the way we uncover error and affirm the truth. As Ellen White wrote during the 1888 era, “When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arise which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what” (5T 707).

But among American Adventists, the fear of thinking simply reflects the prevailing culture. A powerful anti-intellectual undercurrent tugs at our society in general; it may be even stronger in the conservative Christian circles to which Adventism belongs. It seems to me that we hear more than our share of rumors about “heresy” and “wickedness” at our colleges.

Given my own exposure to Ellen White’s exciting agenda, I have been perplexed by the lingering fear of education in the church. To be sure, many of us can point to some who have “lost” their faith while getting an education. And Ellen White spoke eloquently against the wrong kind of education. But it seems to me that the ideal – typified by John Wycliffe, for example – is something we should pursue with vigor and enthusiasm. Tragically, some of our brightest young minds are being caught in the cross-fire between their God-given love of learning and the fear of learning which they sense in the church.

There is a story worth noting, however, behind that “fear of learning” in Adventism. In 1931, when the church finally voted to allow its colleges to seek accreditation, the General Conference urged that advanced degrees *not* be listed in the college bulletins and that teachers *not* be addressed by the title of “doctor.” The report of the General Conference action in the *Review and Herald* (26 Nov. 1931) reflects a certain fear of education – as though education in itself were too “worldly.” Ellen White is quoted as saying, “Those who receive a valuable education, one that will be as enduring as eternity, will not be regarded as the world’s best educated men’ (RH, Nov. 10, 1891 [FE 169]).

What did she mean? Had she forgotten John Wycliffe? Not at all. The statement originated in 1891 when Battle Creek College was struggling to establish a truly Christian educational program. Can

you imagine a BA degree requiring seven years to complete, demanding mastery of both classical Latin and classical Greek (not biblical Greek), and including only two required religion courses during the entire seven years? That was the situation Ellen White addressed at Battle Creek College in 1891. Strong words were in order.

But Ellen White's unhappiness with the tedious classical education at Battle Creek College by no means meant that she favored ignorance over education. Indeed, at a time when cultural forces seemed to be pressing Christians to choose between education and unbelief, on the one hand, and ignorance and faith, on the other, Ellen White was affirming that education and faith belonged together. "Ignorance does not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ," she wrote. "The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian. Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently (*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, 361).

Ellen White's influence, however, was not sufficient to prevent Adventists from sharing the general distrust of education prevalent among other conservative Christians in the first half of the twentieth century. Although church leaders reluctantly agreed in 1931 to allow our colleges to seek accreditation, they remained uneasy and four years later actually reversed their position, arguing that the earlier decision had been a mistake. They voted to allow senior college accreditation only for Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University) and Pacific Union College. Ironically, accreditation had already been received by Pacific Union College (1933) and Walla Walla College (1935). EMC did not receive it until 1939.

The 1935 vote could not stem the tide; all the North American senior colleges (six at that time) sought and received accreditation. In following the path to accreditation, Adventist educators were strongly influenced by the counsel Ellen White had given at the founding of Loma Linda.

Speaking to the ability of the feeder institutions to prepare students for entrance into medical training, Ellen White had written: "The very best teaching talent should be secured, that our schools may be brought up to the proper standard. The youth, and those more advanced in years, who feel it their duty to fit themselves for work requiring the passing of certain legal tests, should be able to secure at our union conference training schools all that is essential for entrance into a medical college" (*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, 479).

Providing that kind of education will cost the church, and will cost dearly. But shouldn't our commitment cost us something? If we just wanted to be thrifty, we could close down all our schools, conferences and churches. Just think of all the money we could save!

That's foolishness, of course. We support Adventist schools and churches because of the good they can do. And to the extent that we allow God to touch our hearts, we are committed to the task He has given us.

Charting a course through the wilderness of modern culture is always a challenge. The flamboyant demons of secularism overshadow the more subtle but equally dangerous demons from the religious world – until they grab us from behind by surprise.

Something like that happened in the great accreditation debate. Adventists got taken for a ride on the pendulum that had been swinging wildly ever since the Renaissance and Reformation had broken up the highly structured medieval world. Freedom newly found led to open revolt against all authority. The Enlightenment proclaimed the individual as the final authority.

By the late nineteenth century, devout Christians were aghast at what the "thinking" person had done to God and religion. The American "Fundamentalist" movement in the early twentieth century was the reaction to "critical" attacks on evangelical faith.

The result? Scholarship died in conservative Christian circles. Kenneth Kantzer, former editor of *Christianity Today*, described his search for a seminary in the 1930s: "I sought an accredited school

committed to a consistent biblical theology, with a scholarly faculty, a large library, and a disciplined intellectual atmosphere. I couldn't find any (*Christianity Today*, February 4, 1983, p. 10).

Just as we are easily swept along today in the fun-and-frolic approach of contemporary American Christianity, so in the 1930s, we shared the general fear of education. Momentarily we forgot our true heritage and the ghosts of that memory-lapse still haunt us.

In 1891, in the context of a full Christian commitment, Ellen White wrote: "It is right that you should feel that you must climb to the highest round of the educational ladder. Philosophy and history are important studies." And she saw our day: "In the future there will be more pressing need of men and women of literary qualifications than there has been in the past" (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 192).

To potential medical students she wrote: "Let not intellectual slothfulness close up your path to greater knowledge. Learn to reflect as well as to study, that your minds may expand, strengthen, and develop. Never think that you have learned enough, and that you may now relax your efforts. The cultivated mind is the measure of the man" (*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, 475).

John Wycliffe would have liked that.

Theme: “Education and Redemption”

Leading question: How can “redemption” appeal to a secular age?

Key issues/puzzles:**For Believers:**

- A. Does God make our decisions for us? – predestinarian Calvinists
- B. Do we make decisions for God? – free-will Wesleyans and Arminians

For Secularists: No sense of need, no sense of the presence of God. Since secularists see little value and no authority in the text of Scripture, we will touch on this question at the end of our discussion.

Key biblical passages:

Isaiah 11:1-9

1 Corinthians 2

2 Tim. 3:14-17

Of the various titles/tasks for Jesus, the official study guide has focused on the idea of “Redemption.” That is one of the ideas with strong Old Testament roots. In the OT, KJV has chosen to translate the term *Goel* as Redeemer. A more functional title would be “the near kinsman who comes to the rescue of the family name, honor and property.” The biblical book of Ruth illustrates two of these functions for us: restoring the family name and property. The “honor” aspect comes much more clearly to mind in the cities of refuge scheme where it fell on the *Goel* to avenge the death of a family member. Numbers 35:16-28 gives a vivid narrative describing how that custom worked in ancient Israel.

In both testaments, a host of different words conveys the same idea behind redemption: a rescuing, a deliverance, often with a price paid (substitution). Exodus 13:11-16 tells about the redemption of the first born: Every male had to be “redeemed” by a substitute.

Question: Is the idea of redemption significant for both believers and non-believers?

Comment: Deeply-religious people are more likely to be drawn by the idea of redemption, a rescue that costs dearly. The New Testament is saturated with the idea of redemption through the blood of Christ. You are “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20); “we have redemption through his blood” (Eph. 1:7)

Question: Is the idea of redemption likely to speak more directly to predestinarian Calvinists or to free-will believers? Is the issue of whether God makes our decisions for us or whether we make our decisions for God – is that something that is caught or taught? Is it natural or cultivated?

Comment: The idea of “grace” is more strongly linked with Calvinistic thinking, though one can still have grace without the explicit “price paid.” In the parable of the prodigal son, grace is represented by the father’s robe – but no price was demanded.

Jesus as Teacher or Rabbi

A number of key passages in the official study guide focus on wisdom, learning, teaching. This effectively shifts the focus from redemption to learning/wisdom. Isaiah 11 is a key passage:

Isa 11:1-9, NRSV:

- 1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- 2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of *wisdom* and *understanding*,
the spirit of *counsel* and might,
the spirit of *knowledge* and the fear of the Lord.
- 3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

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

Question: How does the emphasis on wisdom and knowledge relate to God as the source of all wisdom?

Comment: Can we not revel in the wisdom that comes from God? In other words, worship wholeheartedly and explore/think wholeheartedly?

Wisdom of This World: 1 Corinthians 2

1 Cor. 2:1-16 (NRSV): When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in *lofty words or wisdom*. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with *plausible words of wisdom*, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on *human wisdom* but on the power of God.

6 Yet among the mature we do speak *wisdom*, though it is not a *wisdom* of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak *God's wisdom*, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by *human wisdom* but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

16 “For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

Question: How does the wisdom of Solomon relate to critique of some kinds of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2? Here is the biblical perspective on the wisest man that ever lived:

Solomon's Wisdom: 1 Kings 4:29-34

1 Kings 4:29-30 (NRSV): 29 God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, 30 so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 He was wiser than anyone else, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, children of Mahol; his fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. 32 He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. 33 He would speak of trees, from the

cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. 34 People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

Question: Why do some devout believers use 1 Corinthians 2 as a weapon in an attempt to establish an anti-intellectual agenda?

All Scripture Is Inspired: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NRSV): 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Question: If all scripture is “inspired,” does that also mean it is always factually accurate and always applicable?

Comment: Under the heading of this text, the official study guide includes a remarkable statement: “Some may say that not all the teaching material in the books of Moses applies in our time, and that is correct.” The example cited involves the counsel given in connection with Israel’s kings in Deut. 14:14-20. Could one go further and say that almost never do the passages in Scripture “apply” themselves?

Question: Where is a good place to start when dealing with a secularist who feels no need of “redemption?”

Theme: “The Church and Education”

Leading question: If for some, the church is for believers and the school for thinkers, where can we go in Scripture to provide a more balanced perspective?

Theodore Hesburgh, at one time President of Notre Dame University, said that “the university is a place where the (Catholic Church) does its thinking.” Would that mean that the saints assembled for worship are not to be in a thinking mode? The members of the church at Berea might have something to say about that. Acts 17:11 highlights the role of the members as both believers and explorers.

Acts 17:11 (NLT): And the people of Berea were more open-minded (KJV = “more noble”) than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

Generally it would not be a good idea to compare one church with another. But in this instance the book of Acts seems to have had good reasons for doing so. Acts 17:11 combines two ideas: eagerness and skepticism. Now skepticism may be too strong a word, but the point is that the Bereans were eager learners, willing, no more than just willing – they were enthusiastic. And they were skeptical enough not to simply accept everything they were told.

Let’s look at two additional passages that could help us recognize that believers don’t have to be in a university to be thoughtful and inquiring. These passages focus on the experiences of Nicodemus and the disciple Thomas:

Nicodemus: John 3:1-10 (NRSV): Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

Another of Jesus' high profile disciples was Joseph of Arimathea. While he is not known for raising questions like Nicodemus was, he still took his time to ponder his commitment to Jesus. He made a commitment at a crucial time, but he must have had his questions, just like Nicodemus did.

One of Jesus' twelve disciples, Thomas, was also known as someone who doubted. Here is part of the narrative from John 20, telling the story of Jesus' appearances to the disciples after his resurrection:

John 20:24-29 (NRSV): 24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Question: What do you think Jesus would tell a modern "doubting Thomas" about the advantages and disadvantages of doubting?

More Examples of Biblical Doubters

Abraham. This great man of faith was also a man of significant doubts. Four examples from his life make the point:

Abraham and Sarah in Egypt: Genesis 12:10-20. Abraham did not believe that God would protect Sarah from the advances of the pagan Pharaoh.

Abraham and Sarah and the prospect of an heir: Genesis 17:15-27; 18:9-15: Abraham believed that he and Sarah were both too old to have children. And when the heavenly messenger told them otherwise, they laughed.

Abraham questioned God's right to destroy the innocent and the wicked together at Sodom: Genesis 18:22-23: God did not condemn or even rebuke Abraham for his questions, but granted his request.

Moses: Exodus 32:11-14: This great man of faith was also a skeptic. He confronted God over God's stated plan to wipe out his disobedient people Israel. Moses told God that this would ruin his reputation with the Egyptians: "And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people" (NRSV).

Zechariah, John the Baptist's father (Luke 1): Because he did not believe the angelic messenger, Zechariah was struck dumb until the John was born.

Comment: God responded in a variety of ways to those who doubted God's plans. In the case of Abraham at Sodom and Moses at Mt. Sinai, the doubters won their way through. Sometimes there was a temporary judgment for doubting (Zechariah), or a gentle rebuke (Thomas, Nicodemus). But in no instance was there lasting punishment – in other words, there were no she-bears that came out of the woods to maul 42 boys, and unlike Uzzah, no one was struck dead.

Wisdom in the Old Testament: Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs

The classic KJV rendering of Isaiah 1:18, uses the word “reason,” but in the context of forgiveness of sin: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

What biblical scholars describe as “wisdom literature” focuses on the disciplined human intellect, the very stuff on which education thrives. So while there may be no specific passage of Scripture that bring education/schools and church together, the sacred text of the church gives us illustrations of what the disciplined human mind can and should do.

Wisdom literature is typically divided into two types: “Higher Wisdom” is more speculative and exploratory. In our Bible, the books of Job and Ecclesiastes represent this kind of wisdom. “Lower Wisdom” is more practical and conservative. The book of Proverbs is the best biblical example of lower wisdom.

Higher Wisdom

Of the two books of “higher wisdom,” the book of Ecclesiastes is more secular in tone. God is present, but more on the fringe. There is no prayer or praise anywhere in the book and Ecclesiastes 5:1 provides the framework within which the author operates:

Eccl. 5:1-2 (NRSV): Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil. 2 Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.

The book of Job is one of the masterpieces of world literature. In the book, Yahweh responds to the Accuser's challenge and allows him to put Job to the test. Job knows nothing about the challenge. After 29 chapters of vigorous dialogue between Job and his friends, God intervenes with 84 questions for Job, who has no answer. The book ends with Job's vindication, but no real explanation of the “test.”

Technically, Job presents an attempt at theodicy – the “justification of a good God in the presence of evil.” But its answer is complex. That's why church and education belong together.

Lower Wisdom

Twice in the early chapters of Proverbs, a familiar keynote is sounded:

Proverbs 1:7 (NRSV): The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

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

Many of the proverbs make no reference to God, “secular” to all appearances. But God can still play a part in ordinary affairs of life.

Question: How can believers make sure that their thoughts and actions are directed by the Spirit of God and not the spirit of the age?

Question: In our last lesson, we discussed the role of wisdom as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2. That chapter is quite relevant to this lesson as well:

1 Cor. 2:1-16 (NRSV): When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in *lofty words or wisdom*. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with *plausible words of wisdom*, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on *human wisdom* but on the power of God. 6 Yet among the mature we do speak *wisdom*, though it is not a *wisdom* of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak *God’s wisdom*, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by *human wisdom* but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. 14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny. 16 “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

Theme: “Education in Arts and Sciences”

Leading question: Why are the Arts and Sciences a focus of special attention in these lessons?

I must admit that I became increasingly intrigued as I began working on the study guide for this lesson. Our situation today with the “Arts and Sciences” is quite different from that of the biblical era. But we should address the question of why these two disciplines are a special focal point and also, what the Bible might have to say about them.

From my own perspective, I suspect that the reason why these disciplines have been singled out, is that they easily represent the secularist impulse that lurks so very near in educational institutions in our age. The issues are not the same for the arts as they are for the sciences, but there is a link between them.

In 1994 I presented a paper at both Loma Linda University and La Sierra University entitled, “The Future of Biblical Studies in Adventism.” It was part of a larger series organized by Paul Landa. In that paper I included this comment:

. . . I want to speak candidly to the more sophisticated members of my church, including my academic colleagues, those who rub shoulders with sophisticated people who do not believe. The dominance of science in our modern secular world has threatened to push God to the fringes for some, making it more difficult for them to believe. Interestingly enough, the natural scientists are statistically more inclined to believe than are their academic colleagues in either the humanities or the behavioral and social sciences, even though we often perceive the greatest threat to our world view as coming from the natural sciences. One survey reported that 20% of natural scientists do not believe in God, compared with 36% of humanities scholars, and 41% of the social scientists. [Cited in David A. Fraser and Tony Compolo, *Sociology Through the Eyes of Faith* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 23, from Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989, 146-47.) I suspect that the marvelous complexity of nature makes it more difficult for the natural scientist to believe that it all “just happened.”

Looking first at the arts, I would suggest that the secularizing impulse tempts the academic to look at the “Bible as Literature” rather than as “Sacred Text,” putting some distance between the traditional Judeo-Christian view of God and modern culture.

As for the sciences, devout conservatives have long seen the sciences as a threat to faith, or at least a potential threat. So let’s address each area in turn.

The Arts

Under this heading we can consider both visual and literary arts. The Bible itself is witness to the presence of “literary” art within the Judeo-Christian tradition. We don’t have to

diminish its sacred status when we see it as literature. The Bible itself never makes that distinction.

But because the shadow of the decalogue looms large, devout believers have sometimes resisted any visual representations in their worship: “any likeness” is seen as a clear prohibition.

Exodus 20:4 (KJV): Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

The Roman Catholic Church uses images; the Orthodox churches prohibit images but encourage the use of one-dimension icons. Some modern groups prohibit any kind of representation in worship services.

So let’s look at some examples from the Bible, starting with the “inspired” work of the craftsmen Bezelel and Oholiab.

The description of Bezelel’s “calling” is especially pointed:

Exod. 31:1-5 (NRSV): 1The Lord spoke to Moses: 2 See, I have called by name Bezelel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: 3 and I have filled him with divine spirit,[a] with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, 4 to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, 5 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft.

Question: Doesn’t this passage sound like a blank check for the arts – as long as one worships the divine rather than the created works of a human creator?

Sanctuary artistry: from Exodus:

- 25:18: two golden cherubim over the ark
- 25:33-35: almond blossoms on the candelstick
- 26:31: curtain in blue, purple, and crimson, with in-woven cherubim
- 26:36: blue, purple, and crimson screen, with embroidered needlework
- 27:16: blue, purple, and crimson court hangings with embroidered needlework
- 28:2: Aaron’s vestments for his “glorious adornment”
- 28:5: priestly vestments with gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen
- 28:15-20: breastplate with 12 precious stones
- 28:33: hem of Aaron’s robe: golden bells and pomegranates of blue, purple, crimson yarn
- 28:40: tunics, sashes, and headdresses for the “glorious adornment” of Aaron’s sons

Solomon’s temple artistry: from 1 Kings

- 6:23-28: two olivewood cherubim, overlaid with gold, over the ark
- 6:29, 32, 35: engraved carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers
- 7:13-51: Products of Hiram the Bronzworker
 - 7:18, 20,42: pomegranates
 - 7:19, 22, 26: lily-work and lilies
 - 7:25, 44: twelve oxen for the molten sea
 - 7:36, cherubim, lions, palm trees

Ezekiel's temple artistry: from Ezekiel 40-48

40:22, 26, 31, 34, 37 palm trees

41:18, 20,25: cherubim and palm trees

41:19: cherubim, palm, young lion

Summary: All three of the sanctuaries/temples which are described in the Old Testament are lavishly decorated with images from nature. And the robes of the priests were intentionally beautiful, for the “glorious adornment” of the priests. In short, God is the only One we should worship. But all the beauties of the earth are given for our enjoyment.

Question: What is the origin of the ascetic impulse in Israel? The old proverb: “If it looks good, tastes good, feels good, don’t touch it stands in stark contrast to the hedonistic proverb: “If it looks good, tastes good, feels good, give me more.” Scripture stands against both extremes. But how can we counter the extremes?

The Sciences

If one considers the Bible as a source of absolutely correct information, then any “discovery” which differs from what is in the Bible is deemed a threat to faith. The deeply-rooted impulse to “inerrancy” is the root of the problem. On the university campus, the books that are most quickly outdated are the science textbooks.

In some conservative circles it is argued that in the course of time, science will catch up with Bible. Adventist publications reflect that position. But we should first note how that approach is illustrated in popular Christian literature.

In the 1960s, Fleming H. Revell published *None of These Diseases* by S. I. McMillen, an evangelical physician and missionary to Africa. The blurb on the cover of the 1967 edition reads: “Science – 4000 years behind times!” A new edition (2000) by his grandson, David Stern, also an MD, is currently published by Baker, though without the striking cover blurb.

Citing *Papyrus Ebers*, a medical written in Egypt about 1552, BCE, McMillen mentions “cures” that we would find ridiculous: “To prevent the hair from turning gray, anoint it with the blood of a black calf which has been boiled in oil, or with the fat of a rattlesnake.” Or, apply “worms’ blood and asses’ dung” to embedded splinters.

This is McMillen’s comment:

“God proceeded to give Moses a number of commandments, which form part of our Bible today. Because these divinely given medical directions were altogether different from those in the *Papyrus Ebers*, God surely was not copying from the medical authorities of the day. Would Moses, trained in the royal postgraduate universities, have enough faith to accept the divine innovations without adding some of the things he had been taught? From the record we discover that Moses had so much faith in God’s regulations that he did not incorporate a single current medical misconception into the inspired instructions. If Moses had yielded to a natural inclination to add even a little of his modern university training, we would be reading such prescriptions as “the heel of an Abyssinian greyhound” or “the tooth of a donkey crusted in honey,” not to mention the drugs the leading

physicians were compounding out of the bacteria-laden dung of dogs, cats and flies.” (McMillen [1963], 10)

Most biblical laws can certainly be beneficial – but note the word “most.” When seeking to bring people to a higher level, God has to be highly selective. And McMillen does not refer to such laws as the test for an unfaithful wife in Numbers 5. The accused woman must drink holy water mixed with dust from the sanctuary floor. If she is guilty of unfaithfulness nothing will happen – but the accusing husband goes unpunished. If she is guilty, she will have a miscarriage.

In the 2000 edition of *None of These Diseases*, this statement appears: “Moses recorded hundreds of health regulations but not a single current medical misconception.” – Stern (2000), p. 11.

In Adventism, the popular apologist, Rene Noorbergen, author of *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* (1974), entitled his fourth chapter, “Science Catches Up with a Prophet.” His logic is the same as McMillen’s.

That logic has prevailed in more official Adventist circles, too. In 1963, for example, the Ellen G. White Estate published the three-volume *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*. At the end of volume 3, Appendix E presented a list of 21 items under the heading of “Helpful Points in the Interpretation and Use of the Ellen G. White Writings” pp 3211-16. The same principles are applied to the Bible. Items 6 and 7 are particularly noteworthy:

“6. Recognize the messages as timeless. The passage of the years has not invalidated the testimony counsels.”

“7. Recognize that the counsels are scientifically sound. While the books are not treatises on science as such, they are scientifically accurate. Work in the fields of nutrition and medicine provides increasing scientific support for points which we formerly accepted on the authority of the inspired message alone. Have no fear about believing some things not yet demonstrated in the laboratory or by findings in archaeology. In due time scientific discovery will undoubtedly confirm many more truths God has revealed by inspiration.”

Similarly, in the two-volume publication that came out of the 1952 Bible Conference, these statements appear.

F. D. Nichol: “Some in our ranks, while receding not a foot from the forward position of belief in all God’s Holy Word, have been a little panic-stricken at times as these ancient missiles have been hurled at them by Bible critics.... One of the major subjects of the Bible Conference will be archaeological evidence for Bible inspiration” (F. D. Nichol, *Review and Herald*, 8/28/52, in *Our Firm Foundation* 1:23 [1952]).

Siegfried Horn: “The foregoing survey shows that there is much archaeological evidence at our disposal that we can use in support of the authenticity of the Biblical text and the veracity of the historical parts of the Bible. This material used in the right way can give tremendous strength to our fundamentalist position of accepting the whole Bible as God’s inspired word. The years of study in the field have profoundly strengthened my confidence in the sure foundation on which our faith is built. We do not need to be afraid

to proclaim Bible truths that we cannot prove yet by outside sources, as long as we remain on that sure foundation that has never failed us yet, the infallible Word of God” (Siegfried Horn, “Recent Discoveries Confirm the Bible,” pp. 61-116 in *Our Firm Foundation* 1:116 [1952]).

Knowing that in his later writings Horn preferred to say that archeology “illuminates” the Bible, rather than “confirms” the Bible, I was astonished to discover this confirmation of a fundamentalist perspective. When I first read it, I rushed down the hall to the office of my archeologist colleague, Doug Clark, and blurted out my question: “When did Horn change his mind?” Without hesitation Clark responded: “When he discovered that Heshbon wasn’t where it was supposed to be.”

Horn did not announce from the house tops his change in perspective. He simply shifted his emphasis from “confirms” to “illuminates. And he did it quietly without fanfare.

Towards a Solution

1. Observational wisdom. The book of Proverbs may help us in our dilemma. The biblical passage that appears at the head of our studies for this quarter is Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (NRSV). And in Lesson 1 we discussed the nature the biblical wisdom books (Ecclesiastes, Job, and Proverbs). In Proverbs we have what could be called “observational” wisdom. The words in Proverbs did not come by way of “revelation” but by the observation of a devout Spirit-guided believer. Yet, according to Proverbs, all wisdom starts with the “fear of the Lord.” That should motivate us to see more clearly. And we shouldn’t have to deny what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears.

Perhaps the most helpful proverb when it comes to science is one which describes the process of observing: “Go to the ant, you lazybones: consider its ways, and be wise” – Prov. 6:6 (NRSV).

2. Differing accounts of the same event. Many believers worry about the effect of science on the early chapters of Genesis. We have no “observation” involved with creation, so it would have to come by way of “revelation.” And it may be that because we have no fewer than four creation accounts in Scripture (Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Psalm 104, Proverbs 8), Ellen White pointedly says that we know nothing about the “how” of creation:

“Just how God accomplished the work of creation He has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as His existence” *Patriarchs and Prophet* 113 [1890].

3. Non-science accounts in the Bible. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of “non-science” in the Bible is the narrative of Jacob’s genetic tricks. Can one make sheep and goats bear “striped, speckled, and spotted” young by laying peeled rods in front of breeding animals? (See Genesis 30:25-43). That has nothing at all to do with the modern science of genetics. But that doesn’t mean we have to deny the reality of the biblical narrative. By God’s grace we should be able to describe what we see in the Bible and in nature. And we can praise God for what we have seen. And we can seek wholeheartedly to do good science in our modern laboratories.

Theme: “The Christian and Work”

Leading question: What’s the agenda here: a lesson on “work” in a series on education?

Many of my students have told me that their parents have drilled it into them that they should get an education so that they don’t have to dig ditches the rest of their life. If one looks at the spectrum of “jobs” available in our world, one moves from the very concrete world of menial labor to the cerebral world of the PhD. The mental capacities of some limit limits their options. But using formal schooling as a norm can be terribly misleading. The life of Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, is a primary example. Raised by adoptive parents, he says that he learned more in his 4th grade year in school than in any other. His teacher bribed him (“I really want you to finish this workbook. I’ll give you \$5 to do it.”) – and she finally broke through and his mental activity flourished. He enrolled at Reed College, but dropped out after one semester. So his highest formal qualification was a high school diploma. He knew how to work; he knew how to study, but his formal qualifications in education were not strong.

For this lesson on “work,” we will simply go through some key biblical passages that will help us understand a biblical approach to “work” and “education.”

Genesis 3:19: Sin changes the nature of human work.

“By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

Exodus 31:1-5 (NRSV): God inspires those skilled people who work with their hands.

“The Lord spoke to Moses: 2 See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: 3 and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, 4 to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, 5 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. 6 Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you.”

The Psalmist Talks about the Work of Our Hands

Psalm 90:17 (NRSV):

“Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands –
O prosper the work of our hands!”

The Wise Man Talks about Work

Proverbs 6:9-11 (NRSV):

9 How long will you lie there, O lazybones?
When will you rise from your sleep?
10 A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
11 and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want, like an armed warrior.

Proverbs 10:4-5 (NRSV):

4 A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
5 A child who gathers in summer is prudent,
but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.

Proverbs 12:24 (NRSV):

The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the lazy will be put to forced labor.

Proverbs 16:26 (NRSV):

The appetite of workers works for them;
their hunger urges them on.

The “Preacher” Talks about Work.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 (NRSV): Work should be fun (Part 1).

“There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil.
This also, I saw, is from the hand of God.”

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 (NRSV): Work should be fun (Part 2).

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; 13 moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.”

Note: At our university graduation services several years ago, a student who was receiving a degree in our flying program, once spoke a great truth to told our student body: “If you enjoy what you are doing, then you never have to go to ‘work.’”

Ecclesiastes 9:10 (NRSV): Whatever we do deserves our full attention.

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

A New Testament Perspective on Work

An English poet, Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy (1883-1929) wrote a poem about the Carpenter:

“Close by the Heedless Worker’s Side”
From *The English Spirit*, p. 205

Close by the heedless worker’s side,
Still patient stands
The carpenter of Nazareth,
With pierced hands
Outstretched to plead unceasingly
His love’s demands;

Longing to pick the hammer up
And strike a blow;
Longing to feel his plane swing out,
Steady and slow,
The fragrant shavings falling down
Silent as snow.

Because this is my work, O Lord,
It must be thine;
Because it is a human task
It is divine.
Take me, and brand me with thy Cross,
Thy slave’s proud sign

Question: What was the work experience of Jesus’ disciples?

Comment: We know very little about the work qualifications of most of Jesus disciples. Here is the list of names as found in Matthew 10:2: “Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot.”

Of these, four were fishermen (Andrew and Peter, James and John) and Matthew was a tax collector. That’s all. Acts 4:13 puts it bluntly: “The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were and to learn that they were ordinary men of no education. They realized then that they had been companions of Jesus” (Good News Translation).

Yet Jesus also called Saul of Tarsus, a highly educated man. Thirteen of the 27 New Testament books have traditionally been attributed to Saul. He was highly educated, but still a tentmaker.

Acts 18:1-3 (NRSV). Paul, an evangelist, also worked with his hands.

1. After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together – by trade they were tentmakers.

Comment: Perhaps it was Paul's strong work ethic that led to his pointed comments about work in his second letter to the Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 (NRSV):

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

C. S. Lewis' poem, "In Praise of Solid People," contrasts the life of the ordinary working man with that of the highly educated person, a tension that seems to be built into the very fabric of our sinful world:

"In Praise of Solid People"

Visionary Christian, 6-8; *Spirits in Bondage*, 62-65.

Thank God that there are solid folk
Who water flowers and roll the lawn,
And sit and sew and talk and smoke,
And snore all through the summer dawn.

Who pass untroubled nights and days
Full-fed and sleepily content,
Rejoicing in each other's praise,
Respectable and innocent.

Who feel the things that all men feel,
And think in well-worn grooves of thought,
Whose honest spirits never reel
Before man's mystery, overwrought.

Yet not unfaithful nor unkind,
with work-day virtues surely staid,
Theirs is the sane and humble mind,
And full affections undismayed.

O happy people! I have seen
No verse yet written in your praise,
And, truth to tell, the time has been
I would have scorned your easy ways.

But now thro' weariness and strife
I learn your worthiness indeed,
The world is better for such life
As stout, suburban people lead.

Too often have I sat alone
When the wet night falls heavily,
And fretting winds around me moan,
And homeless longing vexes me

For lore that I shall never know,
And visions none can hope to see,
Till brooding works upon me so
A childish fear steals over me.

I look around the empty room,
The clock still ticking in its place,
And all else silent as the tomb,
Till suddenly, I think, a face

Grows from the darkness just beside.
I turn, and lo! it fades away,
And soon another phantom tide
Of shifting dreams begins to play,

And dusky galleys past me sail,
Full freighted on a faerie sea;
I hear the silken merchants hail
Across the ringing waves to me

– Then suddenly, again, the room,
Familiar books about me piled,
And I alone amid the gloom,
By one more mocking dream beguiled.

And still no nearer to the Light,
And still no further from myself,
Alone and lost in clinging night
– (The clock's still ticking on the shelf).

Then do I envy solid folk
Who sit of evenings by the fire,
After their work and doze and smoke,
And are not fretted by desire.

Theme: “Sabbath: Experiencing and Living the Character of God”

Leading question: How does one experience the Sabbath as a gift instead of a test?

I am intrigued by the fact that a lesson on “Sabbath” is included in this series on “Education.” Maybe because university life is so intense that the editor decided that it would be good to focus on the blessing of the sabbath. I recall a story told me by a colleague in the English Department at Walla Walla University.

When she was in graduate school she had been with a group of fellow graduate students on Friday afternoon. As sundown approached, she began to put her books away. Her colleagues were puzzled and intrigued? Why? They asked. “It’s my religion,” she said. I have been given a 24-hour relief from constant work. It is a day of rest, a Sabbath, to use the biblical word.”

They were intrigued, amazed, and a bit envious!

I almost hear an echo of Moses’ comment about the blessing of God’s law in general:

Deut. 4:5-8 (NRSV): See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. 6 You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” 7 For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? 8 And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

Israel’s neighbors were impressed by the laws had given to his people. So, too, if we can show that the Sabbath is a blessing, not just a test, others will be attracted by what they see. But when I see an email banner announcement declaring, “The Sabbath Is Not Important,” I know that it reflects an experience with the Sabbath as test. I don’t see how the Sabbath can be experienced as a gift when it is first of all a test.

So in this lesson, we will review some highlights about the Sabbath that can help us in experiencing and living the character of God and a gracious and grace-full creator who wants to see his children rejoice in his gifts

1. A Sabbath blessing and an example, but no Sabbath command:

Gen. 2:1-3 (NRSV): Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Question: When God introduces the Sabbath in Genesis 2, there is no command, only the divine blessing and the divine example. How might that shape our understanding of the Sabbath?

2 The Manna: Rediscovering the Sabbath.

Exodus 16:27-30 (NRSV): 27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. 28 The Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? 29 See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

Question: How did the miracle of the Sabbath prepare the people for the Sinai decalogue?

3. Two versions of the Sinai Decalogue: Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Exodus 20:8-11 (NRSV): 8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Deut. 5:12-15 (NRSV): 12 Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 14 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Question: What are the major differences between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the law and what is the significance of those differences?

Comment: The Exodus version of the Decalogue celebrates creation. The Deuteronomy version celebrates redemption from slavery. One line in Deuteronomy is particularly noteworthy: “that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.” One-time British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan is reputed to have said that the Deuteronomic law is “the first and greatest worker protection act in History.” [Chris Wright, “Deuteronomic Depression,” *Themelios* 19:2 (January 1994, p. 3)]

4. Calling the Sabbath a Delight.

Isaiah 58:13-14 (NRSV):

13 If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;

if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
14 then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Question: Does this passage in Isaiah tell us *how* to make the Sabbath a delight? The earlier verses in the chapter call Israel to social justice. Is that part of the delight?

5. The Sabbath was made for human beings.

Mark 2: 27-28 (NRSV) 27 Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

Question: Jesus’ attitude toward the Sabbath was focused more on human need than on human rules on how to keep the Sabbath. What benefits do “rules” have in keeping the Sabbath?

A radical suggestion: A New Testament scholar once noted to me that the phrase “son of man” is simply the ordinary Aramaic word for man/human being. Therefore, the line could be translated: “the human being is lord of the Sabbath.” That interpretation seems to be lurking in Jesus’ attitude. But of the 51 English translations found on Bible Gateway, none is brave enough to give that translation. The Common English Bible may be approaching that position with its translation: “This is why the Human One is lord even over the Sabbath.”

6. The Sabbath as a time for community.

The official study guide brings together several passages from the book of Acts that show how the apostles worshiped with the believers on Sabbath (Acts 13:14-45; Acts 16:13-14; Acts 17:1-5; Acts 18:4).

Question: In our modern secular world, how can the Sabbath be made a time for community?

The article which follows, explores further the tension between Sabbath as test and Sabbath as gift:

The Sabbath and Your Neighbor

By Alden Thompson (*Adventist Today*, 25.4, 2017.10.20).

When asked about the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus named two: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40, NRSV).

Surprisingly, in Jesus’ more succinct summary of his message, he focused on the second command, ignoring the first: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12). Paul does the same: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14). In a world where the human (secular) and the divine (sacred) are so easily separated, Jesus begins to show us how to bring the two together. In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46), for example, even the saintly sheep are surprised when the king links their fate to kindly actions done for human beings, not to service done directly for God.

In 1898, Ellen White makes the unifying model even more explicit: “Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you’ (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts.” [Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 641. According to the EGW Writings database, only two of her later compilations cite these striking lines: *God’s Amazing Grace* (1973) and *Our Father Cares* (1991).]

Remarkably, in her early years, Ellen White saw the secular and the sacred as separate and competing forces. That the transition was complete by 1898 is indicated by her two versions of Jesus’ cryptic response to his mother at the wedding at Cana, when he said, “O woman, what have you to do with me?” (John 2:4, RSV):

1877: “In rebuking his mother, Jesus also rebuked a large class who have an idolatrous love for their family, and allow the ties of relationship to draw them from the service of God. Human love is a sacred attribute; but should not be allowed to mar our religious experience, or draw our hearts from God.” [White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 2, (Battle Creek, MI: SDA Pub. Assoc., 1877), p. 101.]

1898: “This answer, abrupt as it seems to us, expressed no coldness or discourtesy. The Saviour’s form of address to His mother was in accordance with Oriental custom. It was used toward persons to whom it was desired to show respect.” [*The Desire of Ages*, p. 146.]

Are both statements “inspired”? Partial answers come from Ellen White herself. First, she affirmed that God’s messengers were inspired, not their words:

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

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired.” [Ms 24, 1886, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 21.]

Second, she said that the Bible writers “differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments” [White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. vi.] —yes, even in “spiritual endowments”! Even Paul was puzzled by the differing needs at Corinth. “What would you prefer?” he asked. “Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21).

All of that is prelude to the topic of this column: how to share the Sabbath with our neighbors. But wait: Is the Sabbath a gift or a test? Should we blaze a path with a “stick” or “with love in a spirit of gentleness”? Let’s look at several partial answers.

From Stick to the Spirit of Gentleness: Some Patterns. Though I often puzzle over the many ways that Scripture and daily life illustrate the tension between the stick and gentle love, several overarching patterns seem clear:

1. *From fallen Adam to perfect Jesus.* Scripture suggests that the entry of sin thoroughly twisted human understanding of authority. From a gentle God walking in the garden to a bloodthirsty ogre demanding the firstborn son is an astonishing change. But God does not leave it at that. He daringly meets sinners on their own ground, risking all manner of misunderstandings to lead them back to him. It is a pilgrimage from the fear of God’s power to joy in his reassuring love. But it takes time.

2. *From the terrors of Sinai, and a dangerous God who kills, to the splendors of Golgotha and a still-dangerous God who dies.* This pattern is a subset of the first, but it illustrates more specifically how God will use fear as a stepping stone to a life without fear. God so terrified Israel that the people begged Moses for relief: “If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die” (Deut. 5:28). But God was pleased with their fear, telling Moses: “They are right in all that they have spoken. If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever!” (verses 28-29). A law written on the heart? Not yet. But it was a first step. Reaching the goal would take time.

3. *From 2-year-old defiance to adult confidence.* Human growth and development reaches the ideal when the good is fully internalized, becoming as natural as walking, swimming, or riding a bike. But it takes time. And parents, like God, will use a stick as well as gentle love—and everything in between—to make it happen.

4. *From fear and sectarian belligerence to gentle love.* If you are afraid of God, you will share that fear when you share your faith. In Ellen White’s early years, she had feared that God could not govern the world without the threat of an eternal hell. Later she wrote about the day when her mother began studying the possibility that the soul was mortal: “Why, mother!” cried I, in astonishment, “this is strange talk for you! If you believe this strange theory, do not let any one know of it; for I fear that sinners would gather security from this belief, and never desire to seek the Lord.” [White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1968), p. 39. The first edition of the *Testimonies* to include Ellen White’s autobiography was published in 1885, but the memory of her conversation with her mother first appeared in *The Signs of the Times*, March 9, 1876.]

When I first read that statement, I was startled because I was already familiar with her comments on hell in *The Great Controversy*: “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.”
[White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 525.]

Over time, God gradually led Ellen White to complete the 180-degree turn, from fearing that God could not be God without hell to seeing hell as one of Satan’s most deadly weapons. The fact that Ellen White’s Adventism was a confrontational, countercultural movement – sociologists call it a sect – no doubt helped shape her life experience. From countercultural roots, sectarian movements often become culture-accepting, sometimes losing their original fiery identity completely. Because that possibility often frightens devout conservatives, they shy away from “change” and “diversity.”

We need to make peace with both change and diversity so that we can grasp the Sabbath as a gift we share with joy, rather than a test that comes with threats and warnings.

The Sabbath: From Strident Warning to Gentle Gift. Recognizing the biblical pattern that moves from fear to joy can help us make peace with a similar pattern in the writings and experience of Ellen White. With specific reference to the Sabbath, here are two of her quotations, a strident one from 1861 and a gentle one from 1887:

1861: “The name Seventh-day Adventist is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world. Here is the line of distinction between the worshipers of God and those who worship the beast and receive his mark. The great conflict is between the commandments of God and the requirements of the beast. It is because the saints are keeping all ten of the commandments that the dragon makes war upon them. ...

“The name Seventh-day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind. Like an arrow from the Lord’s quiver, it will wound the transgressor of God’s law, and will lead to repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

[White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 223-224.]

1887: “In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus.”

[White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), p. 119.]

While I cringe at some of the methods that have been (and at times still are) used for sharing the Sabbath, I pray that the Lord will bless those methods to his glory and continue to lead us toward the non-confrontational ideal. I take comfort in the fact that the Bible is full of examples where God used rigorous methods to nudge his people. Paul said, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

In the light of God’s revelation in Christ, we can see that in a healthy marriage relationship, words like “test,” “requirement,” “command,” and “demand” never come to mind. That’s the goal for our relationship with God, too. Jeremiah’s description of the new covenant says it all: “No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34).

Still, sin has so distorted our thinking that these “testing” words easily slip in where they don’t really belong. Originally it was not so. Ellen White describes how “law” was a foreign concept in heaven until Lucifer rebelled: “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.” [White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1896), p. 109.]

Is the Sabbath a test? Of course – just as every aspect of every relationship in life is a “test.” But we can be oblivious to the test. “Demand,” “command,” and “test” all vanish when our lives are shaped by the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). And when Paul adds, “There is no law against such things,” we could be seriously playful and remind him that there is no law *in favor of* such things, either, for law has become “something unthought of,” to borrow Ellen White’s phrase. Our keeping and sharing of the Sabbath could thrive in such a world.

If Adventism is seen to be embodied by those strident defenders of an attack-oriented community, then the experience of buoyant, non-Adventist Christians can look very attractive indeed. In 1891 Ellen White referred to those who are “denunciatory, resentful, exacting” in their treatment of others as being called of God to be “more kind, more loving and lovable, less critical and suspicious.” [White, “The Spirit of a Christian,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 24, 1891.] She had become convinced that the “strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.” [White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), p. 470.]

I suspect that many former Adventists, longing for the assurance of God’s love, have abandoned the beautiful gift of the Sabbath because it felt like a test rather than a gift. Compassion, love, and assurance are all at risk in the face of constant testing. So let’s make the transition that Ellen White herself made and share the Sabbath with our neighbors as a gift from God. By his grace, the idea of “test” will never even come to mind.

Theme: “Heaven, Education, and Eternal Learning.

Leading question: The hope of restoration is a vibrant one in the New Testament, but what does that hope look like in the Old?

The official studyguide does not address the differences between the Old Testament hope and that of the New Testament. In this lesson, we will look first at the New Testament hope, its points of contact with the Old, and explore ways of bringing the two together:

Key New Testament Passages:

John 3:16 (NRSV): 16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

John 14:1-3 (NRSV): “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2 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.

Acts 1:9-11 (NRSV): 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 Thess 4:16-18 (NRSV): 16 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. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Revelation 21:1-4 (NRSV): 21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”

Revelation 22:1-5 (NRSV): Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Points of Contact with Old Testament

Isaiah 11:1-9 (NRSV):

- 1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- 2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
- 3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

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

Isaiah 65:18-25 (NRSV):

- 18 I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
 or come to mind.
 18 But be glad and rejoice forever
 in what I am creating;
 for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
 and its people as a delight.
 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
 and delight in my people;
 no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
 or the cry of distress.
 20 No more shall there be in it
 an infant that lives but a few days,
 or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
 for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
 and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
 they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
 22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
 they shall not plant and another eat;
 for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
 and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
 23 They shall not labor in vain,
 or bear children for calamity;
 for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
 and their descendants as well.
 24 Before they call I will answer,
 while they are yet speaking I will hear.
 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
 the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
 but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
 They shall not hurt or destroy
 on all my holy mountain,

Isaiah 66:22-24 (NRSV)

For as the new heavens and the new earth,
 which I will make,
 shall remain before me, says the Lord;
 so shall your descendants and your name remain.
 23 From new moon to new moon,
 and from sabbath to sabbath,
 all flesh shall come to worship before me,
 says the Lord.

Building a Bridge Between the Testaments

1. Both Testaments affirm restoration; but the OT sounds more like a restoration of this world, while the NT sounds more “other-worldly,” i.e. more like “heaven.”

2. The Old Testament looks more to a corporate restoration; New Testament looks more to individual salvation.

3. Abraham and Job did not look forward to personal resurrection: they were gathered to their people (in Sheol, the abode of the dead)

Gen. 25:8 (NRSV): “Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.”

Job 42:17 (NRSV): “And Job died, old and full of days”

Note: The Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament (LXX), produced during the intertestamental period, added a phrase at the end of Job: “And he will live again, with those whom the Lord raises up.” That confirms the position of the book of Daniel, which gives the one clear reference to personal resurrection in the OT

Daniel 12:1-2 (NRSV): 12 “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Note: While the resurrection described in Daniel 12 is personal, it is not yet universal as it is in the New Testament.

John 5:28-29 (NRSV): Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

In sum, both Testaments affirm the idea of restoration, but the OT is more corporate, the NT more individualistic; and the OT is more this worldly, the NT more otherworldly. But even the otherworldly is still described in language of this world.

A Final Commentary from the pen of Ellen White, the closing paragraphs from the last chapter of *The Great Controversy* (1911)

“And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise. {GC 678.1}

"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power,

be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Revelation 5:13.
{GC 678.2}

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love. {GC 678.3}