They that wait
Aug 13, 2015 10:05 pm | Wendy Williams

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No place for emotionalism
Aug 11, 2015 06:52 am | Mark Sheffield

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How many sermons?
Aug 09, 2015 01:19 pm | Keith Boyce
How many sermons will it take us to humbly submit to the Lord? How many sermons will it take us before we allow Him to be Sovereign of our life? I believe this is a question each one of us need to ask ourselves.

Where are my constitutional rights in Jesus?

Aug 07, 2015 09:37 am | Val Loumber

We are often proud of our country because of the liberties it offers. These liberties are mainly associated with the rights and protections incorporated by or read into the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution.

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A couple weeks ago I tried “greeting” for the first time at my church. I enjoyed interacting with many of the members and hearing about how their weeks had gone. But after replying “fine, how are you?” and “I can’t complain,” they walked over to their friends and did just that.

I eavesdropped as one individual told their woes and another responded with greater ones till the conversation became a competition of suffering.

Person one: “My back has been giving tremendous trouble this week.”

Person two: “Oh yeah? My corns are rubbing something terrible.”

Person one: “My arthritis just won’t let me rest today.”

Person two: “My arthritis won’t let me rest any day, so take that!”

Person one: “I forgot where I put my keys and had to look for them for thirty minutes today before coming to church.”

Person two: “Yeah, well, I have a hang nail that snagged my last good pair of thermal underwear this morning, so now I’m going to freeze through church!”

Person one then shakes his head in defeat and silence with no contesting or argument.

Not wanting to imagine what thermal underwear is exactly, I assumed person two won that morning’s round and attended to greeting other stragglers entering the church. In that moment I knew that if I want to continue being a greeter, I must suffer just a bit more and be willing to tell people all about it. So here it goes.

I get migraines. In case you are confusing these with mere headaches and are ready to dismiss my qualifications for championship over “church sob session,” let me elaborate.

When I wake up wondering if someone is using my head as a squeeze toy, I know a migraine is coming and I know I don’t want it. I try to deny its grip over me and tough out the pain. I dread the fact that no matter what I do, it is just going to be a bad day. I know I need medicine and relief, but despite my prayers for removal, the migraine (like a dragon against a knight) wins.

Within an hour of realizing the trouble I’m in, you’ll find me, incapacitated, and lying on the couch in agony. If you happen by chance to find me in this condition, I strongly recommend leaving the light switch in the off position, walking on egg shells, and (as my poor brother has learned) never, ever, dropping a pin! My frustration is at dangerously high levels in this stage, and I wouldn’t want anyone to get hurt!

Somewhere in between yelling at my brother for whispering too loud and frequent pilgrimages to kneel before the porcelain god, I ask my mother to drive me to the doctor. There I stumble in appearing to be only a step ahead of grim death. My hair is partially ripped out of a sloppy pony-tail, and my pajamas are usually accented by a clashing pair of pink and red slippers as I slouch down in a waiting chair that is as pale white as my face.

I hate the waiting room. It seems that everyone, including those who look perfectly well get chosen before me. I want to scream in my jealousy, “You’re not bleeding; you’re not struggling to see straight, so sit down! It’s my turn! I want to see the doctor now!”
I can't tolerate that people are trying to occupy this same space while their health trials are so obviously insignificant compared to mine.

Soon, but not soon enough for my liking, I am guided to a smaller waiting room for a few more minutes of solidifying torture without end before the doctor walks in.

Upon entry, my doctor takes one glance at me and instructs me to lie down.

I obey without protest and begin waving my hand in conduction to his routine lecture as he tries to teach me the merits of taking my medicine before I am unable to swallow without throwing-up.

He knows my habits well and calls a nurse to shove a dissolvable tablet under my tongue. He then anxiously stands before me, waiting for the transfiguration of his "magic wand cure" to take hold and studies my face for signs of relief.

“How do you feel?”

“It’s only been two seconds,” I groan.

“I want you to stay here thirty minutes. The meds should take affect by then.”

I nod in submissive agreement and he leaves me alone with the hope of soon feeling well again. Half an hour later, I am no better. He frowns and stares down at his chart.

“I can’t give you anything stronger here. Do you want me to call ahead to the emergency room for you?”

This is usually the part where I give him an evil stare over the top of my glasses and look back at him in disgust. He knows better than to suggest such a thing! He understands my feelings about hospitals. He knows my pain is great before I trust his medical power, but that doesn’t mean I want to see the inside of a hospital any time soon!

“Just bring me a baseball bat and waiver, I’ll sign on the dotted line,” I pout.

“What about I shoot-ya-up with something that will make you sleep instead?”

By this time I am incredibly weary of waiting for relief, relief that has not come. Life just seems hopeless and disappointing now.

“Ok.” I shrug my shoulders and flop back down on his table.

Less than twenty minutes later the world swirls around me, and though pain is still present, I surrender to sweet sleep. Finally, relief from suffering!

There’s my story. Do I win?

We are all waiting and suffering through something. We all spend some portion of our life in an uncomfortable “waiting room” for something we need desperately and if you personally haven’t yet just wait, it will happen. Jesus promises that in this world we will have tribulation (John 16:33).

When we are being pinched by the pain of waiting, how do we react?

There are three stages of waiting. The first is the “uh, oh” stage in which we realize something bad has just happened and we need something good from the power of God to change it (preferably immediately).

The second stage is anger and frustration mixed with a time of intense soul searching and dialogue with God.

The third is surrender to the wait. We shouldn’t despair or give up, but we must acknowledge that God has not
forgotten us and we are resting in his hands.

I definitely question why I even get and have to go through my migraines. I don’t understand why I have to suffer and wait through so much misery.

Though I can use my migraines to at least win the “church sob session,” I realize that people like Job would just laugh at my idea of a suffering and a “long” wait.

Job woke up one day and discovered his entire life was being used as the devil’s squeeze toy. He lost everything, even his health. Migraines, back aches and bunions couldn’t come close to the excruciating physical and mental suffering he underwent. He was a great guy, who didn’t deserve to suffer. He had faith in God’s power to heal and fix all his problems, but God refused to wave his magic wand and instantly re-instate him. As his strength waned, he became increasingly frustrated and angry with God (Job 7:16-21).

If you’ve ever questioned or been angry with God for your suffering you can relate I’m sure.

I personally believe it’s ok to voice frustrations and resentment to God for not fixing physical and mental aches we face in our lives. I even think it’s perfectly fine to be angry with God. He’s a big boy; he can handle it. Sometimes I get in his face to tell him about it.

I jump into my little convertible, begin blasting music, and munch on potato chips as I drive all the way up mount Calvary. There I find Jesus hanging on a cross. He is bloody, naked, shamed, carrying the guilt of the world, pierced, beaten, dirty, and left uncomforated. I look in his anguished eyes and tell him that my lot in this world is worse than any other and I no longer want to wait for him to fix it. He has wasted his time dying for me. I want relief now, and I want to be compensated for my time spent waiting for relief and rewarded accordingly. I’m not leaving till I’m done putting him in his place and get an answer as to what I ever did to deserve such hardship!

Job didn’t have a car to get up to Calvary. Jesus had not revealed his plan yet. That didn’t stop him from wanting to question God and God granted him an up close audience.

The Bible says that in the midst of the storm God answered Job. “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man: I will question you, and you shall answer me.”

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!” (Job 38:1-5NIV).

Job asked for a meeting with God and he got it. But God turned the table back on Job. He put him in his place.

“You want to question me? You want to be angry? You think you shouldn’t suffer the consequences of sin like everyone else? You think you’ve got all the answers? Did you create you? Do you hold all things in your hands? Are you in control? So you think you’ve got a plan huh? Ok, go ahead, make my day, I’d love to hear it!”

It didn’t take long for Job to get the point. In the midst of the storm and his suffering he surrendered to God’s hand and responds:

I know that you can do all things: no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my council?’ Surely I spoke of thinks I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said ‘Listen now and I will speak: I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. There I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:1-6 NIV)

Surrendering to the wait God has placed before you is not a deficit to God. Often there is no immediate gratification for our trials and suffering, yet God remembers each one like a banker collects interest, and stores them up for us. He sees the big picture. He is still in ultimate control. By the way, the devil had to actually ask God before he could even touch Job with any suffering.
Our wait is merely a storm God uses to draw near us. He will sustain us with strength for today. We may not believe it will be enough for the week, but in the same way a bodily pain must be handled from minute to minute, so is his power. The way in which we handle our wait is a testimony of his plan of salvation. He has held all things together by his cross and will continue to do so in each life.

All we need to know about Job’s outcome is in the first sentence of Job 42:12 (NIV). The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first. This means that we too shall be rewarded not equal to what we had before, but more than we deserve.

Our complaints and trials of every size are not being ignored by God. Our wait is not in vain. The beautiful words of Isaiah 30:27-31 (NIV) say:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?” Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator to the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

None of us can win the “suffering sob competition” because trials will continue as long as the earth endures. We can challenge God to the competition, but he will always win. If in this knowledge you still find yourself wanting to wrestle with God, my only advice is that you watch out for his arms.

Jesus’ outstretched arms upon the cross are the same that offer us the big plan of salvation in the midst of the storm. They are filled with the strength he imparts to us. They are the same that will be raised in victory over earth’s sob session. They are the same that will open wide the gates of heaven and reward “they that wait.”
No place for emotionalism

Mark Sheffield
August 11, 2015

While the issue of women's ordination has consumed a lot of committee time in the last number of decades, it virtually roared into prominence in the months leading up to the General Conference in San Antonio. I had not paid much attention over the years. However, when I found myself caught up in the general fever and began to study the matter in earnest, I was surprised by what I observed.

First of all, I was disturbed to observe that many Adventists use their emotions to make spiritual decisions. Secondly, I observed that many resorted to manipulative means to convince others to view women's ordination through the same lenses as they. I also observed that there were many on both sides of the issue who chose to present arguments based on careful study of the Bible. Good people can, of course, disagree about biblical interpretation.

**THOSE WHO BUILD THEIR BELIEFS ON CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS START WITH A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE**

I observed that those who voiced a stand against women's ordination were speaking against a strong cultural tide. Sadly, people who build their beliefs on cultural (and therefore secular) assumptions start with a distinct advantage in any argument because their opinions are readily digested and deemed acceptable by those who are regularly exposed to the predominant cultural thinking of the day. Those who do not present the Bible as the primary source of direction are actually secularists in sheep's clothing.

Let me illustrate my point about the dangers of emotionalism. Both before and after the General Conference in San Antonio, we frequently heard accounts of the deep emotional pain caused by the discussion of women's ordination. Undeniably, though the emotions are real, their use is dangerous. Sentimentalism was predominant and promoted the fear that life after a no vote could not go on. In fact, all this weeping reminded me of the crying child who keeps one eye on his mother. We all recognize that children sometimes cry for effect and many children discover that it works. However, the "no" vote did not change anything in the church, except the feelings of many who were in favor of women's ordination. In many cases, their emotions ran the gamut from hurt to anger and the result has been that many of those who are in favor of women's ordination are more aggrieved than ever.

**EMOTIONALISM DISTORTS OUR VIEW OF THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH US**

Sadly, those who based their view of women's ordination on a cultural or emotional foundation often view those who voted "no" as people who oppose a fair and just view of women in ministry. When this happens, a rational approach to study is removed in favor of an emotional accusation based on a straw man argument and in some cases, those sincere believers who base their position on the scriptures are viewed as a deadly menace.

Manipulative emotionalism extended itself in an [interview](http://spectrummagazine.org) published at SpectrumMagazine.org August 5, 2015. Charles Scriven interviewed a highly regarded Adventist scientist by the name of Alvin Kwiram, a graduate of the California Institute of Technology and a former faculty member of Harvard and the University of Washington.

The interview appears to be a straightforward discussion of science and faith, but the underlying argument is based on pure emotionalism. According to Kwiram, Adventist scientists are suffering deeply from an oppressive church. Adventist scientists are being "vilified" at the hands of "people with limited qualifications" and "little or no understanding." Kwiram goes on to compare the current situation of many Adventist scientists to Galileo's persecution by the Catholic Church.
With all due respect to the scientific credentials of Kwiram, this claim is simply false. Howling mobs of ignorant peasants are not attacking Adventist scientists, many who believe in theistic evolution. Galileo’s persecution at the hands of the Catholic Church bears no relationship whatsoever to the case of modern Adventist scientists. In fact, Seventh-day Adventists embrace an intellectually informed and logical response to modern philosophies such as Darwinism and the consequent tendency to worship nature.

Adventist Today published an article called “Tenderly Caring for Our Wounded.” Allan Martin, a youth pastor in Arlington, Texas, explains that the entire General Conference 2015 in San Antonio was an act of war against the youth. Martin’s solution suggests spiritual triage based on emotion. If necessary, he writes, pastors should apologize for the actions of the church. Pastors should “actively listen and empathize. Initially, it is likely most important to hear their heart and allow them to voice their emotions and reactions.”

He goes on to say that pastors should offer additional resources to support those who have been left traumatized and debilitated by the “no” vote. He even suggested that perhaps counseling and therapeutic referrals would be necessary. From what I could see, Martin did not offer the Bible or prayer as a source of comfort. What he offered was “togetherness” to stand in place of “the touch of God.” In fact, his counsel is based on emotionalism. It is anti-intellectual and it is anti-biblical.

THE SCRIPTURES PROVIDE TRUE WISDOM AND INTELLECTUALISM

Seventh-day Adventists have always taught that the Bible alone is the means of spiritual survival in a lost world and that the word of God is the answer to all our pain and disappointment. This is not ignorant foolishness. This is wisdom.

Studying and understanding the Bible is the most demanding intellectual challenge of all time, far surpassing the challenge offered by any of the so-called hard sciences. To love the Bible means to love logic, evidence, and progress. Many of those who voted in favor of women’s ordination want to make it appear that reason and logic are on their side. However, when their arguments are based on emotion and the prevailing culture, rather than the scriptures, the evidence suggests otherwise.

In fact, when individuals destroy the Bible by promoting highly questionable methods of interpretation, they are relieved of the intellectual demand of a close study of the Bible. Brothers and sisters, when we reject the Bible, we reject the Spirit who gave it. Emotionalism is a dangerous and flimsy rock on which to build one’s house.
How many sermons?

Keith Boyce

Our associate pastor made an appeal recently when he preached a moving sermon on Jeremiah. It was his second in a series on the book. He said he had meant to make an appeal the previous week, but had for some reason resisted. However, he wasn’t going to resist the Spirit’s calling this time. We have a large church by Adventist church standards (over 650 on the books). Even by larger church standards, a healthy number of people came forward as a result of our pastor’s appeal.

But upon reflection, I asked myself, was it a healthy number of people after all? The appeal was not so much calling for first-time commitments for baptism or submission to the Lord, though those were certainly welcomed. The appeal was to those who wanted to recommit their lives to the Lord and once-and-for-all give over a particular burden, temptation or struggle to the Lord.

I didn’t take an exact count, but maybe 25 people came forward. They were a cross-section of young, medium, and older church members. Thus, in most people’s minds, it was probably a successful appeal. Years ago in college, I felt discomfort when a guest speaker made an extended appeal, hoping that perhaps there would be yet one more soul that would come forward. At the time he kept calling for people to make a commitment and there were extended periods of time where no one came forward. However, there was no sense of discomfort this time, as approximately 25 people moved to get out of their padded pews almost as quickly as the pastor finished making his appeal.

Don’t get me wrong. In no way am I saying that our associate pastor did not make a successful appeal or that the 25 people who responded (I was one of them) weren’t moved by the Spirit to give their burdens to the Lord. In fact, I was personally moved by the reactions of the folks down front who had responded. I believe if even one person comes forward and recommits their heart to God, then angels rejoice. After all, it isn’t about numbers.

IT IS ABOUT NUMBERS AFTER ALL

However, the title of this article is, “How Many Sermons?” Thus, in that sense, it is in fact about numbers. Let me explain. If a life-long Adventist who is 42 years old was baptized at age 12, then he has ostensibly had 30 years to pay fairly close attention to sermons and talks. With 52 weeks in each year multiplied by 30, there could be as many as 1,560 sermons. For the sake of my illustration, let’s assume a 75 percent attendance rate (illness, travel, times of apathy, skipping church occasionally while in college). I would guess that this individual would have heard approximately 1,170 sermons. To this base number we can add such events as: weeks of prayer, evangelistic series and vespers. We can also add in special weekend retreats, ASI or GYC conventions and hundreds of Audio Verse sermons. Now our potential sermon total could be up to 1500 or more during 30 years following baptism at 12 years of age.

Ellen White makes a very interesting statement in Gospel Workers, page 155. She says, “Unless ministers are guarded, they will hide the truth under human ornamentation. Let no minister suppose that he can convert souls by eloquent sermons. Flowery speeches, pleasing tales, or inappropriate anecdotes do not convict the sinner. The message that the sinner should hear is, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (KJV, John 3:16).”

WHAT CAUSES OUR APATHY?

White references probably the most famous verse in the Bible to explain the message that should be proclaimed to
you and me, the average sinners. Therefore, I’m thinking, can we blame our widespread apathy on sermons that
don’t present the message we need to hear? Or, is our Laodician temperament caused by a lack of personal
soul-searching on the part of each one of us?

David writes, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any
wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (NKJV, Psalms 139:23, 24). The prophet Jeremiah states,
“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Is there room for additional and well-researched, heart-felt, and well-delivered sermons? Absolutely! Many would
agree that countless servants of God have been used over the years to deliver edifying messages of
encouragement and reproof. In fact, such sermons have moved many a sinner to repent and search for God in a
deeper, more meaningful way.

However, what about the well-known admonition of Paul? “For the time will come when they will not endure sound
document, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves
teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables  (2 Timothy 4:3, 4). From
this statement, we can conclude that Paul was telling Timothy to preach the word, plain and simple.

ARE WE WAITING FOR A UNIQUE ANGLE ON THE GOSPEL MESSAGE?

How many sermons will it take us to humbly submit to the Lord? How many sermons will it take us before we allow
Him to be Sovereign of our life? I believe this is a question each one of us need to ask ourselves. If the average
middle-aged Adventist has heard 1500 or more sermons, will 5 more sermons do it? How about 200 more? Are we
waiting for that extra-special, unique angle on the Gospel message that will finally tweak our minds and hearts just
right so that the switch is flipped and we can say we have arrived?

Indeed, we realize sanctification is the work of a lifetime, (Acts of the Apostles, White, 560). But, please don’t get me
wrong. I’m not by any means discounting our prophet’s statement about sanctification. In fact, I’ve been around long
enough to know the frustration of personal struggle and to experience the ebb and flow of life’s journey. In other
words, I know the feeling of being spiritually connected one day and isolated on an island the next. I am imploring all
of us (me included) to respond now to God’s call to repentance and humility, to work tirelessly for Him.
Where are my constitutional rights in Jesus?

Val Loumber  
August 7, 2015

We are often proud of our country because of the liberties it offers. These liberties are mainly associated with the rights and protections incorporated by or read into the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution. Although the concept of personal liberties is found in Bible, as God values our right to a choose above all, where are the rights specifically protected by the Constitution in the Bible?

While God values our right to choose, it does not necessarily mean He agrees with our choices. Nor does this mean we will not reap the consequences of our bad choices. “I [God] call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19, NKJV).

Take for instance the constitutional right of women to be treated as men are treated in society. In the workplace for example (known as the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of gender or have equal protection under the law); and the right to marry, as discussed in the Supreme Court’s recent June 26, 2015 decision on gay marriage.

Are any such rights indeed in the Bible? Does God bestow upon me rights solely based on my status as a man, woman, black, white, single, married, divorced, citizen or non-citizen?

God grants no rights to anyone based on their status. “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality [or God is no respecter of persons, KJV]’” Acts 10:34, NKJV; see also Rom. 2:11).

Paul confirms this in Gal. 3:28, “[T]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NKJV).

In other words, God is concerned with only one thing when it comes to our status, whether we are in Jesus Christ. If we are in Jesus, we are all one, neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free or neither male nor female.

On the other hand, if we are outside of Jesus Christ, we are separated from God and our sin remains with us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NKJV; see also Ez. 3:18-20; 18:20).

If God granted rights to persons solely based on their gender, race, ethnicity or other status, He would be necessarily discriminating against others who may not have the qualifying status. This is especially true as we have little or no control over our status attributes. For instance, I had no say over my gender or the color of my skin.

Consider this simple example of a man and woman applying for the same job. The man may be more qualified in education and experience than the woman, but the employer might hire the woman because of her gender.

While it's honorable for the employer to seek to reverse gender inequality in the workplace, the employer is inescapably discriminating against the man, merely based on the fact that he is not a woman.

More, when granting rights solely based on status, and not on merit, those who are qualified based on merit are also in danger of discrimination.

By ignoring merit and granting employment solely based on status, the employer is punishing someone else, the man in the above example, for not having the favored status.

This is why God makes decisions on merit and not on status.
And, His decisions are based on His merit and not on my merit. It is only His merit that counts, namely, whether I am in Jesus Christ.

This leads us to one more question: Does my gender, race, ethnicity or other status entitle me to any rights in Jesus Christ?

The Bible is clear. It is impossible for my gender, race, ethnicity or other status to entitle me to anything when I am in Jesus Christ. When in Jesus, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, NKJV).

When in Jesus then, it is not I who live any longer. It is Jesus Who lives in me. If Jesus is indeed living in me, it is impossible for me to be seeking or asserting anything, much less rights that belong to me.

Moreover, when in Jesus, we receive the mind of Christ. “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16b, NKJV; see also Phil. 2:5). Ellen White said with the mind of Christ “the natural inclinations are softened and subdued. New thoughts, new feelings, new motives, are implanted. A new standard of character is set up--the life of Christ” (Christ Object Lesson 98).

As a result, when we are in Jesus, it is His thoughts, His feelings and His motives that govern the mind. Thus, if I am seeking rights based on my status, it is really I who live in me and not Jesus.

Being in Jesus then contradicts our entitlement to any rights, whether they are based on status or otherwise.

Consider that even salvation, the right granted to those who are in Jesus, does not belong to us. “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number... standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes... and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev. 7:9-10, NKJV).

Note also how God’s end-time people are described just before Jesus returns: “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads... These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14:1, 4, NKJV).

When in Jesus then, our thoughts, our feelings and our motives are those of Jesus, thus leading us to follow Him wherever He goes.

This does not mean that we are pre-programmed or brain-washed to do someone else’s bidding, without a right to choose.

Conversely, as slaves to sin, our only place of liberty in choice is in Jesus, having His mind, His character and perspective on sin. Our only escape from the chains of sin is in Jesus. He is our only hope to be free indeed. For “if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36, NKJV).

Only in Jesus we can be free from the slavery of our utter selfishness and disregard for others and their salvation. “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (Matt. 16:24b, NKJV).

Denying oneself is diametrically opposed to the assertion of oneself, whether it be in rights, status or otherwise. The way to heaven is in the submission of our rights rather than in the assertion of our rights. Jesus established only one way to heaven and that way does not include me, my will or my rights.

When in Jesus, it is not about our rights with others. Rather, it is about others’ right to salvation. As God came in Jesus to seek and save the lost, setting aside all His rights, we are called to do the same.

When in Jesus, we have surrendered all our rights. We no longer assert any rights for ourselves. With the motives of
Jesus, we no longer live for self. We live for the glory of God and others’ salvation.
Submitting to each other for the sake of unity

Yvonne Novlesky

My husband learned to love curling as a young boy when his father would flood an ice rink in their Manitoba back yard and create “rocks” by freezing old jam cans filled with water. Curling teams were organized in the neighbourhood and my husband’s father was the self-appointed skip (captain) of the family team. As son number three, my husband was invariably relegated to be lead, whose role was to set up defense rocks. He quickly learned that curling is a gentleman’s game and that all team members must submit to the skip’s directions for rock placement and for sweeping to curl the rock. Unfortunately, while a youngster playing lead, he rarely had the opportunity to take out the opponents’ rock. Therefore, submission was not always easy for a young boy whose position rarely allowed his rock to score the winning point.

Like the game of curling, in real life, we are not all called to score the winning point. In fact, the whole concept of submission, whether to authority or to one another, is usually a hard pill to swallow. For most of us, it goes against every fiber of our being. Sadly, I’ve even heard Seventh-day Adventist pastors chuckle about their “heavy foot” and their close encounters with the traffic officer intent on enforcing the speed limit. And we often hear such phrases as, “I told him!” or “She deserved to be put in her place!”

In fact, a Christian who chooses a path directly opposed to the culture of the world is judged to be inherently weak. We all know that television promotes aggressive conflict resolution for entertainment purposes. For example, in the movie “The Quiet Man,” the prototype for masculinity, John Wayne, only gains the respect of his new wife and family when at the end of the film, he gives in against his resolve never to fight, and physically brawls with the antagonist. Indeed, it would be boring to see a family calmly resolve a problem and therefore, the hero pretty much always takes an aggressive approach, scoring when he or she throws in a few winning punches.

However, as Christians, we are called to turn away from this mindset and approach our relationships with an attitude of submission. Submission toward others is first built on a foundation of submission to God. Many years ago before we were married, our pastor counseled my husband and me that problems in a marriage are addressed by first looking to our vertical relationship – that is between God and us. I’ve since learned that when we learn how to submit to God, we learn appropriate submission to others, including our parents, spouse, church family and the authorities who make the laws of the land. However, it is a hard lesson to learn in a world where personal rights trump submission to any authority, including God.

IN OUR STAND AGAINST PREDOMINANT CULTURE, UNDERSTANDING SUBMISSION IS VITAL TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

God calls us to “be filled with the Spirit” (New American Standard Bible, Ephesians 5:18). As God’s children we are to “walk as children of Light” (Eph. 5:8) and “learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). These verses explain why it is impossible to submit to God while we are attempting to control our own life and please ourselves. This is why when we are empty of self and filled with God’s Spirit we will have a clearer understanding for the need of submission.

SUBMITTING TO AUTHORITY

God has ordained authority to accomplish His ultimate plan. In the game of curling, for example, the skip stands in the house and determines the delivery of the rock, or the weight, turn and line of the throw. The team players cannot see the far end, and are therefore submissive to the skip, remaining intent on their job, following the skip’s verbal
direction for sweeping, to keep the rock going in the right direction and to speed its delivery. Just as the curling team submits to the skip and to one another in their appointed placement on the team, we also must learn to submit to authority. Just as in a curling game the skip sometimes judges incorrectly, we too may face leaders who make mistakes. But God calls us to submit because all leaders are set up or removed by God, and submission is part of our growing to be more like Jesus.

As Christians, “every person is to be in subjection to the governing authority. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Romans 13:1). Therefore, while at times like Peter and the apostles, we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), we need to recognize that God has ordained such authority.

SUBMITTING TO ONE ANOTHER IS PART OF SANCTIFICATION

Submission to one another is essential to the Christian walk, beginning from childhood. We learn from Luke 2:51,52 that submission to Jesus’ earthly parents contributed to His growth to spiritual maturity. We also learn that it is profitable for grownups to submit, for we are called to do so with “joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13: 17).

Because submission itself is a trait of the Trinity, we grow in unity and godliness as we submit to one another. This is how we grow to be more like Jesus, who not only submitted to His parents, but also to the authorities of His day and suffered unjustly for our sins.

SUBMITTING TO GAIN WISDOM

Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). When we submit to God’s Word and seek the wisdom and counsel of those who are in authority over us, we can gain God’s wisdom. In fact, it is a serious matter to learn submission for “whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Romans 13:2).

There is no one person who has all the answers. Together we can search the word and learn from God’s word and one another.

LEARNING HOW TO SUBMIT

We read in 19 Manuscript Releases that it is the “duty of everyone who professes to believe the truth to do all in his power to remove prejudice, while never lessening the importance of truth by concessions to the world. We are to show by our manners, by our words, by our spirit that we have learned in the school of Christ. We should not manifest harshness of spirit, indulging coarseness of speech. The great Teacher says, ’Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls’” (White 209).

Indeed, the test of whether we are truly united and submissive to one another, as Christ would have us to be, is whether we can submit joyfully. In Eph. 5:18, we are called to be filled with the Spirit, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and [to] be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

It is not easy to submit one to another, and judging by the world’s standards, we rarely score the winning point when by God’s grace we choose not to press our point or engage in confrontation to win an argument. But like the lead on a curling team, our role is to contribute to the overall health of the entire team. As God’s children, we are engaged in a war against evil and God has called us to walk with Him, to represent Him in our relationships, starting in the home and including the church, our colleagues at work and all authorities He has set in place. His call to unity includes submission to one another.
The Toronto 2015 Pan Am games and the baton of truth

Owusu-Banahene Francis

August 2, 2015

God has called His children to be His representatives in this world and therefore, our privilege and responsibility to share His love must be evident in every aspect of our life. In fact, Jesus’ life on earth proclaims the certainty of this unique call to witness. However, because our calling is in direct opposition to the prince of darkness, as God’s children on earth, we also face the certainty of the devil’s direct attack on us. But through this experience we have the assurance that we will be “blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests on [us]” (New American Standard Bible, 1 Peter 4:14).

PERSECUTION OF GOD’S CHILDREN THROUGH THE AGES

When Jesus said, “The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (King James Version, John 15:20) He wanted them to understand what they would face in the years to come. Indeed, it wasn’t long afterward that Stephen faced death at the hands of a persecuting mob. Later we read that Peter understood how Jesus’ words of warning were not limited to his own generation but would indeed encompass the experience of all God’s people down through the ages, until Jesus’ second coming. This is evident in Peter’s later advice to “think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you” (1 Pet 4:12), thereby describing Satan’s warfare against God’s children during Peter’s generation and for the years to come.

In The Great Controversy, we read “the history of the early church testified to the fulfilment of the Saviour's words [regarding persecution of His people]” (White, 39). In fact, Satan feared the gospel’s triumph and summoned his forces to utterly destroy Christianity. "Beginning under Nero about the time of the martyrdom of Paul, [persecution] continued with greater or less fury for centuries” (White, 40). However, history testifies that Satan’s efforts to destroy the church of Christ were in vain. Even when facing death by the stake, God faithful children “rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the truth, and songs of triumph ascended from the midst of crackling flames” (White, 41).

However, amidst the gloom that settled on the earth during these dark years, God had a remnant who kept the light of the truth from being wholly extinguished, by passing the light of truth from one generation to the next. In fact, in every age there have been witnesses for God, men and women who held the Bible as their rule of life, refusing to compromise even a single truth.

THE BATON OF TRUTH

In mid-July, Toronto Canada hosted the famous Pan Am Games, the world’s third largest international multi-sport competitive event, where representatives from 41 countries participated in a host of summer sport competitions. In the relay races, one of the competitions at the Pan Am Games, the challenge is not only to run fast and to stay on the course, but also to pass the baton in such a way that the next team member is able to grab it correctly and keep running. A team is disqualified if they drop the baton, or pass it improperly. In fact, many still remember that at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, both the U.S. men’s and women’s teams dropped the baton in the semifinals, and were sadly disqualified from the race.

WHEN WE EMBRACE UNCOMPROMISING ADHERENCE TO THE TRUTH THE BATON IS AUTOMATICALLY PLACED IN OUR HAND

Amazingly, the world’s longest relay race begins in Nagasaki Japan and ends after 1064 km. However, as God’s
people we are engaged in a much longer and more important race. We are not engaged in a competition but rather a war, and we do not pass a wooden baton, but rather, the baton of truth from one generation to the next. In fact, to accept the baton of truth is to automatically join the winning side. Unlike the Pan Am Games in Toronto where 12 of the 41 competing countries felt the humiliation of receiving no gold medals, all of those on God’s team are winners and will one day receive the crown of victory from Jesus’ own hands.

When we take up the baton of truth we are in direct opposition to God’s enemy, who immediately embarks on a plan to disqualify us from the race.

**PETER AND JOHN’S EXPERIENCE**

In Acts 4, we read that Peter and John were apprehended because they taught the people and preached about the resurrection from the dead. Thus, because they responded to Jesus’ commission to teach the gospel (Matthew 28), they faced persecution. However, while Satan endeavoured to use human agents to halt the disciples’ work, their experience actually became a vehicle for spreading the gospel.

Jesus’ assurance that “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20) testified that God was in control. And the apostles’ response, “whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20) testified that they would never compromise truth to obey man.

In fact, God has always required strict obedience from His children. For this reason Moses cautioned the Israelites not to “turn aside [from the commandments] to the right hand or to the left” (Deut. 5:32). We read in Lift Him Up that “no lower standard is presented to those who desire salvation today” (White, 139).

Though God permits temptations, we can be assured that He will not permit us to face anything that is not in harmony with His ultimate plan and will. We have the assurance that He knows best and therefore our only hope is to pass the baton by strict obedience to His word, with complete faith in Him.

**THE THREE HEBREWS MEN’S EXPERIENCE**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to serve the Babylonian gods or to bow down to the golden image. In Daniel chapter 3, we read that they were therefore summoned before King Nebuchadnezzar. Again, similar to Peter and John, their crime was to refuse to obey the king’s decree at the cost of obedience to God’s word.

Interestingly, even though Daniel described the anger of the king, he also seems to suggest that in an effort to get the three Hebrew men to comply with the law, the king may have appealed to reason and loyalty to himself. Sadly, many of us may be tempted to compromise principle because of respect or honour we hold for parents or someone else in authority. The story of the three Hebrew men shows that the devil is crafty and often pretends to show kindness and even empathy when a more direct and cruel approach proves futile. Finally, we learn from their experience that allegiance is due to God in all circumstances, even at the cost of life, and that ultimately, He is capable to protect His people in persecution.

**PERSECUTION CREATES OPPORTUNITY TO PASS THE BATON OF TRUTH**

We learn from the history of God’s church that persecution, though feared and dreaded, creates opportunity to pass the baton of truth. In other words, when we obey God’s word, He always uses us to accomplish His purpose to share His truth to others.

Let us not forget that when we grab the baton of truth, our destiny is solely in God’s hands. Like the relay participants at the Pan Am Games, we must keep our eyes focused on the race before us. We must make no assumptions about the results of our obedience, but rather leave the consequences in God’s hands and obey in all
circumstances. Indeed, trusting in God's promises and benevolence will save us from fear for tomorrow. Our loyalty and love for the truth confirms our acceptance and justifies our willingness to carry the baton. Let's not drop the baton now. Let's remember the faith of our fathers who suffered for truth's sake and may God help us to hold tight to the baton and stay the course until Jesus comes.
Machine analyzes Ted Wilson's post-election sermon

Harvey Alférez

July 30, 2015

My family and I had the privilege of hearing Elder Ted Wilson’s post-election sermon at the Alamodome in San Antonio. While I was listening to his speech, I found myself thinking about the importance of each word, each one given for the most solemn period of this earth’s history. In fact, as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I believe that it is essential for all of us to understand the underlying concepts in this sermon. As a result, we will know where we, as a united body are called to go in the next five years.

The contribution of this article is to show how a computer was able to analyze Wilson’s speech by means of Natural Language Processing (NLP). Natural language refers to a language, such as English, that we use for our daily communication. NLP covers the computer manipulation of natural language. This field of computer science has several real-world applications such as automatic summarization of a chunk of text and automatic translation of text.

This computer program analyzed the transcript of Wilson’s speech in a plain-text document by means of The Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK). NLTK can be used to analyze a variety of bodies of linguistic data (e.g. the US Presidential Inaugural Addresses). I used a MacBook Pro with a 2.9 GHz processor an 8 GB of memory and the results were obtained in less than two seconds.

DIGGING INTO THE SPEECH

We can discover the emphasis of Wilson’s message by utilizing a lexical analysis to identify the most frequently used words. Thanks to lexical analysis it is possible to convert a sequence of characters into a sequence of meaningful character strings.

Figure 1 shows the frequency distributions (i.e., the frequency of each word in a text) obtained by NLP. In this experiment, the computer generated the lexical dispersion of the 40 most frequent words in the speech. These words have a cumulative count of almost 1,200 frequencies. This is around the 19 percent of the whole speech. Frequent non-relevant words for this study were omitted (e.g. prepositions and conjunctions).
Figure 1. Word frequency for the 40 most frequent words in Elder Wilson’s speech

Since the central idea of the speech was “Cross the Jordan … Don’t Retreat”, Figure 1 shows a high number of mentions for the words “Jordan”, “retreat”, “cross”, “Moses”, and “Joshua”. The From the results we are able to organize the emphasis of the speech in five key conceptual groups: 1) a church guided by God; 2) an inclusive church; 3) a set of advices for the church; 4) working in the present for the future without forgetting the past; and 5) focus on the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. These groups are described as follows.

**A CHURCH GUIDED BY GOD**

Figure 1 shows that the most frequently used word was “God”. In addition, there were several mentions of the words “Jesus”, “Christ”, “Lord”, “He”, “His”, and “Him”.

Figure 2 shows the lexical dispersion plot of these words. Specifically, each stripe indicates the use of a word, and each row indicates its use in an entire text. The high volume of God-related words shows our president’s strong commitment to respect and fulfill God’s will. It is important to notice that the noun “Holy Spirit” appears 13 times in the speech. However, the word “Holy” is also used in other contexts (e.g. “Holy Word”).

![Lexical Dispersion Plot](image)

**AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH**

The frequent use of the word “we” indicates a desire for the support of the audience to work as a unified team. This finding goes hand-by-hand with the invitation of Wilson “to press ahead in unity in proclaiming Jesus’ soon return”.

![Lexical Dispersion Plot](image)
Figure 3 shows the lexical dispersion plot of the word “we” and of two other inclusive words, “us” and “our”.

Figure 3. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “we”, “us” and “our” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

**ADVICE FOR GOD’S CHURCH TODAY**

Wilson gave advice that began with the word “you” and “your”. You can see the lexical dispersions of these words in Figure 4.
For instance, Elder Wilson gave the following advice: “You can count on the Word of God”; “I plead with you to have that same love and respect for this Book and the Spirit of Prophecy”; “You can count on God’s Word and His Spirit of Prophecy!”; “Lay members, I challenge you to become involved in the daily mission of the church far more than you ever have before”; “Yes, you do need to be involved in the inner working of the church to keep it moving ahead”; “Tell someone else about your relationship with Christ!”; and “Adapt your methods, but reach out.”

**WORKING FOR THE FUTURE TODAY WITHOUT FORGETTING THE PAST**

It is interesting to see in Figure 1 that three of the most frequently used words used in the speech are “will”, “was” and “are”. Figure 5 shows the lexical dispersion plot of these words.

Figure 5. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “will”, “was” and “are” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

Emphasis of the present and future tenses indicates that Wilson wants the church to work hard in the present while walking into the future. This fact is described in the following phrase: “We will soon cross the figurative Jordan into that Promised Land”. Also, the speech reminded us to remember the past, as stated by the verb “was”. For example, our president recalled several Bible passages of the Israelites in the desert. In addition, he shared testimonies of previously converted Adventists, and he told the audience what he learned from his grandparents and his father.

**FOCUS ON THE BIBLE AND THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY**

Figure 6 shows the lexical dispersion plot for the words “Bible” with 26 mentions, and “Word” with 21 mentions.
These two words occupied the place number 18 and the place number 21 respectively, among the most frequently used words, as shown in Figure 1. Most of the mentions for “Bible” and “Word” were given between the word offsets 2,000 and 3,000 in which Elder Wilson talked about his Bibles, his plead to read this precious book, and our acceptance of the Bible as God’s inspired Word. It is also important to mention that the Wilson stressed the need to study the “Spirit of Prophecy”. Figure 6 shows the frequency of the word “Prophecy” in the speech with 12 mentions.

![Lexical Dispersion Plot](image)

Figure 6. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “Bible”, “Word”, and “Prophecy” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

**CONCLUSION**

Interestingly, a machine was able to analyze an important milestone in our church: the post-election sermon of our re-elected president. Specifically, thanks to lexical analysis by means of NLP, the machine was able to depict the emphasis of this message. Five key conceptual groups were identified. These groups indicate the Wilson’s deep concern for God’s continued guidance for His church, as well as his advice for inclusiveness and commitment on the part of church members. And finally, there was a strong call for continuation in the work, not forgetting our past, while focusing on the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.

If a mere computer is able to analyze our president’s message for the church, how much more should we, who share a love for God’s truth and one another, understand and follow Wilson’s counsel to keep our heart focused on God’s work for these final days. Let us work in unity to proclaim Jesus’ soon return to a world in need.
Faithful believers often say that though the church appears as though it is going to fall, it will go through to the end. We know this is true because Christ promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. But what will the church look like when it appears to fall? Will it retain the same organized structure with its educational and medical institutions, its various levels of conferences and local churches? Will faithful men and women be in charge of the worldwide organization and its facilities?

Though it is good to be optimistic regarding the future of the organized church, we also need to be realistic and consider what inspiration has told us.

We have been warned by Ellen White, in Volume 5 of the Testimonies, that “few know what our churches are to experience...I know that many think far too favorably of the present time...In the mighty sifting soon to take place we shall be better able to measure the strength of Israel” (76, 80).

It is important to understand that inspiration refers to the church in two different ways. Most of the time it refers to the church militant. In fact, the message to the Laodicean church is addressed to the church militant and it is the church militant that is in danger of being spewed out of Christ’s mouth. Finally, it is the church militant that will be “the first to feel the stroke of the wrath of God” (White 211). This is a result of the Seventh-day Adventist church proving unfaithful to the most important, the most solemn truths ever committed to mortals, making it all the more accountable for its infidelity. However, Mrs. White tells us that the church will be riddled with apostasy and great abominations just before the sealing angel goes through its midst. She also says that when the sifting has done its work and the wheat and tares are separated, the church militant will become the church triumphant. This is the victorious church that will go through to the end.

A TIME OF SIFTING RESULTED IN THE FORMATION OF THE EARLY CHURCH

In the days of Jesus and the apostles, there was a mighty sifting in the corporate Jewish church. For many centuries the Jewish church had been God’s chosen vehicle to advance His truth in the earth. It was the object of His supreme regard, though it wasn’t infallible. When Jesus was crucified, the corporate church was rejected as God’s recognized vehicle to carry on His work on the earth. We have this interesting statement by Ellen White. “When Christ cried out, ‘It is finished,’ the Holy Watcher that was an unseen guest at Belshazzar’s feast pronounced the Jewish nation to be a nation unchurched” (5 BC, 1109).

BECOMING UNCHURCHED

We must ask ourselves a question. At what point will the corporate, militant Seventh-day Adventist Church become “unchurched”? Some people believe that will never happen. But we need to remember that our beloved church is soon going to be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. Judgment begins at the house of God and if the church militant has proven unfaithful to its high and holy calling, on her will be pronounced the sentence, “found wanting”. Therefore, if God’s people prove unfaithful to the truth, the church militant will reap the same consequences as the Jewish nation. We are warned in Volume 8 of the Testimonies, “Jerusalem is a representation of what the church will be if it refuses to walk in the light that God has given” (White 67).

After the sifting, there remained only a few faithful followers from the Jewish nation. Though they made up the nucleus of the newly formed Christian church, they did not inherit the facilities of the apostate church. The temple and synagogues and schools continued to be operated by those who had been rejected as Christ’s chosen people.
Yet the faithful few whom Christ recognized as His church on earth had something far superior than all the facilities that remained with the corporate church. They had the all-inclusive facility of the Holy Spirit that was poured out in mighty power and giving them mighty influence and efficiency to carry out Christ’s commission to preach the gospel to the whole world. Indeed, it “was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (King James Version, Colossians 1:23).

**GOD’S FAITHFUL WILL ENLIGHTEN THE WORLD WITH HIS TRUTH**

In similar manner, the faithful remnant that is separated from the wheat and tares will receive even a more abundant outpouring of spiritual power in the latter rain. With that facility, in a very short time they will be enabled to enlighten the whole world with the glory of God. There will be no time to build and operate schools and hospitals and other institutions that were necessary for the church militant. The work will go like fire in the stubble, without these facilities.

We need to realize that as we near the judgment, both separation and unity will be seen in the ranks of Sabbath keepers. In fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the wheat to mingle with the tares. When the two sides are going in the opposite directions, the bonds of unity become more and more strained. The separation between Christ’s true followers and the world used to be applied to association with unbelievers, outside of the church. However, now it is becoming more and more applicable to the church itself. Sadly, there are many unbelievers in the church who profess the same faith and have their names on the church rolls. But some members are worldly and apostates in heart and therefore as dangerous for association as those outside of the church. One final glimpse of how the church triumphant will appear is found in a special vision given to Ellen White as she foresaw the church during the time of persecution:

I saw the nominal church and nominal Adventists, like Judas, would betray us to the Catholics to obtain their influence to come against the truth. The saints then will be an obscure people, little known to the Catholics; but the churches and nominal Adventists who know of our faith and customs (for they hated us on account of the Sabbath, for they could not refute it) will betray the saints and report them to the Catholics as those who disregard the institutions of the people; that is, that they keep the Sabbath and disregard Sunday. (Spalding-Magan Collection of Ellen G. White Statements, 1)

Today’s Seventh-day Adventist Church is well known to the Catholics. Some of our medical institutions are being run in partnership with the Catholic Health System. Sadly, there is much association and linking up with the fallen churches and much borrowing of ideas and programs. However, those who make up the church triumphant will not be well known to the other churches. The above quote by Ellen White refers to nominal Adventists who, along with the fallen churches, betray the true people of God. These nominal Adventists will be former Seventh-day Adventists who give up the Sabbath when the great, final test comes. In fact, they may very well still be carrying out the functions of the church and operating church institutions and facilities. However, the power and presence of God will be lacking.

In summary, we must continue to be encouraged that Christ is in charge of His work and His people. He will purify His church as He purified the temple when He was on earth. The wheat and tares will be separated by He who makes no mistake. He will have a church that is “without spot or wrinkle…fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Ephesians 5:27; Song of Solomon 6:10). This church will evangelize the whole world in a very short time. Those who are shaken out will be replaced by the multitudes that will come into a church that will be the pillar and ground of the truth and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. It will be a church that keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus. Thus the way will be prepared for Christ to return to earth in power and glory and make a final end to the great controversy.
The Confederate flag and Christian perfection

Kevin Paulson

July 26, 2015

Recently, the Confederate battle flag, revered by an alleged shooter, quickly became the focus of controversy and sentiment for revilement and removal after the senseless slaughter of nine innocent worshipers at a historic African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina. Walmart quickly moved to withdraw Confederate-related merchandise from its shelves, and not long after, the state legislature and governor of South Carolina agreed to remove the flag from the State Capitol grounds in Columbia. Debate has since arisen in other states with regard to pursuing a similar course.

HOW A RECENT EVENT DEMONSTRATES WHY OUR FRAIL BEST ISN’T ENOUGH

What could the Confederate flag possibly have to do with the Adventist debate over character perfection? Interestingly, it may be more than we realize. Perhaps the Confederate flag and all that it symbolizes, helps illustrate the manner in which so many of us come to accept the mixture of good and evil in our heroes and therefore in our own lives.

Allen Drury, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Advise and Consent," described America in a later book as “always heretofore strong through all her weaknesses, decent through all her indecencies, great through all her faults” (Come Nineveh, Come Tyre: The Presidency of Edward M. Jason, 426). Those defending the use of the Confederate flag seem to view its symbol in much the same way. What causes some to recall a heritage of slavery and injustice causes others to recall a heritage of chivalry, honour, and the defence of one's home and family. The Confederacy, like so much of American history and indeed of life itself, therefore becomes an example of accepting the co-existence of right and wrong.

Some years ago, the TNT television network aired a mini-series on the political career of the Alabama Governor, George Wallace, who in 1963 stood in the schoolhouse door to prevent the admission of African-Americans. Later he publically repented of his racism in a speech to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Martin Luther King’s former congregation. In reviewing this mini-series, Joel Stein observed for Time, that Wallace was portrayed as “a villain who [chose] his evil not out of malice but out of weakness” (August 25, 1997).

However, whether sin arises from malice or weakness, it is always sin, and the resulting pain and sorrow is no different in either case. In other words, Wallace’s segregationist policies were no easier for African-Americans to bear because they may have been the result of weakness rather than malice.

When Senator George McGovern spoke against the Vietnam War in the 1972 U.S. presidential campaign, his critics claimed that it was accidental when Vietnamese civilians were killed or maimed by American bombs. The Senator correctly responded that whether by accident or design, the suffering and death inflicted were the same.

We all know that the wife-beating husband who claims, “I hate what I’m doing, but I can’t help it,” does just as much harm as the one who vainly attempts to justify his abuse. Either way, the wife gets hurt.

When we attempt to justify sin by inherent weakness, we face a practical problem with a Christian experience that leaves people imperfect. In fact, such a Christian experience explains why the perfection debate is so persistent and divisive in contemporary Adventism. We are challenged to ask two simple questions: Does the Christ of scripture offer an end, here and now, to the bad choices that make life miserable for ourselves and those around us? Or does He merely offer a formula to achieve our frail best, while forcing others to live with our shortcomings?
Many who reject the possibility of sinless obedience here on earth claim they’ve never met a sinless person. 
(Considering the unpopularity of true holiness throughout the ages, even when manifested perfectly in the life of Christ during His incarnation, one is tempted to ask such objectors if they’re sure they would recognize a sinless person if in fact they did meet one.)

**IS THERE ANY SIN BEYOND HEAVEN’S POWER?**

Perhaps the best answer I have found to such objections is the reminder that all of us, at numerous times, have met men and women who through God’s grace have overcome sins of every stripe. Every time we meet a Christian who through divine power has conquered such sins as: greed, racism, sexual immorality, alcoholism, and tobacco or other drug addictions, we see the fulfillment of the Bible promise of victory over sin. Therefore we must honestly ask ourselves, “If God can give people complete victory over these sins, which sin in my life or another’s is beyond heaven’s power to resolve?”

We would do well to remember the long forgotten pledge, still in the sacred script, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (King James Version, Psalm 119:11). The same assurance was penned two thousand years ago by the apostle Paul and is also still in the sacred pages. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1). It is on the basis of these Biblical teachings that Ellen White traced the following lines:

The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God’s grace has power to sanctify the heart. (Review and Herald, April 1, 1902)