Conundrum of the balanced view

Aug 20, 2015 06:52 am | Ron Woolsey

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Are you all in for Him?

Aug 18, 2015 04:34 pm | Darcee Christensen

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The God of little things

Aug 16, 2015 08:45 pm | Shane Hilde
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Conundrum of the balanced view

Ron Woolsey

Scenario One

The year was 1999, and a denominational publishing house heard my conversion story from homosexuality, and asked me to submit my story for publication, as a resource for our denomination. I was given a deadline of four weeks.

After much prayer and fourteen-hour days of writing, I met their deadline. After many months, I finally called for a status report.

“Oh! You haven’t received your manuscript? It was supposed to have been returned to you.”

“Why would it be returned?” I asked.

“It was rejected. The book committee decided they wanted a more balanced view.”

“Balanced view of what?” I asked. “I was asked to submit my story. Are you suggesting it is unbalanced?” I was alarmed.

“No, they just thought it would be better to have more stories to put into one book in order to present a balanced view,” came the reply.

I wondered aloud, “So stories of victory and success must be balanced out with stories of failure? Why?”

For fifteen years now I have continued to face the conundrum of the balanced view, this puzzle, as time after time I have been inhibited by the need to present a balanced view of the subject of homosexuality and the church. Ironically, I had to have my book published by an outside publisher who in turn sold it back to the denominational publisher to facilitate placing it in all the English-speaking ABCs around the world.

Scenario Two

A few years ago I was invited to share my testimony at a conference on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church. Sadly, I was discredited by one who promoted a view of “once gay, always gay,” and my presentation was therefore reduced to a mere interview. During the conference, this same individual replaced me on a panel addressing the university student body to present “a balanced view”. Critics and skeptics have repeatedly dismissed me as a perfectionist because I share of my personal experience of victory over homosexuality and how God offers salvation from sin rather than in sin.

Through the years, as opportunities to share were becoming less and less, I had made it a matter of prayer to ask God that whatever time I am given, the Lord will make it count. And at this specific conference on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church, He did. In the closing presentation the speaker stated, “When Ron Woolsey stood here opening night, held up his Bible, and said that he found everything he needed in the word of God to turn and walk away from homosexuality, that set the tone for this entire conference.”

Scenario Three

Once again I faced the conundrum of the balanced view when invited to speak at one of our denominational...
universities. This time the invitation was held up in committees for months, because of the very “controversial”
nature of my story.

“But there are two sides to this issue…” they insisted.

“OK! So, why don’t we present the second side, God's side…?”

I pointed out that I had graduated from their university, with a degree in theology, with honors, and that I was a
conference pastor. Therefore, if straight/gay alliances are allowed on campus, why can’t I be trusted on campus with
God’s perspective? Eventually approval came through, and the student body, filled with great interest and
appreciation for my message, warmly received me.

Scenario Four

Two issues especially caught my attention at the recent North American Division Ministers Convention and break
out sessions preceding the General Conference Session--women’s ordination and homosexuality.

Though leadership had commissioned much study over the past few years, the “pro side” of the issue was promoted
while the “con side” was ignored and even suppressed. The absence of a balanced view was noteworthy.

There were three different seminars addressing the LGBT issue. My ministry, “Coming Out Ministries”, was originally
scheduled to have two of these sessions, but one was taken away due to “controversy”. Again, we prayed that the
Lord would make whatever time we had, really count, and I truly believe He did.

However, when another seminar, with a very different message, was given more than twice the time we were given,
many people who attended both sessions expressed confusion. I explained that both seminars were in fact
presenting the same message, but only to a point. Both seminars presented a message of love and acceptance.
However, Coming Out Ministries teaches the full gospel - that acceptance from God is conditional upon an entire
surrender of the will, including the need of repentance, surrender, discipleship, transformation of character and
victory over the sin of homosexuality, as with any other sin issue. Therefore, along these lines, the two seminars
parted ways.

At the same North American Division Ministers’ Convention, a lesbian Adventist, a gay Adventist church elder, and
the parents of a gay man married to another man presented testimonies. In fact, a gay Adventist was given time for
a power point presentation denouncing all efforts to lead homosexuals to victory and transformation. Sadly, no
testimony of victory was given. A psychologist even testified that she had never seen anyone overcome
homosexuality. Some in attendance turned and waved at me, for I was redeemed 24 years ago and have been
married now for 23 years and am the father of five children.

One of the organizers defended these presentations, saying that the gay issue has more than one ideology and
therefore, they needed to present a balanced view. However, such a balanced view left many unsettled.

Do we need to present a balanced view by giving equal time to political correctness, conventional wisdom or social
sciences?

Is not God’s view balanced in itself? God teaches us that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately
wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways,
and according to the fruit of his doings” (King James Version, Jeremiah 17:9).

In 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 we read, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this
world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is
written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they
are vain.”
THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF BALANCE

In Proverbs 20:23 we read, “Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good.” God help us if we are weighed in the balances, and found wanting.

We read in Revelation 6:5, “And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.”

Sadly, “not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven…Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:21-24).

Apparently, balance with God is not found between two opposing views, but rather between truth and acceptance, between the law and obedience, between God’s expressed will and our compliance.

You see, “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). The only way we can be found righteous is in the Lord, (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). Perfect balance is found within justification and sanctification, and within pardon/forgiveness and cleansing/transformation.

Christ’s righteousness is imputed, or attributed to us at the point of confession and repentance. In addition, Christ’s righteousness is imparted, or created in us through His grace, His transforming power, when we surrender to Him and to the process. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Notice the balance here.

Micah 7:19 reads, “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Ellen White explains, “Satan stands at the head of all the accusers of the brethren; but when he presents the sins of the people of God, what does the Lord answer? He says, ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?... They were therefore standing before God clothed with the garments of Christ’s righteousness…Every sin of which they had been guilty was forgiven, and they stood before God as chosen and true, as innocent, as perfect, as though they had never sinned” (RH August 29, 1893).

We read in Acts of the Apostles that “John saw the mercy, the tenderness and the love of God blending with His holiness, justice, and power” (White,489)

“When we study the divine character in the light of the cross we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice.” (White, 333).

Now this, I contend, is a balanced view.
Are you all in for Him?

Darcee Christensen  
August 18, 2015

We know the story and we know how it ends. We even have an instruction manual to guide us to the assured victory, yet many still fear the end of time. Though prophecies foretelling catastrophic events and even death decrees might play a significant factor in provoking fear, why do Seventh-day Adventists fear when they know that God will prevail against evil? While non-believers are afraid because they do not know or trust in the scriptures, as Seventh-day Adventists we have the assurance of God’s victory, foretold in His word. Therefore, I believe there is greater underlying motive causing many Seventh-day Adventists to dread what should be their greatest hope.

A COMMITMENT PROBLEM LEADS TO FEAR FOR TOMORROW

Simply put, I have observed that many Seventh-day Adventists today have a commitment issue. Though they may faithfully go to church, pay tithe, and participate in daily devotions, many have failed to seek God and let Him infiltrate every aspect of their life. Instead, they seek worldly success. As a freshman in college, on the brink of my adult life, I am not immune to this same struggle. I often struggle with becoming distracted when contemplating my own future of desire for success. God asks us to surrender completely to Him, but it is sobering to realize that many of us do not entrust 100 percent of our life to God’s will.

For example, we read parables about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, but fail to apply the message to our own life (New King James Version, Matt. 13:44-46). These lessons call us to invest everything in searching after God. Therefore, God wants this goal to be at the forefront of our every thought and decision. I am afraid that we have become halfhearted. I believe that those of us who fear the end of time have a subconscious realization of our personal failure to commit entirely to God’s cause. In other words, we are apathetic, and we know it. We understand the standard God is calling us to, but we are too wrapped up in our own selfish ambitions to comply. We are afraid because we know we are not doing all that we can for the glory of God. We do not want to sacrifice the pleasures of this world, and therefore we fear the consequence we know are coming.

A BALANCING ACT THAT LEADS TO OUR FALL

I have often wondered how, throughout history, men and women of God could have chosen the obvious wrong path. What was Eve thinking when she took the fruit? How could all of the disciples abandon Christ at His darkest hour? How could Peter deny Jesus when he had just been warned that he would? How could the priests have failed to accept their long awaited Messiah? How could the antediluvians reject the invitation to enter the ark? Sadly, the sobering truth is that we have continued to follow this pattern. We try to maintain our balance with one foot in the ark, but the rest our bodies are engrossed in the affairs of the earth. However, to be saved, we must be fully inside of the ark of salvation even if this shuts us out from society.

WE MUST TAKE GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS SERIOUSLY

Though we are equipped with warnings and instructions, sadly, we fail to act on them even when they are abundantly clear. First Thessalonians 5:17 calls us to, “pray without ceasing,” and Deuteronomy 6:5 instructs us to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart,” yet many do not even begin to think about God nearly as frequently as they contemplate their favorite baseball team, their next winter vacation or how they will advance within the company. However, the Bible makes it unmistakably clear that there is no middle ground. Either we are all for serving God or we are not. We must take these counsels seriously if we are to be ready for Christ’s soon advent. Jeremiah 29:13 informs us that God is only found when we search for Him with all of our hearts. This leaves no
room for complacency. Ephesians 6:13 guides us to, “take up the WHOLE armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done ALL, to stand.” We should be doing everything in our power to prepare to stand for Christ!

**LOVE FOR JESUS, THE ONLY LASTING MOTIVATOR**

The greatest fear of death or love of life will never enable us to endure the tribulation to come. Our only hope is to fall in love with our Savior so that He absorbs our precious thoughts and time. In fact, this love will give us the desire to fervently study the Bible. We will begin to constantly pour our hearts out before God in prayer. Experiencing this love will be so incredible that we will not be able to keep it to ourselves. We will happily share with all who are willing to listen and we will humbly serve others as Jesus would. To effectively draw others to Jesus, these actions must spring from genuine love for our Savior.

However, following God goes against our natural selfishness. Therefore, if we are to be His children, we must be intentional in our walk with Him. Following God will not offer the glamour and fun that this world uses to entice us. Rather, following God will offer hardships, trials, persecution, and yes - true joy. Second Corinthians 4:9 points out that Christians will be persecuted on every side, but we will never be forsaken. Followers of God may experience pain, loneliness, discouragement, and rejection, but they press on because they know that the joy to come is immeasurable. Nothing can compare to the wonder of basking in God’s presence.

When we truly see all that Jesus has done for us, we cannot make an unworthy sacrifice for His cause!

I especially love the way Ellen White describes this pure joy in her vision of heaven, recorded in Early Writings. “We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that surrounded us that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out, ‘Alleluia, Heaven is cheap enough!’” (White, 17).

We know the story and we know how it ends. We even have an instruction manual to guide us to the assured victory, yet many still fear the end of time.

*Darcee Christensen is a freshman at Southern Adventist University.*
The God of little things

Shane Hilde

Photo: Mary Hilde. This is where I lost my phone.

When we hydrated, we decided to hop in the car and scoot down the road to Thera. Mary grabbed her phone and we were off. Thera was about a 10-15 minute drive, and the town is a tourist trap, making parking a challenge, but thankfully our little Fiat 500 rental was able to fit in the smallest of spaces. We hopped out of the car and headed down to the main strip. I gave a reflexive pat to my pocket to check for my phone, but no phone!

"Wait! I forgot my phone in the car," I said.

I ran back to the car and looked through it. Nothing. An anxious feeling began to take hold of me as I frantically searched the car. I looked everywhere.

"I can't find my phone. I don't even remember where I had it last. I remember taking pictures and set it down…"

The reality of what must have happened hit me, kicking my stress into high gear, as iPhones aren't cheap.

"Well, we'll just have to drive back and look for it," Mary said.

She was taking this better than I expected. I was hating myself for being so stupid as to forget my phone in a foreign country, and to top it off, I had placed my phone in airplane mode. This meant I couldn't even track my phone to see where I had left it.

We raced back to Oia and checked the two locations we had stopped, but there was no phone, and a hopeless feeling set in. I had left my phone on the bench and now it was gone. I was more upset over losing an expensive phone than I was with what was on the phone. What a waste of money, I thought to myself. And with other misfortunes happening not even a day before, such as Mary scratching the rental car bumper, our Greek experience was quickly turning into a mini nightmare.

I called T-Mobile to see if they could track my phone if it was in airplane mode. The answer was no. They suspended service, and I marked it lost on my iCloud account. I was quite depressed the rest of the day. I secretly wondered if this was God's doing. I suppose blaming God for anything bad that happens in our lives is a typical human response. Maybe I was spending too much time on my phone and this was God's way of forcing me off it. While I was upset about the loss of my phone, part of me was relieved I would have a forced break.

A few days later we flew back to Athens to catch a flight to Cairo, Egypt. I woke up in my hotel and checked my email. I had a new message come through from ADvindicate’s contact page. The subject line immediately caught my attention. It said, "Cell Phone Missing."

I couldn't believe it. My eyes quickly fell to the message.

"Dear Sir, We have found a cell phone dropped by the church here in Greece," a man named Thanos wrote. "We saw you are managing the facebook page of this website and it was the only way to reach out to you."
“This website” was ADvindicate. He was able to see the notifications on the locked screen and saw that whoever owned the phone also managed ADvindicate’s Facebook page, and from Facebook he visited ADvindicate and emailed me.

Two days after I arrived home, my phone arrived via Fedex.

I said multiple thank you’s to God for watching over my phone and bringing it back to me. I couldn’t help but be reminded that God is interested in the details of our lives. And even though losing an iPhone could be considered a silly first-world problem, God still cares.

Jesus said in Matthew 6 not to worry about life. The birds don’t sow or reap or store their food, yet God feeds them. The flowers or grass aren’t worried about clothes, but God clothes them, and in God’s eyes we are much more valuable. We aren’t to worry about the basics of life, or even things that might seem huge and impossible. God already knows and promises to provide and make a way -- even for a lost phone.
They that wait

Wendy Williams

August 13, 2015

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 uncomfotred. 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

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 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

August 9, 2015

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 recommit 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
courage 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
doctrine, 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 the Bible, as God values our right to 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

August 4, 2015

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.