Say 'Uncle!'

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When I was a kid, I used to get into all kinds of fights with my two brothers—over all kinds of silly stuff. Anybody who has brothers or sisters knows what I’m talking about. Anyhow, the fights didn’t last long, and the bigger sibling usually won (not me). Usually the loser wouldn’t be released until they admitted defeat. More times than not, I was told by a brother who had landed on top of me, holding my hands and arms down, to “say ‘Uncle!’ ” So I did, because if I didn’t they would probably still be on top of me to this day!

God wants us to say the same thing to Him. Not that He’s beating us down and yelling at us to submit, as my brothers did with me. Rather, He’s asking for us to give up trying to do things on our own. He wants to help us. We always talk about the importance of having a relationship with Jesus Christ in order for us to receive the peace, love, and acceptance that we’re made for. When we accept Christ, we also automatically get plugged into God’s Holy Spirit, who gives us not only the motivation to make good decisions, but the ability and power to overcome sin and bad habits as well.

Submission vs Obedience

There is a definite connection between obedience, humility, and submission. Now, submission is different than obedience. Obedience is the act of obeying, and submission is the attitude of obedience. If someone threatened me with death if I didn’t obey them, I would obey. This is not so with submission. Someone who has submitted wants to obey; they don’t have to be forced or threatened. When we talk about submitting to God, we’re talking about willing obedience that springs out of our love for God and our thankfulness for the salvation that He’s freely given us.

Obedience is difficult for a sinner born into sin. Have you ever seen the bumper sticker that says “Let go and let God!” This is easier said than done. Remember, all of us, Christian or not, are dealing and struggling with our flesh—our natural sinful selves.

Meek Isn’t Weak

James, the writer of the biblical book by the same name, stresses that you must submit to God in order to resist the devil: "'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:6-10).

There is power in humility and submission. Humility is the internal attitude that allows an individual to be externally submitted. Don’t you find it interesting that a Christian can receive power from giving it up? How is that possible? The key to the whole shebang is finding the right person to submit to. God, of course, is the right person, and when you submit to Him, all kinds of wonderful things can and will happen. The first of those being that you will begin to see that you can get free from habits, addictions, and sins that you could never stop by yourself. Let’s take a closer look at the passage in James. There is an important progression that you need to be aware of:

1. God can and will give you the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome all evil—whether the evil comes from you, the devil, or the world—but you’ve first got to . . .

2. Submit to God. You can say “no” or “stop” to the devil all you want to, but the reality is you’re about as significant to him as a fly. The devil wants to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), so he’s not your friend. You
can’t resist him by yourself. He’ll squash you in a heartbeat! But once you submit to God and He moves you under His protection and authority, you will be able to say “no” to the devil. When this happens . . .

3. The devil will flee from you. Did you catch that? Without God you’re about as powerful as a gnat, but when God’s got your back, Satan runs away! But he’ll be back—and soon—with a slicker, sneakier temptation. So what do you do?

4. Come close to God, every moment of every day, and God will come close to you. Have you ever been scared of something and then had your parent, sibling, or a friend “back you up”? How did you feel? Invincible and untouchable, right? That’s exactly what drawing close to God can and will do for you, but you’ve got to start that process. Because of your free will—your ability and freedom to make your own decisions—God will never force you. Forcing is the way the devil works. So how do you remain in that attitude of coming close to God? Well, you . . .

5. Recognize that you’re a sinner in need of a Savior; have a serious and realistic recognition as to how your attitude, behaviors, and sin affect God deeply and break your relationship with Him. Admit to what you’ve done wrong (with no excuses or justifications) and say you’re sorry (confession) and stop doing it (repentance). When you do that . . .

6. You will have a humble attitude that will put you in a position of submission, which allows God to lift you up to a closer and closer relationship with Him . . . and the process continues every moment of every day, and you will continually draw closer and closer to Him so He can continue making you more and more perfect and sinless (sanctification).

**Nebbi the Knucklehead!**

I want to tell you a sad but important story in the Bible that has to do with one knucklehead who decided to learn about submission to God the hard way.

This story illustrates what happens when somebody consistently doesn’t submit to God. It’s found in Daniel 4, and it’s an amazing story of King Nebuchadnezzar—King Nebbi, for short. It’s incredible to think about the ways God chooses to get people’s attention. I hope you’ll read this, learn, change, and choose never to get this far away from God that you need this kind of wake-up call.

Before you read this story, there’s something that you have to understand about King Nebbi and his culture: they ascribed the status of a god to their king. And as with anything, if you hear something enough times, you begin to believe it. So King Nebbi began to believe that he was a god.

God said in the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (New King James Version, Exodus 20:3). And we read in Scripture that God isn’t in the business of sharing His glory with other gods. These are important facts to remember as we consider the lessons and principles of the story in Daniel 4. Read it for yourself, and then we’ll discuss what we can learn from Nebbi’s mistakes.

So what’s the point of this story? That we are to give honor and glory to no one other than God. We are to recognize that by His hand He created all things, controls all things, and moment by moment, gives us our very breath and heartbeat! God does not mind if we admire or even aspire to beauty and power, but He wants us to give Him all the credit. After all, He rightfully deserves it. By doing this, we are submitting to His authority and not our own.

I believe that King Nebbi learned his lesson and learned true humility. Just the fact that he was able to write this information down gives evidence of this. I find it interesting that even after having been clearly warned by God through the prophet Daniel of what would happen if he didn’t change his ways, King Nebbi still went down the path of pride. Now, it took 12 months until he did it, which shows us our first principle: You and I must choose every day to submit to God, and we must remain vigilant that we don’t stray off of the path into our taking credit for the good things in our lives. It all comes from God and belongs to God, and He can choose to give it and take it away at any
time.

The apostle Paul, in Acts 26:14, when telling the story of his conversion, relates that Jesus said to him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." What are goads? Well, for the most part, they’re like the spurs that cowboys wear. Goads are sharp pieces of metal, stone, or wood that are used to get stubborn animals to do what the owner wants them to do. Are you catching the relevance of this issue to your life? Have you ever done something in your life that caused God to need to use a "goad" to get your attention? Instead of God having to do that to us, wouldn’t it just be easier for us to submit willingly? It would be easier, we’d live longer, and we’d be happier.

It took seven years for King Nebbi to finally humble himself and submit to God! The Bible says that after seven years, Nebbi prayed, and when he did, his “mind was healed” (Contemporary English Version, Daniel 4:34). In other words, he had lost his mind before he finally humbled himself! Now, what happens when your mind is sick? All kinds of stuff: anxiety, depression, hallucinations, delusions, and other mental health problems. Remember, we’re not talking the brain. For the most part, your brain is about a three-and-a-half-pound organ the consistency of soft cheese; your brain controls your body. Your mind, on the other hand, determines and controls your character and personality, your emotions and your will and choices. Your mind generally controls and affects those things about you that are untouchable.

You might be thinking, seven years? Come on, that seems a little extreme for someone to keep living like a wild animal and not to recognize that God is in charge?! Oh really? I wish I would have gotten it after only seven years—it took me longer than that.

And I’m sure some of you know people who have been living crazy, out-of-control lives longer than that. Maybe that person is you!

Psalm 36:1-4 says: “Sinners don’t respect God; sin is all they think about. They like themselves too much to hate their own sins or even to see them. They tell deceitful lies, and they don’t have the sense to live right. Those people stay awake, thinking up mischief, and they follow the wrong road, refusing to turn from sin.” This passage paints a picture of somebody just lying in their bed, nervously wringing their hands, and thinking about what kind of progressively evil and perverse things they will do tomorrow. YIKES! Take a cue from King Nebbi and don’t go there.

**You or God?**

So what’s it going to be? What will you choose? Will you choose to honor yourself above God and live a miserable, out-of-control life full of selfishness, pain, and passing pleasure—and then die? Or will you choose to humble yourself before God and recognize that He’s in charge, order your life accordingly, then live a life of joy, peace, and contentment both here and in the world to come—and never die! The choice is yours. Take it from me and Nebbi—you’re much better off living life with God than without Him.
“Beware of the greasy finger effect,” my new supervisor warned me.

“What’s that?” I asked.

I was a brand-new engineer, I had just completed my studies and was now newly employed as an assistant engineer in an engineering consulting company. I would be working at a power station for 6 months as a system engineer to resolve a number of problems that the power station was experiencing.

“Power stations are complex interconnected systems,” he responded to my enquiry, “The engineers who designed the power station designed it that way for a reason. So don’t just go and make modifications without first asking yourself why the systems have been put together the way that they have been. Else, you may find one modification ruining the system and necessitating another modification, which in turn might further ruin the system necessitating another modification and so on.”

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO WORK AT A POWER STATION?

In other words, to improve the performance of a power station, a holistic approach was required and the engineer must consider the station as a whole when making design changes. Human beings are even more complex. We are made up of a range of differing facets, systems and parts and each one depends on the proper function of the others. In addition, each system also requires its own unique method of cultivation and maintenance. Therefore, we can say that a holistic approach is required in the care and the development of our body, mind and soul.

The activities we perform while pursuing personal care and development are referred to as duties and responsibilities. For example, good spirituality depends on Bible study. On the other hand, effective Bible study is only possible when the body is healthy. And good health is directly related to exercise. Can you see the connection?

In other words, Christian education—which does not stop after school here on earth, but continues into eternity—requires a holistic approach to be effective. In the Bible we learn that Jesus increased, or developed, not just in one area, but “in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (King James Version, Luke 2:52). Jesus’ example shows us that holistic development is essential.

HOW TO IMPEDE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

A great danger to holistic development is the neglect of known duties and responsibilities. In fact, we belong to a vastly interconnected and complex system called “life” that was created by a super-intelligent God. Every fibre is dependent upon the well-being of the next fibre. This is why God cannot allow even one speck (that is, our planet) of disharmony, pain or suffering. It is a threat to the well-being of the entire universe. Indeed, all of creation has been groaning because of man’s disobedience (Romans 8:22).

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Justice is indivisible; injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” I would say that care and development are each indivisible and neglect in any area of your life is a threat to every other facet of your being and therefore, holistic development is a necessity.

Sadly, in pursuit of personal goals, we are often guilty of neglecting such things as: Bible study, prayer, Christian standards, health, physical labour, church duties, sleep, recreation, or the development of our minds and intellects. The neglect of any one of these areas results in a reduction of effectiveness in every area.
We read in Messages to Young People, “Some students put the whole being into their studies, and concentrate their minds upon the object of obtaining an education. They work the brain, but allow the physical powers to remain inactive. … And after having obtained their education, they are often invalids for life. They have neglected their health by remaining too much indoors, deprived of the pure air of heaven and of the God-given sunlight. … Health is a great treasure. It is the richest possession that mortals can have. Wealth, honor, or learning is dearly purchased if it be at the loss of the vigor of health. None of these attainments can secure happiness if health is wanting” (White, 240).

It seems that when these students enter the workforce they have not learned their lesson for we read in Testimonies for the Church, Volume 1, “The brethren in the office feel that they cannot leave the work for a few days for a change, for recreation; but this is a mistake. They can and should do so. Even if there were not as much accomplished, it would be better to leave for a few days than to be prostrated by disease and be separated from the work for months, and perhaps never be able to engage in it again” (White, 519).

MAKE SCHEDULE AND INCLUDE TIME FOR THE ESSENTIALS

A turning point in my journey for holistic development was when God helped me to understand the importance of a daily schedule. Consider the following statement from Child Guidance: “As far as possible, it is well to consider what is to be accomplished through the day. Make a memorandum of the different duties that await your attention, and set apart a certain time for the doing of each duty. Let everything be done with thoroughness, neatness, and dispatch. … Give yourself a number of minutes to do the work, and do not stop to read papers and books that take your eye, but say to yourself, “No, I have just so many minutes in which to do my work, and I must accomplish my task in the given time” (White, 124).

Proper management of time allows us to be more thorough. If you do not assign time for each aspect of development the following may result: (1) a reduction of overall efficiency (2) worry for undone tasks and (3) imbalance in time distribution for various responsibilities.

In my third year of undergraduate studies, I decided, based on what I had learned about holistic development, that I needed a daily schedule or timetable. Up until then, it seemed I was only “putting out fires.” In other words, I was doing assignments as I got them and I was neglecting some subjects and even areas of personal development. I decided that I was going to do school work for 10 hours a day, 5 days a week—that was it, no more.

I did the best that I could in those 10 hours, setting aside equal time for each class to revise lectures and to do homework assignments. After hours I concentrated on Bible study, exercise, spending time with the family and helping around the house. I did not do school work on Sundays, unless something came up that was absolutely necessary. Sundays were set aside for working in the garden at home.

This approach ensured that that I did not neglect any class or any other significant area of my life, whether health, family, or devotion to God. While doing Bible study, I did not have to worry about an assignment for my thermodynamics class because I knew that I would be working on it, say, Wednesday from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. as per my schedule. In fact, I completed my studies within the minimum period of four years—a major accomplishment for any engineering student and I believe due in large part to following a schedule. Therefore, to this day, I still make use of a daily schedule.

God has designed that we should love Him with our heart, soul and mind. Therefore, all of these areas are important for our development. To neglect one is to threaten every other. It is my prayer for you that you do not neglect any area of your development. May you increase in wisdom without neglecting your stature. May you increase in stature without neglecting favour with God and men.

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technology. Shanley was baptized at the age of 12 and is a faithful member of his local church in Pretoria, South Africa.
God is craving your time

Lerotholi Johnny Mahao

Life is made up of time. That is, fragments of time when added together make up life. Therefore, it is what you spend most of your time doing that makes up your life. Life is time and time is life! On the contrary, Death is the absence of time, or rather death is 'life' that is void of time. The difference between a dead person and a living person is that the latter has time, whereas with the former there is not even a passage of time. Indeed, without time there is no life.

Haven't you noticed that we define a person by that which they spend most or all of their time doing. A drunkard is someone who spends most of his or her time drinking, just as a surgeon is someone who devotes most of his time performing surgical operations in the theatre. You cannot be labelled a neurosurgeon when a large portion of your time is spent in the hotel serving numerous guests. To put it more plainly, experience in any line of work is, to a great extent determined by the time one would have taken on that work. Yes, we also look into the knowledge one would have acquired, but the truth of the matter is that the first and most considered determinant of experience is time.

It was not by chance that the disciples of Christ were called Christians. These people spent virtually all of their ministerial lifetime speaking, teaching and healing in the name of Jesus Christ. The name Christ was the burden of their tongues and thoughts. Ultimately, the citizens of Antioch (where they spent almost a year preaching about Christ) gave them the name Christians. Time dictates everything!

Just in case you were not aware; if you take a coup d’oeil in the first book of the Bible, you will notice that God blessed time, “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made” (King James Version, Genesis 2:3). To God, time is not just any other thing; it is what defines and gives tone to human existence! Matthew 16:24 drives the point home, “Then Jesus said unto His disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” But how are we to follow Him when He is no more physically present in this world? To follow Christ is to spend time with Him, to be where He is all the time.  On a spiritual level, to be vitally connected with God we ought to allocate time for reading His word (which is the expression of His will to mankind), live lives which are in perfect harmony with His word (of course, this includes sharing the glad tidings of salvation to others), and set aside time for communing with Him in prayer.

In essence, just as a student who does not devote his time into attending lectures and studying is destined to fail, a Christian who does not dedicate his time to the Lord everyday cannot be a Christian for long. Otherwise, he will be a superficial Christian. Remember the parable of the wheat and tares as recorded in Matthew 13:24-32? Obviously, the tares represent those who profess to be followers of Christ yet they never sit at the feet of the Master to learn from Him.

More often than not, we value the time we spend with our families, friends and loved ones. At times we even go to holidays, outings and picnics just so we can have quality time with people we cherish in our lives. But how much of our time do we set aside for the Lord? Do you ever really allocate a special time in a day when you are alone with God? A time when it is only you and God: no cell phone, no Facebook, no WhatsApp, no Twitter, no children, no wife, no husband around! Usually, we fall into a trap of concluding that this issue of spending quality time applies to a married or a courting couple only. A resounding NO! God is craving our attention too; He misses us! Yet we are too pre-occupied to even give Him a place in our daily schedules. Amid the busy cares of our life of toil, we are most likely to forget that God is waiting for us. He is longing and thirsting for our time. And unless we earnestly devote our time to Him, we will soon lose interest in eternal truths.

God is craving your time — ADvindicate
http://advindicate.com/articles/2015/9/16/god-is-craving-your-time
Richard W. O’Ffill puts it elegantly, “People who are growing spiritually, who enjoy what it means to be overcomers...are the people who have set aside a special time every day to be alone with God. If we are going to have a thriving spiritual life, we have to spend time at it. The cares of this life are all but choking out the spiritual lives of countless people” (The Transforming Prayer 116 and 117).

Undoubtedly, much as a husband and a wife have to plan time to be together and enjoy the company of each other without the interference of their kids and other family members, even so must we wisely plan how we spend time alone with our Lord. Our relationship with God is determined by how much and how well we spend our time with Him. Hence Ellen White said, “Guard jealously your hours for prayer, Bible study, and self-examination. Set aside a portion of each day for a study of the Scriptures and communion with God.” The key word here is jealously. That means we should never allow anything (even that which we think will bring us material gain) to meddle in our appointment with His Majesty. She concludes by saying, “Thus you will obtain spiritual strength, and will grow in favour with God” (Gospel Workers 100).

Beloved, God is craving your time. What do you spend most of your time doing, thinking or even talking about? What do you do in the morning when you wake up; who is the first person you talk to when you wake up? What about in the hush of the night before you sleep? When it’s quiet and the sounds and the noises of this world are asleep, what do you meditate about? “The hours of morning and evening worship should be the sweetest and most helpful of the day” (Child Guidance 522).

God is earnestly searching for people who will daily set aside time for communion with Him, and you are one of them! Grab this chance and enjoy the spiritual riches fresh from the heavenly throne.

Indeed, time well-spent is life well-lived! God Bless You!
Radical spirits

Mark Sheffield

Adventist scholar Laurel Damsteegt has done a thorough study into the relationship between Spiritualism and feminism in the nineteenth century. Much of that study centers on statements by Ellen G. White. It is well known that Mrs. White supported the abolitionist and temperance movements, but not the women's rights movement. An obvious question arises—why not?

One possible answer might be found in Professor Ann Braude's book from 1989 entitled Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America (Indiana University Press). Braude is at this time Senior Lecturer on American Religious History at Harvard Divinity School.

TWO PEAS IN A POD

Braude notes that the women's rights movement and Spiritualism began in the same year, 1848, only miles apart, in New York State.

Each movement sought for radical change in the traditional relationships between men and women. Both movements denounced the conventional thought about gender and religion that prevailed in the middle of the nineteenth century. Well-known leaders of the women's rights movement, such as Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Lucretia Mott, were not Spiritualists, but many people associated with them were.

According to Braude, some feminists remained close to their respective churches and agitated for women's ordination. For women who found their churches hopelessly chauvinistic, separation became necessary. To keep a semblance of faith, but determined to abandon patriarchy, a few women moved on to witchcraft, goddess worship, or Neopaganism.

Looking back at the mid-century movement from the vantage point of the 1880s, feminist historians noted that Spiritualists were the only reformers who recognized the equality of women in religious leadership roles. In fact, equal leadership was one of the most important goals of Spiritualism. Braude writes, “Spiritualist women had equal authority, equal opportunities, and equal numbers in religious leadership” (3).

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE

The Fox sisters, who experienced mysterious “rappings” in their Hydesville, New York home in 1848, were already known by at least two Quaker reformers. Quakerism had weak institutional structure, accepted the validity of “inner light,” and viewed with skepticism all religious organizations. This outlook made some Quakers ready supporters of the Fox sisters; but in yielding to inner light over external truth, they added something new—acceptance of communication with the dead.

Braude writes, “Mediumship was closely identified with femininity” (23). Some mediums were male, but the stereotypical medium was female. This fact closely connected Spiritualism to the idea of home and family. Séances could take place around a kitchen table or in the comfort of a living room. For Spiritualists, the domestic setting was diametrically opposed to the male-dominated churches.

SPIRITUALISM, LIBERALISM, AND THE BIBLE
Since Spiritualists were not formally organized, their numbers are hard to measure. Their writings were voluminous, however, so millions of Americans were influenced to at least some degree. Braude indicates that religious progressives were the most likely supporters of Spiritualism.

Spiritualism and liberal theology came together in one particularly important way. One author of the period wrote that “Spiritualism is undermining the authority of the Bible in the minds of what are called common people faster than all other causes put together” (Braude, 28). Liberal theology had already de-emphasized the concept of the punishment of the wicked and highlighted brotherly love. Both Spiritualists and liberals rejected redemption, the resurrection, and the need for Christ.

Spiritualists told stories of their sad days as young people caught in a depressing orthodoxy. In this way, they wanted to show that Spiritualism was a comforting release from the churches. Among Spiritualists, the view of the home as a purely feminine environment where motherly feelings dominated began to undercut the traditional place of the father. He was no longer the head of a household. Instead, he was thought of as spiritually contaminated by his mixture with the dirty world of business. Fathers became, in their minds, identified with a wrathful God and a harsh theology.

One result of this new attitude toward fathers was that children became sentimentalized angels instead of budding sinners who needed male influence in their lives. Spiritualism offered a kinder, gentler world of natural goodness in which there was no need for male leadership.

THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Spiritualism denounced authority of all kinds—in the family, in the church, and in the government. In the churches, male ministers and the Bible were the binding forces. In the séance, such forces did not exist.

Spiritualism joined with many other groups in seeking all kinds of reform, but the reform that was uppermost was the liberation of women from male authority. Braude writes that “Spiritualism became a major—if not the major—vehicle for the spread of woman’s rights ideas in mid-century America” (57). She continues, “Raps reportedly rocked the same table where Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton penned the ‘Declaration of Sentiments,’ which formed the [Seneca Falls] convention’s agenda” (58).

Braude says, “The two movements shared many leaders and activists. While not all feminists were Spiritualists, all Spiritualists advocated woman’s rights” (58). Gender roles were attacked: “Spiritualist reformers found adherence to prescribed gender roles inconsistent with the principle of individual sovereignty” (61). The most radical reformers “found immoral attempts at coercion in virtually everything associated with Protestant religious practice: in the hierarchies of denominations, in the exercise of discipline over church members, in the power of the clergy, and in the use of the Bible as the test of truth” (62).

Spiritualists developed the notion that women were morally superior to men, and that even though women were deeply involved in churches, they were being unfairly denied ordination. Women were seen as more sensitive and innocent than men, and thus more pious. This is one reason that women were valued as good mediums. Young women were especially delicate and innocent, it was thought, and they made a sensational impression on the public stage, especially if they were physically attractive.

SO WHAT?

If Ann Braude is correct in her historical analysis, it is not surprising that Ellen White would have avoided any connection to the women’s rights movement. The reasons can be easily inferred.

Mrs. White probably felt that the feminist movement of her time was demonic and offered no real advancement for women. The Bible had already described the role of women in marriage (see the “beloved” of the Song of Solomon);
the role of women in crucial duties both inside and outside the home (see Prov. 31); the rights of women to fair
treatment (see Gen. 31:50); and the equality of men and women before God (see Gen. 1:27 and Gal. 3:28). For
Ellen White, the women's movement in her time was simply a dangerous distraction for the people of God.
Test case one: Adventists and Kim Davis

Caleb Torres September 10, 2015

On Friday, September 4, while I was reading about how the German Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave up his life rather than see Germany overrun by Hitler's politics, I couldn't help but think about Kim Davis, who recently put her job on the line to stand strong for her convictions.

REMANDED TO FEDERAL CUSTODY AFTER STANDING FOR CONVICTIONS

Kim Davis, Rowan County clerk in the state of Kentucky, has been remanded to federal custody by U.S. Marshals at the order of David Bunning, Federal District Court Judge for Eastern Kentucky. This came as the result of Davis’ statements to the media, exposing her newfound Christian convictions as the reason she was refusing to issue any marriage licenses in order to avoid issuing licenses to lesbian and homosexual applicants.

Her legal counsel, attorneys from Liberty Counsel, an evangelical legal group, openly presented the case as protected under the First Amendment free expression clause.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Two days before, the online edition of Atlantic Monthly published a comprehensive analysis of this unfortunate situation. The writer took the position that it was a case of poor legal counsel and closed with the hope that a more tidy case might soon surface to force the courts to deal more carefully with the issue of religious liberty in the face of the new legal environment following the Supreme Court's ruling on homosexual marriage in June, 2015.

ADVENTIST ONLINE MEDIA QUICK TO RESPOND

Many Adventists took issue with Davis’ decision to order her deputies not to issue any marriage licenses until the court or a state legislature had resolved her personal grievance. They saw this as a clear case of the violation of the separation of church and state, the First Amendment's non-establishment clause.

It is true, as Adventists we are very sensitive to this clause. In fact, our long-held doctrinal position is that a religious power will lead to the disestablishment of all religious freedom around the globe, ushering in the stark prophetic oracles of Revelation 13 through 17. Therefore, as an Adventist of 30-plus years, it is not difficult for me to understand the concern expressed by many Adventists. On the other hand, I believe a key point was missed in the Adventist social media discussions surrounding the Davis’ situation.

DAVIS PUSHED INTO A CORNER

I believe the free expression and non-establishment clauses are two sides of the same coin. Though many Adventists labeled Davis as misguided to cease all processing all marriage licenses until the issue was resolved to her satisfaction, what was generally not acknowledged was that she was pushed into a corner by the court itself, and the state governor's refusal to acknowledge her free expression claims. In other words, she was forced to infringe on the establishment clause--if we can call it that--when her fellow public servants (judge, governor) violated her rights of free expression. Just because they couldn't be bothered.

To top it all off, what many Adventists saw as nothing more than a capricious violation of the non-establishment clause by Davis, in fact, has very sobering prophetic implications. Still, they write her off as nothing more than an intellectual, conducting an academic, exercise.
LAWMAKERS NEED TO ADDRESS FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS SCRUPLES AFTER THE SUPREME COURT’S RULING ON HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE

Utah and North Carolina have enacted laws exempting public officials who would prefer non-adherence to the Supreme Court's ruling on homosexual marriage based on personal religious convictions. This shows that both the courts and state legislatures have yet to comprehensively address the issue of free expression in the face of the new dystopian ruling on marriage and the family.

If we don’t want to see further violations of the non-establishment clause by our elected officials then we must ensure that religious scruples are respected, that public servants are not forced to leave personal religious conviction at the door when discharging newly demanded public duties fundamentally at odds with everything that came before.

In Davis’ case, she asked both Kentucky's governor and District Court Judge Bunning for an exemption allowing marriage licenses to be processed without her name and authority. But these public officials would not be bothered. Rather, Judge Bunning ordered Davis to federal custody, and instantly creating a public folk hero. Ironically, Bunning then ordered marriage licenses to be processed without Davis’ name and authority, the very thing Davis had asked for.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we owe Davis our gratitude for her fortitude in facing the issue head-on, potentially forcing many more states and the courts to recognize that Christian convictions cannot be nakedly dismissed as irrational artifacts of a bygone era.

I struggled as I watched and participated in an Adventist conversation on social media. I was surprised that Adventists, who are often accused of seeing the Sunday law behind every rock and shadow, by and large reacted with, at best, bemused curiosity. And even worse, many simply excoriated her as proud, misguided and one who simply wanted a little limelight.

At the same time, a much more supportive approach developed among evangelical social media. Of course many Adventists will simply label this support as consistent with and merely a step on the road to the dreaded establishment of a political religious system by Sunday-keepers, ushering in the Sunday law. However, this begs the question: Is Adventist theology nothing more than one big pot of fear-mongering? Is it one that renders its practitioners unable to offer the barest forms of human empathy and compassion? Have we forgotten that other Christians also have the right to publicly express their religious convictions?

What if Davis' predicament were over Sabbath observance? Would her Sabbatarian scruples be rendered null and void by virtue of being an elected official? Would a tribal denominational urge change Adventist perceptions? Not easy questions and therefore, no easy answers.

Would we still insist that in the face of public opposition, Davis must keep the law of the land and either give up her position or her personal Sabbath convictions?

WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO

Personally, I don’t believe that Seventh-day Adventist doctrine is simply a big pot of Sabbatarian fear-mongering, but I do believe that we as Adventist laypeople, have a long way to go before we fully grasp the implications of our own unique religious paradigm. Freedom of expression for one group means freedom of expression for all, without a knee-jerk fear reflex with establishment overtones. A balanced approach to the free exercise clause will give way to a balanced approach on the establishment clause.

Christ's way, after all, is that we treat others as we would expect to be treated. We must extend compassion for others' viewpoints if we would receive compassion when our turn comes. Love demands it. We are not a one-pony
show—the Sunday law—but, as our own freewill expression of the gospel, we must be willing to grant other Christians their right to free expression.

"Just at the moment we think we got the formula kind of figured out, it's the mysterious God who comes to us and says, 'This may not be the way you would have quite figured it out,'" said Martin Doblemeier, documentary filmmaker, creator of the Adventist trilogy set, and Adventist admirer.
Ethical eating

Wicus den Dulk  September 8, 2015

As Adventists, we have an acute awareness of the God’s principles for ideal health (Genesis 1:29; 3:18), and we believe that, as we draw closer to our redemption, God seeks to more fully restore His image within His people, and His final call to reform is for all areas of life, including diet.

Sometimes, however, we find ourselves (and others) thinking at least one of two things: “What I eat is not a moral issue; it is nobody’s business but my own”, and/or “Diet is not a salvational issue”. As I have considered these two claims from time to time, I have come to the conclusion that both are false. Before consigning me with the unrighteous to the lake of fire, allow me to explain.

Any question of morality only makes sense within a relational context. Therefore, to identify food as a potentially moral issue, we need only determine if it bears a positive or a negative sway in our relational spheres. Christians ought to recognise the fact that relationship has two dimensions: The horizontal, or earthly, and the vertical, or heavenly. Even if it were true that our dietary choices had no bearing on the earthly, the divine element would still need to be addressed. We are compelled to admit that dietary choices have a direct influence on our quality of life, which ultimately belongs to God (1 Corinthians 6:19). We were not only created in His image (Genesis 1:26, 27), but we were bought at an unimaginable price (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). Our very breath is in His hand (Daniel 5:23), and our lives are continuously being upheld by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). These texts assure us that we have been given essential worth and value. Therefore, is it not imprudent for us to wilfully mar the image in which we were created, to systematically break down that which God's power works to uphold, and to destroy the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16), for whom Christ shed His blood to redeem? Are we fully surrendered to God when we deliberately imperil His gift of life? If our mission and our message are to give glory to God (Revelation 14:7), are we not delivering a deficient Christian witness by endeavouring to glorify Him in spirit, but not in body?

HOW DOES DISREGARD FOR HEALTH PRINCIPLES AFFECT OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS?

Our ability to care for and protect family and friends suffers to the same degree that our health suffers. The outward expression of affection is only as strong as the physical ability of the lover to express it. Think of it: A person in good health is better able to attend to the wants and needs of loved ones. Secondly, if we suffer ill health we cannot fulfill our mission to go to all the world and proclaim the glad tidings (Matthew 28:18-20). How can we answer God’s call to minister to the souls of the needy? Why create needless hurdles and difficulties for ourselves?

John Donne famously said that no man is an island. When you choose a bad lifestyle and as a result suffer poor health you not only wreck your own life, but you actually burden those who love you, and perhaps even those who depend on you. Moreover, if the disease is severe, undue and unnecessary distress (emotional and spiritual) is imposed upon family and friends.

Perhaps we do not appreciate the gravity of the fact that our dietary choices may actually add to the problem of suffering in the world; not only our own, but others’ as well. One would think that the portion of hurt doled out to us in life as a result of circumstances beyond our control is sufficiently unsavoury to our sensibilities that we would not see fit to actually go about creating our own share of misery. It is proper for us to take cognisance that whenever we decide to gratify our own desires (appetites, or otherwise) without regard for potential consequences to those around us, we are indulging a spirit of selfishness.
What of our children? Here is a sobering thought. The reality is that our lifestyle choices have a profound effect on our children on a genetic level. It is not the purpose of this article to go into the scientific detail (neither does the author think he is qualified), but the reader is challenged to look into what is called 'Epigenetics'. The bad news is that what we choose to put down our mouths will have an effect on our children. The good news is that our kids do not necessarily have to be utterly hopeless prisoners to our propensities. The short of it is this: You are what you eat, but you are also what your parents ate, and by parity, your children are what you choose to eat. This aside, bear in mind that we raise our children according to our own habits and customs, and thus they become unwilling heirs of our misguided ideas, and, consequently, inherit the effects of our lifestyle decisions.

They experience reduced quality of life due to no conscious effort, nor due to any fault of their own. It is an injustice that we would inflict needless affliction on future generations only because we are unwilling to part from cherished, harmful practices. As you can imagine, this process is passed on multiple generations, and so the travesty only increases in magnitude the longer it is allowed to go on unhindered.

Now, stop to think that if it is true that we are what we eat, even to the genetic level, then it follows that what we eat must necessarily have an effect on our brain. We cannot indiscriminately consume whatever our eyes see and our hands can lay hold of without paying the price. Food will influence our moods and our judgement as surely as day follows night. If this were not true, oral medication would have been a complete waste of time and money for pharmaceutical companies. These drugs find entrance into the body and are assimilated exactly the same way as our meals. It may well be that some of our foolish decisions, which we later regret bitterly, are caused, at least in part, by poor dietary choices.

Lastly, most of us have at least a vague awareness of the cruelty perpetrated against the other creatures of God's domain (Psalm 50:10) for the sake of gratifying our palate, but we rarely give it sufficient thought for this reality to be noticeable in our lives. As Christians, we, above all people, ought to have a surpassing sympathy for creation, for it is motivated by a divine imperative. When we were given the commission to have dominion of the earth, this command was given us within the immediate context of having been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). Therefore, the derivative dominion we exercise over our fellow creations ought to reflect the kind of dominion that characterises God's government. Though we live in a fallen world, this should not be an excuse for failing to at least mitigate animal cruelty as far as possible.

I hope the preceding content helps to show the bearing that the first question we started with has on the second. Even though diet is not a means of obtaining salvation, it can have an indirect influence on our moral choices, which may prove ourselves disqualified from salvation. It is like being a pilot: Not drinking does not qualify you to be a good pilot, but drinking can cause even a good pilot to crash the plane. While God's love is unconditional, salvation, though free, is not. By stubbornly making bad appetitive choices, we make abidance with those conditions unnecessarily hard at an hour when we can ill afford to forfeit the benefits that have been so gracefully provided us.

It has been said that we cannot eat our way into heaven, but we can eat our way out. While this aphorism does apply to the main burden that this article endeavours to communicate, I would suggest that it applies equally to the monster of fanaticism. We must at all times strive to be gentle, peaceful, patient, understanding. Let us be sensitive and sensible in dietary reform. The kind of character often associated with fanaticism is precisely the kind that reflects a satanic spirit, rather than a Christ-like one. Both snares (that of hard-heartedness and of fanaticism) do nothing for the cause of God and only dishonours Him in the eyes of the world.