## NEWS

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## OPINION

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Devotional writer Debbonnaire Kovacs says internal slavery comes not so much from that which overcomes us, but from that to which we voluntarily give up our freedom. She urges us to consider new thoughts on the topic and in this week's feature from Victory Over the Beast (see below)....

## FEATURES

*(Available to Logged-in Subscribers)*
denominational schools of higher learning....the paradigm to minister to and with North America Adventist-born youth is rapidly shifting....

Summer Special: Camp Meeting
Then and Now: 'Tis the camp meeting season, and an ancient "Camp Meeting Song" quoted here includes the lyrics “we’d live in a tent, how well we’d get a long, for you see it was (beat) camp meeting time!” The song is ancient and has not yet made it onto the Web, but you'll find it here and much more as you share camp meeting memories....

Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 16: Come Out of Babylon: Dr. Thomsen again focuses on coming out of Babylon, and what that really means. How can we find true healing from serious inner issues? he asks. “Some sincere believers may claim that holding correct doctrine is the antidote to the mindset of Babylon, but correct doctrine, while important, is only of limited value," because doctrines "may actually become idols themselves."...
20 Years After Waco Adventists Wary of Extreme Groups, Individuals

Seven in ten Seventh-day Adventists say that looking back on the tragic events of 1993 at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, their primary view now is "concern about extreme groups at the margins of the Adventist movement" and/or "a sense that one must be aware of the unbalanced people who may be in the church." Another third still have questions about how Federal agents handled the confrontation and one in four worry about emphasis on the apocalyptic.

In a survey conducted for Adventist Today in April and May among a random sample of church members only 14 percent expressed fear that the event may still be the source of negative attitudes toward the Adventist Church. Few respondents indicated that they have no memory of the tragic story that unfolded on national television in April 1993 when a small religious group called the Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists got into an exchange of gunfire with agents of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) attempting to serve a search warrant. Federal officers and members of the group were wounded and killed in the gun fight and after a standoff that stretched for nearly a month, Federal officers from several agencies attempted to force the group to leave by using gas and a conflagration ensued killing women and children as well as gunmen.

The majority of Adventists who responded to the survey (57 percent) remember their horror at the deaths involved in a confrontation in which interpretations of the Book of Revelation played a public role. Another 31 percent remember that they were concerned that the general public might think the group was a part of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination; 29 percent remember that they were perplexed about how the tragedy could have happened and 18 percent were shocked that Adventist could be involved in such violence.

How should Adventist relate to the 20th anniversary of the event? Nearly half (48 percent) said that it is good to think about what can be learned from the tragedy. Almost as many (44 percent) felt that it is appropriate to remember the families who suffered from the tragedy. A third felt that the anniversary is cause for spiritual reflection and prayer and 14 percent said it should be a reason to redouble efforts against extremists in the Adventist faith.

Nine percent of the survey respondents indicated that they had a personal relationship with someone who was caught up in the events in Waco in 1993. A number of Adventist families lost loved ones in the event because the group included both individuals who had left the denomination or been dropped from membership and people who were still members.

A total of 233 individuals responded to the online survey out of a random sample of 400 email addresses of church members. The response rate is 58 percent and the standard allowance for sampling error is eight percentage points, plus or minus.

The first issue of Adventist Today was published soon after the event and the cover article in that issue was about the Waco tragedy. Adventist Today continues to be the only Adventist news publication that regularly covers independent ministries and a variety of groups that consider themselves "Adventist" but are not officially affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Current subscribers can access a PDF copy of that first issue in the archives on this Web site.
‘There are still some small groups around the edges of the Adventist movement that have very extreme views about fulfillment of prophecy and related issues,’ an Adventist historian told Adventist Today. ‘There is also about a quarter to a third of Adventists in North America who are very conservative in their approach to the faith, almost sectarian in some ways. It may be a somewhat larger percentage in some developing nations, although no one has published really definitive research on this subject.’

‘More remarkable,’ said a retired pastor, ‘is the growth of a strong evangelical stream among Adventists in North America. In 1980 the North American Division included a question in a survey asking about assurance of salvation and 67 percent indicated a strong sense of assurance. Since that time the percentage expressing a firm assurance of eternal life has grown to more than 90 percent. You can see the same trend in the Valuegenesis 1 and 2 surveys among young people. There is much more emphasis on Christ-centered preaching and faith today.’

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Study Papers from Ordination Committee to be Released Soon, Chairman Announces

Submitted: Jul 27, 2013

By AT News Team

"In a few days [the Bible study papers on women's ordination] will be available online for everyone," Dr. Artur Stele, is quoted in a story released July 25 by the official Adventist News Network (ANN) and written by Mark Kellner, news editor of the Adventist Review.

Stele is chairman of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee appointed by the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to seek a solution to the denomination's controversy about women serving as ordained clergy. He is a GC vice president and director of the denomination's Biblical Research Institute.

The committee released a short consensus statement earlier last week providing a general overview of the topic of ordination with no mention of the gender issue. The ANN story includes a few, selected pieces of the debate in the committee. Those who support the ordination of women and those opposed to the practice were given equal time and opportunity during the July 21-24 meeting to review biblical evidence supporting their positions, as well as materials from the writings of Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White.

In a paper on hermeneutical principles, Dr. Jirí Moskala, newly-appointed dean of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University, told the committee, “There is no theological hindrance” to ordaining women. “On the contrary, the biblical-theological analysis points in that ultimate direction, because the Spirit of God tears down all barriers between different groups of people in the church, and gives freely His spiritual gifts to all, including women, in order to accomplish the mission God calls all of us to accomplish.” He pointed out that there is no statement in the Bible commanding: “Ordain women to ministry!” Nor is there one urging: “Do not ordain women to ministry!”

Taking a contrary viewpoint, Dr. Gerard Damsteegt, an associate professor of church history at the seminary, cited the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition which led to Adventism, as well as Catholic fathers and Protestant reformers, to oppose women’s ordination: “If we look as the Adventist pioneers on women’s involvement in the mission of the church,” he said, “we notice that their position is very similar to that of Wesley and Methodism. These pioneers strongly encouraged female participation, excepting in the headship offices of elders and ministers.”

Pastor Stephen Bohr, also arguing against women’s ordination, said that Ellen G. White’s role involved her being “set apart by God to be a prophet, not an elder/overseer. To say that because Ellen White was a prophet she had the right to be an elder or pastor would be like saying that because I am an elder, I have the right to be a prophet! The conclusion simply does not follow the premise!”

Dr. Richard Davidson, seminary professor of Old Testament at Andrews, focused the committee’s attention on the Biblical passage at the heart of the debate: “In the modern discussion over whether women should be ordained as pastors the foundational passage for both those who affirm and those who oppose women’s ordination is Genesis 1-3.”

Davidson pointed to the roles given Adam and Eve at creation: “According to Genesis 1:27-28, both the man and woman are equally blessed. Both are to share alike in the responsibility of procreation, to ‘fill the earth.’ Both are to subdue the earth. Both are given the same co-managerial dominion over God’s non-human creation.”
Illustrating their very different reading of the same Biblical text, Pastor Paul S. Ratsara, president of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and Dr. Daniel K. Bediako of Valley View University in Ghana, asserted “God created man and woman as equals and with role differentiation. In the church, men are to lead.” They maintained that if women’s ordination is permitted, either globally or on a regional basis, the church’s influence and theological unity would be diminished. “A decision to ordain women as pastors can be made only outside the bounds of Scripture,” they concluded.

Additional presentations contrasted Biblical concepts of authority with models built on “elitism” and “hierarchy,” and explored the views held by Adventist co-founder Ellen White on the appropriateness of women serving in various ministry roles. Urging the committee to disavow models of male authority and headship that he maintains are rooted in post-apostolic Christianity, Dr. Darius Jankiewicz, chair of the seminary’s theology department, maintained that “if anything apart from commitment to Christ and His church, spiritual gifting and maturity determine fitness for various functions in the church, then, whether we intend it or not, we create an elitist community.”

Dr. Edwin Reynolds, a New Testament scholar at Southern Adventist University, underlined a very different view of how authority should function in the church. “Spiritual headship and teaching authority seems to be vested in the roles of apostle and elder in the [New Testament],” his presentation noted. “These roles would not seem to be appropriate for women to seek under the principle of submission to male headship.”

Dr. Teresa Reeve, a New Testament scholar at the Andrews seminary and one of several female presenters, reached an opposite conclusion: “The New Testament practice of ordination as the formal appointment and endorsement of an individual for a ministry task or role gives no impediment to the ordination of suitably qualified women to serve as pastors.”

Dr. Denis Fortin, a church historian, offered a detailed summary of Ellen White’s perspective on women serving in ministry: “Ellen White understood ordination as an ordinance at the service of the church to commission people in various kinds of ministry and responsibilities, and to ask God’s blessing on their ministry. There is no indication in her writings that the rite of ordination should be limited only to men or that it should be used to establish some kind of church hierarchy. She emphatically encouraged the involvement of women in all forms of ministry.”

The committee will meet again in January 2014 for five days to share evaluations of the papers presented and to chart the path ahead for the study process. The committee will also receive reports from each of the church’s 13 division Biblical Research Committees that are concurrently studying the issues at a regional level.

“We are now at the point that [the] two groups have presented the hermeneutical issues, the principles. They have illustrated it, and they have given all the facts, all the findings, they have found for both positions,” said Stele. “The next step, based on what was presented, [is] to try to see if we can find a common ground, whether we really can come up with one position” on the ordination issue. If that can’t be done, he said, “then we would have to prepare two different reports, and concentrate on what solutions we would suggest.” He concluded, “We have seen a good spirit, which was a big blessing. Both groups, although having different views, have really demonstrated respect for each other, and it was a very friendly atmosphere, a very open atmosphere.”

A total of 17 papers with Bible and historical study on the topic of gender as it relates to ordination were presented last week. Stele stated that they will be available on line in the near future and ANN supplied this web address as the location where these papers will be available: http://www.adventistarchives.org/ordination#.UfKFY28CzB
Adventist Given a Life Sentence in Pakistan May Have Been Tortured and Girlfriend Abused

Submitted: Jul 31, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Adventist Today reported July 14 (with an update on July 17) that a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pakistan has been given a life sentence under that nation's controversial "blasphemy" laws for text messages that he allegedly sent. New details have emerged in a story released yesterday by the Adventist denomination's official news service, Adventist News Network (ANN).

Sajjad Masih, age 29, has been in prison since he was arrested in December 2011 and says that he was forced to confess to sending the text messages "under duress," ANN reports. Affidavits from Masih's coworkers confirm that he was at work at the time prosecutors claimed he sent the text messages from his former fiancee's cell phone in the United Kingdom.

"Masih was framed by Donald Bhatti, who in May 2011 forcibly married Masih's then fiancee, coercing her parents with promises of work visas. Bhatti had dated the young woman before moving to the U.K., and is said to have still been jealous of her relationship with Masih. After the ceremony, Bhatti immediately returned to the U.K., taking his new wife with him. Masih and his former fiancee, however, maintained a close friendship, frequently calling each other."

The phone from which the text messages originated was found to be registered in the name of Bhatti's wife and she told Masih that Bhatti had purchased a SIM using her ID card and arranged for an accomplice to send the messages, hoping to end the relationship. Masih's defense attorney, Javed Sahotra, who is also a member of the Adventist Church, is cited as the source of this information in the ANN bulletin.

A committee on the defense of members persecuted for religious reasons has been formed at the denomination's General Conference to deal with cases of this type. "Members of religious minorities in Pakistan live with the constant threat of being accused of 'blasphemy.' They know that if they are accused, they cannot count on a serious investigation," Dr. John Graz, GC director of public affairs and religious liberty, told ANN. "What is happening to Sajjad Masih is another tragic example of the abuse of blasphemy laws in some parts of Pakistan."

The laws are notoriously used to take revenge on Christians and other religious minorities, Michael Ditta, the president of the Adventist Church in Pakistan, told ANN. "We as a minority faith are concerned about the misuse of this law and growing intolerance toward Christians in the country." The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom cited Pakistan earlier in 2013 for "systematic, ongoing and egregious" suppression of minority religious rights.

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Event Prepared Students to Lead Public University Campus Ministries

Submitted: Aug 1, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

The Berkeley (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church recently hosted Campus Catalyst, a weekend seminar organized by Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF) to equip student ministry leaders at public universities and colleges. Some 25 students from three California schools—UC Berkeley, Sacramento State and Diablo Valley Community College—attended the event last weekend (July 26-28). Training focused on the essentials of successful campus ministry, the power of one individual to organize a ministry, and how to use Journey, a 12-lesson small group study guide on Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Participants also spent time in groups planning campus events for the coming school year.

“Campus Catalyst is a great way to kick-start your campus ministries program for the year,” explains Ron Pickell, lead pastor at the Berkeley Church and the ACF coordinator for the denomination's North American Division. “Campus Catalyst was created to help local conferences, churches that are near campuses, and students who are on a campus launch an ACF group and to grow and sustain campus ministry.” Pickell has led four Campus Catalyst events in recent years with more scheduled in Hawaii, Florida, Nebraska and Texas, as well as five locations across Australia.

ACF is the denomination's official organization for campus ministry at educational institutions not affiliated with the Adventist Church in North America. The ministry functions under the NAD youth and young adult director, Pastor James Black.

ACF supports more than 150 student groups across North America. Because of the number and distribution of ACF groups, Pickell is working with other leaders to host Campus Catalyst events. Kirk King, who helped develop the training materials, will lead a weekend event at the University of Nebraska in September. Additional facilitators are scheduled to be trained.

Both the total numbers at public universities and the number of Adventists attending these schools underline the significance of this ministry. With an estimated 22 million students in North American universities, ACF has a substantial field for outreach. According to a survey conducted by the NAD in 2009, 15 percent of church members have a family member attending a public or secular college or university. Based on this research, Pickell estimates that between 80,000 and 100,000 Adventist young people are currently attending public institutions of higher learning. In comparison, there are approximately 26,000 students in the Adventist colleges and universities in the NAD and not all of these students are church members.

Public campus ministry is becoming a greater concern for the Adventist Church in North America. In 2012 NAD leadership voted to focus on six strategic issues, including the retention of young adults raised in the Church. Public campus ministry is a major component of this, says Pickell. Consequently, the NAD has increased funding for Campus Catalyst as well as for other initiatives such as the ACF Institute, a 10-day intensive training event for young adults who wish to serve as ACF Mission Year volunteers. These volunteers spend a year working full time on public campuses. Pickell's goal is to have ten ACF Mission Year volunteers trained and placed by the Fall of 2014. Interested young people should plan now to attend the ACF Institute to be held May 16-25, 2014, at Union College, not far from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.
CRAVE is another ACF outreach. It is a week-long study group focusing on the cravings of young adults—relationships, success, money, etc.—and how these point to deeper spiritual needs. CRAVE meetings held at California State University in San Marcos included food and music, attracting 100 to 120 individuals each day. As a result, about 500 students signed up for Bible studies, far more than the ACF chapter was able to handle. Pickell emphasized that this level of response shows the potential for Adventist ministry on public campuses as well as the need for ACF Mission Year volunteers.

More information is available at: http://www.acflink.org/
The Pharisees of Revelation 3

By Danny Bell

What if I told you that the Laodicean Christian was not a backslider at all but in fact the very opposite? What if I told you that the Laodicean was a nicely dressed, well spoken, regular church attending, active Christian? What if I said that the common belief of the last day Laodicean as being someone who struggles with sin, sliding in his walk with the Lord was a false application of Revelation 3? What if I told you that we are experiencing the Laodicean spirit now in western Christianity more than ever before?

Most of us have read about the seven churches in Revelation. While visiting John in a vision on the Isle of Patmos, Jesus gave pointed messages to each of the seven churches that were in existence at the time. Starting in chapter two, Jesus delivers some wise counsel to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Adventists, along with many commentators, teach that the seven churches have a future application to the seven phases of church history right down to the end of time. Each message to the churches becomes strikingly similar to the successive eras of the Christian movement with a descriptive likeness to what happened to the Church after the time of the Apostles. From the first organic roots of Christianity, a pattern emerges with matching counsel for each of the seven churches right down to Laodicea—the last era of Christians at the time of the end.

Out of the seven churches, however, the counsel given to Laodicea is the least flattering. In fact there’s no encouragement about their performance like the other churches, but only a stern rebuke that their condition makes Jesus sick: “because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot I will vomit you out of my mouth” (Revelation, 3:16, NKJV).

The condition of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3 is astonishing. They are presented as being in denial about their true condition and say to themselves that they are “rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing” (v17), but in reality they are the opposite. Jesus calls them “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked” (ibid). The last-day Laodicean does not fare well among the seven churches, earning the strongest rebuke from Christ Himself.

From my earliest memories, the Laodicean message has always been presented as being about backsliders. Preachers were not neglectful to point out that those who have continued to sin, leaving their first love, were Laodicean and had backslidden to a point where, if they didn’t change, God would spew them out of his mouth.

Backsliders are said to be those who have not overcome besetting sins, sliding backwards in their relationship with God. The Laodicean backsliders, therefore, were urged to buy ‘gold’ from God, “refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (v18).

Under such instruction it seemed to me that I must feel even more ashamed of my sins and have more guilt that I had not overcome. The message was clear—the Laodicean Christian was a sinful backslider and should repent, coming up to a higher standard of behaviour than other church saints had attained, the saints who always seemed to be looking down at me with a kind of smug sympathy. For years I had held this belief, and for years... I was wrong.

While backsliders are in all churches and are in need of Gods ‘gold’, they are not the focus of Jesus’ message to Laodicea. The condition of the Laodicean is one of spiritual blindness, and because they cannot see their poverty of spirit, they feel no need to change. In fact it has nothing to do with backsliders at all, but more to do with a mentality that Jesus often encountered and warned about in his parables. The Laodicean spirit is not about specific sins but an attitude.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went up to the temple to pray reflects the difference perfectly. The Pharisee, proud of his spiritual attainments and blind to his true condition, prayed, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector” (Luke18:11). The tax collector, representing more the backslider, prayed, “God, be merciful to me
a sinner!” (v13). Jesus concluded by giving credit to the man who was aware of his sins as opposed to him who was blind to his.

My favourite grandmother had this to say:

*The people of God are represented in the message to the Laodiceans in a position of carnal security. They are at ease, believing themselves in an exalted condition of spiritual attainments. (RH, September 16, 1873).*

The Laodicean message is not about backsliders but about proud Christians. Self-sufficient spiritual superiority versus the humility of common sinners can be seen in other parables such as the Prodigal Son, the Ten Virgins, the Sheep and the Goats, all of which point to the dangers of becoming spiritually proud and self-sufficient. Over and over, Jesus warned his disciples not to think of themselves too highly but rather be aware of their own spiritual poverty and dependence on God. This spiritual blindness was a constant source of discussion with Jesus, and he attributed it mostly to the Pharisees—a group responsible for His death and distorting what God actually requires from believers.

The Pharisees were in denial about many things when Jesus called them *blind guides* (Matt 23:24). In very descriptive rebukes, these self-sufficient worshippers were said to have: majored in minors, stopped the growth of churches, exalted themselves, made rules for others to follow but didn’t practice themselves, followed the law scrupulously, had an obsession with outward appearances and were full of hypocrisy.

The warnings about becoming spiritually proud were a precursor to the Laodicean condition spoken of in Revelation 3. It’s not about Christians who are aware of their sins and status before God. To the contrary, the Laodicean would likely fly under the radar and be sitting in our pews fully engaged in worship and the internal ministries of the church. The Laodicean holds positions of influence and authority, and their church record, for all appearances, is impeccable.

Unfortunately, the Laodicean is one who is happy in their religious walk and confident in their standing when it comes to being saved at the end (Matt 7:22). They may talk of their salvation as if it were a foregone conclusion and would perhaps deride those who didn’t exhibit such confidence and certainty. Their over-confidence is their downfall because it’s based on their apparent spiritual wealth, biblical knowledge and standing in the church. They are not struggling fringe-dwellers, but are at the core of church life and its functions, often leading out in high praise and sanctimonious acts of worship (Matt 6:2).

My grandmother again said,

"*I asked the meaning of the shaking I had seen and was shown that it would be caused by the straight testimony called forth by the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans. This will have its effect upon the heart of the receiver, and will lead him to exalt the standard and pour forth the straight truth. Some will not bear this straight testimony. They will rise up against it, and this is what will cause a shaking among God’s people*"

"(1T, p181).

The Shaking, as is commonly taught, is something that precedes the *Latter Rain*—a much coveted event by many Adventists who want to go home. Could this be, however, the reason why the Shaking has not come? Have we been applying the message of the Laodicean wrongly? Could it be in our pride of our high achievements and status within the church that we are unwittingly placing a burden on those who are stragglers in the spiritual department? In our concerns about *being good* rather than *doing good* are we not playing into the spirit of Laodicea and setting the bar too high for those who struggle?

Our foremother concludes:

*It seems to me that the Lord is giving the erring, the weak and trembling, and even those who have apostatized from the truth, a special call to come fully into the fold. But there are but few in our churches who feel that this is the case. And there are still fewer who stand where they can help such. There are more who stand directly in the way of these poor souls. Very many have an exacting spirit. They require them to come to just such and such terms before they will reach to them the helping hand. Thus they hold them off at arms’ length* (T2, pg20).

This to me is classic Laodicea and again was encountered in Jesus’ time, “*For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay*
them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt 23:4-5). This distancing oneself from the rabble, the repulsion of dirty sinners, the selfish focus on our own comfort to the detriment of others is a strong theme that runs right through the New Testament to Revelation 3. There at the end of time, we see a church that is self-absorbed, self-sufficient and proud of her achievements.

All our prayers and wishful thinking for Jesus to come quickly may need to be tempered with this thought. The predicted Shaking will not come, as it depends greatly on our preachers and publications addressing the self-righteous and self-centred religion that infects the last-day western church culture.

We may also have to revise our teaching on the “Unpardonable Sin.” Is it right to attribute it to sinners who continue to fail in their attempts to live right, or could the unpardonable sin instead be about those who cannot see anything wrong? How can a sin be forgiven if it is not confessed? Maybe that’s why it is termed unpardonable?

The Laodicean is in a state of confidence and happiness concerning their stand with God and the church. They cannot see the needs of others beyond their own. They are self-sufficient, and their way of doing religion centers on externals and achievements they have acquired within their community. Jesus loves the Laodicean and pleads, “anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (Rev 3:20). It's not a surprise then that Jesus is found outside of the Laodicean church’s door knocking. Could it be that these are the things they lack—a heart for those who are desperate to come in and the capacity to see who it is who knocks?

_______________________ Join in the discussion:

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Dr. David Wilbur: Power and Illusion: Religion and Human Need. Part 14, Chapter 13

By Ervin Taylor

This is Part 14 of the summary of Dr. Wilbur’s book. It should be emphasized that all of the text in this series of blogs in bold font in the body of the text of the chapter summary has been kindly provided by Dr. Wilbur. If there are any of my own comments, they will follow in regular type.

Summary for Chapter 13: Religion and Science and Reason

Atheism, Acculturation, and Individualism

Most humans are acculturated into a religion when they are young. This acculturation of the child seems to create an enduring comfort with a set of beliefs that are then hard to abandon or alter later in life. Alternatively most atheists seem to be so as the result of an individual evaluation of evidence. They don’t usually reach this belief because of a warm feeling inside that gives them confidence. There is a tendency for many such people to go on their way as private non-believers in a believing society, not seeking public notice and not founding religion like associations.

Other important currents include the officially atheistic Marxist world now largely gone and an efflorescence of anti-religion or anti-God books in response to Muslim religious terrorism.

Short Review of Some Arguments Supporting Atheism

The rational Greeks may be the first to leave us a record of rejecting the reality of the gods. Some of the concerns that fuel atheistic thinking are as follows.

1. *Theodicy or the justice of God.* In a world with much evil, how can you believe in some powerful, knowledgeable and kind supervisor?

2. *The question of the supernatural*

   . The central myth of every great religious tradition contains some supernatural claims. These are not based on publically evaluable evidence.

3. *Exclusivity in Ethics.* A good ethics is usually offered but then exceptions are demanded as prescribed by the leaders—speaking for God.

4. *Use as a tool for domination.* Among others, Karl Marx, Upton Sinclair and Jared Diamond have found frustrating this use/abuse of religion.

5. *Direct disagreement with scientific studies*

   . Immortal immaterial souls and a recent creation of the world and life are just two places where some religions make implausible claims.

6. *The multiplicity of competing claims*

   . The large number of competing religions
Atheism and the Marxist World

For about 70 years the Communist Party had control of Russia and tried to create a Godless society. With almost three generations of control they were unable to form a compelling substitute for belief in religion and when their empire collapsed there was a rapid emergence of various religious alternatives: especially the Russian Orthodox faith. There may be many reasons for this failure but Paul Gabel suggested that the Marxist interpretation of religion as primarily a tool for domination by the ruling class made the party unable to appreciate religion’s adaptive power.

Philosophy, Religion, and Atheism

Philosophy addresses many of the same concerns as religion but tries to do it rationally without recourse to the supernatural. Religions often engage philosophers to relate their beliefs to the rest of human knowledge. In contrast some famous philosophers of the last few hundred years have eloquently defended skepticism or atheism: men such as David Hume, Bertrand Russell and Friedrich Nietzsche. Thus philosophy may defend skepticism and offer alternate interpretations of the universe but it seldom fills human needs as well as a caring religious community.

Is Atheism an Alternative to Religion?

Atheism offers a substitute world view compared to supernaturalism but it doesn’t easily fill the many functions of religion described in Chapter Two. Some secular humanist organizations have tried to develop social programs that fill this role but so far their success has been limited.

Is Atheism Dying?

Alister McGrath has written a book, The Twilight of Atheism, proposing that it is a dying belief system. His main support seems to be the failure of international communism. Other evidence suggests that secularism and atheism are thriving in many places.

Atheism and Atrocity

The government managed atrocities of the 20th century were driven by dreams of some future utopia that justified the violence. The Marxists had a “faith-based ideology” with prophet, scripture and eschatology. Their confident belief drove their actions but their atheism was only an incidental feature not responsible for the actions. The Nazis and the Fascists committed their atrocities, also justified by utopian visions but did it while maintaining good relations with the established churches.

Summary

Atheism has never been a replacement for religion in any society. Religion fills many roles in civilization and is usually chosen by the believer on an emotional, not rational basis. Atheism will always be an intellectually viable position that attracts adherents in most educated populations and sometimes a large minority. Humanism may have a role similar to religion for some of these people.
Stability in Unstable Times

Submitted: Jul 31, 2013

By Debbonaire Kovacs

I had edited this week’s chapter of Dr. Ervin Thomsen’s book *The Victory over the Beast* (I hope you are reading this book as we post it, one chapter per week, in the Features section—it’s awesome!!) before I read the next chapter in *The Monastery of the Heart*. It is titled “Stability of the Heart” and one passage startled me because it was so similar to something Dr. Thomsen had said.

Chittister had been talking about the inevitable disappointments in this life: “often confusing and blurred, unsure under foot... The world around us has tilted and tipped without our permission. [Amen!] Nothing is what it once had been, nothing is what it promised to be.” Then came the passage that struck me:

*But one thing is inescapable:*
*the way we deal with*
*whatever happens to us*
*on the outside*
*will depend entirely*
*on what we have become*
*on the inside.*

*Wherever we have fixed our hearts,*
*whatever it is to which we have given them,*
*will determine the way we experience*
*all that is happening to us now.*

*Indeed, it is stability of heart,*
*not stability of place,*
*that is the real monastic gift.*

Here is what Dr. Thomsen had said:

*We usually consider bondage as something external, like a prison or a concentration camp. But bondage can also be internal; we are held captive by patterns of thinking and by the experiential beliefs we hold. We see this kind of bondage most obviously in the loss of our freedoms through unforgiveness, bitterness, and resentment toward others – arising, not from people who have offended us, but from within ourselves by our failure to forgive.*

He writes in this chapter about these inner patterns of thinking becoming “idols” in the spirit of “Babylon-living.” And what is an idol, if it’s not something “to which we have given our hearts”?

I was struck by this in part because I used to live in a prison created by patterns of thinking imposed on me when I was so young that they were internalized without my will or understanding. It took gentle and persistent counseling to help me dig all the way to the source and figure out the false attitudes and ideas about myself and the world that were holding me captive even though I *did* choose to forgive and be forgiven; I *did* accept God’s love and acceptance of me—indeed, I depended my entire self on God’s opinion of me—it was the only thing
that kept me alive!

Where, then, do you get this “stability of heart”? Both this week’s writers agreed:

Thomsen: “The wounds inflicted upon you by the offenses of others can be healed. Jesus understands, because He has experienced everything you are going through. When He died on Calvary’s cross, it was not only for the forgiveness of your sins, but He also carried your griefs and sorrows (Isaiah 53:4). Jesus can heal your woundedness by replacing your hidden and cherished inner lies with His truth. ‘The truth shall set you free,’ and ‘you shall be free indeed’ (John 8:32, 36).”

Chittister: “. . .there is only one invariant on which we must depend: the steadiness—the stability—of the heart of God.”

Thank God that great heart is stable! No matter how we tremble and waver, if we cling like a limpet to God’s loving heart, we will be safe.

www.joanchittister.com
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Summer Special: Camp Meeting Then and Now

Submitted: Jul 31, 2013
By Debbonnaire Kovacs

We’re going to do a series for a few weeks on camp meetings in the United States. The camp meeting tradition began in the middle 1800s, when large revivals and Chatauqua lecture series were highly popular. According to that fount of wisdom, Wikipedia:

The camp meeting is a phenomenon of American frontier Christianity. The movement of thousands of settlers to new territories without permanent villages of the types they knew meant they were without religious communities. Not only were there few authorized houses of worship, there were fewer ordained ministers to fill the pulpits. The "camp meeting" led by itinerant preachers was an innovative response to this situation. Word of mouth told there was to be a religious meeting at a certain location. Due to the primitive means of transportation, if the meeting was to be more than a few miles' distance from the homes of those attending, they would need to stay at the revival for its entire duration, or as long as they desired to remain. People generally camped out at or near the revival site, as on the frontier there were usually neither adequate accommodations nor the funds for frontier families to use them. People were attracted to large camp meetings from a wide area. Some came out of sincere religious devotion or interest, others out of curiosity and a desire for a break from the arduous frontier routine; the structure of the situation created new converts.

Wikipedia also has a short article on Adventist camp meetings, with this to say:

Camp meetings in the Adventist church trace back to the preceding Millerite movement led by William Miller. These in turn had influences from the existing Methodist camp meetings. The Millerites held more than 130 camp meetings from the earliest in summer 1842, to prior to Autumn 1844; with an estimated combined attendance of over half-a-million people. Media campaigns surrounding the camps extended their influence further.

When many readers and writers of this magazine were children, camp meetings were an important, even essential part of summer. Not only were there large varieties of meetings, with all the attendant spiritual blessings, but fellowship, the kind that only develops in the midst of heat, mosquitoes, storms, wet tents, ice chests full of vege-food, and the desperate need for the can opener forgotten at home, blossomed into friendships that lasted a lifetime. Some of those friendships might only catch up once a year during that unforgettable camp meeting week, but they brightened the life all year.

Ohio Camp Meeting in the 1970s and 80s, was an unforgettable experience. If memory serves, there might be 2,000 attendees during the week, swelling to 5,000 or even more on weekends. The pastors from all over the state met the week before to have their own special experience, consisting of meetings, prayers, and the setting up of hundreds of 10-14 canvas tents and thousands of chairs.
Individual children’s departments might hold 100 or more small wigglers, all expecting something at least as exciting as VBS, but all day long, not just at night. Teachers and leaders of these programs worked all year to plan them. One teacher in central Ohio built giant backdrops of Bible scenes out of cardboard from appliance boxes, storing years’ and years’ worth of them all year in her basement. Wrist band security systems were set in place so leaders knew which children were allowed (only above a certain age) to go to their parents, which must wait for parents to pick them up, and which must be sent to between-meetings day care and play set-ups. Security guards (volunteer pastors with walkie-talkies and a sense of importance and authority) walked the grounds, helping people, finding lost children, and hushing noisy night-time wanderers.

As early as 6:30 am, loudspeakers rang out with wake-up music, attempting to drag out these same night-time wanderers to early meetings—“the best of the day!” From that point on, if you attended them all, you’d be in meetings all day, with meal breaks (the lunch one might include time for a quick nap), and then you might well stand or sit around discussing anything from the three angels’ messages and the nature of Christ to the recipe of the loaf at lunch or the bad behavior of everyone else’s children, until midnight or later.

On the last night, it was hard to pack up and go. We lingered and lingered, wishing it could go on, but also more than ready to be back in a normal routine, all at the same time. Camp meeting! We thought they’d go on forever.

But times change. Many conferences no longer have camp meetings, some are larger than ever, and some have taken creative steps to remake camp meeting in ways that will be relevant to a very different world. During the next few weeks, we’ll look at some examples of camp meetings today. Please post your own camp meeting memories and join the discussion!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_meeting
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_camps
“And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people.”

(Revelation 18:4)

God’s last-day message invites people everywhere to come out of symbolic Babylon and to escape the life-damaging effects of a Babylon-like lifestyle. Because the Babylon virus is largely internal, to switch membership from one organization or church to another will not really suffice. Our heavenly Father wants us to experience genuine freedom as symbolized by life in the symbolic city of the New Jerusalem. Such freedom is to rise above fears of exposure, because the security of our identity in Christ removes all unhealthy fears. Such freedom also includes deliverance from the bondage of our “intoxication” and addiction to our custom-designed idols, on which we have depended as the source of our salvation, self-worth, and significance.

Would it surprise you to discover that Jesus, in the message He delivered in His hometown synagogue of Nazareth, made a similar appeal to the one found in the 1st and 2nd angel’s messages? Again, let us compare scripture with scripture to discover more of God’s truth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus’ Message in the Nazareth synagogue</th>
<th>The Three Angels’ Messages</th>
<th>Revelation 14:6-12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Luke 4:14-30</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The 1st angel’s message: the everlasting gospel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The 2nd angel’s message: Babylon is fallen! come out of Babylon (Revelation 18:4). God’s appeal for captives to escape their bondage and enter into freedom. To be in Babylon is to be in the bondage of spiritual adultery, which is idolatry – the replacement of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, with the covetousness of our own hearts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The 3rd angel’s message: Do not worship the beast. When we worship anyone or anything other than the person of Jesus Christ, the fruit of such worship is the presence and outbreak of beastly behaviors (force, fear, threat, control, intimidation, manipulation, persecution, et cetera)</td>
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Jesus here addressed the spiritual blindness and bondage of His listeners who were in captivity to the idol, or beast, of their false identity – “we are not outsiders, but insiders, God’s specially chosen elite.”

• Their response to Christ’s message – beastly behaviors: They wanted to throw Him over the cliff. Why? Because he challenged the idol of their false identity - “we are better than others.”
About 400 years prior to this time, many of the Jews had returned from their Babylonian captivity and resettled in Judea and Jerusalem. God had ordained their exile in Babylon to teach them lessons about the life-damaging consequence of idolatry – spiritual adultery. When these Jews returned to Palestine and resettled there, they had indeed learned some valuable lessons. No longer did they engage in the worship and adoration of the idols of foreign nations.

Rather than worshiping foreign gods, the Jewish leaders now started to elevate their own religion in an elitist fashion. In their sincere attempts to avoid the idolatry of their ancestors, they gradually began an excessive preoccupation with the law, with rules and regulations added to the law, with the Sabbath, with the temple services, with their own religious machinery and organization.

It is far easier to detect the external idols of others than to be aware of religious idols within one’s own religious movement. Religious idols are also more deceptive. After all, reasoned many of their leaders, we are only trying to raise the standards of our faith to protect our people from ever lapsing into idolatry again. Instead of guarding the people against heresy, the religious leaders developed a religious system that just as effectively separated the people from their God, as had the foreign idols of past generations. Formalism, ritualism, externalism, elitism, and other isms by the dozen now became their own custom-designed idols, manufactured in the covetous desires of their own hearts.

The conflicts between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day arose because Jesus courageously challenged these religious idols, which had damaged the lives of both leaders and people through their hypocrisy, extreme callousness and insensitivity to human need. Their narcissistic parochialism and perceived superiority over others blinded their eyes from seeing and receiving Jesus as the Messiah. John, the beloved disciple, wrote about their reception of Jesus, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Thus, the Jewish people at the time of Christ were in a bondage of idolatry more severe than the captivity of their ancestors in Babylon some 500 years earlier.

The inspired intention of God’s last day message to “come out of Babylon” should really be to deliver people everywhere from the bondage of all idolatries that have held them captive. To understand something about the subtle pervasiveness of idols, I recommend Herbert Schlossberg’s Idols for Destruction [1] for a Christian analysis and understanding of the twisted thinking which typifies our idol-shaped and idol-motivated contemporary culture. A major issue, in the conflict between God and Satan in the last days prior to the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ, will be the contest between competing idolatries, each one claiming to have the answers to fix the pressing problems of our spiritually decadent world.

**The Loud Cry for Today**

The intoxicating effects of the “wine of Babylon” are present everywhere, for all nations have drunk of the wine of Babylon’s fornication (Revelation 14:8). Some sincere believers may claim
that holding correct doctrine is the antidote to the mindset of Babylon, but correct doctrine, while important, is only of limited value in overcoming idolatry, for such doctrines, intellectually held and cherished, may actually become idols themselves. After all, my claim to “have the truth” may conveniently cover up attitudes of pride and self-sufficiency which prevent me from deeply probing the hidden recesses of my own heart and life. The Jews at the time of Christ were on high alert for any attempts to compromise their religion, but they were blind in observing the causes of the conflicts in their own congregation (see James 4:1-11) which were rooted in spiritual adultery and idolatry.

This spiritual illness afflicted many early Christian churches, and it still afflicts us today. So much of the warfare in local churches may be nothing more the contests between various idolatries, each one claiming to be God’s answer to fix the church, when upon closer examination these may only be ways of establishing our identities as loyal, card-carrying, true-blue believers trying to make a name for ourselves. If we claim to have “come out of Babylon,” why has the Babylon-virus not also come out of us? Why is there so much squabbling among church members? Why are there so many unsettled conflicts?

In commenting on the Christian church, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr observed that the church is just like Noah’s ark – you wouldn’t be able to stand the stink on the inside unless you knew there was a storm on the outside. [2]

The Characteristics of Idolatry – Spiritual Adultery

There is a definite and most obvious link between spiritual adultery, idolatry, and the presence of demons in people’s lives. But, you say, if according to Paul (1 Corinthians 8:4) an idol is nothing, why then is the Lord so concerned about idolatry? It is because there is a power behind the idol that is seducing, destructive, and extremely deceptive. When we are not worshiping God with all our heart, soul, and mind, then our hearts can become deceptively filled with affections for our idols, god-replacements.

There is among us an obvious and healthy avoidance of anything demonic – areas where Satan works to deceive and destroy us – such as astrology, spiritualism, séances, tarot cards, palmistry, et cetera. But would it surprise you to discover that Satan may actively be at work even within many churches? Wherever the Babylon virus is present, conflicts will arise in any church afflicted by spiritual adultery, idolatry. This opens the doors for the presence and operation of demonic spirits. It is the work of believers, deputized as kings and priests (Revelation 1:6), to bring deliverance to all who are still in bondage to such idols and the attached habitual sins.

Evil spirits are continually alert to any such spiritual vacuums, or empty places. Hiding behind our idol-images, they are waiting to occupy and control our lives. Look closely at these Scripture passages:

- **Idolatry changes the affections of our hearts and sets us up for stumbling.** “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Everyone in the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts
before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity…I will set My face against that man…” (Ezekiel 14:4, 8). Idolatry makes us enemies of God.

- **God directs His jealousy against idols.** “They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know, to new gods, new arrivals that your father did not fear. Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you” (Deuteronomy 32:16-18).

- **Idolatry opens our lives for the operations of demons:** “But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk” (Revelation 9:20).

- **Seducing spirits give birth to doctrines of demons:** “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2). To understand the seductiveness of demonic doctrines, just look closely at Satan’s temptations directed at Jesus in the wilderness. There was no attempt to prompt Jesus to do something outwardly evil, but rather to do something good, like enhancing His ministry by publicity, popularity, and the avoidance of suffering. The seductiveness of idolatry always resides in its offer to do something good for us.

- **Idolatry, spiritual adultery, affects our children and future generations.** About this, the Psalmist writes with inspired conviction: “But they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they were defiled by their own works” (Psalm 106:35-39). Idolatry is deadly and destructive.

**The Presence of Demons in Babylon**

“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!’” For all the nations have drunk of
the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues’” (Revelation 18:1-3).

Let us unwrap the truths contained within this passage.

- **Great authority.** The work of this angel symbolizes the authority with which God has invested all believers. Jesus has given his church both power and authority to act in His stead as kings and priests (Revelation 1:6) in setting people free. When Jesus sent out the seventy, He deputized them as He gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick (Luke 9:1, 2). Through the gospel commission, Jesus Christ has deputized His church to proclaim the gospel under His authority. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…” (Matthew 28:19, 20). As Peter openly confessed the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God, Jesus invested him, as a representative of the church that confesses the identity of Jesus, with authority. “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18, 19). This is an authority bestowed on all Christian believers to act in Christ’s stead to deliver people from any captivity that restricts their service for God. They are to unlock the prison doors to set the captives free.

- **Illumined with his glory.** The glory of angels resides not in themselves, but in the One to Whom they give glory. When was Christ most glorified? Was it at the feeding of the multitudes? Was it when He performed miracles? Or when He hung on the cross dying for our sins? How do we detract from God’s glory? When we portray Him as inadequate to save us and to meet our needs. In our worship of idols, other gods, we are essentially telling lies about God, saying the one God is not enough for us.

- **He cried with a loud voice.** John reports of his vision in heaven, that when Christ died for our sins, he heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down” (Revelation 12:10,11). Our authority (power – εξουσία [Greek]) comes from Calvary’s cross. The strength (dunamis) comes from the proclamation of the gospel of Christ’s redeeming work. Be careful, however, lest this loud cry becomes a claim that church membership constitutes all there is to coming out of Babylon. To come out of Babylon is really to be set free from all idolatries, god-substitutes, and counterfeit gods. The power of the gospel legally establishes a new standing for us, without condemnation, but it also will also give us freedom from the slavery of serving Satan. On the road to Damascus,
Jesus personally and directly commissioned Paul “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18).

- **Babylon the great is fallen.** This is an amplification of the 2nd angels’ message of Revelation 14:8. God declares His judgment on Babylon, and on all who have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. If you claim to be a believer, then as the bride of the Lamb, Jesus is your bridegroom. Do you trust Him? Are you faithful to Him?

- **A dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird.** What is an unclean spirit? It is a spirit contaminated by double-mindedness (Matthew 6:24; James 1:8, 4:8) and the resulting conflict of interests will bring this person under the control of Satan. We often tempt the devil to tempt us, and thus open the doors for the working of demonic spirits in our lives. Such evil spirits are held captive (notice the use of the words prison and cage) in a vacuum because if Jesus Christ is not present, it is because we have relegated Him or dethroned Him to a 2nd place status. And when Jesus no longer has pre-eminence in our lives, evil spirits are then able to move in and establish occupancy in us. “Then let not a semblance of pride or self-importance be cherished, for it will crowd Jesus out of the heart, and the vacuum will be filled with the attributes of Satan.”[3]

The foundation for the operation of evil spirits is spiritual adultery, idolatry. This is the core sin that has affected the entire human race, for “ALL nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 18:3). Notice how Eugene Petersen, author of the Message Bible describes the subtle seductiveness such whore-worship.

“Worship under the aspect of the Great Whore is the commercialization of our great need and deep desire for meaning, love, and salvation, for the completion of ourselves from beyond ourselves. Whore-worship thrives by naming the worst things about us – our pride, our lust, our envy, our greed, our anger – with the designation ‘God,’ and gathering depersonalized and depersonalizing crowds to pursue these divinized defects religiously. The great danger that the world poses for us is not in its gross evils, but its easy religion. The promise of success, ecstasy, and meaning that we can get for a price is Whore-worship. It is the diabolical inversion of ‘you are bought with a price’ to ‘I can get it for you wholesale.’”[4]

So if all nations have drunk of Babylon’s cup, let’s examine how idols in subtle and devious ways may control our thinking processes.

In the writings of Ellen G. White, there are times when she refers to sins and character defects by their actual descriptive terms, but at other times, she labels such as the “spirit of Satan” or a
Detecting Religious Unclean Spirits

As Jesus dealt with the unclean demon in the synagogue of Capernaum, Jesus plainly rebuked him, saying, Come out of him. The response of the onlookers was one of amazement, “for with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits and they come out of him” (Luke 4:35). In commenting on this incident, Ellen G. White makes this observation, “The same evil spirit that tempted Christ in the wilderness, and that possessed the maniac of Capernaum, controlled the unbelieving Jews. But with them he assumed an air of piety, seeking to deceive them as to their motives in rejecting the Saviour. Their condition was more hopeless than that of the demoniac, for they felt no need of Christ and were therefore held fast under the power of Satan.” [6] This was the spirit of those who in the Nazareth synagogue attempted to throw Jesus over a cliff. It was the same spirit that motivated those who crucified Jesus at Calvary.

How to overcome Satan and escape from his cages and prisons

There is no doubt that evil spirits sometimes need to be verbally rebuked, but what is first needed is not so much a power encounter, but a truth encounter. When we learn to see everything in the light of Calvary’s cross, we will discover the source of both our power and authority. The words of Fundamental Beliefs No. 11, [7] capture this so aptly:

“Growing in Christ. By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaningless of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (Ps 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17-20; Eph 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; Rom 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25).”

The Captivity of Unforgiveness

We usually consider bondage as something external, like a prison or a concentration camp. But bondage can also be internal; we are held captive by patterns of thinking and by the experiential beliefs we hold. We see this kind of bondage most obviously in the loss of our freedoms through unforgiveness, bitterness, and resentment toward others – arising, not from people who have offended us, but from within ourselves by our failure to forgive. When we fail to deal with these offenses according to the Biblical pattern, we will imprison ourselves in a prison of darkness,
torment, and bitterness. The Bible speaks about the contagious defilement of this kind of spiritual
disease, and Jesus Himself addressed this on numerous occasions in His teachings, speaking of a
prison-like tormenting existence when we fail to forgive others.

- “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; Lest any root of bitterness
springing up cause trouble, and by this may become defiled” (Hebrews 12:15).
- “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But
if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your
trespasses” (Matthew 6:14, 15).
- In the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus said “And his master was angry, and
delivered him to the torturers, until he should pay all that was due him. ‘So my heavenly
Father will also do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brothers his
trespass’ ” (Matthew 18:34, 35).
- On the importance of seeking reconciliation: “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the
altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift
there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then
come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23, 24).

In the last days, our enemy, Satan, is an expert in taking advantage of our personal woundedness
and unforgiveness as a means of deceiving us. In Matthew chapter 24, which lists the signs of the
2nd coming of Jesus, this sign also occurs – “And then many will be offended, will betray one
another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many”
(Matthew 24:10, 11). Notice the sequence of this deception--

- Offended people experience woundedness and betray one another by failing to deal with
their offenses, and then
- false prophets, taking advantage of their woundedness, arise to deceive them, and lead
them to false christs, promising them make-believe cures for their problems.

Weak and wounded (offended) sheep are the first target of wolves. Many of us have developed a
fear of deception arising from false doctrine. But false doctrine must first find soil to grow in,
and this soil is often found in unforgiveness, the failure to promptly forgive our offenders.
Through my years as a pastor, I have observed that the main cause of doctrinal heresies is not
always found in differences of interpretation and understanding of scripture, but in attitudes of
pride and personal woundedness, the idolatries of our defense strategies arising from prior
offenses not settled according to Bible principles.

The Devil’s Malpractice

Would you let a physician treat you who was guilty of prior malpractice? Would you engage an
attorney to represent you who was incompetent and who had failed the local State Bar
Examination? Why then do we so readily take suggestions from Satan in how to deal with our
offenses, when we first should consult Jesus Christ, who has been designated by the God the Father to serve both as our attorney and our great physician? He is the only One authorized and competent both to treat our sin-disease and to provide unassailable legal representation for us in heaven’s courtroom.

Here is the sequence of what often may happen when we fail to forgive our offenders.

**The Path to a Wounded and Bitter Spirit**

- We experience woundedness through the offenses of others.

- We experience anger because of such offenses. “Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26, 27). When we fail to deal with offenses according to the Scriptures, then the devil establishes “footholds” in our lives, and such “footholds” over time become “strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:1-5) fortified by “arguments” that eventually will program our lives with the virus of Satan’s lies. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for pulling down strongholds; casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).

- When we fail to deal with past offenses through the principles of Matthew 18, our anger, though it may be repressed, leads to bitterness. “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble [you], and thereby many be defiled” (Hebrews 12:15). Such bitterness can contaminate families and entire congregations with Satan’s deceptions. We set ourselves up for last-day deceptions by our failure to deal with every-day problems through the principles of Scripture.

- *The lies that are attached to our wounds.* The problems are not so much our wounds, but the subtle subconscious lies that are attached to our wounds, “I am no good,” “No one cares,” ”I am hopeless,” “Nothing matters anymore,” “Nothing ever changes,” “God does not love me,” “If I don’t get my way, I’m out of here,” et cetera, distorted thinking about God, self, and others. The enemy will come in and take full advantage by attaching his custom-designed lies to your wounds. Have you ever had thoughts like those listed above? It is through such lies and half-truths that Satan will take advantage of your woundedness and seek to control your life. Ellen White noted that “Satan has a variety of scientific lies framed to be used on special occasions. He waits his opportunity to take souls captive.” [6]
• Through unsettled offenses we incarcerate ourselves in a *prison of woundedness*, though we may blame others for our problems. We also experience blindness in our ability to truthfully see and assess the damage that Satan is causing in our own lives, and how this affects the lives of others.

• *Self-centeredness.* If you ever hurt the fingers on your hand due to a missed hammer blow, you will feel intense pain. In that moment of pain, you think of only one thing, namely yourself. To think of yourself when you are wounded and hurting is not a sin. The Creator built this defense mechanism into our bodies for our protection. Such self-centeredness causes the instant mobilization of all the systems of your body to protect itself from further injury, as every system focuses on only one thing—the protection and healing of that hurting finger as evidenced by the symptom of pain.

But if we keep holding onto that self-protective attitude long after a psychological “hammer blow,” this unresolved woundedness may provide the programming whereby we custom-design our personal idols to help overcome the original offense. Have you said, or heard it said, “I am never going back to that church again;” “If this is the way they treat me, I’ll never give them another dime;” “Just wait till the next nominating committee; I’ll make sure that Mr. Blank does not get elected;” “I am not going to be a member of a church that does not stand up for the standards”? Far too often our conflicts may not be theology-based, but rather *wound-based*.

• *Inability to forgive.* Maybe the pain was so great and the offense so unjust that you said to yourself, “I’ll never forgive;” and you meant it in an innocent way as a path to achieve justice.

• *Control—guarding against further wounding.* You say to yourself, “I want to make sure that this never happens to me again.” We live to control ourselves against further wounds. Control is motivated by fear, and such unresolved fears may prevent us from having close and intimate relationships with people. Again, idol-making may be a protection against further wounding.

• *Negative emotions:* Anger, fear, self-pity, worry, anxiety. It is not always wrong to have these emotions, but when present in a person over extended periods they can wreak havoc with a person’s thought processes as well as his spiritual and physical immune systems.
Many Christians have lost their way through apostasy, because they have failed to discern the subtle deceptions of the enemy in taking advantage of their unresolved unforgiveness and bitterness arising from unsettled offenses. Could it be that the addiction to habitual sins (like Babylon’s intoxicating wine) is found in its deceptive promise to provide relief of painful symptoms while never treating the cause of our disease?

An often-overlooked application of the second angel’s message is God’s warning against the devil’s malpractice, which causes offended people to live in a prison-like existence. Satan wants you to believe that you can gain an upper hand over people who have offended you by refusing to forgive them, and by believing that your strategy is working.

To deal with our emotional wounds arising from the offenses of others, we may often resort to this sequence:

We curse our wounds,  
we nurse our wounds,  
we rehearse our wounds,  
but we cannot reverse our wounds until we let Jesus heal them.

As God’s children, we must always ask for the ointment of heaven to anoint our eyes that we may detect these lies and replace them with God’s truths to bring light into the darkened areas of our own and the lives of others. These divine truths, contained in the everlasting gospel, will bring healing and freedom by demolishing the lies attached to your wounds, and these can re-program your entire life by the truths of the word of God.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Bondage-Breaker

While preaching in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus used this text (recorded in Luke 4:18 quoting Isaiah 61:1, 2a) to introduce His sermon: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

The Promises of Jesus for you

- The gospel –The good news is that Jesus offers you His abundant life as a free gift to set you free from all past woundedness, brokenness, unforgiveness, and bitterness arising from your own sins or the sins of others. Jesus wants to set you free to experience His abundant life of love, joy, and peace, rather than leaving you to wallow in your woundedness arising from the offenses of others.
- **The poor** - Jesus describes you as “poor,” meaning helpless, because you are stuck in a situation from which there is seemingly no escape. To be poor is to be without resources. You are helpless, but not hopeless. He addresses here those who are at the end of their rope, those facing impossibilities, whose self-fix methods have not worked.

- **To heal the brokenhearted.** The wounds inflicted upon you by the offenses of others can be healed. Jesus understands, because He has experienced everything you are going through. When He died on Calvary’s cross, it was not only for the forgiveness of your sins, but He also carried your griefs and sorrows (Isaiah 53:4). Jesus can heal your woundedness by replacing your hidden and cherished inner lies with His truth. “The truth shall set you free,” and “you shall be free indeed” (John 8:32, 36).

- **Proclaim liberty to the captives.** You can make a jailbreak now through the forgiving and healing power of Jesus. Lies of Satan that have held you captive can be removed. Your entire life can be reprogrammed. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can be set free from bitterness and unforgiveness. God’s truths can remove and replace lies of Satan that have held you captive.

- **Recovery of sight for the blind:** Your blind spots are removed. You see yourself, God, and others from a new perspective. You see God working out good in the midst of pain (Romans 8:28). Your blind spots will disappear as you gradually begin seeing everything from God’s perspective. You see both the offender and yourself as precious beings for whom Jesus died.

- **Set at liberty the oppressed!** You can escape from the devil’s prison house and be free!

**Jesus Has Deputized His Church on Earth with Authority to Set People Free**

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock. I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you bind on earth will be bond in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18,19).

This passage is not primarily referring to some kind of ecclesiastical authority that authorizes churches to disfellowship members here on earth, and God, therefore, is under obligation to abide by the church’s decision. The wording here used strongly suggests that it is in heaven that Satan has already been bound, and that God has invested His church on earth with authority to do
on earth what has already been done in heaven. The church is God’s enforcement agency on earth to carry out the benefits of what has already taken place in heaven. We are only able to bind because of Christ’s prior victory over Satan at Calvary’s cross.

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.’” (Revelation 12:10, 11).

Who binds people? Satan binds people and severely limits their usefulness through unforgiveness, bitterness, unresolved woundedness, anger, fear, and even physical maladies. When Jesus once healed a woman, afflicted by curvature of the spine, in the synagogue, He said to His critics, “So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound – think of it – for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” (Luke 13:16).

Leaving Babylon for Jerusalem
The Journey from Unforgiveness to Forgiveness, from Bondage to Freedom

The work of preparing for heaven begins here on earth, now. It is really the work of “sanctification,” – growing more and more into the likeness of the character of Jesus Christ as we avail ourselves of all the benefits of the cross. Remember the words, “free to all, a healing stream flows from Calv’ry’s mountain.” So often we think we can accomplish this work by closer adherence to standards, or lists of behaviors (often dictated or suggested by other well-meaning Christians), but this is not a do-it-yourself-project. You need the intervention of Jesus Christ in your life to deliver you from sins that both blind and bind you. So start this journey now, and you will find your burdens lifted as you experience a new joy in Jesus.

As you read and compare the two columns below, would you ask Jesus Christ to move you totally over onto the “when we forgive” column?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When we do not forgive…</th>
<th>When we forgive…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We either deny or wallow in the pain</td>
<td>We feel the pain and we lay it on the Lamb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We become martyrs and victims</td>
<td>Who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who carry our own griefs and sorrows</td>
<td>Who was wounded for our transgressions and the transgressions of others - and we do not try to get mileage out of our wounds by soliciting sympathy and attention from others, and avoid the pit of self-centeredness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and we display our wounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get mileage out of our wounds by soliciting sympathy and attention from others, thus making self our focus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We use our past offenses as a means of reminding our offenders and ourselves about their offenses and thus hold them responsible for our bitterness. We do not use our wounds as a means of bringing up the past and using it against those who have offended us.

We let the offenses of others control us, and thus we experience bondage, because we have not received God’s forgiveness as a free gift. We do not let the offenses of others control us, which leads to freedom because we have received God’s forgiveness as a free gift.

We become losers by trying to make the offender look like a loser. We may end up looking like losers, and the offender may look like the winner.

We do not realize the pain we are continually inflicting upon ourselves by not forgiving. We may sometimes experience a pain greater than that caused by the original offense.

We want to crucify our offenders and we experience a living death that squeezes all joy out of living. We are crucified with Christ and believe the promise that in Christ we will experience new life as we die to self.

We become angry and bitter, We let go of anger and bitterness, and we desire to serve and love others.

We resent most in others what we are denying in ourselves. We recognize similar hidden sins in our own lives.

We attempt to prosecute our own cases and become anxious lest the offender may not be sufficiently punished. We find rest by resting our cases with God and exercise faith that He will judge our offenders.

We become infectious carriers of contention and strife. We become ambassadors of reconciliation, a kingdom of priests.

**Make a Jail-Break Today**

Think for a moment about the possibilities that await you when you make a jail-break from the devil’s prison of “Babylon.” You are now on the verge of one of the greatest adventures of your life, as you discover the freedom that awaits you when, from your heart, you forgive all those who have offended you. Forgiveness is an act of the will, not a feeling. If we can pray for a person, we can be assured that we have forgiven that person. To help accept an individual and open ourselves to a particular person, visualize him/her as being with the Lord Jesus and say to the Lord, “I love him/her because You love him/her.”

Never was any person more abused, tormented, and wounded than our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, while on the cross, we do not hear Him cursing His tormentors, but rather praying words of forgiveness, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (*Luke 23:34*). A few
moments later He died. When on the first day of the week He arose from the grave, what was His first work? He did not go into Jerusalem to confront Herod, Pilate and the religious leaders for their abuses and miscarriage of justice three days earlier. His first work, after a few brief appearances to His followers, was to ascend to His Father in heaven, and there receive His approval that His sacrifice was acceptable. The work of judging His enemies He trustingly left in the hands of His heavenly Father. We can do the same. It is the sure path to freedom! “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:21-23).

This cry for justice permeates the book of Revelation. “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6:10). Our hope is not in what we by ourselves can somehow accomplish in the settling of scores, but it is in what God will ultimately accomplish in the hour of His judgment, and at its conclusion. As God’s children, forgiven by Him and in turn forgiving others, we will not in our lifetimes be able to find complete justice for ourselves, nor see justice for all who have offended us. But not let this deter us from actively working in behalf of others. The hope held before us in Revelation is that God is actively and silently working out His purposes in restoring justice to His entire universe, and through our prayers, worship and personal initiatives we can join Him in this work.

**Life Applications**

**Questions to Ponder**

1. What causes the greatest alienation between you and fellow Christians – doctrinal differences or unsettled personal offenses?

2. To come out of Babylon is to experience total freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you have that freedom now? If not, why not?

3. Have you ever as a victim sung the “somebody done me wrong” songs? Did it really help you? Did it help those who listened to your tales of woe?

4. List some methods of dealing with the offenses of others that did not help.
5. Think of a person who has offended you and who you need to forgive – if not for their sake, at least for your own sake, and for Jesus’ sake. Are you willing to forgive that person today?

6. Will a change in church membership help you gain freedom from the slavery of Babylon?

7. What is the best deterrent against idols?

Texts to Remember:

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:32, 36).

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14, 15).

Truths vs. Lies

Replace the lies of the enemy with these truths that will set you free:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lies</th>
<th>Truths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I could experience genuine freedom if it were not for certain people who have offended me and circumstances that are not what they ought to be.</td>
<td>I can do all things through Christ, because I have learned to be content in Him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is too difficult for me to forgive, so I just choose to suffer in silence.</td>
<td>The cost of not forgiving takes a high toll on your physical, emotional and spiritual health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To forgive opens my life to more hurt, and I just cannot afford to take that chance.</td>
<td>To forgive opens my life to both the giving and receiving of love. It may hurt, but for Jesus’ sake I am willing to become vulnerable in order that He may be glorified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Write out any other lies or half-truths that you have believed, and how you will replace these.
with the truths of the Bible.

Endnotes:

[5] The following quotes are all from the writings of Ellen G. White. Notice how often she spoke of certain character defects in terms of demonic possession: “demon of strife” – *Adventist Home*, 106; “demon of intemperance” *Children Guidance*, 401; “demon of ambition” *Lift Him Up*, 135; “demon of jealousy” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 650; “demon of unkindness” SL 16; “demon of hysteric and Satanic imagining,” *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce*, 77; “demon of appetite; demon of heresy” *The Upward Look*, 275. “The fierce spirit which rises up in the hearts of some in the church when anything does not please them, is the spirit of Satan, and not the spirit of Christ,” *An Appeal to Ministers and Conference Committees*, 1892. “The spirit of selfishness is the spirit of Satan.”--*Review & Herald*, Oct. 17, 1882. (*Christian Service*, 19). “There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas.” *Desire of Ages*, 487). “A spirit of harshness and severity is the spirit of Satan.” *Signs of the Times*, February 14, 1895. “Any man, be he minister or layman, who seeks to compel or control the reason of any other man, becomes an agent of Satan, to do his work, and in the sight of the heavenly universe he bears the mark of Cain” (MS 29, 1911).

Note: If you are enjoying these chapters and wish to have Dr. Thomsen come to do a seminar at your church or organization, please visit [www.streamofhealing.org](http://www.streamofhealing.org).