Homosexuality and the Bible: What is at stake in the current debate

Truth and moral absolutes

The gift of sexuality: A biblical overview

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Beware of counterfeits

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). But He did more than that. He created people — “namely, a male and a female, or a he and a she” — as the foundation for all of human society.

It took God six days to make everything recorded in Genesis 1. Yet the week is not six days long. The week’s seventh day was born out of God’s desire for companionship. He valued being with Adam and Eve enough to create a world for them to live in, and when He was through, He set apart the Sabbath for communing with this pair made in His image.

By placing the man and the woman in a brand-new world they knew nothing about, and by spending time with them afterward to show them what He had made, God established a basis for the entire enterprise of education. He was our first Teacher. We were created to be curious, to learn, to know. He wanted us to know Him, to have fellowship with Him and with each other, and to relish learning about the amazing world He created.

Thus the Creator gave Adam and Eve three great gifts: the holy estate of marriage, provision for education under God’s own care, and an entire day for both worship with the Creator and fellowship with each other.

Tragically, that’s not the end of the story. An enemy deceived our first parents, and they fell from their state of mutuality and joyful fellowship with God to a state of fear and alienation.

Since then “we all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6).

Our humanity with its male-female differentiation and relationship, the Sabbath with its joyful fellowship with God and others, and education with its infinite possibilities of learning under the Creator-Teacher — all of these contained within them the seeds for unlimited happiness and development. However, in each case the deceiver offered a counterfeit, an imitation designed to defraud us of the treasures God wants us to have.

Moving the day of rest and worship from Sabbath at the end of the week to Sunday at its beginning not only reverses the original sequence of work and rest, but also challenges the Creator’s right to set order and sequence in the universe. This counterfeit might seem subtle, but it defrauds us of the blessing of the Sabbath and the joy of celebrating the wonders of creation in companionship with God.

The second counterfeit involves secular education, in which nothing we learn has anything to do with God. This impoverishes the Edenic educational system, in which the infinite God is both the source and the object of learning.

The third counterfeit attacks the Edenic model by putting aside the divine plan for male-female marriage and replacing it with a male-male or female-female pairing. This effaces something in us, and also in God, because together — male and female — we reflect the divine image (see Genesis 1:27). The great theologian, Karl Barth, observed that man is the imago dei only and in so much as he is male and female “in open differentiation and joyful relationship” both to each other and to Him. Together, man and woman exercise dominion over the created order.

The last book of the Bible, describing conditions at the end of time, implores: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7). This is more than a command to remember the original Sabbath of creation...
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week. It is also an appeal to acknowledge that God was wise and right when He established all things just as He did in the beginning. This would include the wisdom of ordaining marriage between a man and a woman.

It is misguided to think that a God of love must indulge any and all forms of behavior. It is also misguided to think that the Bible calls upon us to serve as advocates for all who are socially marginalized, irrespective of the reasons for their marginalization. We should help anyone who is in need. Christ did this. But defending the sin that produced the problem is not something the Bible calls us to do. As we help others, we should relieve immediate suffering and also work to remove the cause of the suffering. God loves the sinner but not the sin, and we must learn to make similar distinctions as we reach out to those who, for whatever reason, find themselves on the fringes of society.

Some might wish to use the Pauline argument that in Christ there is neither male nor female (see Galatians 3:28) to redefine marriage, but this is not the point he is trying to make. What Paul argues here is that in Christ, the differences of race, social status, or gender that society uses to exclude or oppress are no barrier to our salvation. Even God’s law that condemns us is no barrier, because it leads us to Christ (see Galatians 3:24). In Christ we are legitimate heirs to the promises of redemption made to Abraham. Thus, Paul’s argument has no room for Gnostic Encratites who would not marry, or on the other hand, the counterfeit to Genesis that denies the male-female prerequisite for marriage.

Read Davidson’s article and De Oliveira’s book review in this issue of Dialogue for more on what is at stake in the debate about same-sex marriage. God still wants to be known and understood by His human children, and in doing so to restore us to His original design. The surest way to receive the full measure of blessing God has in store for humankind is to avoid counterfeits and implement His will in one’s life.

—Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy
Editor-in-Chief

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1. All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.
2. See Martin Luther on “The Estate of Marriage,” http://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/Reformations441/LutherMarriage.htm

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Homosexuality and the Bible: What is at stake in the current debate

by Richard M. Davidson

The sexual distinction between male and female is fundamental to what it means to be human. Humankind-in-fellowship as male and female is fundamental to what it means to be in the image of God.

Amid the vigorous debate over homosexuality and the Bible, it may be tempting for some to ask, “What is all the fuss about?” Isn’t it only a wrangling over a couple of passages in the obscure book of Leviticus and how they apply today? It doesn’t seem that important. Isn’t it only a matter of quibbling over definitions of marriage? What’s the big deal if we call these unions “marriage”? The question certainly demands a straightforward answer, so I would simply reply that there are fundamental biblical and theological issues at stake.

What is at stake hermeneutically?

The authority of Scripture and the sola Scriptura principle.

The Protestant Reformation, as well as the Advent movement, was founded upon the basic principle of sola Scriptura. “By Scripture alone” all issues of faith and practice are to be ultimately judged. “To the law and to the testimony; if they do not speak according to this word, there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). For Bible-believing Christians, Scripture is the final norm for truth. It is the standard by which all doctrine and experience must be tested (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 30:5-6; Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; Hebrews 4:12). Scripture provides the framework, the divine perspective, and the foundational principles for every branch of knowledge and experience. All additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture. All other authorities are to be subordinated to the supreme authority of God’s Word.

It is evident from the verses regarding homosexual practice and God’s Edenic model that Scripture gives a consistent and clear condemnation of homosexual practice. Not only is there univocal condemnation of homosexual practice throughout the Bible, but numerous lines of evidence connected to the Levitical legislation also point to the universal (transcultural) and permanent (trans temporal) nature of the prohibitions against homosexual activity.3 As Richard Hayes summarizes: “The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal. ... Scripture offers no loopholes or exception clauses that might allow for the acceptance of homosexual practices under some circumstances. Despite the efforts of some recent interpreters to explain away the evidence, the Bible remains unambiguous and univocal in its condemnation of homosexual conduct.” 4

The witness of Scripture concerning homosexuality is not some obscure and minor point in the biblical corpus that might be dismissed as peripheral to the overarching concerns of the Bible. It rather forms part of the core values of Scripture. Robert Gagnon points out that among Scripture’s core values are values that are held:

1. pervasively throughout Scripture (at least implicitly),
2. absolutely (without exceptions), and ...
3. strongly (as a matter of significance). This applies all the more in instances where:
4. such values emerged in opposition to prevailing cultural trends and ...
5. prevailed in the church for two millennia.

The limitation of acceptable sexual intercourse to sexually-complementary partners and the strong abhorrence of same-sex intercourse is just such a value.5

In the current debate, there are those who lean heavily upon the evidence of science, particularly the findings of the social sciences, arguing that many homosexuals are born with such tendencies and orientation, and that it is impossible for such people to change their orientation. Therefore, in
light of science, the biblical position against homosexual practice is no longer tenable or relevant in modern-day society. In response, we note that scientific studies, such as those presented by Mark Yarhouse* give evidence that change in sexual orientation is sometimes possible, and even if the attraction or orientation does not change, a significant number of homosexuals move from practice to a position of chastity. But even if those studies were not forthcoming, the larger hermeneutical question remains: which authority gets the last word — science or Scripture? Seventh-day Adventists believe that in the last days we will not be able to trust even our senses; we will have to depend totally upon God’s Word, even as miracles and counterfeits swirl around us. Do we truly believe in sola Scriptura — by Scripture alone all other authorities are to be tested?

Others in the current debate, coming from a postmodern perspective, cite their personal stories in their pilgrimage with homosexuality. They describe being delivered from fear and frustration to freedom as they embraced their homosexual orientation and moved to an active homosexual lifestyle. Personal experience becomes the norm by which we judge the appropriateness of a lifestyle issue.

Consider Eve at the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. God’s word was plain: do not eat of the tree. But the serpent lisped his insinuations to Eve to doubt: Did God really say not to eat of the tree? Don’t you know that He does not really mean what He says? He is trying to keep something good from you. Look at me, at my experience: I have eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree, and I can talk. Imagine what would happen to you if you ate. You would become like God. And the biblical record states: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6, NKJV). She trusted the empirical evidence, the personal experience, and the seemingly logical reasoning of the snake, rather than the Word of God, and the floodgates of woe were poured out upon the world.

The same issue is before us today with reference to the issue of homosexuality and the Bible. What is at stake? The sola Scriptura principle. The *tota Scriptura* principle.

It is not enough to affirm the final authority of Scripture. Those like Martin Luther, who called for sola Scriptura but failed to fully accept the Scriptures in their totality, have ended up with a “canon within the canon.”

For Luther this meant depreciating the book of James as an “epistle of straw” and despising other portions of Scripture as presenting the way of law and not the gospel.

The self-testimony of Scripture is clear in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (NIV). *All* Scripture — not just part — is inspired by God.

In the current debate, those who claim that one part of Scripture — for example, the passage that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28, NASB) — is the key passage, or that one principle, such as love, is the overarching norm, in effect make this passage or principle a “canon within a canon,” in order to dismiss or totally ignore other evidence that is relevant to the issue. By dismissing and ignoring such evidence, the very concept of love is taken out of its scriptural context, and its meaning is distorted. Others in the debate explicitly set aside certain data as irrelevant or outlawed in terms of the current discussion. What is at stake here? The *tota Scriptura* principle — the totality of Scripture.
The unity and harmony of Scripture. A third foundational, biblically-derived, hermeneutical principle that is at stake in this discussion is “the Analogy (or Harmony) of Scripture” (anologia Scripturae).

Since all Scripture is inspired by the same Spirit, and all of it is the Word of God, there is a fundamental unity and harmony among its various parts. The parts of Old Testament Scripture are considered by the New Testament writers as harmonious and of equal divine authority. New Testament writers may thus support their point by citing several Old Testament sources as of equal and harmonious weight. For example, in Romans 3:10-18 we have scriptural citations from Ecclesiastes (see 7:20), Psalms (see 14:2-3; 5:10; 140:4; 10:7; 36:2), and Isaiah (see 59:7-8). Scripture is regarded as an inseparable, coherent whole. Because there is an underlying unity among the various parts of Scripture, one portion of Scripture interprets another, becoming the key for understanding related passages. Scripture is its own expositor (Scriptura sui ipsius interpreti). Or as Martin Luther put it, “Scripture is its own light.” Jesus demonstrated this principle on the way to Emmaus when, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27, ESV). Later that night in the upper room, Jesus pointed out “that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44, 45, ESV).

Paul expresses this same principle in 1 Corinthians 2:13: “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (NKJV, emphasis added). This does not mean the indiscriminate stringing together of passages in “proof text” fashion without regard for the context of each text. But since the Scriptures ultimately have a single divine Author, it is crucial to gather all that is written on a particular topic in order to be able to consider all the contours of the topic. Part of the analogy or harmony of Scripture is the principle of the consistency of Scripture. Jesus succinctly stated this principle: “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35, ESV). Since Scripture has a single divine Author, the various parts of Scripture are consistent with each other. Thus Scripture cannot be set against Scripture. All the doctrines of the Bible will cohere with each other, and interpretations of individual passages will harmonize with the totality of what Scripture teaches on a given subject.

In contrast to this principle of the unity/harmony/consistency of Scripture, some proponents of the homosexual lifestyle and gay marriage claim that various individual passages of Scripture are contradicted by overarching principles, and these contradictory passages can now be set aside. Others claim that various passages of Scripture are not consistent or in harmony with each other on this issue, and therefore we need to move to the general principles of love or tolerance or equality to decide this issue. But even those who are not evangelicals have recognized that in the area of homosexual behavior, the Bible speaks univocally — with one voice — consistently condemning homosexual practice.

So, the basic principles of Evangelical Protestant hermeneutics are at stake: sola Scriptura, tota Scriptura, and the unity and harmony of Scripture that allows Scripture to be its own expositor. If we reject these Bible-based principles, then we are left at sea interpreting all the other doctrines of Scripture that depend upon a faithful application of these principles. On the other hand, if we accept these principles of sola and tota Scriptura and the unity of Scripture, if Scripture becomes the final word to the homosexual, then Scripture becomes the way to peace and power.

What is at stake doctrinally?

Let us now look at some doctrines of Scripture that are at stake in this debate over homosexual behavior.

The doctrine of creation, particularly the doctrine of humanity as the imago dei. In Genesis 1:26-27, “the high point and goal has been reached toward which all of God’s creativity from verse 1 on was directed.” Here in lofty grandeur is portrayed the creation of humankind (hd’addm) as the image of God: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV).

The sexual distinction between male and female is fundamental to what it means to be human. Humankind-in-fellowship as male and female is fundamental to what it means to be in the image of God. As Karl Barth expresses it, “We cannot say man [humankind] without having to say male or female and also male and female. Man [humankind] exists in this differentiation, in this duality.” The mode of human existence in the divine image is that of male and female together. In Genesis 1, “heterosexualism is at once proclaimed to be the order of creation.”

Certainly, homosexual practice strikes at the very roots of God’s Creation order for humans made in His image. The rationale of the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 — including homosexual behavior — rests upon the foundational principles of Creation order in Genesis 1:27-28: the creation of all humanity in the
image of God as “male and female,” unique and distinct from the rest of God’s creation, and the command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” These principles describe the order and structure of humanity in two relationships: to God and to society. All the laws of Leviticus 18 may be understood as violations of these principles.”10 The activities proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20 are portrayed as “abominations” because homosexual practice violates the divine order of gender set forth in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24.11

This connection with the creation order is implicit in the refrain of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: “with a male as one lies with a woman” (emphasis added).12 Such phraseology intertextually links with both Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, homosexual activity is regarded as an abomination rejected primarily because it involved “behaving toward another man as if he were a woman by making him the object of male sexual desires. That is an abomination, an abhorrent violation of divinely-sanctioned boundaries — in this case, gender boundaries established at creation.”13 The prohibition of homosexual relations is not an issue of gender status (male honor or hierarchy), as some would claim, but concerns “a distortion of gender itself, as created and ordered by God.”14 B.S. Childs captures this biblical rationale and the implication for today:

“The recent attempt of some theologians to find a biblical opening, if not warrant, for the practice of homosexuality stands in striking disharmony with the Old Testament’s understanding of the relation of male and female. The theological issue goes far beyond the citing of occasional texts which condemn the practice (Lev 20:13). ... The Old Testament views homosexuality as a distortion of creation, which falls into the shadows outside the blessing.”15

Seventh-day Adventists have rightly defended the doctrine of Creation against attacks from those who would wish to deny the literal six-day Creation described in Genesis 1 and propose some form of theistic evolution for the earth’s origins. But a rejection or undermining of the basic distinctions in the Creation order is just as devastating an attack on the doctrine of Creation — perhaps more so.

In fact, the view that homosexual orientation is congenital and therefore natural is built upon an evolutionary premise: namely, that we are simply living out the urges that we naturally have as a result of natural selection, time, and chance. Thus the argument for the naturalness of homosexual orientation actually supports the doctrine of evolution and denigrates, if not implicitly rejects, the doctrine of Creation as described in Genesis 1 and 2, in which humans are created in the image of God, and heterosexuality is the divine mandate for humanity. So at stake are both the doctrine of Creation as a whole and humankind’s creation in the image of God in particular.

The theology of marriage and family. Related to the doctrine of Creation is the theology of marriage, since human sexuality according to the Edenic divine paradigm finds expression in a heterosexual marital form. Genesis 2:24 presents a succinct theology of marriage: Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (RSV).16 The introductory “therefore” [al-ken] indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the pattern for all future human sexual relationships.17 The reference to “a man ... and ... his wife” — literally, a “man and his woman” — indicates a heterosexual marriage relationship of a man and woman as the Edenic model for all time. This Creation pattern of heterosexual relationship remained the norm throughout the canonical Old Testament Scriptures.

Only two institutions have come down to us from the Garden of Eden: the Sabbath and marriage. It is not surprising that in the last days both of these divine institutions, these divine gifts to humanity from the Creator’s hand, are under attack.

God Himself officiated at the solemn covenant-making ceremony in Eden (the first garden wedding). God Himself designed, and defined, marriage. What God has defined, no one has the right to redefine. At stake in the debate over same-sex marriage is the integrity of the institution of marriage as God designed.

The doctrines of the Fall and sin. Those who suggest that the homosexual lifestyle is natural and thus unavoidable — and even to be welcomed and celebrated — have not taken into account the biblical doctrine of the Fall. At the time of the Fall, Adam and Eve’s natures were corrupted, turned inward in selfishness, depraved. Since that time, we are all born with depraved human natures. We naturally incline toward sin. Whether a man looks lustfully after a woman not his wife, or after another man, it can be said to be natural. But simply because it is natural does not make it right. The Bible makes clear that harboring lustful thoughts, let alone acting out our lustful fantasies in illicit sexual activity, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is sin.18

Here I want to underscore the difference between homosexuality as an orientation (propensity, inclination, condition, disposition) and homosexual practice. The Old Testament condemns homosexual practice and the harboring of homosexual lustful thoughts and temptations. Homosexuality as a condition is clearly a sexual disorder, a distortion of the Edenic ideal, but I find in Scripture no culpability for homosexual orientation per se, just as there is no condemnation of natural fallen tendencies and temptations to heterosexual lust, if these are not harbored or acted upon.19
But now consider homosexual practice itself: same-sex intercourse. How much is at stake in the issue of same-sex intercourse may be judged by how seriously it is regarded in God’s eyes. Gagnon makes a strong case that, according to God’s Word, “homosexual practice is a more serious violation of Scripture’s sexual norms than even incest, adultery, plural marriage, and divorce.” Only bestiality is presented as a worse sexual offense.

Gagnon first presents the evidence that in Scripture there are different degrees of severity when it comes to sin: “In the Old Testament there is a clear ranking of sins. For instance, when one goes to Leviticus 20, which reorders the sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 according to penalty, the most severe offenses are grouped first, including same-sex intercourse. Of course, variegated penalties for different sins can be found throughout the legal material in the Old Testament.”

Jesus also prioritized offenses, referring to “weightier matters of the law” (Matthew 23:23, NKJV) and to different degrees of punishment for different offenses (see Luke 12:48). Paul’s attitude toward the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5 also makes clear that he differentiated among various sexual offenses, with some being more serious than others.

Having established that Scripture does consider some offenses more serious than others, Gagnon then gives three main reasons as to why same-sex intercourse is one of the gravest sexual sins:
1. It is the violation that most clearly and radically offends against God’s intentional creation of humans as “male and female” (Gen. 1:27) and definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24). ... Since Jesus gave priority to these two texts from the creation stories in Genesis when He defined normative and prescriptive sexual ethics for his disciples, they have to be given special attention by us. Paul also clearly has the creation texts in the background of his indictment of homosexual practice in Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9.
2. Every text that treats the issue of homosexual practice in Scripture treats it as an offense of great abhorrence to God. ... Indeed, every single text in Scripture that discusses sex, whether narrative, law, proverb, poetry, moral exhortation, or metaphor, presupposes a male-female prerequisite. There are no exceptions anyway [anywhere] in Scripture.
3. The male-female prerequisite is the foundational prerequisite for defining most other sexual norms. Jesus himself clearly predicated his view of marital monogamy and indissolubility on the foundation of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, texts that have only one thing in common: the fact that an acceptable sexual bond before God entails as its first prerequisite (after the assumption of an intra-human bond) a man and a woman (see Mark 10:6-9; Matt. 19:4-6). Gagnon rightly concludes that “same-sex intercourse is a high offense in the sexual realm toward God.” What is at stake in the debate over homosexuality is the biblical doctrine of sin. Are we willing to take homosexual practice as seriously as God takes it?

At the same time, although in God’s estimation homosexual practice is placed near the top of sexual sins in seriousness, we should remember that from God’s perspective such sins as “pride of heart” (Proverbs 16:5) and “lying lips” (Proverbs 12:22) and “idolatry” (Deuteronomy 17:3, 4) and “dishonest scales” (Proverbs 11:1) are castigated just as strongly by God as “abominations” (using the same Hebrew word tō‧ēḇa), although there is no effective mechanism to punish such sins until the final judgment. All of us are sinners, in need of the grace of God. And all sins, even those most strongly condemned by God, can be forgiven by Him.

The doctrine of grace. The biblical view of grace must be seen against the backdrop of sin. According to Paul, “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Romans 5:20, NKJV). Unless we recognize our sinfulness, we are not prepared to appreciate God’s grace. If homosexual practice is not considered a sin, or not regarded as a serious sin, then grace is not needed. Only when God’s estimation of homosexual practice is taken seriously as a grave sin is it possible to respond properly to God’s grace.

Throughout the Bible, the picture is clear that God unequivocally upholds the Creation duality between the sexes (see Genesis 1:26) and the heterosexual norm for marriage (see Genesis 2:24). Divine judgment is pronounced against those who engage in homosexual practice.

God’s amazing grace is revealed in His willingness to forgive and provide empowering grace for obedience. In view of God’s grace extended toward all sinners, including homosexuals, and in view of the sinful desires that lurk in all our hearts, expression of disapproval of homosexual practice must be made “in the context of our own sexual fallenness.” We must all recognize our need of grace and healing in matters of our sexuality, including especially the heterosexual sin of hatred toward homosexuals. At stake in the discussion over homosexuality and gay marriage is a proper recognition of God’s grace within the context of human sinfulness.

The doctrine of the church. It is the duty of the church to relate to homosexual practice in a responsible way, in harmony with the principles of Scripture. The Seventh-day Adventist official statement on homosexuality expresses this concern well: “Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He
offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.25

We have a long way to go toward providing the needed psychological and spiritual care for those struggling with homosexuality. How much we need to learn to follow the example of the Messianic Servant: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench” (Isaiah 42:3). How far we still need to go to provide an accepting and loving church family for those homosexuals who have chosen by God’s grace to follow a celibate lifestyle. We must show unconditional love for homosexuals, while at the same time assisting those active in the lifestyle to move from brokenness into healing and chastity by the power of God. At stake is nothing less than the doctrine of the church and her mission.

The gospel in the setting of the three angels’ messages. For Seventh-day Adventists, who see their specific mission to proclaim the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, the issue at stake in homosexuality takes on an eschatological/apocalyptic perspective. The first angel has “the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth.” Adventists have rightly emphasized the reference to the investigative judgment: “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come.” We have rightly seen the quotation from the Sabbath commandment in the next phrase: “and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea, and the fountains of waters.” We have recognized the mission of the Adventist Church as repairers of the breach (see Isaiah 58:12) in God’s law, especially with regard to the seventh-day Sabbath (see Isaiah 58:13, 14). But the call of the third angel for the “endurance of the saints ... those who keep the commandments of God” (Revelation 14:12) includes all the commandments of God, not just the fourth.

Some have proposed that the three angels’ messages concern both the Sabbath and marriage;26 the references to sexual immorality in the second angel’s message, allusions to the “image of the beast” as a counterfeit of the image of God in Genesis 1, and the reference to “fire and brimstone” as an allusion to the destruction of Sodom for its sins, particularly its practice of “sodomy.” In the introduction to the three angels’ messages, Revelation 14:4 describes God’s special people as a chaste people. In Revelation 19 we find reference to “the marriage of the Lamb” in which “His wife has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7-8). Although the metaphors of marriage and immorality are applied in a spiritual sense to doctrinal purity, the very use of such a metaphor also implies the sexual purity of God’s people. Elsewhere in Revelation is a special call for believers living in the end times to be pure, with numerous references to sexual immorality as especially displeasing to God (see Revelation 2:14, 20-21; 9:21) and even disqualifying worshipers from entering the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 22:15).

In the eschatological context of Revelation, it is not surprising to have an emphasis upon creation, the Sabbath, and marriage/family, and to indicate that all of these will come under attack in the last days. According to Revelation, the final remnant will keep “the commandments of God” (12:17; 14:12), including the fourth, the seventh, and the fifth.

So what is at stake is no less than the call to be faithful to the commandments of God, in light of the Gospel and the three angels’ messages. All of us are called to be faithful to God, with regard to both the day and way of worship, and the fundamental structures of marriage and family as given by God in Creation.

The great controversy worldview and the character of God. Finally, the book of Revelation also brings us to the issue of the larger worldview of Scripture. Revelation reiterates what was already present in the beginning of Scripture, in Genesis 1 to 3, with a description of the great controversy centered on the issue of the character of God. In Genesis 3, the serpent casts doubts upon the character of God, and the great moral conflict, begun in heaven with the rebellion of Lucifer, is brought to this earth. Job 1 and 2 reveals that the moral conflict is cosmic, yet it springs from the same basic issue of whether or not we will trust God’s character and His Word. In the last three chapters of Revelation, we have the windup of the great controversy, and the final triumphant shout of the universe as God’s character is vindicated in His dealing with sin: “true and righteous are His judgments” (Revelation 19:2; cf. the song of Moses and the Lamb in 15:3: ‘Just and true are Your ways, O King of saints!’).27

The homosexuality debate is part of the great controversy worldview. It is a symptom of the clash of two worldviews, the biblical versus the humanistic. The reasoning of the gay activist community, and even of many not part of that community, utilizes (whether knowingly or not) the perspective of the humanistic, evolutionary worldview. It is so easy to imbibe the spirit of the culture without even being aware of it and to adopt elements of the secular worldview in these issues. At stake is the biblical worldview that stands against the modern culture in so many ways.

At the heart of the great controversy is the issue of the character of God. No one knows this better than those believers who struggle with same-sex attraction. Religious people who face up to their homosexual orientation often get angry with God for allowing them to have such an orientation and (too often) for not seeming to be
willing or able to help them overcome such an orientation. How many of those who are practicing homosexuals were once very religious but have turned away from religion because of what they perceived to be the untrustworthy character of God?

And on the other side, how many heterosexuals implicitly cast aspersions upon the character of God by their failure to love homosexuals? They distort God’s character as they treat homosexuals in a manner that does not model God’s love and compassion. God’s character can be distorted by falling into either ditch, either upholding His justice at the expense of His mercy, by hating and rejecting the homosexual, or by upholding His grace at the expense of His justice, by tolerating or even affirming homosexual practice.

God calls for us to model in our individual lives, as well as in the church, both His justice and mercy. He is looking for a people who will present to the world, in word and in deed, a living exhibition of the character of God.

Conclusion
Ultimately, what is at stake in the current debate over homosexual behavior and the Bible is more than abstract hermeneutical principles or doctrines, but the lives of real people. Consider those who struggle with their homosexual tendencies, but have found power in the grace of God to live above those tendencies.

For myself, what has been at stake is my own heart. I have realized that my own treatment of homosexuals, whom I ridiculed as “queers” while in high school, and whom I generally mocked for their mannerisms while in college, was once flawed. I have had to confess my own falling short when it comes to the call to treat homosexuals with respect and love.

I have had to revisit the painful reality that one of my close friends in college, with whom I joked about homosexuals, struggled with his own homosexual tendencies. I even once sent him a letter of rebuke for activities which I interpreted as his indulging his sexual passions but which I now realize were his attempts to project a heterosexual identity.

My friend recently shared with me his testimony — and his forgiveness. I wept to learn how he had desperately sought help for his brokenness as a teenager but was repeatedly rebuffed or even taken advantage of by those he thought he could trust. But I also rejoiced as he described his recovery, healing, and blessing — how God has freed him from the devil’s counterfeit sexuality and how returning to God’s plan has not been easy, but worth it.

What is ultimately at stake in this debate? The lives of men and women like my friend. May God help us to be a community of believers who welcome them into our midst and who minister God’s grace and healing in their lives, while allowing that same grace to heal our own brokenness and insensitivity.

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1. For further discussion and biblical grounding of this and other foundational hermeneutical principles discussed in this first section, see Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12, ed. Raoul Dedeker (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 2000), pp. 60-68.
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Truth and moral absolutes

by Larry L. Lichtenwalter

There is a difference between the statement that moral absolutes exist and the claim that one can know these absolutes with the same clarity that God knows them.

“What is truth?” Pilate asked Jesus. A really good question — perhaps the most philosophical question in the entire Bible (John 18:38). The question echoes at the foundation of our secular worldview and culture. Many today are convinced that nothing is absolutely true, that truth may not exist at all, and if it does, it is certainly not self-evident and may not even be knowable. Even more, they say, nothing is completely right or completely wrong. At best there is only a diversity of truths.

This relativistic view of reality and the quality of human experience makes truth “person dependent” or simply “truth for me,” relative to one’s individual preferences or those of the group to which one belongs. No longer viewed as objective, timeless, or passed down, truth is now created and re-created out of experience, in dialogue with others, and within one’s culture. This means that the morals of today are not the morals of yesterday. They are cultural, relative, and shifting according to time and personal or social need or preference. Of course, those who champion the existence of enduring moral, religious, social, or political truth face a barrage of objections about imposing standards on others, intolerance, and oppression. Because moral truth can be deeply polarizing, many find the concept of truth itself dangerous.

Surprisingly, instead of the collapse of morality, this daring relativism has actually spawned a renaissance of searching — often lonely and painful — for principles of life. The angst comes in the perceived pluralism or absence of authority, and the centrality of choice in the self-constitution of postmodern moral agents. The cacophony of moral voices throws the individual back on his or her own subjectivity as the only ultimate ethical authority. The challenge of exploring all possible roads one could travel to know how one should live morally is often soul-wearying as well as scary, if not risky.

Pilate never gave Jesus time to answer. Most who ask about truth today don’t take the time either. But had he paused long enough to listen, Pilate would have heard some incredible truth about truth — and moral absolutes.

Truth exists

First, truth exists (John 8:32). Moreover, there is but one way, one truth, and one life (John 14:6). Way, truth, and life are biblical moral expressions. Truth is a moral realm in which one can stand and be and act — even worship (John 3:21; 4:24; 8:44). There is a spirit of truth and a spirit of error, and no lie is of the truth (John 18:27; cf. 1 John 2:21; 4:6). The truth is in contrast to untruth and falsity, unreality and illusion, or any idea of a diversity of truths.

Truth is personal

Second, the essence of truth is personal. Before Pilate even asked, Jesus had already declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6; emphasis added). This is a bold biblical delineation: God is truth. His nature, His very spirit, is truth. At its core, truth is a Being. This means truth is both moral and “inherently personal.” It is neither abstract nor a mere teaching. It is “first a matter of inner character and only derivatively a quality of words and deeds.” All God says and all God does is truth. His words and His works are but revelations of His nature. The teachings of Jesus are true because they express the truth, which He Himself is.

Truth, then, brings us into a personal relationship with the very Source of authentic life. It will always engage us as persons. A truthful Person encounters our person with respect to the truthfulness of our own being and doing. It is a Person who brings example, hope, courage, and power to be true in a world of deceit and illusion. This is good news, because it makes us something more than mere machines applying correct principles or a code of ethics: it makes us persons. Furthermore, it anchors truth in the supernatural. Truth begins with God, not human beings. Truth is eternal because it resides in God. Truth is unchanging because God does not change. There is a unity of
God’s Word is truth

Third, God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). While the essence of truth is personal, truth can at the same time consist of ideas and words that are concrete, objective, and propositional. Truth as ideas or words can be spoken, heard, written down, read, understood, and kept; it is life-transforming. Jesus assumed that truth-filled words and ideas carry understandable form, content, and, most important, meaning. There is correspondence between the ideas and the realities they represent — whether Jesus, His Father, or human moral or spiritual life. Truthful words can be relied on precisely because they both accord with reality and come from the One who is true (John 14:6; cf. Revelation 21:5; 22:6). Because Jesus Himself is both “the Word” and the “truth,” correspondence between words and reality is assured (John 1:1-3,14; cf. Revelation 19:14; 1 John 1:1).

Truth is the oxygen of the mind. It is the point of departure for all intellectual, spiritual, and moral pursuits and what alone truly frees (John 8:32; Philippians 4:8). We say “true” when we are convinced that reality and our minds match. We say “morally true” when we are convinced that that reality matches our perceptions of what is right, just, and good. Truth is vital, directly influencing our lives. We act upon what we believe to be true, thus shaping the way we live. Truth affects how we see ourselves and view others. Truth is what matters.

Like a navigator who gets bearings from the stars so he can sail at night, we need some fixed points by which we can orient ourselves morally, something outside ourselves. God’s Word as truth provides such fixed points for moral orientation. Jesus’ statement “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17) implies revelation, and if revelation is possible, moral absolutes are possible. Moral truth is not constructed, it is revealed; it is discovered, and not determined by a majority vote. It is authoritative, and not merely a matter of personal preference.

Dostoyevsky’s Ivan Karamazov contended that if there is no God, everything is permitted. But if God does exist, then one can expect moral truth to exist as well. And if the absolute standard for morality is God Himself, every moral action is to be judged in the light of His nature. God’s revealed Word — Scripture — is our link both to God and to moral truth. The Bible is our ethical standard because it comes from God, who alone is the standard for morality. This must be kept in mind when we appeal to the Bible in moral matters, for it was written in a different cultural situation and in a different time from our own. “Only the fact that God transcends culture allows us to entertain the hope of using moral principles from the Bible in our [own] culture.” Without this we could not hope to rise above cultural relativism. But God is above it. And God has spoken. What God reveals in the Bible applies universally to all cultures.

You can know truth

Fourth, truth can be known: “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Sometimes proof of truth is easily achieved — like at what temperature and altitude water boils or freezes. This is scientific truth, which can usually be objectively verified. Verifying moral-truth claims is tougher and more mysterious. Good and evil cannot be directly observed or measured. They require a different approach, but nevertheless can be known with enough certainty to be inwardly orienting. Even our own subjective evaluations of truth can be objective — when we observe cause-and-effect experiences of moral truth lived or not lived in our own lives.

Moral principles correspond to the nature of God and to our own nature as well. Man is not an animal, but a unique moral being. Because we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27), we have the capacity to understand what we need to know, both about God and moral life. When we obey the moral law of God, we are behaving in a manner consistent with the way God made us. Sin or disobedience to the moral law is not only an offense to God, it is a violation of our own created nature. Proverbs puts it succinctly: “He who finds me [God’s moral wisdom] finds life . . . but he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:35, 36).

Divine revelation means that biblical truth ultimately corresponds to reality as perceived by God, who alone sees reality in all its complexity and fullness. What we understand is partial and limited. There is a difference between the statement that moral absolutes exist and the claim that one can know these absolutes with the same clarity that God knows them. Absolute truth is not the same as absolute knowing. We can only have a relative understanding of absolute truth (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet partial truth can be real truth, as long as we do not take it for the whole truth. This is inwardly freeing, because it gives hope of a fuller understanding, even while we live confidently by what we already know (John 7:17).

Truth behaves

Fifth, truth is integrally linked with righteousness (what is upright, good, just, right). Truth is right action. It is ethically-correct behavior. Truth encompasses and assumes the moral. It is something that can be expressed in tangible deeds, which in turn reveal the authenticity of one’s connection with God, the Source of truth (John 3:21; cf. 5:36; 10:25). Truthful behavior reveals the moral essence of one’s
very self. It gives witness of the life-changing power of truth (John 17:17). It follows Jesus, whose own works and deeds gave continual witness to the truth itself and to His personal connection with the Father (John 5:36; 10:25, 37; 14:11).

Truth is relational
Sixth, truth is relational. It includes speech and transparent behavior before others (John 8:44-46, 55). Truth and the trust it engenders are the foundation of all relationships. No genuine relationship can exist between false selves. Truthfulness cannot be compartmentalized. One cannot be true in one area of life (spiritual, religious, doctrinal) and false in another (moral, political, societal, business, marital) and still be true. Separating the spiritual from the moral divides the person. Subjective selectivity of moral truths divides the person. As Jesus spoke truth (John 8:45,46), so must we. Just as He exposed the hypocrisy, hidden agendas, and less-than-transparent ways of Israel’s religious leaders, Jesus invites us to a higher level of personal transparency and truthfulness (John 8:44, 55).

Being truthful
Seventh, moral truth will ever be a matter of our own being. As with God, the essence of truth on the human level is personal. It concerns our own inner moral consistency. Are we true selves or false selves? Do we love the truth or inwardly seek to evade its claims on our lives? Only those who are “of the truth” (1 John 3:19) will understand and receive truth and, in keeping with the truth, be truthful (Revelation 14:5; 22:15; cf. John 18:37). This is the meaning of Jesus’ statement: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching” (John 7:17). The willingness to implement moral truth in one’s life and the ability to perceive it are inseparably linked. We know the truth as we live the truth. We reach truth by doing it. “Doing the truth means living out of the reality which is He who is the truth, making His being the being of ourselves and of our world.”

Scripture speaks of those who love lies because they do not love truth (2 Thessalonians 2:7-13; cf. John 3:19-21). They believe what is false because they do not love what is true. It becomes a circle. One’s inner moral orientation tends either toward truth or falsehood; the practice of either further imprints one’s inner world in the respective moral direction.

The real issues regarding the perceived relativity of truth reside here. Many are satisfied that moral truth is relative because it means they can pick and choose their own lives. They don’t want moral truths contained in laws to direct their behaviors. This is selfish. If they can relativize truth, then nothing is externally restrictive or binding. Moral truth, then, is not always convenient or valued. Ultimately, as seen with Pilate, the question of truth is also a question about our own selves.

People are rarely across-the-board subjectivists or objectivists. Many who believe in moral absolutes are comfortably relativistic in certain areas, and many who claim to be relativists qualify their relativism. The real issue is not whether truth exists, but where we draw the line that separates matters of fact from issues of opinion or taste. Moral relativism seemingly resonates with our desire to treat people kindly. It offers a way to justify our actions by claiming that ethical standards are personal. It allows for laziness of intellect and character. Defending ideas and moral formation is hard work. Relativism takes the easy way out, because it creates the illusion that we don’t have to do the heavy lifting of supporting our ideas.

Moral relativism is often reaction- ary. Christians themselves have been a major cause of moral relativism. Many choose moral relativism over moral absolutes because those who believe in moral absolutes are often fixated on select moral truths (agendas); they appear legalistic, arrogant, unbending, insensitive, abusive, and assert their positions without explanation. We need to admit that we are not God, be humble about ethical issues, listen more carefully to the genuine moral concerns of our times, and think of moral absolutes in terms of character and moral qualities rather than mere actions. Perhaps then there would be less reaction. We should be absolutely just, compassionate, loving, and patient.

Grace-filled truth
Finally, truth and grace go together. They are organically linked, and in no way are they mutually exclusive. The glory of God’s character revealed in Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). “Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). We “[understand] the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:6). We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Grace, mercy, peace, truth, and love are inseparable components of genuine moral and spiritual life (2 John 3). The moral truth of Jesus is never cold or impersonal. It is ever concerned about unique circumstances of real people. It is as gentle as it is forceful. It treats people kindly. Thus, Jesus could tell the woman caught in adultery, “I do not condemn you, either,” and at the same time say to her, “Go. From now on, sin no more” (John 8:11). Jesus, who is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” always treated people with understanding, grace, mercy, love… and the truth.

The truth Jesus spoke about incorporates a moral, life-transforming dimension: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” He prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 8:32; 17:17). “We do not so much need freedom in order to discover truth, as we are to reside in truth in order to experience freedom.”

Are there moral absolutes? Of
course! As an infinite, eternal pattern, truth lies at the heart of the Christian worldview. We are to seek it, believe it, live it, model it, and speak it. We must make decisions based on it and be transformed by it. A battle for moral truth lies at the heart of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. It is a battle for our minds and characters as we live life and are engaged in the final showdown of earth’s history (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; Revelation 12:17; 14:6-13; 16:12-16). God has given His Spirit to guide us toward truth (John 16:13). At every step, Jesus lived it, model it, and speak it. We must give His Spirit to guide us toward truth, given His Spirit to guide us toward truth (John 16:13). At every step, Jesus lived it, model it, and speak it. We must

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1. All biblical references are from the New American Standard Bible.
4. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Human beings possess (1) the capacity for self-reflection; (2) the ability to reason; (3) moral capacity, i.e., we can understand distinctions between good and evil; and (4) the capacity to be rightly related to God.
11. Lutzer, p. 70.
12. Tillich, p. 121.
18. See Robert B. Lawton, “Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?” Journal of Biblical Literature 105 (1986): pp. 97-98, for evidence that this is not just an etiological insertion to explain the common legal custom. The verse expresses “a description of divine intention rather than of habitually observed fact” (p. 98). See also Deborah F. Sawyer, God, Gender and the Bible (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 24: “The first couple provide the blueprint for normative citizenship in the theocracy proposed in the Bible’s first story.”
19. See especially Job 31:1; Proverbs 6:25; Ezekiel 23:11; Matthew 5:28; Romans 1:27; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Galatians 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 1 Peter 1:4; 2:10; and 1 John 2:16-17.
20. As I have argued in the essay referenced in endnote 3 above: “But just as some people quit smoking and never again have the urge to smoke, while others quit smoking yet battle the urge all their lives, so some homosexuals have a miraculous change of orientation, while others may have to battle homosexual tendencies all their lives. The culpability is not in the tendencies, but in the acting upon (either in imagination or actual practice) those tendencies.” For those homosexuals who insist that homosexuals must have changed their orientation before their status is acceptable before God, I simply ask if they themselves can honestly say they no longer experience heterosexual temptation. We all are fallen sexual creatures, whether we are tempted by heterosexual or homosexual lust.
22. Ibid., p. 13.
23. Ibid., p. 15.
27. Nicholas Miller, attorney and professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, has made the argument in a paper titled “Why should Adventists care about protecting traditional marriage?”
The gift of sexuality:  
A biblical overview

by Ekkehardt Müller

The biblical account of creation and its narrative of marriage and family clearly teach that human sexuality is God’s gift to human beings, and its sanctity is to be fully exercised.

In Eden, God gave wonderful gifts to humanity. Two have survived paradise: the Sabbath and marriage. Humanity is supposed to enjoy and celebrate these gifts. The first one is to recognize God as the Creator of the universe and worship Him as the One who gives us absolute meaning and identity in life. The second one is to appreciate that life is lived in fellowship and friendship with each other — a man and a woman in bonds of love, together a testimony that our God is a God of love and fellowship.

Marriage is about companionship, love, and mutual support. It is also the place to use the gift of sexual intimacy. When we talk about stewardship of our bodies, that includes this very gift. This article provides a brief biblical survey of this second pre-Fall gift of the Creator to His creatures.

Marriage in the Old Testament

The institution and meaning of marriage. Marriage differs from non-marital sexual relations by its public and legal recognition. Instituted by God when He created the first human couple, marriage has its holy grounding and rooting in the divine will and plan for human life. Therefore, we have to go back to the creation account in Genesis when we talk about marriage. Read the following Genesis passages and discover for yourself the biblical approach to the institution and meaning of marriage and sexuality.

Genesis 1:26-27 — Both men and women were created in the image of God, in spite of their sexual differentiation.

Genesis 1:28 — The first divine mandate to be “fruitful and multiply” and exercise stewardship over the creation was addressed in plurality. This means that both Adam and Eve, both man and woman, had equal and special status in all God’s creation — a concept that is unique to the Word of God, not to be found in other ancient Near-Eastern religions.

Genesis 2:18-23 — Man and woman were created for each other. They share a common identity, with the same value and coequality. God took Eve, brought her to Adam (Genesis 2:22), and performed the first wedding.

Genesis 2:24 extrapolates five distinguishing characteristics of marriage as designed by God: (1) It has a clear beginning. The husband leaves his parental family and becomes somewhat independent, ready to enter into an intimate union with his wife; (2) God’s will is heterosexual monogamy; that is to say, it is between a man and a woman, and it creates a single unity to be lived, loved, and enjoyed by a man and a woman; (3) Marriage is a complete companionship. It is about becoming one in thinking and feeling, in will and action, climaxing in becoming “one flesh”: a unity of love; (4) In its character, marriage is indissoluble. It is a union marked by trust, faithfulness, and enduring love; (5) Marriage is the legitimate place for sexual intimacy. God created marriage. It is not a human invention of sociological or anthropological convenience or convention, but a result of God’s provision to create “one flesh” out of the two.

The wedding. In the Old Testament, a wedding was connected to the following steps:

1) Courtship. Typically, parents selected spouses for their children (Genesis 21:21; 24). However, there were also cases when young people could choose their spouse — or at least were asked (1 Samuel 18:20-21; Genesis 24:57-58).

2) Engagement, marriage contract, and bride price (dowry). The payment of a bridal price may be assumed from several passages, such as Genesis 34:12, 1 Samuel 18:25, and Genesis 22:16.

3) Wedding ritual. The wedding consisted of three elements: the wedding procession (Judges 14:11; Psalms 45:14-16), the marriage banquet (Genesis 29:22; Judges 14:12, 17), and the wedding night (Genesis 29:22-23; Deuteronomy 22:13-21).

In the Old Testament, marriage is neither a private matter between a man and a woman nor a form of concubinage, but a public event involving the families and the community. It has legal implications. Sexual intimacy by
Marriage in the New Testament

With regard to marriage, the New Testament follows the Old Testament and does not develop a new form of marriage. This is not an exception, because other Old Testament teachings and institutions are also presupposed and continued in the New Testament, such as creation, the Decalogue, and the Sabbath. Note the following outline of the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and some important Scriptural passages.

Jesus. At the very outset of His ministry, Jesus participated in a wedding (John 2), thus giving the institution of marriage His approval and blessing. In addition, Jesus referred to marriage in various places — its link to the creation account, parables illustrating diverse aspects of marriage, the seriousness of adultery and divorce, and provisions for remaining single. See Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13; 5:27-32; 19:1-12.

Paul. The apostle dealt with marriage and related aspects in various places. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of responsibilities within the marriage bond, faithfulness to marriage vows, marriage and faith confession, a life of chastity, church discipline and immorality, etc. (1 Corinthians 7 and 5). The apostle also takes the high road to emphasize the sanctity of marriage by comparing the relationship of a man and a woman in marriage to the relationship between Jesus and His church (Ephesians 5:22-23). This figurative counsel of Paul has deeply influenced the appreciation of marriage in Christian history.

Matthew 1:18-20. Mary and Joseph were engaged, but not yet involved in sexual intimacy, thus giving to posterity an important Christian principle of marriage: no sex before marriage.

Matthew 19:4, 5. Jesus refers back to Genesis 2:24 and stresses the permanence of marriage. Christians, therefore, ought to commit themselves to their spouses publicly, exclusively, and permanently, seeking God’s blessing in the community of believers.

Sexuality gone wrong

The biblical account of creation and its narrative of marriage and family clearly teach that human sexuality is God’s gift to human beings, and its sanctity is to be fully exercised, preserved, and defined within the parameters of marriage. The inspired Word, including the Decalogue, clearly teaches that the divine pattern for human sexuality is within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman, and that marriage is holy and monogamous, governed by deep love and care. Yet the picture of marriage we see in the history of the human race is far from the biblical ideal. What went wrong? Like all ideals set forth by the Creator for the human race, the ideal of marriage also became tainted by sin. Some of these marks can be viewed in the following questions, raised in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and also elsewhere in Scripture.

What are some of the sexual sins the Bible prohibits?

Fornication. Fornication is a broad concept in Scripture, and typically includes all sins of a sexual nature, such as premarital sex, adultery, incest, homosexuality, sodomy, and others. However, if the term is listed with other terms that refer to sexual sins, it may describe premarital sexual intimacy (see Hebrews 13:4).

Adultery. Adultery describes a sexual affair with a person other than one’s spouse (John 8:3-11; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

Homosexuality. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, the effeminate seems to play the female in a homoerotic relationship, while the second Greek term, asemekoits (the male who lives with a male), obviously describes the one playing the male in such a relationship. See also Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27.


Divorce. Divorce as a separation of marriage, except for reason of adultery, is unscriptural. See Matthew 19:1-10; Mark 10:1-10; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

Intentionally marrying unbelievers. Marriage, as intended in the Scripture, should be “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39) that is, within the bounds of the faith that sustains the spiritual lives of the community of faith. The warnings in 1 Corinthians 5-7 pertaining to marriage are seen as a warning against marriage with an unbeliever. “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3, NKJV) is the prophet’s enduring counsel that certainly applies to marriage too. See also Deuteronomy 7:3 and Nehemiah 13:23-25.

Why should Christians avoid sexual sins?

Because there is a kingdom to gain. A misuse of the gift of sexuality does not square with God’s rule and His kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Immorality is damaging. It harms or destroys relationships with spouses, family, friends, and neighbors (1 Corinthians 7:10-14). It harms our relationship with God (1 Corinthians 6:15; 7:35). It harms ourselves — emotionally, psychologically, and physically (1 Corinthians 6:18).

God wants us to live fulfilled lives (John 10:10).

Hope for the sinner

If I have committed any sexual sin, is there still hope for me? Yes, that hope is the primary focus of the gos-
Most public figures are familiar with interactions involving a disbelieving and even hostile audience. People can be fickle in their responses to information and advice given. This is nicely illustrated during presidential elections. Personal fortunes can change rapidly following ill-considered statements or an awkward revelation.

Not only presidential candidates but also prophets have found popularity an illusion. Consider the prophet Jeremiah. He commenced ministry in his youth (Jeremiah 1:6) and was instructed by God to speak without considering the consequences (1:7, 8). When he did this, his faithful preaching led to persecution and to plots against his life (11:18-23; 26:6-11; 38:6). His words were disliked, debated, and discarded by some (e.g., 26:8-24; 38:4-28; 39:1-6).

Our own prophet, Ellen White, encountered disbelief and hostility in her day. Her own comments are revealing: “Every opposer to our faith makes Mrs. White his text. They begin to oppose the truth and then make a raid against me. What have I done, if evil, then let them bear witness of the evil. ...” It is no secret that critics and the disbelieving have multiplied since her death.

I must admit that a prophet’s words are not always easy to understand. When I was young, some of Ellen White’s statements dealing with scientific matters caused me considerable difficulty. Her statements could not be explained satisfactorily by reference to credible information then available. Fortunately, I chose to wait patiently and to reserve my judgment. Others, unfortunately, declared her to be misguided and printed their doubts. This experience has functioned in my mind to highlight both the nature of knowledge and the prophetic gift.

Knowledge is both tentative and progressive, and humans are unwise to be too hasty about accepting scientific knowledge in total, because soon they may be shown to be not so correct after all. Concerning the prophetic gift, a prophet’s work is varied. It can be quite ordinary, and the advice given may come from a number of sources: from principles derived from impeccable sources (e.g., Bible-based or previous revelations), logical deductions from astute observations of human behavior, or extensions of knowledge through extrapolation. Ellen White extrapolated information in the promotion of Graham bread. Her enthusiasm was based on the proposition that the closer to the natural product a food item was (Edenic diet), the more nutritious and beneficial it was likely to be. On the other hand, special revelations or God-given impressions stand in a different category and take us beyond our current knowledge base.

The prophet Daniel’s revelations on the rise and fall of nations and his time prophecies are an excellent example of statements that often took many years to be fulfilled. No doubt detractors existed in his day, and since then some have arisen to discount even the most amazing of his predictions. This is done irrespective of the clarity of history. Similar choices are given to us today with both ancient and modern prophets: we can choose to examine the evidence under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or we can approach the issues with a critical, disbelieving, and dismissive attitude. I will illustrate how a number of White’s puzzling statements can be resolved and have led to a faith-strengthening experience for the author.

Something fishy about yellow rice

The Japanese were the first to connect eating mold-discolored cereal grain with disease. They demonstrated the toxic effects of eating such food in 1891, and the work was extended in 1920. However, their investigations were not widely known. Experts in universities and the United States Department of Agriculture did not accept that molds produced toxins injurious to animal health, even up to 1913. However, after 1960 the consequences of eating mold-contaminated food was widely understood. The year 1960 is famous for the death of 100,000 turkeys in Britain through eating mold-contaminated peanut meal and the almost simultaneous development of cancers among rainbow trout-fed inferior cottonseed.
It is fascinating that Ellen White warned in 1885 that those who used decayed apples to produce popular products (wine and cider) were introducing poisons into the body. Then she stated: “This pleasant beverage (cider) is often unfit for the human stomach,” as microscopic examination will show. She said that boiling the juice would render it less injurious. Then in 1887, she stated without hesitation that fruits and vegetables chosen for eating should not show the "slightest sign of decay." She indicated that more deaths than imagined result from eating decayed fruits and vegetables. These were provocative statements, but they have gained credibility in recent years. Since the 1960s, many toxic substances have been found in foods associated with the growth of microorganisms.

The famous mold (found on apples) capable of producing a toxin was discovered in 1874, but no one was aware that it produced a toxin until 1943. The toxin is called patulin, and its toxicity is reduced by heat. Due to its toxicity to animals, world health authorities have nominated a provisional maximum tolerable daily intake limit. In some countries, the level detected exceeds that considered safe for infants and young children. Now, the molds associated with fruit and vegetables and the production of toxins are relatively few, but the principle of avoiding mold-contaminated foods (a principle that can be made from White) is one of great significance that science has realized relatively recently.

### The smell of death

The idea that the particles we breathe may contribute to ill health is not something new. In the Old World, pollution and its ill-effects were experienced. However, Ellen White was not taken seriously when she wrote in 1905: “No waste vegetables or heaps of fallen leaves should be allowed to remain near the house to decay and poison the air. Nothing unclean or decaying should be tolerated in the house.”

Vindication began to come after 1932. Relatively recently, it has been found that various bacterial toxins and microbial components are released into the air surrounding decomposing plant material. Scientists now speak of safe limits for airborne microbial toxins. Handling organic waste exposes individuals to airborne particles (animal, vegetable, and microbial in origin) and can lead to a variety of health consequences, particularly respiratory diseases. Exposure to organic dust (bioaerosols) from indoor organic waste storage containers also has been indicated, thus giving additional credibility to White’s statements.

### Deadly missiles

Some unusual hypertensive crises (headache, rash, elevated blood pressure) began to be noted by the medical profession in 1963, following the eating of the “stronger” types of cheese when taken with certain medication. This was due to the amines present in the food items. Normally, such amines are degraded, but in individuals lacking the appropriate enzyme, symptoms occur. In other individuals, classical migraine headaches may be precipitated by the intake of foods rich in amines such as certain cheeses and chocolate. Now, the concentration of amines found in cheese is dependent not only on the length of time the cheese is ripened but also on the bacterial biota and the hygienic conditions maintained during processing and storage. Some well-documented amine poisoning episodes have been recorded. Another group of toxins that can be present are formed by molds. These are often found in mature cheeses, and the toxins may penetrate into the food from the surface growth. The level of contamination of such toxins in cheeses is generally low, although a wide range has been detected.

This fascinating information triggered my interest in a comment made by Ellen White in 1868 to a couple suffering from ill health. She wrote: “Cheese should never be introduced into the stomach.” This advice might have been made in an attempt to lead the couple to select foods easy to digest. However, a more general case might be argued along the lines that the combined effects of eating cheese potentially rich in fats, carrying amines, toxins, and burdened with disease-carrying organisms rendered it unfit for consumption.

Somewhat later (1905), she wrote: "Cheese is still more objectionable [than butter]; it is wholly unfit for food." In the German-language edition of the article, White permitted the editors to use the term “strong and sharp cheese” to underscore what she meant. The editor’s comment accompanying some English print editions indicates that the term did not apply to “cottage cheese or foods of a similar character.” This statement was clarified further in Arthur White’s publication when he indicated that Ellen White ate cottage cheese, but not cured cheeses.

Individuals have puzzled over the meaning and accuracy of the 1868 and 1905 statements. Some have accepted them at face value and have rejected cheese because they perceive Ellen White acted this way after she accepted the health-reform message. Others have sought to understand the principles involved. The following information gives clarity.

In the time in which the first statement was written, milk-borne diseases were prevalent. Infectious diseases were not well understood, and pasteurization had not been discovered. At the time of the second statement,
Pasteurization had been perfected and was being more generally used, so food-borne diseases were in the process of being reduced. Some have considered the disease load carried by cheese the chief reason for White’s advice. Deeper consideration of this idea leads us to reject it as the primary reason. The statements about cheese mentioned above were made around the same time that other dairy products were spoken about more supportively.25 Furthermore, the manufacturing process for both unripened and ripened cheeses is very similar in the initial phases. It is during the latter phases of the process where we must search for possible clues. An interesting observation is that both unripened and ripened cheeses may carry diseases.26

The point of departure in the preparation of unripened and ripened cheeses is, as the name suggests, in the ripening process. Cottage cheeses are marketed within days of preparation, whereas other cheeses are matured under defined conditions for periods of some months (most cheeses are ripened for at least three months). The length of the maturation time determines the classification of cheddar cheeses as “mild”, “strong,” or “mature.” The first indication that all was not well with some matured cheeses was noted in 1963. Some individuals experienced high blood pressure, headache, fever, and other symptoms when they ate at the same time as taking specific drug medication.27

During the ripening of cheese, the protein casein is broken down by rennet and bacterial action (fermentation). Some of the bacteria produce amines. In short-ripened cheeses, the opportunity for the production of various bacterial by-products is limited. In well-matured cheeses, biogenic amines are present. In broad terms, the amine content increases with increases in storage time. Now, cheeses made from pasteurized milk may show much lower levels of amines than those made from raw milk.28

From the scientific evidence available, we can argue with credibility that the advice given by Ellen White is reasonable. First, cheese is more difficult to digest than many foods. Second, we understand that the vegetarian lifestyle can provide a rich source of nitrates coming from plants and perhaps water. The body converts nitrates into nitrites. This process may seem harmless, but when nitrites combine with amines following the consumption of food items (including cheeses), nitrosamines form in the intestinal tract, giving rise to potent cancer-forming chemicals.

White’s writings on cheese are not meant to be read like a recipe book, but rather are to be taken as underlying principles given about some cheeses. We can say that amine-associated illness has been connected with certain cheeses and other food items, and that some individuals are at greater risk than others. Furthermore, individuals may be predisposed to cancers through the intake of nitrosamines and mycotoxins.29 The dangers vary in different parts of the world and have changed over time. It is up to us to be careful when eating all foods rich in amines.

Ellen White urged us to think and reason from cause to effect. Her books imply that we should follow the best scientific advice. We can assert this with reasonable confidence if we care to trace her instructions regarding the safe use of milk. When the scientific world was divided over the usefulness of heat-treating milk, she chose the correct course when some of the world’s great scientists took the alternative route. We can also say this if we look at the principles underlying her advice regarding the use of three fermented products, namely cheese, olives, and pickles; her advice differs for the three food items mentioned.30 Why is this? And what are we to conclude about the dozens of fermented products that are not mentioned in her books? Are they always safe? As a scientist, I can say that we are in the process of gaining the answers and establishing principles as outlined above.

Concluding comments

Our brief survey of a number of statements made by White has been resolved in view of information coming from scientific sources. Science confirms the accuracy of her statements and gives us added confidence in her ministry. Much of the expert information has come to us recently, which is a clear reminder to readers that hasty conclusions may be incorrect. However, in our broad reading of Ellen White we have been reminded by others that, just as experienced with sacred Scripture, occasional inaccuracies may be encountered. This should not detract from our confidence in either the inspiration or authority of the Bible or the writings of Ellen White.31

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4. ————, Counsels on Diet and Foods, pp. 373, 343, 345.

Warren Shipton (Ph.D., M.Ed., FASM) obtained his doctoral degree from the University of Sydney; he is a former dean of science, James Cook University, Australia, and former president of Asia-Pacific International University, Muak Lek, Thailand, and currently works for the latter university in an honorary capacity. E-mail: wshipton@gmail.com.

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15. C.J. Fuller, “Farmer’s lung: A review of present-


21. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, pp. 67, 68.


23. White, Ministry of Healing, p. 302. The editor’s footnote is not present in all hardcover editions of the book. The details referred to are mentioned in the 2007 CD Complete published edition of Ellen White Writings located at p. 368.5.


28. Ibid.


30. G. Pfandl, “Ellen G. White and her relationship with the Lord.” The gift ... Continued from page 17

pel. There is no sin that God cannot and does not forgive. 1 Corinthians 6:11 provides the framework of that hope: “Such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11, NKJV). If we have failed and sinned, forgiveness and a new beginning are possible through God’s grace. Yes, Jesus challenges us also: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11, NKJV).

God has given humanity the gift of marriage, including sexual intimacy. This gift of true love needs to be treasured, kept pure, and protected against abuse. It is a symbol of our relationship with the Lord.
PROFILE

Uli Nees
Dialogue with an Adventist Lufthansa pilot from Germany

Interview by Barna Magyarosi

Uli Nees is a Seventh-day Adventist with a career that is rather unique to Adventists: he is a commercial pilot for Lufthansa, flying Airbus 340s. Although he spends much of his work life up in the air, soaring over the clouds and looking down at the sea, mountain peaks, rivers, and large cities, he firmly has his grounding where it really matters: in the faith he chose to accept years ago and in the path he has consistently tried to follow, testifying to others about the joy of Adventism.

Uli was born in a non-Adventist family in Alzenau, Germany. His father, who loved to study God’s Word, heard the Lord’s call and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church when Uli was three or four years old, and he was a consistent force in shaping young Uli’s early faith and life. His mother did not become an Adventist until much later, in her 50s. Going to school on Sabbath was mandatory, something Uli overcame by the strength of his faith and commitment to a prayer life. His father took him along to church in spite of the discouraging attitude of his mother, and Uli enjoyed the experience of church fellowship and Bible study. The friendly environment, worship, and fellowship there led him to the decision to surrender his life to Jesus.

Uli completed his baccalaureate (German Abitur) degree in his native town. Instead of choosing the army, he opted for 16 months of public service as a conscientious objector. After completing this alternative to military service, Uli set out to reach the dreams of his youth: he always wanted to fly. He enrolled in Lufthansa’s flight school, completing the theoretical part in Bremen, Germany, and the practical in Phoenix, Arizona. Returning to Germany, he finished his rating (an aircraft-specific training) and became a pilot for Boeing 727s. In 1990, he became a captain on the Airbus 320, flying that plane until 2000, when he moved to fly Airbus 340s and later also Airbus 330s. During this period, he also functioned as a training and check captain, assisting and testing pilots to become captains.

Uli Nees is married to Dagmar, and the couple have two daughters, Astrid and Anke.

Why did you choose to become an Adventist?

My father’s faith and life influenced me as a child. As I grew up, having studied the teachings of the Bible, I arrived at the conclusion that the Adventist way of living, believing, and articulating one’s faith is the closest expression of the teachings of God’s Word.

How did you become interested in the line of work you are doing — that of a pilot? We don’t have too many Adventist pilots.

I think I inherited the desire to fly from my father. He always wanted to be a pilot, but because of World War II, he could never see his dream fulfilled. When I was 10 years old, he gave me a little airplane that I could assemble myself, and we continued to build more and more model-aircraft together.

One day, my mother, who was working in the city council, met a pilot who lived in the same town. He related to my mother that his passion and hobby was to fly remote-controlled model airplanes. After a nice chat, she shared my dream of becoming a pilot, and learned that there is a place where Lufthansa regularly organizes a test for candidates.
When did you decide to become a pilot?
I was 18 when I applied at the evaluation center. They asked for my latest grades, provided a round-trip ticket to Hamburg, and allowed me to take the test. Out of 18 applicants in my test group, they selected four, including me.

Who shaped your life in a special way?
My parents shaped my life a lot. My grandmother, who basically raised us and spent a lot of time with us, had a significant influence on my life in terms of making good choices and leading a responsible, frugal life.

Did you have a role model?
As a teenager, I read books about pilots, such as Lindbergh, and books about test pilots and war pilots, whose stories have fascinated me. Perhaps there were several persons who served as models. When you fly, you are with a certain crew for a few days (a shift), working with one captain. There were several captains whom I highly respected, and I tried to learn as much as possible from them. Their honesty and modesty, which stood in clear contrast to the bossy attitude of the professionally-poor ones, who were playing the captains, provided an example that I wanted to emulate.

What motivated you to always stay fresh in your daily routine?
Flying is an occupation where you cannot afford inattention or laziness. Alertness and freshness are a must in this profession. They come with the job. I always liked to fly, since I started flight training, I think I would have flown even for no pay. I still do fly with a private plane, a single-engine four-seat Grumman Tiger, which I own together with two other friends. Regardless of what I fly or where I fly to, I make sure that I am fresh and alert.

Have you ever experienced crisis situations?
In my career, since 1977, I have never had one single serious problem. There was only one engine failure on the ground, as a result of which we had to cancel the flight. I consider it providential that the failure occurred before takeoff. Otherwise, my flights were as normal as possible. Once I had an unruly passenger who caused a forced intermediate landing, but nothing else worth mentioning. These incidents reminded me that I do not have everything in my own hands. We double-check everything, we control many detailed aspects of a flight, but it is good to be reminded that there is a God who is above you and whom you can trust, even in extreme situations.

What gives you the most satisfaction in this work?
The most rewarding area of my professional experience proved to be the instruction of other people, especially helping them finish their training. I remember a particular case when somebody was actually giving up near the end of his training. I talked to him, encouraged him, and three weeks later he passed his final check and became a captain.

What do you consider to be the biggest achievement in your life?
I am not sure if this is an achievement, but the fact that I came to find out who God is and what He means to me is the most satisfying discovery I have made in my life. My discovery is not an achievement, it’s God’s gift. But if I think of a particular experience, there is one that made a significant difference in my church life. Once, after going off-blocks in Frankfurt, I did something that I had never done before, and checked the passenger list. My eyes stopped at the name of Robert Folkenberg.*

I went up to him and approached him, saying that I still remembered one of his sermons from the time he visited Germany at a camp meeting. He was returning from a mission trip in Kenya. Our informal conversation resulted in an invitation to my church and a mission project to Africa, during which some of our church members experienced the joy of sharing the gospel with others and helping those who are in special need. I am not a big speaker; however, being part of such a project, I preached a whole evangelistic series, which turned out to be a special blessing in my own life as well.

How do you manage to balance life, the demands of your profession, and your own spiritual life as a Seventh-day Adventist?
One of my priorities is to be at home for Sabbath. However, during my career, I sometimes spent Sabbaths in other cities. I always looked for a church that was closest to my hotel and enjoyed being part of a worldwide family. Keeping close to God’s Word and His children helps us to live better.

As a pilot, how do you manage to keep the Sabbath?
In the beginning of my career, unfortunately, I did not try hard. Later however, as a result of a pastoral visit, I arrived at the conclusion that I have to do everything that depends on me to keep the Sabbath. The pastor of our church talked to me about it, and I realized that I should not take Sabbath-keeping lightly. I started to pray, together with many people from my church, to have Saturdays off.

Initially, it worked by talking to the person who was making the monthly schedule for the short-range flights (Airbus 320). For the long-range flights (Airbus 340/330), there were several people preparing the schedule. When there were frequent changes.

* Folkenberg is a pseudonym.
in the personnel of the scheduling department, I wrote a letter to all of the responsible persons, and they kept it on their desk, reminding them that I am a Seventh-day Adventist and I want to be free on Sabbaths. In the last two years, computers scheduled the pilots for the flights, and it became more and more complicated, but I talked to the person who was responsible for short-term replanning and asked for replacement. I took those flights that nobody wanted to take, but as a result, I could honor God’s commandment and keep the Sabbath.

How were you able to balance your many travels with family life?

My wife knew that she was marrying a pilot. She agreed to that. When our first daughter was born, I wanted to take them home from the hospital, but I was called in to fly. Now that I have retired, some people ask us about how we are getting along, since I am at home most of the time. Many years ago, there was a period when I stayed at home for a longer time, and my wife told me after a while that it was time for me to go flying again. She adjusted her schedule so that she could accomplish household chores when I was away. Praise God, we are doing very well.

What type of skills and attitudes prepare a person to work successfully as a pilot?

You need to have technical knowledge, a good grasp of mathematics, and good orientation and geometry are important. You also have to be able to work as a team. It is a huge difference from military pilots. Here you have to fly in a team. You will have to learn to work with a great variety of people whom you cannot choose, so you have to be able to get along and interact with them and integrate them into the crew with their own initiatives. Sometimes they have better ideas than you do. That realization is important in any line of work.

If readers (university students and young professionals) are interested in this line of work, what steps should they take?

They have to think about it seriously. Sabbath-observance can be a real challenge. If they already have a family, they will have to be able to cope with being separated from their loved ones for a couple of days each week. It is not a common job; I would not recommend it on a wide scale. Had I known all the implications at the beginning, I would perhaps not have chosen it, despite all my dreams of becoming a pilot.

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* Robert Folkenberg was president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from 1990–99.
Christopher Mbulawa
Dialogue with an Adventist police officer in Botswana

Interview by Hudson E. Kibuuka

Assistant Commissioner of Police Christopher Mbulawa is third in a family of seven. Born into a Christian family in Blue Town, a suburb of Francistown, in northeastern Botswana, he completed his elementary and secondary school in his hometown. Although his family went to church each Sunday, religion did not mean much more than that. Church was a routine of a few hours, and after that, life was the same: school, soccer, shopping, and social activities. But for Christopher, this was to change the year he completed secondary school, when one day a neighbor invited him to attend an evangelistic campaign that was about to take place in Francistown.

The neighbors were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Christopher did not have much social contact with them, but he had observed their lifestyle: peculiar and somewhat odd, with weekly routines suddenly stopping Friday evening and the whole family marching to church on Saturday, instead of on Sunday as the rest of the community did. Out of curiosity, Christopher accepted their invitation and started attending the evangelistic meetings. What he heard there was new, thrilling, and biblical. Day after day, new truths, never before heard, convinced him that his future was here.

His faith found its grounding, and he got baptized. Soon after, he planned to study theology at Solusi University, but his papers did not work out as planned. So he joined the police service in Gaborone, Botswana. He also completed a diploma in mass communication from Harare Polytechnic School, and has a bachelor's degree in media studies from the University of Botswana.

Inspector Mbulawa currently serves as assistant commissioner of the Botswana Police Service, in charge of public relations. He is an active member and current head elder of the Broadhurst Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gaborone. He works closely with the church youth and leads out in youth ministry. He is also actively involved in the chaplaincy program of the police service, where he has invited Adventist pastors to be among the guest speakers invited to address members of the police service.

Christopher Mbulawa is married to Bongani, a daughter of the family that invited him to attend the evangelistic meetings. They have two daughters, one of whom is studying at the Adventist University of the Philippines.

Tell us something about your work in the Botswana police service.

I joined the police service in 1983 as a constable, and my first posting was at the Central Police Station, attending to general duties. Thereafter, I was appointed to become the registry clerk, working normal hours. I rose through the ranks, and then I was sent for further studies. I had an interest in writing, so while working as a police constable and registrar, I began writing for the police magazine. The editors liked my work and invited me to study journalism; I was among the second batch of graduates in the police public relations unit. This unit, among other things, is responsible for publishing the police magazine, with a monthly circulation of more than 10,000 copies — within the police and other government departments, as well as educational institutions locally and abroad.

Six years after joining the police service, I was promoted to become a sergeant, and a year later I was promoted to become a service inspector. I was then sent for further studies, after which I was promoted to become an inspector, and then to be an assistant superintendent. Three years later, I became a superintendent. After further training again, I was promoted to be senior superintendent, and from

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Christopher Mbulawa is married to Bongani, a daughter of the family that invited him to attend the evangelistic meetings. They have two daughters, one of whom is studying at the Adventist University of the Philippines.

Tell us something about your work in the Botswana police service.

I joined the police service in 1983 as a constable, and my first posting was at the Central Police Station, attending to general duties. Thereafter, I was appointed to become the registry clerk, working normal hours. I rose through the ranks, and then I was sent for further studies. I had an interest in writing, so while working as a police constable and registrar, I began writing for the police magazine. The editors liked my work and invited me to study journalism; I was among the second batch of graduates in the police public relations unit. This unit, among other things, is responsible for publishing the police magazine, with a monthly circulation of more than 10,000 copies — within the police and other government departments, as well as educational institutions locally and abroad.

Six years after joining the police service, I was promoted to become a sergeant, and a year later I was promoted to become a service inspector. I was then sent for further studies, after which I was promoted to become an inspector, and then to be an assistant superintendent. Three years later, I became a superintendent. After further training again, I was promoted to be senior superintendent, and from
there to be assistant commissioner. The better part of my service has been as a public relations officer for the service.

What are your current responsibilities?

As a public relations officer, I am not only a spokesman for the service, but I am also responsible for advising the commissioner, the entire senior management team (the commissioner and his two deputies), and the police service in general on media relations. I am also responsible for training police officers on how they are to relate to the media. We have regular interaction with the media. On a weekly basis, we issue police statements to the public about specific crimes that occur in the country and other relevant situations. We are also responsible for public education, to sensitize the public about emerging crime trends in the country, coming up with prevention methods, and how the public can help the police in preventing crimes. We have both television and radio programs that are aired three times a week on public television and radio stations. We publish a number of pamphlets and fliers with information for the public.

As a spokesperson for the service, what has been your experience when dealing with the media?

Dealing with the media poses many challenges. However, my training in journalism has given me an advantage in communication. I know the terrain. It is all about creating rapport. Many of the communication personnel were my classmates, so we can relate on a personal level. Some of the challenges we face include one that is common to news handling: the media wants it now, and we want to wait to collect all the information. When such information is not released immediately, some may interpret it to mean that we are trying to hide something. Another challenge is that some people think that a public relations officer’s responsibility is to doctor information, paint it to look good, and generally cover up. This is a perception that many members of the public have about public relations officers, which is not easy to change. However, my stance is to tell the truth, and I would advise all public relations officers to never tell lies. The day one tells lies is the day one digs his or her own grave as a professional when the cover-up is discovered. No matter what happens, we must tell the truth. Truth is golden when it comes to public relations.

Unfortunately, perceptions are stronger than reality, and at times we find ourselves on opposite sides, with the public media insisting that “we do not think you have told us the truth.” One just has to stick to the truth, and as for me as a Seventh-day Adventist, truth is not optional.

How does being a Seventh-day Adventist influence your work?

Police work is a 24/7 duty. By God’s grace, however, I have found myself in positions where I am able to worship without restriction. One time someone, noticing that I am always at church and carrying out my church responsibilities, asked me if I was still a member of the police service. I also attend most, if not all, church functions, such as camp meetings. I arrange my program in such a way that I take leave when those functions are scheduled.

My bosses know that I am a Seventh-day Adventist, and they respect my beliefs, which I have made plain to them. They also do not organize Sabbath programs that involve me.

I believe that God has allowed me to serve in the police service for a reason. With my being here, the Adventist church has been able to do many things with the police and elsewhere which would have been difficult otherwise. Involvement by police officers in community days organized by different churches has been a blessing. As I have visited different denomina-

The police service and the church have similar goals in many respects. For example, keeping law and order and maintaining peace and security are interests in which both the church and the government are concerned. So when we work together, we can see more stability in these areas.

One pastor friend has told me that where we work is just a temporary job. Our real work, as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is to win souls to God — evangelism. I have taken those words seriously and have tried to use every opportunity to do evangelism through my influence as a police officer. I always look for an opportunity to evangelize, because that should be my permanent work as a church member.

What advice would you give to Seventh-day Adventist young people who are serving or would like to serve in the police?

First, remember God has His people everywhere. In His wisdom, God has placed people in various places for a reason, just as He did with Joseph and Daniel. Some could be placed in the police or army or anywhere. The important thing is, wherever we are, we must live as Adventists. Sometimes people hide their identity. That creates more problems than solutions, if any. It is best to disclose one’s faith identity to the bosses and let them know what you believe. In most cases, they will respect you, especially if you live what you claim to be.

Second, live like a Christian every day of your life. The Bible says we are epistles to be read. Our way of life is the greatest sermon we can ever preach. Let God be God, and let Him place you where He wants you to be. For example, in Botswana we have rural areas, which may be considered as hardship areas, and unentered
areas as far as the gospel is concerned. Oftentimes, when civil servants, including Seventh-day Adventists, are transferred to these places, they refuse to go, and yet these could be their mission fields.

■ With your work as a policeman, do you have enough time for your family?

I try to make time for my family. One very important time for us as a family is worship time in the morning and evening. Additionally, as a family we find time to go out and just be together. We also, on occasion, have time to meet together to discuss different topics as a family regarding things like cleanliness in the home, reading books and sharing with others what we read, and so on.

We often gather as an extended family at different locations, and it gives us an opportunity to share our faith, particularly with those members of the extended family who are not Adventists. These things are important for us as a family. One of my daughters who is still at home is also a writer who likes to share with us what she writes, and I encourage her to pursue her interests as a Christian.

■ Any last word to the readers of this magazine?

Young people must be true to their faith and not play church. They should be Adventists not just before other people or on Sabbath, but even when they are by themselves. University students face a lot of challenges. Often they are in the minority on their campuses. The same could be true at work in different organizations, companies, or government departments. There are also pressures that often come to them, such as Sabbath examinations and work. Several stand firm and do not take the exams or work on Sabbath. Sadly, however, a few of those who stand firm with regard to Sabbath may be found participating in questionable parties and other activities, including the using of alcohol. This becomes a contradiction of life. It is not what we say but what we do at all times that matters and speaks louder to those we come in contact with.

■ Lastly, how can the church and the police work together?

The church should know that there are abundant opportunities to minister within the police service. Members of the police service are also human beings who need the Savior. Yet, by the nature of their work, they often get traumatized by the experiences they go through. They are usually among the first people to arrive at an accident scene, a murder scene, and so on. This affects them as human beings. Some of them are very young — nineteen years or so. If the church could offer counseling to them, they would appreciate it very much. It would also be an opportunity to point them to a greater counselor: Jesus Christ. Our church has very good programs in family life and healthful living. The police need this kind of service extended to them. The church can help them discover a more wholesome life in Christ.

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North American Division holds first-ever campus ministry conference

by Ron Pickell

Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF) — the North American Division (NAD) public campus ministry association — held the first-ever NAD-wide campus ministry conference at Columbia University, in New York City. Sponsored by ACF Columbia, the NAD Youth and Young Adult Department, the Atlantic Union Youth Department, and Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM), the conference drew close to 250 students from the Northeast and across North America.

The youth spent a wonderful weekend in New York City being inspired to “Break Well” as opposed to “Breaking Bad” — Southern slang for leaving home and making a bad break into adulthood that spirals down instead of up; also referring to a current TV drama depicting the conflicted life of Walter White a high school chemistry teacher with only two years to live. Pastor and professor Zane Yi encouraged students to break well into adulthood — in their personal lives and in the world they are preparing to serve.

Worship leader Nick Zork led the group in inspiring worships all weekend, beginning in a cafe on Friday evening at the Church of the Advent Hope on the lower east side of Manhattan and continuing on at Columbia University’s Earl Hall — the religious-life building on campus. Sabbath concluded with a concert by Ohio’s Spring Valley Academy. Special features during the weekend included musical performances by the Columbia University Gospel Choir, led by Emanuel Sean Peters, a graduate student at CU; a solo performance by guitarist and singer/songwriter Nick Zork during the Sabbath morning worship; and breakout workshops on topics such as relationships, spirituality, story as a form of communicating the gospel, and an update on campus ministry by ACF/NAD volunteer coordinator Ron Pickell.

An unplanned outreach occurred when leftovers from the lunch sponsored by ACM were used to feed CU students enjoying an afternoon concert on the campus quad area. At first, music coming from the campus festivities seemed to be an annoyance and interference, until participants began sharing the abundance of their leftover lunch. Our students got the message. Adventist students on public campuses will continue to be viewed as disruptive and annoying until we begin to ask how we can serve others, as Jesus showed His disciples by feeding the five thousand. CU students for the most part did not even know we were there, until we offered to share our lunch with them. It was only then that many expressed an interest in ACF at CU.

While students were busy sharing their lunch on campus, campus ministers and student leaders from across the NAD gathered to talk shop and plan future campus ministry conferences. In that meeting, it was decided to host an NAD-wide event every three years and encourage union-wide gatherings for the in-between years. The next NAD-wide campus ministry conference will take place in 2015. Until then, watch for annual union-wide campus ministry conferences and pray for the witness of our Adventist students on non-Adventist college and university campuses — for when we are reaching the campus, we are reaching the world. All for Christ and campus!

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This book was birthed out of a symposium I attended in 2009 on homosexuality, marriage, and the church that was held on the campus of Andrews University. The opening remarks from the lead host and symposium director, Dr. Nicholas Miller, challenged our church leaders to engage with and speak to the struggles of our day. He set the tone for the whole symposium as one of compassion and understanding.

The book is organized into four sections. The first three sections deal with theological, legal, and counseling issues. The last section is personal, presenting testimonies from six individuals who have witnessed, struggled, and dealt with the issue. The book deals with a wide range of perspectives, interests, and relevant tensions, so the reader may simply plough through according to what interests him or her the most.

The first section lays the foundation by turning to the Bible. Leading theologians and ethicists of the church (Richard Davidson, Robert Gagnon, Roy Gane, and Miroslav Kis) clearly articulate the theological and biblical positions and questions of interpretation: homosexuality in the Bible and what is at stake in the current debate; the biblical case for male-female sexual relations; biblical disapproval of homosexuality; and the issues of biblical teaching and social variance and dynamics.

The first five chapters provide sufficient information for anyone who has ever wondered what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. What kind of relationship was it that Jonathan and David had? Is the Bible consistent in its teachings on human sexuality? Are those teachings applicable today? Choice quotes are placed in bold text throughout the book, offering insights into the progression of thought, such as, “The seventh commandment against adultery, which was aimed at guarding the institution of marriage, served as summary of all biblical sex laws, including the prohibition of male-male intercourse” (p. 89). Anyone who has to offer a Bible study in this area should read this section side by side with their Bible.

Section two focuses on legal issues, giving a powerful introduction to the complexities facing us. “It seems remarkable that only fifty years ago, sodomy was considered a criminal act in all states in America. ... It was only in 1961 that Illinois became the first state to remove criminal sanctions” (p. 211). For those of us keenly engaged in the political climate, current trends, and personal faith commitment, the burning question is: just how do we respond to these changing societal views? The authors in this section are lawyers, historians, and theologians who, offer healthy challenges to active faith. These are critical questions for our day, when injustice and crime are increasing. Engaging the current generation and our peers with articulate, logical processes founded on biblical values makes a tremendous difference.

The third section deals with counseling issues. The section is so practical that it is the first one I read, as it is so relevant to my work as a university chaplain, and I was not disappointed. It is a very powerful reminder of how critical our vocabulary is when talking about these delicate areas. Mark A. Yarhouse provides a three-tier distinction (same-sex attraction, homosexual orientation, gay identity) that I wish everyone would use to avoid so much confusion, pain, and offense. Inge Anderson delves deep into our approach and reminds us that “sin involves choice. Thus a homosexual orientation does not make anyone more sinful than a heterosexual orientation does. It is what we choose to do with our sexuality that may be sinful” (p. 447). If you, like myself, are in close conversation with anyone within the three tiers, please read this section. Then re-ground yourself in section one, followed by section four and two.

The final section deals with testimonies. The testimonies will give you courage and patience, and will challenge you toward a gentler and kinder relationship within the community of faith. It may not be your story word for word, but the process and principles offer an alternative voice to what so many others have said before.

Our faith community — Seventh-day Adventists — longs for Jesus to return. This book is a powerful statement of our faith community’s desire to offer safe places to explore and understand that Jesus loves everyone and died for everyone.

The book is a “must read” for all college and university students and will help us look at all people as sons and daughters of God.

Reviewed by Japhet de Oliveira

Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling and Religious Liberty Issues

Japhet de Oliveira (M.A. Religion, Andrews University) is university chaplain and adjunct professor for youth and young adult ministry, Andrews University, Michigan. E-mail: japhet@me.com.
A young man comes to Jesus (Mark 10:17-22) with all the signs of respect and adoration. He runs up. He knows that if you want to speak to an authority, you must go to him. It needs effort. We all know that to run up is often not enough. You need to see the secretary and get an appointment. That is our world.

He addresses Jesus: “Good teacher!” Here’s a quiet admission: “I am willing to learn from you. You know so much more than I do. Please clear my doubts. Show me the way.” I do not think that this was flattery. The young man is full of real admiration for the Teacher from Galilee. It is as if we would approach a renowned professor, asking for some lessons and good advice. The young man is ready to acknowledge Jesus’ authority.

He asks a very important question, the most important one for anyone to ask. Today, people would phrase it this way: “I do not want to waste my days. I want to find meaning in life. I need to know my individual fulfilment of my time, my talents, my being. My life should not simply be over one day. I want more: eternal life.” We do not ask a child this very personal, intimate question. We would not approach just anyone with a question that has such eternal consequences. The question demands that it be addressed to someone with experience, maturity, and spiritual and moral authority. We would seek out a person who is well acquainted with the passions of today and the promises of tomorrow, and knows the difference between the two. The young man kneels before Jesus. This was unusual at that time, as it is today. It was a sign of highest respect and adoration.

The young man wants to catch up with Jesus

Who is Jesus to him? Certainly, Jesus is two or three steps ahead. The young man has heard marvellous things about Jesus: that He casts out the demons, heals the sick, cures the lepers, make wine of water, raises the dead, and much more. Jesus could not do such things without being close to God, the young man concludes. Jesus knows what to do in order to come close to God. He knows the way to heaven. The young man wants to know what Jesus knows. He wants to catch up with Jesus. He wants to become like Jesus — as far as possible, at least. What a noble aspiration!

Jesus is different

Jesus rejects the respectful address. “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” What a strange reaction!

If I went to my professor with all the signs of respect and asked him an important question, would he not welcome me? If I went to my boss, indicating that I consider her experienced person, would she not do all she could to justify my expectations? In any case, my question would help them to fulfill their calling.

If I went to my doctor, counsellor,
Jesus is Lord without making us slaves

Jesus is great, but His greatness is different from the type we are used to. He says: “You know the commandments.” The young man is convinced that Jesus knows more than he does. Jesus could have demonstrated His supremacy: “Very good that you come and ask me! I am the only one who can help.” But Jesus downplays the difference in knowledge. He says: “You know! Find your way!”

In our world, we know of strong personalities. Nobody can grow besides them, but Jesus stimulates growth. He does not constantly seek our weak points. He does not put us in a corner. He reminds us of what we already know. His presence makes us develop our abilities. His greatness is not our ignorance. Jesus provokes learning, He challenges our mind. The mysteries of God’s kingdom do not downgrade us. They lift us up. “In the kingdoms of the world, position meant self-aggrandizement. … The people were expected to believe and practice as their superiors directed. The right of man as man, to think and act for himself, was wholly unrecognized. Christ was establishing a kingdom on different principles. … In Christ’s kingdom there is no lordly oppression, no compulsion of manner.”

Jesus removes the burden that enslaves us

Jesus says: “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor.” The man was shocked. Why? Did he not ask what he should do? If Jesus had said: “Give more money to the poor,” would he not have done it? What was the problem?

The man was young. Possibly, he had not earned his possessions himself, but inherited them together with the good name of the family, with its traditions and its religion. He was responsible for it. The whole clan watched over his money, that it was spent in a way to increase the honor of the family. Thus, what he possessed occupied him, bound him.

Is it not so with us too? What we inherit can bind us, even enslave us. It might not be money, but customs, cherished prejudices, old dichotomies. It can occupy us. Jesus says: give it away.

Other great men of our world would have said: give the money to me. But Jesus does not want the money. He wants the young man to be free.

Jesus gives freedom

The end of the account of the young man is the most astonishing part of the story. The man did not accept the invitation of Jesus. He departed. And what did Jesus do? Nothing. He let him go. I am sure it hurt Him. He loved him. He would have liked to give him eternal life. “Christ looked into the face of the young man, as if reading his life and searching his character. He loved him, and He hungered to give him that peace and grace and joy which would materially change his character.”

But He let him go. He gave him freedom to choose.

Jesus could have done something: promotion for God’s kingdom, a miracle, brainwashing. He could have sent His disciples to get the man back. He could have frightened him with the last judgment. This is what the leaders of this world do. Their authority is measured by the number of subordinated people. Therefore, they like to increase the number of subjects.

Jesus is different. He let him go. In the world, it is customary to force subordinates into what they should be or should do, but invite friends. Jesus does not want subordinates. He seeks us as friends. He looked at the young man and loved him. He invites him: “Trust me! Be my friend.” Where love is, there is freedom.

Jesus is trustworthy. He does not want us as subjects of his kingship. His interest is not our labor, our thoughts, or our money. He does not make us weak or slavish, saying: “You do not know anything, you cannot do anything, you are not allowed to risk a single step.” He reminds us of what He has already given us. He trusts us to have our own thoughts, our own decisions. He respects our “yes,” but also our “no.”

He gives freedom. He invites us: “Come and follow me. Be my beloved friend.”

“In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom.”

REFERENCES
2. Ibid, p. 519
3. Ibid, p. 466.
One of the difficult Scripture passages to understand, especially to those of us who insist on salvation by faith in God’s grace alone, is Philippians 2:12: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” The difficulty is further compounded by the verse that follows: “For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:13). Is there a contradiction between the two statements: the demand and the promise, the summoning and the enabling? Is there a legalistic stance in the phrase “work out your own salvation”? Or is there an attempt to walk the theological tightrope, trying to balance the divine and the human in the process of salvation?

Perish the thought. If there was one truth that was precious to the apostle, it was the good news of salvation by grace through faith alone. Paul spent his entire ministry proclaiming that salvation could not come by any other way except through grace, and that a sinner’s acceptance before God is not something merited, but always something given. The apostle even bequeathed to the Christian community two whole epistles — Romans and Galatians — devoted entirely to this good news of God’s saving grace.

And to the Ephesians he wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

What, then, did the apostle mean by demanding that Christians must “work out” their own salvation? Far from any reference to salvation by works, Paul’s appeal is for a life and a lifestyle consistent with the demands of faith. In effect, the apostle is saying, “Yes, you are saved by faith. You are saved by the free grace of God. But you are saved to live. Your faith experience must move from believing to living. You must live out your salvation. That involves a lifestyle of obedience, just like our great model — Christ Jesus — who obeyed even to the point of humiliation and death (Philippians 2:5-12). And furthermore, your Christian walk is your personal responsibility; no one else can do it for you.”

“Work out your salvation,” therefore, does not mean “work for your salvation,” but “live a life consistent with the new status of being children of God.” As Jac Muller points out, “The believer is called to self-activity, to the active pursuit of the will of God, to the promotion of the spiritual life in himself, to the realization of the virtues of the Christian life, and to a personal application of salvation. He must ‘work out’ what God in His grace has ‘worked in’.”

This human responsibility, the apostle suggests, is to be pursued “with fear and trembling.” Paul is not referring to any “slavish terror” of a vengeful master; nor is he concerned about any frustration in the fulfillment of God’s redemptive purpose. But he is wary of self’s innate capacity for overconfidence or complacency in the journey toward the kingdom. Ellen White warns, “God does not bid you fear that He will fail to fulfill His promises, that His patience will weary, or His compassion be found wanting. Fear lest your will shall not be held in subjection to Christ’s will, lest your hereditary and cultivated traits of character shall control your life. … Fear lest self shall interpose between your soul and the great Master Worker. Fear lest self-will shall mar the high purpose that through you God desires to accomplish. Fear to trust your own strength, fear to withdraw your hand from the hand of Christ and attempt to walk life’s pathway without His abiding presence.”

In that sense, fear and trembling must accompany the Christian walk,
but in no way is there any implication that the journey is to be performed by self alone. “For God is at work in you.” The word for “at work” is energeo. God is energizing you. God is empowering you. He who has begun a “good work in you” (Philippians 1:6) is now enabling you to finish that work.

This emphasis on God’s work in the life of a Christian (1 Corinthians 12:6, 11; Galatians 2:8; Ephesians 1:11, 20) gives us the assurance that the contours of salvation — the beginning, the continuation, and the culmination — are guaranteed by God’s grace to everyone who believes in Him, and walks with Him. As Karl Barth has noted, “It is God who gives each one whatever he accomplishes in ‘working out his salvation.’ … As such we put ourselves entirely into the power of God, that as such we recognize that all grace, that everything — the willing and the accomplishing, the beginning and the end, the faith and the revelation, the questions and the answers, the seeking and the finding — comes from God and is reality only in God. … Man cannot put his salvation into practice except as he recognizes: it is God …!”

That is the beauty of the gospel. God is paramount in the salvation of man. His grace initiates and His grace completes the redemptive process. “Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enabling.”

Therefore, fear not. Tremble not. Believe and let God work in us.

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*All Scripture passages are from the Revised Standard Version.
5. White, p. 333.

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Perfect praise implies allowing God to fully read us. Because in the end, when words fail, that is what is left after enjoying a sincere exchange with our Lord and Creator.

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A Smile ...
Continued from page 34

Indeed, praise is a smile in our souls. In spite of our seeming maturity, we may be just kids in the eyes of God. He wants us dependent on Him, sincere and honest, even when we are not able to express it with words. Have you ever considered that a baby, even before learning how to speak, learns how to smile? A baby strikes up a deep and loving relationship with his or her parents, even before being able to deliver a single word. That is why God said we must be as children if we want to enter His kingdom. He is looking for the sincerity of our souls, not for our well-crafted speeches. Our sincere smiles carry messages that can fashion miracles.

Once Jesus, speaking to the leaders and priests, said, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise” (Matthew 21:16, NIV). In this statement, we find two important elements. First, babies have a clear inability to take part in formal communication. Second, in spite of it, they are able to offer perfect praise. This prompts us to conclude that true communication with God is based more on attitudes than on words. Thus, lacking for words can actually be an advantage for someone who has been born with limited capacity.
Communication is basic to making and keeping friends. The process is no different when it comes to our relationship with God. We hope for our words not to fall on deaf ears. Actually, every time we talk to God, we have the assurance that our words are never in vain. But if it is true that we are supposed to pray fervently, what could we possibly say to Someone who already knows everything? What to say to the One who knows us better than we know ourselves? How can we open our hearts to a Friend who knows all of our secrets before we utter them? Isn’t it an unbearable joy that we can be in touch with God as much as possible, even when, apparently, we happen to be at a loss for words?

Thus, as we set out to spend quality time communicating with God and to make the most of this relationship, we decide to pray. We plan to speak with our Creator, but then we realize our talk is often related to what we need. We feel as though our relationship with Him is based on our longing for Him to meet our needs. Have you ever tried talking to God for over ten minutes without making any request? I think requests are valuable, since we know our God is more than willing to bestow His richest blessings on us. However, our communication process with our Creator entails much more than that. When we decide not to make a single request, not to share our sorrows and problems with Him, what do we have left?

You may have already noticed how difficult it is to strike up a dialogue with the King of the Universe with such a limited vocabulary as we humans have. I love to envision how the journey of the saved will be as we rise in the air heavenbound. Along the way, Jesus will show us around the wonders of His creation. What will we say to the Author of all those wonders? At that moment, I believe, if we still manage to mumble some words, we will feel very clearly that our vocabulary is not only extremely limited but also outright absurd.

“Congratulations, Jesus! Everything is so beautiful! Good job!”

And what will we say regarding the cross? “Look, Jesus, I really liked your gesture. Thank you very much.”

I am certain that more than in any other moment, we will feel our vocabulary shrink in such a way that we will be looking for a completely new one.

Our words are supposed to translate what we feel. Many times, however, our feelings are deeper than what our words can express. It is like feeling the desire to fly when you well know you have no wings to do it.

But at that moment, an amazing resource comes to our help. When words are not enough, there is praise. When we become aware of our shortcomings, when we realize our words are infinitely limited, we resort to praise. By praising God, we are able to give a clear expression to what we have in our soul but find it impossible to describe with words. By praising our Creator, we engage in an existential dialogue with Him, acknowledging how much we depend on Him and accepting His sovereignty and leadership in our lives. Our praise reveals that this world is not our ultimate home. Our praise is made up of not only what we sing, but what we are.

Some time ago, I went to an ice-cream parlor with my five-year-old niece. Her shining eyes made me happy, as I saw her so excited with the prospect of eating ice cream. I really wanted to make her happy. As we were coming back home after she enjoyed her ice cream, I asked her, “Did you like it?”

She gave me a silent answer, just a broad smile with the sincerity of a child. Her smile made her message quite clear, which was well beyond a mere “thank you.” In her smile, I was able to grasp the depth of her happiness and the sincerity of her thankfulness.

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Global Youth Day
Sabbath, March 16, 2013
by Gilbert Cangy

The General Conference Youth Ministries Department has consulted with the 13 Division youth directors, the GMEU, and the Israel field, and has received overwhelming support for adopting a Global Youth Day.

Sabbath, March 16, 2013, has been chosen, as it marks the beginning of the Youth Week of Prayer globally. Although some Divisions of the world field host their Youth Week of Prayer at a different time of the year, they will still unite as one on that day for a common purpose.

Objectives
The objectives of Global Youth Day are to:
• Recapture the reality of Seventh-day Adventist Youth as a Global Movement.
• Lead our youth to rediscover the sense of belonging to a global army.
• Reposition Mission at the heart of Global Youth Ministry.
• Provide a much-needed positive and constructive response to perceived fragmentation.

Grounded in the concluding words of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:25-37), the theme of Global Youth Day will be “One In Compassion.”

Eight million Adventist youth will be mobilized on the streets of our villages, towns, and cities around the world to be the hands and feet of Jesus through acts of kindness. A strategy of “Simple, Global, and Relevant” has been devised.

Strategy
On Sabbath, March 16, 2013, youth will hear one less sermon in the morning. THEY will be the sermon. They will step out of the building to be the Church and reach out in the name of Jesus.

There will be six elements to Global Youth Day
Young people from local churches, regions, or Conferences/Missions will meet for a time of consecration before spending the best part of Sabbath reaching out in local communities.

To provide a focus for the day after their diverse acts of kindness, youth around the world will donate blood as the symbol of the ultimate life saving act of compassion.

To complete the day’s activities, young people will congregate in their local churches, regions, or Conferences/Missions for a time of worship and sharing of experiences to mark the beginning of the Week of Prayer, which is based on “Mission & Service.”

Youth around the world will be connected through technology and live coverage as stories light up the world progressively through the different time zones.

A specially designed T-shirt will provide identification with the global initiative.

Global Youth Day will be an annual event with a different emphasis each year. The day will reposition youth at the center of the Church’s life and Mission. It has the potential of being the dawn of youth ministry’s finest hour.
global youth day
March 16, 2013
ONE in Compassion
8 million adventist youth mobilized on the streets worldwide
www.gcyouthministries.org