Once I asked a group of college students to close their eyes and point toward what they thought was North. Then I asked them to keep pointing while they opened their eyes. This exercise demonstrated that not everyone had a good grasp of which direction was where. Some were pointing East. Some pointed South, and some West. Maybe some were even pointing up. (After all, North is always up on maps!) And some had it right and had a finger pointing northward. But whichever way they were pointing, it didn’t change where North really was.

A flight center director once told me that it is possible for pilots, while flying, to lose track of which way the ground is. In other words, they don’t know which way is up and which way is down! This condition is called spatial disorientation or vertigo. Obviously this would be a dangerous situation for a pilot. If pilots think they are ascending when in actuality they are about to plow a furrow in the ground, the plane is in grave danger.

This deadly condition that pilots sometimes experience is a metaphor for the contemporary world. The world in which we live is experiencing moral vertigo. Many people think down is up, and up is down. And we see the results around us in the disintegration of our families and our society. We hear about horrifying stories and unspeakable atrocities all around us. We seem to be living again in the days of ancient Israel: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25, NKJV).

I am told that a pilot needs the horizon as a reference point, or if the horizon is not visible, the pilot should consult the aircraft instruments, such as the attitude indicator or the altimeter to head off this vertigo. And likewise, Christians need the reference points of the Word of God, a life of prayer, and the counsel and companionship of Christian friends to live out the truth in their lives.

Whatever the contemporary world might say, truth does exist.
There is an objective reality. There are moral absolutes. There are eternal truths: The truth that Jesus died for your sins and mine. The truth that He is coming again. The truth that He has a plan for each life. The truth that God wants each of us to be part of His family, the church, and to help those in need. Truth does exist.

Truth No. 2: Truth matters.

Truth not only exists, it matters. In other words, it is important. It is vital. It is significant.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul declares, “God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (NIV). Also, 3 John 1:4 states, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (NIV). Since it is through belief in the truth that we are saved, because it brings God joy when we walk in the truth, it is evident that truth matters.

Sometimes we become confused about what really matters in life. We get distracted by sports events, movies, business, or politics. But how we respond to the truth of God matters more than anything else. Truth matters!

Have you noticed that when you realize something affects you, personally and individually, how important it suddenly seems? Suppose you are traveling out of town and you hear on the radio that a natural disaster, such as an earthquake or a tornado, has struck your hometown. You are suddenly all ears. You want to find out everything you can about the extent of the disaster. Why? Because it affects you. And that is why truth matters so much. It involves everyone.

How we respond to God’s truth affects the quality of our lives on this earth. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV). The happiest, most fulfilled, most satisfying life that one can live is a life that is committed to truth. And of course, how we respond to truth affects us not only now, but also for eternity. Our response to the One who is the embodiment of truth determines whether we will be able to live forever.

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Sometimes when a big sporting event is about to begin, as the camera focuses on the festive environment and all the spectators preparing to cheer for their favorite teams, the commentator says, “It doesn’t get any better than this!” As if to suggest that this game that is about to be played is the most important thing on the face of the planet.

With due appreciation for sport commentators and fans, it does get better, a lot better than this. When you live in a relationship with Jesus Christ, when you have the full assurance of His love, when you are looking forward to His return, when you are married to the spouse God has led you to, when you hold your child in your arms, this is when you can truly say, “It doesn’t get any better than this.” Truth matters!

Truth No. 3: Truth must be sought.

The Bible underscores that truth must be sought. That is, we must seek it and inquire after it. Since truth is so important, it might be nice if we possessed it innately, if it were intrinsic to humans. As if the knowledge of truth could be as natural and automatic for humans as the ability to swim is for ducks.

But truth is not inherently ours, nor is it dropped in our laps. God wants us to search diligently and earnestly for truth. The Lord declares, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13, NIV). And what this verse states about finding God is also the case for discovering truth, one of His foremost qualities. In other words, we find truth when we search for it with all our hearts.

Someone might ask, “What does it mean to really seek after truth, to truly seek it with all my heart and soul?” I was speaking at a camp meeting several years ago, and I did something I shouldn’t have done. My wife and I had finished eating at the dining area and were engaged in conversation with some other...
Simply put, a Christian is a follower of Christ. An Adventist Christian is a follower of Christ who is looking forward to His soon return. And a Seventh-day Adventist Christian is a follower of Jesus who is so deeply in love with Jesus that he or she has a foretaste of heaven every Sabbath while awaiting His soon return.

Truth No. 4: Truth is in a person.

The fourth truth that the Bible states about truth is this: Truth is wrapped up in and flows out of a person. To elaborate, truth is not just a set of principles, nor is it merely certain doctrines of Scripture. Rather, truth is found in a Person. Notice John 14:6: “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (NIV).

Occasionally, I do a bit of pre-marital counseling. Sometimes couples will want to make sure that all the details of their new life together are arranged prior to marriage—that they are financially secure, have good jobs, and a place to live. And though all these things have some significance and it is helpful to have cared for them, they aren’t nearly as important as knowing that marriage is primarily about being in a permanent relationship with another person, about being attuned to the other person’s needs, and taking time to listen to and care for one’s spouse.

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The fact that truth is wrapped up in a Person doesn’t diminish the importance of the teachings of Scripture. It doesn’t minimize doctrine. To the contrary, it shows that all biblical truths radiate out of the One who declared Himself the way, the truth, and the life.
The Athenians achieved a higher level of culture than their countrymen. Athens became the literary and artistic center of Greece. Yet Athens’ “great age” lasted only 50 years. Why? Who brought an end to this mother of arts and invention? “It was the Sophists who popularized Protagoras’s phrase Man is the measure of all things and translated it to mean that individuals are not responsible to any transcendent moral authority for their actions.”

The Sophists were not concerned with “reaching the truth. Some even denied that there was any truth at all. They said that all knowledge is relative, and that things are correct or incorrect only as people consider them so. So many voices were the problem. Each person’s view had equal value at the table....The Sophists also claimed that there are no absolute standards of morality.”

As Russell Kirk observed, “It was the clear relativism of the Sophists, not the mystical insights of Plato, nor Aristotle’s aspiration after the mystical experience of the gods.”

Are you trying to listen to too many voices?

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dom. Scripture warns, “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings” (Heb. 13:9, NIV), for “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1, NIV). Babylon is confusion because conflicting human voices drown out the voice of God. Allowing the Bible to interpret itself is dragged in the dust as human interpreters scramble to push their views at the table.

The Catholic Church believes the canon of Scripture is the product of the church, rather than the church being the product of the biblical canon. This positions the church above Scripture: “For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.”

This has been the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church throughout history, and it is the basis of all the false doctrines espoused by Roman Catholicism. The Reformers revolted against this error with the cry sola Scriptura (scriptura sui ipsius interpretes; scripturam ex scriptura explicandam esse). This means that the Bible is capable of interpreting itself and does not need tradition, philosophy, church, or any other human experience to interpret it. It is the sole interpreter of itself. The word sole is vital; the erosion of this word has led to pluralism and relativism that constitutes the fall of Babylon. Today’s landscape is crawling with external interpreters, all claiming to be the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.

The battle today is between the internal interpretive role of Scripture versus the external interpreters who reject Scripture’s self-interpretive role. Experience, reason, and tradition are not the interpreters of Scripture. Neither do they share the interpretive role with the Bible’s self-interpretation (though we would be naive to claim we do not use them as tools or aids as we search for Scripture’s self-interpretation).

Supreme God, which dominated the thinking of the classical Greeks in their decadence.” No ancient Greek philosopher defended Protagorean relativity. Socrates and Plato taught that truth was absolute.

The problem today is even more disturbing. The Sophists promoted relativism from outside, but now relativism thrives within Christianity itself—and even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” (John 18:38, NKJV) must burn deep within every Adventist conscience. Do we know the truth? We are told that “none but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict” (The Great Controversy, pp. 593, 594). We are told that the coming sealing work of the latter rain Holy Spirit is a “settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually” (Ellen G. White Comments, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1161). Those sealed will be the ones who hear the voice of God above the multiplied voices of humankind.

The Fall of Babylon
We live in the time of the fall of Babylon. The term Babylon recalls the tower of Babel, where confusion resulted from multiplied voices. Modern Babylon is confusion resulting from multiplied human ideas about divine truth. This is why Babylon is fallen (Rev. 14:8; 18:2, 3). Scripture never calls people to relativism, to pluralism, or to secularism. It calls people to Christ (Matt. 11:28), the One who is the Truth (John 14:6), and it therefore calls people out of Babylon, as seen in the final end-time invitation, “Come out of her, my people” (Rev. 18:4, NKJV).

It was the Babylonian-like confusion over truth that led to the demise of Athens, and it is this same confusion over truth that is leading to the rapid collapse of much of Christen-
than the Living Word of God shares His salvation mission with others. The fall of prophetic Babylon results from failure to hold to this Reformation Scripture principle of *sola Scriptura*.

This failure was dramatically demonstrated on March 29, 1994, when 13 persons, Catholic and evangelical, issued a document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the third Millennium.” Endorsed by 25 well-known Catholic and evangelical leaders, the document caused a furor in Catholic and evangelical circles. Dave Hunt wrote, “The document, in effect, overturned the Reformation and will unquestionably have far reaching repercussions throughout the Christian world for years to come.”

One of the key differences between Catholic and evangelical theology has to do with justification by faith alone through Christ alone. Martin Luther discovered in the Book of Romans that, “The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17, NKJV). This was the heart of the Reformation. It countered the Catholic notion that justification is through faith *plus* works. Any human works detract from the one saving work of Jesus Christ. “The doctrine of Justification,” wrote John Calvin, “is the principal ground on which religion must be supported.”

Justification by faith, however, is understood differently by Catholics and evangelicals. The key word *alone* is missing throughout Catholic thinking. Evangelicals believe the gospel is justification through faith alone by Christ alone found in Scripture alone. By contrast, Catholics see faith as a human work, so there is no faith alone, Christ alone, or Scripture alone. Human penance is added to justification and to Christ’s work, and the tradition of the Magisterium is added to Scripture.

Any placing of human experience, reason, or tradition as interpretive tools above Scripture’s self-interpretation rejects the important distinction between Catholic thinking and that of the Reformers. Whether people know it or not, anyone who places outside authorities above or equal to scriptural authority has a Catholic view of Scripture.

“Despite all the recent dialogue among those desiring to reunite Rome and Protestantism,” writes John MacArthur, “there has been no suggestion that Rome will ever repudiate its stance against justification by faith. For that reason, the trend toward tolerance and cooperation is a destructive one because it blurs the distinction between biblical truth and a system of falsehood.”

**Postmodernism**

Today we’re in the midst of a profound transition from modernism to postmodernism. The human race has entered a new era that presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities to Seventh-day Adventists’ mission.

**Postmodernism Defined.** Postmodernism is follows modernism. Modernism was launched by the 17th century Enlightenment, which dominated human quest for knowledge and understanding for 200 years. Scientific method brought multiplied technological benefits to human living, but it also brought a negative impact on global ecology, as well as bringing the race to the brink of a nuclear holocaust. In this way, belief in knowledge as good came to a shattering end. Thus, in the last half of the 20th century, the modern worldview was challenged and continues to be questioned.

**Differences Between Modernism and Postmodernism.** When it comes to comparing modernism and postmodernism, there’s some continuity between the two, but also a radical discontinuity. The modern antipathy to metaphysics and the transcendental is continued in postmod-
Postmodernism’s rejection of a center in theory cannot be lived in practice. If God is not the center of a person’s life, then someone or something else will be. Idolatry was a recurring problem throughout the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments deal with the problem up front. . . “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me’’ (Ex. 20:2, 3, NIV).

ernism. “While modernism categorically denies the transcendent and spends a great deal of time and effort attempting to prove that the transcendent does not exist,” says William E. Brown, “Postmodernism confronts the transcendent with a yawn.”

In this confined context, postmodernism champions liberation causes. If there’s no transcendent God, then humans are left to be revolutionaries, to bring change in their own strength, in their own way. Yet this is the time when “religion is marginalized and trivialized,” and “Postmodernists have genuinely given up on the idea of absolute truth.” What a paradox: They have an absolute mission or right (to liberate) without absolute mandate or truth, which leaves one wondering how even liberation can be an absolute truth for them!

In modernism, God was shut out of this part of His universe. This closed continuum worldview rejected any inbreaking of the supernatural within the natural nexus of cause and effect on planet Earth. Huston Smith suggests that the modern mind thought that “seeing further in a horizontal direction would compensate for loss of the vertical.” But modernism failed to realize that vision on the horizontal plane is still confined within a closed universe, and therefore shut up to its own subjectivity. Smith illustrates this vision with a line silhouetting the Himalayan range. Modernism grabbed both ends and pulled it into a straight line. Modernism flaunted human reason as the savior of all human problems. This extreme rationalism was not enlightened, although a product of the Enlightenment. Postmodernists rightly call into question this arrogance, but go too far by rejecting reason altogether. The solution lies between the two extremes, where a proper use of reason under Scripture is necessary to arrive at solutions.

For the God of all truth invited humankind: “‘Come now, and let us reason together’” (Isa. 1:18, NKJV).

Difficulties in Postmodernism for the Presentation of Truth. Postmodernists accept a number of voices (ideas) that are only theoretically relevant, but which cannot be sustained at the level of living. This makes postmoderns vulnerable to the certain voice of Truth.

There are major difficulties, however, for the presentation of biblical truths to postmodernism. Biblical truths need to be thought through for this generation—not for a generation that has gone. This does not change the content but may involve a change in communication techniques. We must understand postmoderns before we attempt to speak to them. The following characteristics give us insight to their thinking:

1. Opposed to system. How can one present a systematic understanding of biblical truth when such systems are irrelevant to postmoderns? It’s one thing to reject a system, and another thing to live a muddled life. Often the very ones rejecting systems organize their day, plan their vacations, and work in a routine manner, arriving at appointments on time. Modern life demands schedules, whether for travel, business, or the time to listen to the evening news.

Opposition to systems takes place only on the theoretical level, not where life is lived. Yet there’s no advantage in rejecting something at the theoretical level that proves eminently workable at the everyday level. Rejection of the strictures of modernism, the science that led to ecological and nuclear threats to the planet, is understandable and worthy; but there’s more to modernism than that. There’s a good side to modernism that lives on in postmodernism because life is more orderly than the theory of postmodernism allows.

2. Opposed to a center. Postmodernism’s rejection of a center in theory cannot be lived in practice. If God is not the center of a person’s life, then someone or something else will be. Idolatry was a recurring problem throughout the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments deal with the problem up front. The very first commandment says, “‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me’” (Ex. 20:2, 3, NIV).

Humans are incurable worshipers. This is true of postmoderns as well. The end-time confrontation will involve worship, and all humanity will participate (Rev. 13:3, 4, 12). The fact that humans are worshipers stems from their creation by God (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:7, 20-25). They were made for God. If they do not worship God, they will worship some other god or gods. This is why
religion is found in every culture, however primitive or advanced. Humans are programmed through creation to seek a center to their life, to give it meaning and security. Postmodernism has not decreased the number of sports fans. Hollywood stars are still sought after. Work is often central to those wanting to get ahead. Workaholism hasn’t receded with the advent of postmodernism. The effects of creation and modernism still live on in spite of the decentering theory of postmodernism.

3. Opposed to any worldview. There is no overarching worldview for postmodernism as there has been for all prior ages. Yet it is not possible to live up to this theoretical position. Postmodernism is a revolt expressed in many ways. One way is through liberation theology. It’s a quest for political power, influenced by Marxism. Liberation theology has a worldview: God is in the business of liberating marginalized people. This is one example of how a movement within postmodernism does have a worldview in practice.

Modernity had a center and a worldview; postmodernism has neither. Yet, paradoxically, postmodernism finds itself in a shrinking world that thinks more in global terms, from economy to ecology. At the very time when order has been thrown to the winds, a global village has emerged. To this extent, in many areas of life, a worldview has been thrust upon the very revolution that abandoned all worldviews.

With the rejection of any system, center, or worldview, the only option left to postmodernism was relativism. But relativism means that every individual has a right to his or her own view. Perspectival thinking replaced worldviews, the local situation replaced the broader context, situation ethics replaced the moral code, and personal preference replaced values. “If it feels good” replaced an objective norm. Order gives way to chaos, hope to nihilism, and the future to the ever present. There is no goal, purpose, or fulfillment. Humanity has become less than human. Thus, postmoderns have no protection from the eschatological and universal delusion of Spiritualism (Rev. 16:12-16, 13:12-17).

Such dysfunction cannot sustain viable human existence. Postmoderns are desperate for meaning and a future. More than ever, they need to know the good news of the gospel. They are vulnerable to a certain voice of truth. They need to hear the voice of God in Scripture.

How to Reach Postmoderns With Biblical Truth

The gospel is everlasting (Rev. 14:6), first given to humanity after the Fall (Gen. 3:15), and consistently the same throughout Scripture. It’s this gospel that Christ commis-

Yes, postmoderns have overthrown the unified worldview of modernism. Yes, they are awash in a seemingly meaningless sea of pluralism without chart or compass. Yet, their lives are hectic, stress-filled, and often dysfunctional. Yet still they bear the image of God and have a receiver on board to hear the good news of the gospel.

This is why Christ is still the light that lightens everyone coming into the world (John 1:9). The fact of the image in no way discounts or detracts from Christ as the light to the world. Christ as Creator (John 1:1, 2; Heb. 1:1, 2) chose to make humanity in such a way that after the Fall, it would be possible to reach humanity in its fallen condition and bring enlightenment, even to postmoderns. It is also vital to recognize the function of the Holy Spirit in this process. For two things are crucial: not to underestimate the longing in the hearts of postmoderns and not to underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to satisfy that longing.

If Christ made all humankind in His image, this includes postmoderns. If Christ put within the human mind a longing for Himself, this includes postmoderns. If conscience is the location where God speaks and His voice is heard, then this includes the consciences of those who espouse postmodernism. Yes,
It’s true that for some the new science has contributed to the insecurity in postmodernism. But far more than a new way to look at reality (for example, light as a particle or wave) is the insecurity produced by nuclear science. Postmoderns believe the world began with a Big Bang and wonder if it will end that way.

postmoderns have overthrown the unified worldview of modernism. Yes, they are awash in a seemingly meaningless sea of pluralism without chart or compass. Yes, their lives are hectic, stress-filled, and often dysfunctional. Yet still they bear the image of God and have a receiver on board to hear the good news of the gospel. Their case may seem hopeless, but their very hopelessness makes them long for hope, and open to the only One who can bring them meaning out of chaos. As Augustine of Hippo said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

Generation X is a product of postmodernism. The question, How do we reach postmoderns with biblical truth, must also be asked of the Xers. In their book A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World, William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi (an Xer) explain what the X generation is like. The X generation were born between 1961-1981. It was called the X generation because it was perceived that they

stood for nothing and believed in nothing. It’s a generation dominated by technology. Half of them are divorced, one in three were abused. Born in the time of President Nixon, they have never known trust in leadership. For the first time in American history, this is the generation, for the most part, who will not have it better than their parents.

Mahedi and Bernardi claim, “Einstein’s relativity theories along with quantum mechanics and recent discoveries in astronomy have rendered all previously held positions obsolete. Reality is far more complex than we had imagined it to be.” It’s true that for some the new science has contributed to the insecurity in postmodernism. But far more than a new way to look at reality (for example, light as a particle or wave) is the insecurity produced by nuclear science. Postmoderns believe the world began with a Big Bang and wonder if it will end that way. The Xers have had a rough life and find themselves in a rough environment. Aloneness defines the generation. This is not loneliness, rather it is a life of activity without family and friends. Postmoderns struggle with issues of abandonment, alienation and aloneness. Their greatest need is for a cohesive family unit. This is where we must begin. Not with Daniel 2. But with their needs and attempts to meet them.

In fact, “Generation X has been spiritually starved, emotionally traumatized, educationally deprived, condemned to a bleak economic future and robbed of the hope that should characterize youth.” Those in Generation X live in a time when the world has become a “global village,” when the major problems halfway around the world are graphically displayed on the nightly news. In such a time “a great spiritual hunger has arisen around the world as we repudiate the moral and intellectual emptiness of modern life and resist the impersonal forces of vast and dehumanizing systems.”

We must not underestimate this genuine spiritual hunger. The emotionally wounded and spiritually empty postmoderns face an end of their civilization very much like the ancient Athenians. They lack security. In spite of all the relativism, pluralism, lack of worldview, center, with dislike of systems, objectivity, absolutes, and the transcendent, the needs of postmoderns cry out for the very things they have rejected. This is crucial. They cannot live their own theories.

Perhaps the best way to help postmoderns is to come close to them and share with them what Christ has done for us and offer them a relationship with a personal and present God who loves them. Tell them they belong to His family. Christ lived and died for them. There is a certain future for them so much better than the present. Christ is coming for them, to give them that which they do not have and cannot get from the relativism and confusion of postmodernism. Christ’s presence with them now and His coming for them soon can give them the security that propositional truths bring, and set them free from the meaninglessness that comes from the many voices.

For after all, postmoderns were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27), and though that image is ever so damaged, it still provides a point of contact for the Holy Spirit to enlighten them (John 1:9). It is to postmoderns that the final cry will go forth: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! . . . Come out of her, my people” (Rev. 18:2, 4, NIV). It will be an authoritative, certain, and welcome voice to free postmoderns from the Babylonian confusion of pluralistic voices.

Like ancient Athens, modern Babylon crumbles. It has nothing lasting to offer. The invitation to
come out of her goes forth under the Latter Rain (Joel 2:28, 29) “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:16, 17) who authored the Scriptures (1 Peter 1:10, 11; 2 Peter 1:21). He will come to “guide . . . into all truth” (John 16:13, NIV). Christ the Living Word and Scripture the written Word, with its sola Scriptura, are the only hope for postmoderns. The Savior and Scripture provide the only optimistic worldview, with glorious love, purpose, peace, security, and hope that negate the meaninglessness, purposelessness, pluralism, relativism, and confusion of postmodern life.

Postmoderns are open to all voices and thus open to the voice of God. Many postmodern theories cannot be lived. Postmoderns are vulnerable because of disappointed relationships and disappointed theories. These make them vulnerable for a certain voice. We must not underestimate their need or the ability of the Holy Spirit to meet it as we mingle among them as their friends.

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16. Ibid., pp. 25, 43.

In our postmodern world, the idea of absolute truth is fast becoming outdated.

In his book Reality Isn’t What It Used To Be, Walter Truett Anderson tells of standing one day on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In the surf far below, a sea otter floated on its back, holding an abalone in its forepaws and cracking the abalone’s shell with a rock. Waves washed in, and the otter rocked gently about on the surface, seemingly paying no attention to this movement as it concentrated on its task.

“I thought, how different from mine its experience of life must be,” Anderson says, “living in a medium in such flux and so unlike the hard ground on which I stood. But as I thought about it further, I realized that the medium in which I live is far more turbulent than anything the sea otter could ever conceive of—because as a human being, I bob about in a sea of symbols, an ocean of words.”

Words communicate ideas. They shape perceptions of reality. An ocean of words in our postmodern world is creating crosscurrents of diverse values and beliefs in which

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In his book *Reality Isn’t What It Used To Be*, Walter Truett Anderson tells of standing one day on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In the surf far below, a sea otter floated on its back, holding an abalone in its forepaws and cracking the abalone’s shell with a rock. Waves washed in, and the otter rocked gently about on the surface, seemingly paying no attention to this movement as it concentrated on its task.

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Morality is seen as having reached the end of the line. Such fashionable pronouncements cascade from the scientific and academic community, the arts, as well as the entertainment and news media, saturating our society’s view of ethics and morality so that the average GenXer believes there are no rules, no right, no wrong, no meaning, and no absolute truth.

eternal correctness of certain beliefs and values is no longer accepted, and the idea of absolute truth is fast becoming outdated.

Five fundamental changes characterize the postmodern worldview of reality as evidenced by the actions people are taking in relation to politics, religion, ethics, and culture. These interrelated changes include:

1. Changes in thinking about thinking. There is a growing awareness of the multidimensional, relativistic quality of human experience and the mind’s ability to see itself—and to see itself seeing itself and step outside of reality constructs to examine them. This opens the way for the idea that all explanations of reality are themselves constructions—human, and useful, but not perfect.

2. Changes in identity and boundaries. This is an age of fading boundaries, the twilight of a mindset that structured reality with sharp lines. The boundaries between nations, races, classes, cultures, religions, and moral systems, have all become less distinct. With this confusion comes the loss of one-dimensional social identities. Multiple identity has become a common feature of postmodern life.

3. Changes in learning and the purpose of learning. The kind of learning that becomes necessary for survival in the postmodern age is that of discovery, which includes an ongoing process of reality-construction.

4. Changes in morals, ethics, and values. In postmodernism, morality is not merely handed down, but learned and created and re-created out of experience and in dialogue with others. The morals of today are not the morals of yesterday, and they will not be the morals of tomorrow.

5. Changes in relationship to traditions, customs, and institutions. Changes in thinking and about thinking affect ethics and values. And changes in identity and boundaries affect relationships to traditions, customs, and institutions. But ethics and values are the bottom line of how all these changes truly touch human life. Because of this, ethics and values are, in fact, the driving force behind all other changes. People are pursuing certain values and desire an ethic that facilitates those values.

Morality in Postmodern Perspective

The postmodern approach to morality is all too often associated with the celebration of the supposed emancipation from moral standards and the disavowal of moral responsibility. We are witnessing, some assert, “the demise of the ethical” and the transition to an era in which we are placed beyond moral duty. Morality is seen as having reached the end of the line. Such fashionable pronouncements cascade from the scientific and academic community, the arts, as well as the entertainment and news media, saturating our society’s view of ethics and morality so that the average GenXer believes there are no rules, no right, no wrong, no meaning, and no absolute truth.

Generation X is the first generation to see the world through postmodern eyes. This generation truly thinks differently, perceives differently, believes differently, and processes truth differently from any previous generation. It is leading the way toward relativism. According to Barna, adults in this generation reject absolute truth by a staggering 78 percent.

The significance of this lies in Eugene Peterson’s observation that there was a time when ideas and living styles were initiated in the adult world and filtered down to youth. Now the movement has been reversed: Lifestyles are generated at the youth level and pushed upward. Dress fashions, hairstyles, music, and morals adopted by youth are evangelistically pushed on an adult world, which in turn seems eager to be converted.

But the collapse of belief taking place in postmodern society does not, it turns out, result in a collapse of morality. Quite the opposite. According to Anderson: “The early postmodern years are bringing, instead of collapse of morality, a renaissance of searching for principles of life that we variously call morals, ethics, values. And this is not merely a single shift of values but a continual dynamic process of moral discourse and discovery.”

For the eminent sociologist and postmodern theorist Zygmunt Bauman, the great issues of ethics have not lost their importance at all: They simply need to be approached in a wholly new way. He sees our postmodern era as presenting a dawning, rather than a twilight, for ethics. Postmodernism does not bring an end to morality or ethics, but an end to morality or ethics as modernism has framed it in ethical theories that began looking like blind alleys.
According to Bauman, postmodernism presents an apparent absence of any universalizing authority. This rules out, then, the setting of binding norms that moral agents must obey. It places moral responsibility wholly upon the moral agent, who must face point-blank the consequences of his or her actions. In the postmodern context, moral agents are constantly faced with moral issues and obliged to choose between ethical precepts. The choice always assumes responsibility, and for this reason bears the character of a moral act. “It requires us not only to make moral choices,” Bauman says, “but also to add to our life-making responsibilities the task of creating and re-creating our ideas of what morality is.” He terms this situation the “ethical paradox of postmodernity”:

“The ethical paradox of the postmodern condition is that it restored to agents the fulness of moral choice and responsibility while simultaneously depriving them of the comfort of the universal guidance that modern self-confidence once promised. Ethical tasks of individuals grow while the socially produced resources to fulfill them shrink. Moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice . . . . In a cacophony of moral voices, none of which is likely to silence the others, the individuals are thrown back on their own subjectivity as the only ultimate ethical authority. At the same time, however, they are told repeatedly about the irreparable relativism of any moral code.”

The postmodern mindset contrasts sharply with the optimistic cultural forecasts of modernism in terms of inevitable human progress through human reason, values, and abilities. Modernism was the attempt to bring structure and order to human existence, to order society toward certainty, orderliness, and homogeneity. Because modernism appears to have failed to deliver, postmodernity brings with it an existential insecurity—a pessimism about personal and global survival.

Adding to this angst is a very practical dilemma: Our consciences naturally yearn to have our moral choices affirmed. That requires some objective truth principle outside our own thinking, something that postmodernism denies. A person can never be entirely sure that he or she has acted in the right manner. “The moral self is a self always haunted by the fact that it is not moral enough.” It is moral, nonetheless, when it has set itself standards it cannot reach or placated itself with self-assurances that the standards have been reached.

Bauman also contrasts moral responsibility with ethical theories or rules. Ethics provides the tools for moral life—the code of moral behavior, the assembly of the rules of responsibility home to where it should be: inside me” rather than outside of myself. Hence, postmodernism becomes morality without external ethical code. The notion of no universal standards does not release us from moral responsibility: It only increases it. It brings moral responsibility home to where it should be: inside the moral agent.

Finally, Bauman speaks of postmodernism as bringing the “re-enchantment of the world.”6 The postmodern mindset represents an abandonment of the rationalist belief system. The postmodern framework allows for the existence of realities that science cannot measure: the supernatural, the transrational, the spiritual, the paradoxical, the numinous, and the mysterious. Postmodernism thus opens up the ability to deal with aspects of morality that modernism often struggled against. We learn again to accept contingency and respect ambiguity, to feel regard for human emotions, to appreciate actions without purpose and calculable rewards.
A valid critique of modernity’s ethical systems does not necessarily mean there are no valid systems at all. The apparent plurality of equally well-founded (or equally unfounded) moral authorities does not negate this, either. In fact, it increases moral responsibility or choice, because the moral agent must become informed enough on the issues to be morally discriminating if he or she is to make the right moral choice.

After modernity falls away, but it is that turn in which modernity’s assumptions have been problematized and the continuity of our confidence has been called into question.”

Modernism and postmodernism share some fundamental presuppositions, then, when it comes to ethics, human nature, and human ability. Modernism celebrated human reason, human values, and the ability of human beings to bring social/moral structure to personal life as well as to the world. At bottom, postmodernism does the very same in that it celebrates the human moral capacity and human nature’s ability to rise to challenging moral exigencies of contemporary society. Modernism and postmodernism are both essentially humanistic.

Though postmodern ethics correctly faults previous ethical systems as failures and asserts that ethical theories and rules—not morality itself—are being called into question, it nevertheless throws the baby out with the bath water. The real problem is not with ethical theories per se, but with ethical systems that don’t deliver. It denies the possibility that there might be an adequate moral theory yet to be embraced for moral formation and reflection. It also assumes an unnatural dichotomy between moral responsibility and ethical theory.

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In addition, the reality of human nature and the age-long phenomenon of enduring human problems points to the existence of moral structure corresponding to human nature. When Mortimer Adler was once asked by an interviewer, “How do you know there is a real, tangible world outside our minds?” Adler said, “It’s no mystery. The world outside my mind never lets me forget it is there. When I run into a wall, reality abruptly stops me. When I throw cold water on my face, reality wakes me up. It I stub my toe or burn myself, reality brings me a taste of pain. If I ever think the external world is not there, reality finds a way to slap some sense into me. The external world is there. I have the bruises to prove it.”

How could our postmodern society know for sure that there is moral structure in human nature and human relationships? The real moral world outside all this great sounding postmodern idea of the relativity of ethical theories and

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Rational thought. The postmodern worldview places intuition and emotion at its center, not intellect. The first question asked by a postmodernist is not “What do you think?” but “How do you feel?” Subjective experience supersedes logic and objective facts. Postmodernism creates a generation accustomed to paradoxes and processes truth relationally rather than propositionally. Moral reflection and action follows accordingly. Such moral reflection and action is ambiguous, paradoxical, and often processed relationally.

Postmodern ethics includes the following: pluralism of authority, centrality of choice, existential angst, re-personalizing morality, ethical systems discredited while morality is affirmed, and the re-enchantment of the world.

**Reality Check the Emergent Fiction**

One may take issue with Bauman’s position on the issues he outlines, but his description of morality from a postmodern perspective is fair. He correctly asserts that moral responsibility touches the heart of who I am as a person. He is correct, too, in noting that “we are not moral thanks to society (we are only ethical or law-abiding thanks to it), we are society, thanks to being moral. At the heart of sociality is the loneliness of the moral person.” Our question is whether or not postmodern ethics as he has described it fits moral reality, whether or not it fits what ought to be in terms of human moral theory and practice.

As Bauman describes postmodern ethics, it shares some of the same assumptions about human nature and the contingency of moral/social order that modernism has projected. Scott H. Moore describes “postmodernity as a ‘turn’ rather than as an epoch or an era. Postmodernity is a modern problem and a modern phenomenon.” Moore says that “postmodernity is not what comes
Ethical theory works within three interrelated levels: theological and philosophical bases, universal principles, and rules for action in specific areas of life. When it is asserted that the moral agent needs no moral framework to work within, we are basically assuming too much of our fallen human nature and are overlooking how very much we need guidance in making moral choices.

and it stood fast. His word is truth. In a lesser way, we create reality by what we say, whether verbally or in our minds.

In fact, Solomon himself did a little reality-creating. Referring to his writing of Ecclesiastes, he says, “The Preacher sought to find delightful words” (12:10, NASB). Solomon was a master preacher, an orator who knew the power of words to create reality, a writer who understood what words can do. So he chose beautiful words. Creative words. Words that would catch attention, convince, persuade.

Besides, Solomon says, “Beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body” (vs. 12, NASB). He understood the existential angst and soul-wearing pain that comes with wading through all possible roads to find the meaning of life or to know how one should live morally. He knew the existential angst that comes with creating one’s own reality, one’s own morality. Solomon tried it all. His been-there-done-that-now-what experience makes him very postmodern: “I set my mind to seek and explore... It is a grievous task to write this when books were rare. His thoughts apply to our postmodern time as if the book were written only yesterday and suggest that the postmodern condition is not all that different from any other age, except that it might be more sophisticated, radical, and all-encompassing in terms of its influence and grip on contemporary culture. Ecclesiastes outlines the whole aspect of our postmodern world and its perspective on morality—the bobbing like an otter in an ocean of beliefs and values and ideas. It includes the plurality of authority in

rules never let us forget it. People on their own are stubbing their moral toes. People on their own are getting beat up and hurt. And so with societies. The question of ethics can never be pluralistic because the moral issues our world faces are very much human and transcend time and culture.

Human beings need an external moral compass (ethical theory) to be morally responsible. The famed and beautiful Cliffs of More in western Ireland demonstrate something about rules and the centrality of human choice. These cliffs rise 700 feet from the Atlantic Ocean, and large open meadows roll right up to the edges. Over the years, miles of stone wall have been erected with warning signs. Some of those signs read “People are falling” rather than “People have fallen.” Despite warnings and barriers and slippery slopes and loose rocks, people continue to fall because they disregard the signs and get close and look down because they are confident of their ability to judge the situation. Yet people keep falling and dying.

Ethical theory works within three interrelated levels—theological and philosophical bases, universal principles, and rules for action in specific areas of life. When it is asserted that the moral agent needs no moral framework to work within, we are basically assuming too much of our fallen human nature and are overlooking how very much we need guidance in making moral choices.

In his book The New Absolutes, William D. Watkins comments on whether or not relativism really rules conscience: Do we truly live as if right and wrong, truth and error, are up for grabs? Are we really operating without any sense of objective values? Watkins states: “The answers lie not so much in stated belief as in actual behavior. That difference makes all the difference in the world.” No one ever truly functions without a worldview or system of absolutes. The postmodern meta-narrative is simply that there are no metanarratives except one’s own.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon has something to say that pertains to postmodern ethics and about postmodernity’s ocean of words with their competing visions of moral and spiritual reality. “In many dreams and in many words there is emptiness” (Eccl. 5:7, NASB). “The fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen” (10:14, NASB). Solomon’s point is that words can cause moral and spiritual confusion. Words are very powerful. They shape our perception of reality. They create reality for others as well as ourselves.

God creates reality by what He says (Ecclesiastes, I suggest, was written with Genesis in hand, as evidenced by its themes). God spoke and it was done. He commanded

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Reading Ecclesiastes, we can sense how Solomon systematically critiqued the ethical systems of his day and concluded that personal moral responsibility could never be escaped from. In the end, Solomon calls for a reality check. Like postmoderns, he accepts the need to re-personalize morality.

which we are pressed with the centrality of personal choice and feel the angst that goes with it. For sure, there is the philosophical and practical emptiness of all the explored ethical theories.

We find, too, Solomon’s rational attempt to disenchant his world by leaving God out of the equation. A Danish philosopher tells the story of a spider who dropped a single strand down from the top rafter of an old barn and began to weave his web. Days, weeks, and months went by, and the web expanded. It regularly provided food as small insects were caught in its maze. One day the spider was traversing its beautifully woven web and noticed a single strand going up into the darkness of the rafters. I wonder why this is here? it thought. It doesn’t serve to catch me any dinner. The spider climbed as high as it could and severed the single strand that united him with God above the sun and decided to find meaning and satisfaction in a life lived strictly under the sun. In other words, he chose a life lived on his own terms, in a natural dimension with no reference to the divine.”

Reading Ecclesiastes, we can sense how Solomon systematically critiqued the ethical systems of his day and concluded that personal moral responsibility could never be escaped from. In the end, Solomon calls for a reality check. Like postmoderns, he accepts the need to re-personalize morality. He re-enchants his world and goes the next step to accept the reality that God has something to say, that in this ocean of words, there is a word from the Lord, that there are right and truthful words.

Notice how he ends Ecclesiates: “The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly” (12:10, NASB). He wanted to find creative, captivating words. Persuasive words. But he wanted to write words of truth. And he wanted to put these true words together correctly. The NIV says it this way: “what he wrote was upright and true.”

In effect, Solomon is pitting God’s word against the ocean of words in his world. He is pitting God’s word against our words. He affirms an ultimate reality. An ultimate authority. “The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails” (verse 11, NASB). There are nails of certainty on which to hang our perceptions of moral reality.

It all comes down to this: “Fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (vss. 13, 14, NASB). Human ethical systems discredited while morality is still affirmed? Yes! Centrality of choice? Yes! Re-personalized morality? Yes! Re-enchantment of the world? Yes! Plurality of authorities? No! Existential angst? Only if you don’t fear God or accept His pattern for moral life.

Like the otter, we can survive in a world of flux and movement because of some very fundamental moral/spiritual principles that exist for all human beings, no matter how much movement of ideas there may be around him or her.

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Modern feminism, religious pluralism, and Scripture

"Every woman," writes feminist Naomi Goldenberg, "working to improve her own position in society or that of women in general is bringing about the end of God. All feminists are making the world less and less like the one described in the Bible and are thus helping to lessen the influence of Christ and Yahweh on humanity . . . .

"Contemporary feminist critics of religion can be placed on a spectrum ranging from those who revise to those who revolt."

Goldenberg's own words place her in the "revolt" category:

"Everything I knew about Judaism and Christianity involved accepting God as the ultimate in male authority figures. A society that accepted large numbers of women as religious leaders would be too different from the biblical world to find the book relevant, let alone look to it for inspiration.

"'God is going to change,' I thought. 'We women are going to bring an end to God. As we take posi-

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Hosea, they now celebrate Gomer’s desertion of her husband and blatant prostitution. Queen Jezebel, feminists suggest, represents flourishing female pagan worship in Israel.

Along with this, feminists adjust the spelling of words. For example, theology becomes “thealogy” to avoid the masculine gender of theos.

Some feminists now endorse witchcraft, which they argue is one of the many lost “arts” of ancient goddess religion, a treasured remnant that received its “bad reputation” only through persistent male suppression. They claim that witchcraft was forced into hiding because of male determination to destroy any remnants of female power. But now, they maintain, Wicca is finally being liberated from male destruction.

Connected closely with this, feminists sometimes affirm the symbol of witchcraft—the snake or serpent: “It is only from the historical perspective that the story of Eve taking counsel from a serpent makes any sense. The fact that the serpent, an ancient prophetic or oracular symbol of the Goddess, advises Eve, the prototypical woman, to disobey a male god’s commands is surely not just an accident. Nor is it an accident that Eve in fact follows the advice of the serpent; that, in disregard of Jehovah’s commands, she eats from the sacred tree of knowledge. Like the tree of life, the tree of knowledge was also a symbol associated with the Goddess in earlier mythology. Moreover, under the old mythical and social reality . . . a woman as priestess was the vehicle for divine wisdom and revelation.”

Modern feminists often insist that the Christian patriarchy-stained Scripture forces all women into submission to all men, reminding us how even the Church Fathers interpreted the canon. Interestingly, radical feminists don’t seem to question this early church exegesis. With their acceptance of the Church Fathers’ position on women (by which they unwittingly reflect early Church Fathers’ male interpretation read into Scripture long ago), feminist authors snarl that Scripture as a whole degrades women and that centuries of male dominance have clouded modern minds from realizing this.

**Questioning Feminist Reconstruction**

**Historical Selectivity.** Although their historical analysis is extensive, too often feminist writers exhibit great selectivity in their research. Major theories are propounded without substantiation. It is argued, for example, that the whole basis for biblical “male god-ism” is to prop up the male ego, citing Mother Goddess history as support for their argument: “When the patriarchal, prophetic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) met the Middle Eastern goddess practices, powerful interests came into conflict. Masculine self-control, social authority, and theological construction (a masculine God) were all bound to see the Goddess temple worship as extremely threatening. Since the patriarchal religions won the battle, their scriptural and cultural authorities became orthodoxy,” and the female-oriented fertility religion became foul deviancy.”

In support of what feminists portray as primeval Mother Goddess worship, many seek to authenticate an ancient matriarchal culture of supposed peace and tranquility. In so doing, they somehow ignore extensive evidence of weapons found in tombs of even the earliest archaeological sites. They exclude the many ancient inscriptions also discovered by archaeologists that describe grotesque wars and butchery carried out by female gods. Instead, feminists confidently describe the ancient matriarchal society as a now-lost utopia, or “Paradise.”

Critics of feminist re-interpretation of history decry this selectivity. Joan Townsend, anthropologist and archaeologist, insists that the Goddess movement is flawed by its “arm chair” archaeology and survey of ancient history: “The existence of a ‘universal’ or Mediterranean/European-wide Goddess religion, which is claimed to have existed from the Upper Paleolithic through the neolithic and beyond, cannot be validated. The supposition that there existed a peaceful matrilineal/matrilocal kinship organization and/or matriarchy as a political organization in these areas during that period is also unfounded. . . . Sadly, it is this kind of pseudo-history that many women listen to, partly because it is so readily available, and because it appeals to them by giving the illusion of an effective means of acquiring social and political power.
Increasing recognition has been expressed that throughout the Old and New Testaments women are affirmed not only in home/family administration, but also in public and religious spheres.

The roles of women in Scripture are varied and vigorous. At first glance, males may appear to predominate by sheer numbers. Even this fact, however, must be understood with a correct perception of historical writing itself.

Increasing recognition has been expressed that throughout the Old and New Testaments women are affirmed not only in home/family administration, but also in public and religious spheres. The roles of women in Scripture are varied and vigorous. At first glance, males may appear to predominate by sheer numbers. Even this fact, however, must be understood with a correct perception of historical writing itself.

No history book is exhaustive. Each historical document includes details deemed by that historian as the most important. Scripture, though including much historical material spanning multiple centuries, is also not exhaustive. Great time voids exist.

Christians have long believed that the development of the canon was superintended by God to include details that are decisive in salvation history from the divine perspective. Furthermore, the issue of gender roles is not a primary concern addressed in Scripture. Rather, as the biblical writers focus the reader on salvation history, these peripheral (to the writers) issues are brushed up against tangentially—and it is these that later readers must be aware of.

The historical panorama, thus, is lengthy yet basically narrow in scope. The reader is informed of...
patriarchs and matriarchs, kings and queens, prophets and prophetesses, couched between significant historical voids regarding other female and male personages throughout the many centuries connected by Scripture. In this light, it is unwarranted to insist that males have always dominated women. Furthermore, recent probing into the biblical text itself also suggests that this is not the case.

This reasoning appears increasingly valid as overlooked details in biblical narratives are re-examined.

Sarah. Abraham’s life of faith has been extensively (and rightly) studied and admired. His wife, Sarah, though rarely acknowledged on a par with her husband, is equally remarkable. Consider that: “As Sarah and Abram are approaching Egypt [during the famine], he does not order her to comply with his planned deception. Rather, Abraham must ask her to say that she is his sister. He cohabits with Hagar because Sarah wants him to; and when she decides that Ishmael is a threat to her own son’s inheritance, Sarah succeeds in expelling both mother and child. Indeed, God defends her demand; and this is not the only time that the Lord acts on Sarah’s behalf. In Pharaoh’s court, and within the household of Abimelech, God is concerned that Sarah be protected and returned to her husband.”

The Genesis record depicts Sarah as being as crucial to the covenant as Abraham himself. God maintains that Sarah’s offspring will fulfill the covenant promise—even when Abraham argues that he already has a son, Ishmael: “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant’” (Gen. 17:18, 19, NKJV). “The instruction given to Abraham touching the sacredness of the marriage relation was to be a lesson for all ages. It declares that the rights and happiness of this relation are to be carefully guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the only true wife of Abraham. Her rights as wife and mother no other person was entitled to share. She reverenced her husband, and in this she is presented in the New Testament as a worthy example. But she was unwilling that Abraham’s affections should be given to another, and the Lord did not reprove her for requiring the banishment of her rival” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 147).

“In particular, women have traditionally been depicted as primitive and childish in their aspirations and generally lacking in vision. Fresh study of our female forebears, however, invalidates this view and shows us that the patriarchs were learned, wise women who were highly developed spiritually.”

Sarah’s life surely demonstrates this:
1. When Abraham pleads with her to misrepresent their marital relationship (as they travel to Egypt), he does not approach the suggestion from a position of absolute authority. Sarah appears to have some say in the situation.
2. When Abraham offers hospitality, the patriarch shares in the domestic preparations along with his wife (Gen. 18:6–8).
3. After Sarah’s death, little is recorded about Abraham. Genesis 44 deals with the marriage of Isaac, and chapter 25 records Abraham’s marriage to Keturah and their offspring in his remaining 48 years. The remaining verses in the Abraham narratives deal briefly with the distribution of his wealth. The record of Sarah’s funeral, however, involves an entire chapter in the Book of Genesis.

Rebekah. We know more about Rebekah than Isaac, the patriarch!
Radical feminists fail to compare Paul’s counsel to Timothy, who was ministering in Ephesus, with numerous other Pauline passages portraying Paul’s attitudes and actions toward women elsewhere, along with his strong insistence that his teachings were normative, and that his example be followed. Paul as apostle cannot be contradicting himself.

Later, when her son Esau marries two Hittite women, the text informs us that this was “a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah” (26:35, KJV, italics supplied). Mention of Rebekah’s distress suggests that she was just as concerned about the covenant promise as was Isaac.

The Genesis matriarchs were not passive “wallflowers”! It would be unfair to the biblical portraits of these women to argue that within patriarchy, women bowed in submission to all men. Rather, though respectful and devoted to their husbands, they were intelligent, willful, and directive.

Jesus and Women. No scriptural evidence suggests that the Messiah ever treated women as inferior to men or urged all women to submit to all men. At this time, though the status of women in Judaism is very complex, the position of the female is generally conceded to have been restricted, at least according to rabbinical rules. Women did not count in determining a minyan in worship (the number needed to organize public Jewish worship, according to the Mishnah). They could not bear witness. Jesus, however, repeatedly rejected these customs.

We must bear in mind, of course, that the Mishnah was not written down in Jesus’ day, and many of its remarks against women are almost certainly from after that period. Further, even if these rules were in place in them, this does not mean that all or even many Jews followed them. Mary the mother of Jesus certainly knew the Bible, as she alludes to it in a sophisticated way in her prophetic song. Josephus estimates that there were only about 6,000 Pharisees, and we actually know of the Sadducees only from the Gospels and the writings of Pharisees. So we should not assume that all women in Israel were necessarily treated the same way Pharisees and rabbis thought they should be treated.

Jesus also refused to limit a woman’s horizon to domestic responsibilities. When a woman once called to Jesus from a crowd, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!” Jesus sought to widen this feminine perspective by responding, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:27, 28, RSV). Yet Christ never belittled the role of mother. Indeed, He likened Himself to a mother hen seeking to gather her baby chicks under her wings (Matt. 23:37).

Some feminists have not been blind to all this and have openly appreciated Christ’s attitude toward women. Though much feminist material boils with rage against Scripture, it is arresting to notice how many feminists, though vehement against the canon, refrain from denouncing the Messiah. Often, in fact, they uphold Him as an example of a “revolutionary man” (even though He is male—and God).

Women in the Epistles of Paul. Of all the New Testament men, Paul receives the greatest scorn from feminists, especially for his supposedly chauvinistic statements in 1 Timothy. Because of what they consider as Paul’s sexist language, feminists often jettison all of Paul’s teachings and many times the entire New Testament.

Radical feminists, however, fail to compare Paul’s counsel to Timothy, who was ministering in Ephesus, with numerous other Pauline passages portraying Paul’s attitudes and actions toward women elsewhere, along with his strong insistence that his teachings were normative, and that his example be followed. Paul as apostle cannot be contradicting himself. He will not be saying one thing in Ephesus and acting contrary elsewhere, though this is often the accusation suggested by feminists.

“The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human
hands... Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtfu, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony” (The Great Controversy, pp. v, vi).

Consider Paul’s acknowledgment of women in Corinth publicly praying and prophesying during the service of worship. Moreover, a spate of studies on the Philippian church suggest that “Philippi is perhaps the classic NT case study on the roles of women in the founding and developing of a local congregation.”13

Moreover, in Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to 26 people in the church at Rome: “Reflecting on the names and circumstances of the church at Rome: “Paul greets,... the most prominent place occupied by women in Paul’s entourage shows that he was not at all the male chauvinist of popular fantasy.”14

Paul’s positive inclusion of women is also implicit throughout his writings. He entertain the believers in Rome, for example, to “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (12:1, NIV). Paul uses five more-or-less technical terms. He represents followers of God as a priestly people, who, in responsive gratitude for God’s mercy offer or present their bodies as living sacrifices. These are described as both holy and pleasing to God, which seem to be the moral equivalents to being physically unblemished or without defect, and a fragrant aroma [cf. Lev. 1:3; 9].”15 This passage echoes Old Testament sacrificial language and allows no differentiation of men and women. All the believers are functioning in this New Testament “priestly” role.

Nevertheless, it is Paul’s letter to Timothy in Ephesus that modern feminists (and the early Church Fathers) cite most often. And because of this passage, feminists in droves have abandoned scriptural authority. But perhaps they have not given careful consideration to the initial situation that Paul was addressing in Ephesus. Just as biblical patriarchy needs to be fairly interpreted in the light of its original context, so with Paul’s materials.

Ephesus was a major center for goddess worship. Some of its major tenets were that a female goddess gave birth to the world, that the first woman was created before the first man, and that to achieve highest exaltation, wives must claim independence from their husbands, and especially from child-bearing.

Extensive research suggests that radical religious pluralism existed in Ephesus and that various false teachings were endangering the faith of the new Christian converts there. Thus, Paul was instructing Timothy how to deal with such a stark departure from the Christian faith. Instead of exhibiting a negative attitude toward women, Paul is seeking to preserve the exalted position of the Christian wife. Paul’s concern in 1 Timothy 2:8-15, according to Sharon Gritz,16 is not that women might have authority over men in the church, but that certain assertive women in the church who had been influenced by false teachers would teach error. For this reason, he charges them to “be silent” (1 Tim. 2:12, NIV).

It appears significant that Paul wrote this singular counsel to Timothy in Ephesus. When he counseled the churches in Philippi or Galatia, for example, a different situation existed, and other issues were addressed: “Far from being intolerant, Paul neither teaches nor suggests in this text [1 Cor. 14:34, 35] anything regarding patriarchalism or female subjection. The real issue is not the extent to which a woman may participate in the work and worship of the church, but the manner. Paul’s corrective does not ban women from speaking in public, but stops the disruptive verbal misconduct of certain wives who are giving free rein to ‘irresistible impulses’ to ‘pipe up’ at will with questions in the assembly.”17

Careful interpretation suggests that all of Paul’s personal ministry, along with his counsel in his letters and epistles, hold together without contradiction. Paul can even be seen demonstrating the attitudes of Christ Himself, who treated men and women with equality in the church, along with carefully preserving the marriage union.
contradiction. Paul can even be seen demonstrating the attitudes of Christ Himself, who treated men and women with equality in the church, along with carefully preserving the marriage union.

Women in Scripture are observed functioning in many different spheres. Contrary to the interpretations of radical Feminism, biblical evidence does not reveal stifling patriarchy. Feminists have been correct to focus attention on the abuse of women inside and outside the church. Their pain is real. Their anger is deep. Nevertheless, they have been wrong in their denunciation of biblical patriarchy and the Apostle Paul. Upon a closer reading, the entire canon—taken in its entirety—can be seen to affirm the marriage union.

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CONSIDER THIS

“The one originating, living, visible truth, embracing all truths in all relations, is Jesus Christ. He is true; he is the live truth” (George MacDonald).

“It is now front-page news that those who go to church are healthier than those who don't. Weekly churchgoers have healthier immune systems than those who don't attend religious services. The curative and causative role of faith in healing is almost more accepted in medical circles than in theological ones” (Leonard Sweet).

“Traditional apologetics . . . has become marginalized in the great debate within modern society, precisely because it makes its appeal to an increasingly marginalized element inside this society—the academically minded. The cutting edge of faith now lies elsewhere” (Alister E. McGrath).

“Although benefits result from following Christ—tangible ways in which our heart's deepest longing is answered—we need to discourage our listeners from thinking that the decision to follow Christ comes down to having our needs met. . . . A decision to follow Christ is about God first, about his intentions more than our needs” (David W. Henderson).

“There is a built-in tendency for the Internet to favour those whose disposition is not to wander into realms which challenge or conflict with their interests and opinions, but who like their existing interests to be satisfied and their current opinions to be confirmed. Moreover, its interactive character allows for mutual reinforcement. . . . There is no reason to expect the Internet, or its further development, to act as a check upon irrational political opinion and behaviour in a democracy. On the contrary, irrationality may be reinforced” (Gordon Graham).
Where would we be if relativism were true?

Moral accountability, evil, praise, blame, justice, fairness, moral improvement, moral discourse, and tolerance all seem to be concepts that have meaning apparent to our moral common sense. Each is justified by moral intuition, yet relativism renders them all meaningless. If these moral notions are valid yet are inconsistent with moral relativism, then relativism must be false. There are at least seven flaws of relativism that point to its bankruptcy.

Relativists can’t accuse others of wrongdoing. Relativism makes it impossible to criticize the behavior of others because it ultimately denies such a thing as wrongdoing. If you believe morality is a matter of personal definition, then you surrender the possibility of making moral judgments about others’ actions, no matter how offensive they are to your intuitive sense of right or wrong. You may express your emotions, tastes, and personal preferences, but you can’t say they are wrong.

Nor may you critique, challenge, praise, or fault them. It would be like trying to keep score in a game with no rules or putting a criminal on trial when there are no laws.

To illustrate, relativists cannot object on moral grounds to any form of racism or cultural imperialism if those actions are consistent with the perpetrator’s personal moral understanding of what is right and good. What sense can be made of the judgment “apartheid is wrong” spoken by a relativist? What just ideation is there to intervene? Certainly not human rights, for there are no objective rights in relativism because there are no rights or wrongs of any kind. As former Attorney General Ramsey Clarke once said, one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter. It would be inconsistent for the same car to sport the bumper stickers “Pro-choice” and “End Apartheid.”

Relativism is the ultimate pro-choice position, because it legitimizes every personal choice—even the choice to be a racist.

Nor can lying be wrong, even if the lie perverts justice and condemns an innocent person. In fact, there is no real difference between one who is guilty and one who is innocent because in relativism, guilt and innocence are meaningless distinctions.

The notion of a promise is also empty. A promise is not just a statement of intent about the future but also entails the moral obligation to fulfill the intent. That’s why changing one’s mind is different from breaking a promise, a distinction lost in relativism. No contract could ever have any moral force. Marriage vows would be empty words, providing no comfort or protection for spouses and no stability for families.

There can be no accountability in relativism. Those who answer to themselves ultimately answer to no one of consequence. And this makes it impossible to distinguish relativistic morality from self-interest or ethical egoism.

Further, if morality is an individual call, and if moral wrong is the kind of error for which punishment seems to be justified, then all punishment would have to be approved by the individual responsible for the “immoral” conduct.

This is the first law of relativism: When right or wrong are a matter of personal choice, we surrender the privilege of making moral judgments on others’ actions. But if our moral intuition rebels against these consequences of relativism—if we’re sure that some things must be wrong and that some judgments against the conduct of others are justified—then relativism is false.
Relativists can’t complain about the problem of evil. The reality of evil in the world is one of the first objections raised against the existence of God. The common argument says that if God is absolutely powerful and ultimately good, He would deal with evil. But since evil exists, God appears too frail to oppose it or too sinister to care.

The entire objection hinges on the observation that true evil exists. The only way one can have this complaint about God is if evil is “out there” as an objective feature of the world. Evil can’t be real if morals are relative to the subject.

Relativism is inconsistent with the concept that true moral evil exists because it denies that some things are objectively wrong. Evil as a value judgment marks a departure from some standard of moral perfection. But if there is no standard, there is no departure. As C. S. Lewis notes, a portrait is a good or bad likeness depending on how it compares with the “perfect” original.

Relativism denies such a standard. This was a serious problem for Lewis: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . . Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed, too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies.”¹

If relativism is true, the objection against God based on evil vanishes. There is no true evil to discuss, only differing opinions about what is pleasant or unpleasant, desired or not desired.

This point was made clear in the movie The Quarrel. The main characters, Hersh and Chiam, grew up together but separated because of a dispute about God and evil. Then came the Holocaust, and each thought the other had perished. Reunited by chance after the war, they become embroiled once again in their boyhood quarrel. Hersh, now a rabbi, offers this challenge to the secularist Chiam: “If there’s nothing in the universe that’s higher than human beings, then what’s morality? Well, it’s a matter of opinion. I like milk; you like meat. Hitler likes to kill people; I like to save them. Who’s to say which is better?”

“Do you begin to see the horror of this? If there is no Master of the universe, then who’s to say that Hitler did anything wrong? If there is no God, then the people that murdered your wife and kids did nothing wrong.”

The approach many relativists take at this point is confused. First, they say that the Holocaust was evil and ask why God would allow such depravity. Later, when the tables turn and their own behavior is in question, they argue that morality is merely a matter of opinion. This reduces their earlier objection to, How could a good God allow things that are contrary to my opinion?

Moral relativism and objective evil are strange bedfellows. They couldn’t possibly both be true at the same time. If morality is ultimately a matter of personal tastes, like preferring steak over broccoli or Brussels sprouts, the argument against God’s existence based on the problem of evil vanishes. Relativists must surrender this objection.

If, however, it seems legitimate to raise the issue of evil in the world, then relativism can’t be true.

Relativists can’t place blame or accept praise. Relativism renders the concepts of praise and blame meaningless, because no external standard of measurement defines what should be applauded or condemned.

Without absolutes, nothing is ultimately bad, deplorable, tragic, or worthy of blame. Neither is anything ultimately good, honorable, noble, or worthy of praise. It’s all lost in a twilight zone of moral nothingness. Relativists are almost always inconsistent here. They seek to avoid blame but readily accept praise. C. S. Lewis notes that our habits of welcoming praise and of making excuses to avoid blame evidence our deep commitment to objective morality: “The truth is, we believe in decency so much—we feel the Rule or Law pressing on us so—that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we
try to shift the responsibility. For you notice that it is only for our bad behavior that we find all these explanations. It is only our bad temper that we put down to being tired or worried or hungry; we put our good temper down to ourselves.52

B. F. Skinner argues in Beyond Freedom and Dignity that humans are simply biological machines whose conduct is determined by a mixture of biology and environment. In Walden II, his description of the brave new world founded on principles of behavior modification, the concepts of praise and blame are portrayed as completely meaningless. Morality is a fiction.

In like fashion, relativists must remove the words praise and blame from their vocabularies. But if the notions of praise and blame are valid, then relativism must be false.

Relativists can’t make charges of unfairness or injustice. Justice and fairness are two more concepts that don’t make sense in a world devoid of moral absolutes. Under relativism, these notions are incoherent for two reasons:

First, the words themselves have no meaning. Both concepts dictate that people receive equal treatment based on an external standard of what is right. This outside standard, though, is the very thing repudiated by relativists. After all, how can there be justice or fairness if there are no moral requirements to be just or fair? It’s not wrong to punish an innocent person, nor is it immoral to release the guilty.

Second, there is no possibility of true moral guilt. Justice entails, among other things, punishing those who are guilty. Guilt, however, depends on blame, which we have seen cannot exist. If nothing is ultimately immoral, there is no blame and subsequently no guilt worthy of punishment.

People give away their true intuitions about justice and fairness by their language. “A nation may say treaties do not matter,” says Lewis, “but then, next minute, they spoil their case by saying that the particular treaty they want to break was an unfair one. But if treaties do not matter, and if there is no such thing as Right and Wrong . . . what is the difference between a fair treaty and an unfair one?”

If relativism is true, then there is no such thing as justice or fairness. Both concepts depend on an objective standard of what is right. If the notions of justice and fairness make sense, however, then relativism is defeated.

Relativists can’t improve their morality. With moral relativism, moral improvement or reform is impossible. Relativists can change their personal ethics, but they can never become better people.

How can one get “better”? Moral reform implies an objective rule of conduct as the standard to which we ought to aspire. But this rule is exactly what relativists deny. If there is no better way, there can be no improvement.

Further, there is no motive to improve. Relativism destroys the moral impulse that compels people to rise above themselves because there is no “above” to rise to, ethically speaking. Why change our moral point of view if it serves our self-interest and feels good for the time being?

In relativism, by definition one’s ethics can never be more “moral” at one time than another. Morals can change, but they can never improve. If, however, moral improvement seems to be a concept that makes sense, then relativism can’t be true.

Relativists can’t hold meaningful moral discussions. Relativism makes it impossible to discuss morality. What’s there to talk about? A meaningful ethical dialogue can be held only when moral principles are seen as universal action guides.

Ethical discourse involves comparing the merits of one view with another to find which is best. But if morals are entirely relative and all views are equal, then no way of thinking is better than another. No moral position can be judged adequate or deficient, unreasonable, unacceptable, or even barbaric.

A. J. Ayer agrees, arguing that ethical statements are meaningless because they are not empirically verifiable: “We find that argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed.”

Ayer’s own view, called emotivism, denies that ethical statements are anything more than raw expressions of emotion. As such, they have
no more content than words like "Wow!" or "Yuck!" "If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false. And we have seen that sentences which simply express moral judgments do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood."

If Ayer is right, then moral education is impossible, because the words themselves are meaningless. One can't even have a moral dispute. Yet quarrels seem to entail meaningful moral discussions, as Lewis points out: "Quarreling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football."

If ethical disputes make sense only when morals are objective, then relativism can be lived out consistently only in silence. For this reason, it's rare to meet a thoroughgoing relativist. Most are quick to impose moral rules like, It's wrong unless there was some agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.

Relativists can't promote the obligation of tolerance. Finally, there is no tolerance in relativism, because the relativists' moral obligation to be tolerant is self-refuting.

The principle of tolerance is considered one of the key virtues of relativism. Morals are individual, relativists argue, and therefore we ought to tolerate the viewpoints of others and not pass judgment on their behavior and attitudes.

It should be obvious that this attempt fails through contradiction. To relativists, tolerance means, "I (morally) ought to tolerate the moral opinions and behavior of others who disagree with me. I (morally) should not try to interfere with their opinions or behavior." If there are no objective moral rules, however, there can be no rule that requires tolerance as a moral principle that applies equally to all. In fact, if there are no moral absolutes, why be tolerant at all? Why not force my morality on others if it's in my self-interest and my personal ethics allow it?

Relativists violate their own principle of tolerance when they do not tolerate the views of those whose morality is nonrelativistic. They only tolerate those who hold their ethical viewpoint. They are, therefore, just as intolerant as any objectivist appears to be.

The principle of tolerance is foreign to relativism. If, however, tolerance seems to be a virtue and we owe a measure of respect to those who differ with us, then relativism can't be true.

The Sum of All Flaws
What kind of world would it be if relativism were true? It would be a world in which nothing is wrong—nothing is considered evil or good, nothing worthy of praise or blame. It would be a world in which justice and fairness are meaningless concepts, in which there would be no accountability, no possibility of moral improvement, no moral discourse.

What kind of world would it be if relativism were true? It would be a world in which nothing is wrong—nothing is considered evil or good, nothing worthy of praise or blame. It would be a world in which justice and fairness are meaningless concepts, in which there would be no accountability, no possibility of moral improvement, no moral discourse.
In his book Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery, surgeon Richard Selzer tells of the night he stood by the bed of a young woman recovering from facial surgery. Her mouth was twisted with palsy. Almost clownish. There had been a tumor on her cheek. To remove it, Selzer had had to cut a tiny twig of the facial nerve—the one to the muscles of her mouth. Her mouth would have this awkward twist the rest of her life. A young man was in the room with her, standing on the opposite side of the bed. Together, this couple seemed to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from the surgeon, private.

Who are they? Selzer asked himself. He and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily?

"Will my mouth always be like this?" she asked, looking his way.

"Yes, it will. It’s because the nerve was cut," Selzer explains.

She nods and is silent.

But the young man smiles. "I like it," he says. "It’s kind of cute."

All at once Selzer knew who the man was. He understands and lowers his gaze. Unmindful of the surgeon’s presence, the young husband bends to kiss his wife’s crooked mouth, Selzer so close he could see how he twists his own lips to accommodate hers—to show her that their kiss still works.

One wonders how God twisted His mouth to breathe into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). Can you imagine it? The gift of life is conferred on humanity in an intimate face-to-face encounter. Like a creative artist, God forms a work of art out of moist reddish clay. A bond with this piece of art begins to grow in the gentle process of making. Then comes that incredible moment. The final touch. Who would have thought it? Only God! Living lips are placed against cool earthen nostrils. A silent puff of life giving breath moves from God’s mouth to His lifeless clay sculpture. Earthen lips flush with life. Cold expressionless eyes open to see God’s dancing eyes, God’s smiling face still...
very close, God’s hands still cupping either side of his face? It’s Adam’s first experience—face-to-face encounter with God. What a moment! What intimacy!

Genesis was good news for the generation of Israelites preparing to enter the Promised Land. People uncertain of their identity and what purpose there was in life or in their future. They were a people who needed to get their spiritual and moral bearings in the midst of an immoral God-denying culture, a people struggling to believe that the Promised Land was far better than Egypt or any home they might make for themselves in the wilderness. They needed to stand apart and be different from their pagan neighbors.

So do we, God’s end-time people! You and I! What better image can be given us than that of God cupping Adam’s face in His hands and His twisting His lips against Adam’s earthen nostrils to bring life? That God made us in His image? After His lips did this very close, God’s hands still cupping either side of his face? It’s Adam’s first experience—face-to-face encounter with God. What a moment! What intimacy!

Christians have each dressed human beings up with this or that form of being. Marxists tell us we are made by our society. Evolutionists tell us we are the high end of natural biological development where the fittest survive. New Agers tell us we are gods and part of a larger cosmic consciousness. Existentialists tell us we have an open road ahead where each of us determines our selves by our choices and the things we value. French existentialist Jean Paul Sarte writes that “man is like a bubble of consciousness in an ocean of nothingness, bobbing around until the bubble pops.”

If we don’t have a clear sense of inner identity, we can feel lost and anonymous amid the billions of people with whom we share this planet. The future can seem absurd, empty, meaningless. Much of the moral breakdown in our society today and the dysfunction in our families comes because there is confusion about who we really are.

But the good news of Genesis is that we have been made in the image of the God who loves us and is at work to redeem us! This mouth-to-nostril awakening from inert dust is unique, significant. Very few biblical scholars today would say it really happened. Nevertheless it is the centerpiece of biblical teaching about who we are—our purpose in living, our accountability, our rights, dignity, and moral character.

Naomi Rosenblatt writes that, “being made in the image of God invests us with a portable spiritual center.” Wherever we go, that portable spiritual center goes with us. “If we define ourselves as being made in the image of God, no one else can ever define us to ourselves.”

With this sense of spiritual identity firmly embedded within us, no one can ever usurp it or whittle it away—even when we are undergoing difficult life passages. That’s what Israel needed to hear so long ago. That’s what we need to hear today as God’s remnant people on the verge of the heavenly Promised Land. It must ever be part of our end-time gospel message to our confused and lost world.

Genesis’ mouth-to-nostril awakening tells us that not only does God have the power to bring something out of nothing—including the nothingness of our lives—but He also has the heart to do so. This has been affirmed at Calvary where the lips of Jesus were shaped with words of woe, anguish, and forgiveness. Revelation promises us that in the new creation the face of God will once again be intimately seen by human beings (22:4). Lips will be shaped with words of blessing and a joyful smile (Zeph. 3:17). We will wonder at that face (2 Thess. 1:10).

Right now in the midst of our hurt and trials and angst, we are invited to ponder those three incredible moments of divine love: creation, cross, consummation.

Praise God with wonder! Who are we that God thinks of us so?

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2. Genesis states that God breathed into Adam’s “nostrils” rather than “mouth-to-mouth.” This is significant in that it displays the Creator’s respect for the intended intimacy, which kissing would express, between man and woman. Adam’s first kiss would be with his wife, Eve. God would not intrude on that privilege in any way. The tenderness and intimacy experienced in kissing is an integral dynamic of human sexuality which God gifted humans with, a gift belonging to the human realm and not the divine. It would also mitigate against implications of male-to-male sexual contact.
inadequacy, I’d be tempted not even to attempt such an audacious assignment.

This was part of Moses’ problem when he happened upon God in the burning bush. God assigned him to manage Team Israel as it was about to enter a long, difficult season. At that moment, Moses couldn’t have known the challenges he would have to face for the next several decades, but he was aware of enough of the responsibilities of leadership to know that he was facing a forbidding task. And he knew his own limitations only too well. Even though as a youth he had received the very best possible worldly preparation for success, he had pretty much botched every opportunity that had come his way. Educated in Egypt’s finest schooling to be a future leader of men, thus far he could boast of leading only sheep.

“‘Who am I,’ he said, ‘that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’” (Ex. 3:11, NIV). From his human view of things, this was a valid question. He asked what he should say. He claimed that the Israelites would not believe he was truly sent from God. He reminded God that he was not an eloquent spokesman. It was plain to Moses that he was not a reasonable choice for the task that God was giving him.

God’s answer to Moses’ sniveling was simply to remind him of where all human skills come from: “‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?’” (4:11, NIV). Surely, if God made Moses’ tongue, He could provide a way for him to overcome his problems of self-expression. Now that’s reassurance, and it’s a promise that I, personally, am taking to heart.

I hope I won’t be misread here to be asserting that PD is in slavery to anything and that I’m supposed to lead it heroically from failure and defeat. This is clearly not the case.

To return to the analogy of a baseball team, I’m stepping into the cleats of a manager with well-earned trophies of his own, who has led the team to the World Series—more than once. Roland R. Hegstad is a winner—a legend! His career is punctuated regularly with awards of recognition for the editorial leadership he has brought both to his publications specifically as well as to Adventist journalism in general. If there were such a thing as Adventist journalism’s Hall of Fame, he’d be in it long ago.

And entering into that kind of atmosphere brings yet another challenge: the responsibility of maintaining a winning (read “successful”) tradition. In one sense, at least, it would be preferable to take up leadership of a losing team, a “cellar-dweller” as it is sometimes called. In a situation like that, you have no
place to go but up. Just about anything you do works well.

But Perspective Digest boasts a distinguished past and a worthy objective: to present the ideas explored in current theological research in a fresh, complete way to those of us immersed in a too-often hostile culture. It is my personal hope that our readers will come to count on Perspective Digest to address the non- and anti-biblical ideas expressed explicitly and implicitly in today’s society.

And this brings me to one last point: The future—and the never-ending goal of improving Perspective Digest—needs one further team member. This is where you, as the reader, come in. There are only two ways for a sports team to gauge its success: (1) the number of people sitting in the stands; and (2) the feedback from fans and sports writers. Similarly, a publication can evaluate its work through (1) circulation; and (2) feedback from readers. We encourage you—yea, we implore you—to sound off about what you read in these pages. Perspective Digest is, after all, a human document—and therefore fallible. We will count on you, the reader, to round out the full texture of content through correspondence that we will be pleased to include in “Epistles.”

With these things in mind, let’s “Play ball!”

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