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"People in church who dedicate their lives to making the pastor's life miserable usually recur. Should we equate or attach defenselessness to forgiveness, we would unnecessarily expose the pastor to further trauma."

Pastoral post-traumatic stress

Kudos to Mark LaFollette for his wonderful article, "The Pastor's PTSD: When You Cannot Bounce Back After the Conflict Is Over" (January 2016). Seldom do pastors and pastors' wives have the opportunity to "dump" their ministerial frustrations and pain on trustworthy ears. This leaves them with the heavy burden to deal with conflict and rejection on their own.

LaFollette's suggestions are sound with the exception of one. Forgiveness need not be attached to defenselessness. People in church who dedicate their lives to making the pastor's life miserable usually recur. Should we equate or attach defenselessness to forgiveness, we would unnecessarily expose the pastor to further trauma.

—Carlos Turcios, Agaña, Guam-Micronesia

The cover of the January 2016 *Ministry*, with the pastor attired in a battle helmet, captured my attention. I immediately read the article, "The Pastor's PTSD."

The article brought flashbacks to my mind of three major church conflicts in which I was involved. I identified with the statement: "So avoidance and self-protection can easily become a means of trying to cope." Truly, when one is exposed to the firearms of church members, pastors can become "gun shy."

My question to *Ministry*, now that you have opened up the issue of PTSD and the pastor, is: What help can active pastors in the pulpit obtain when facing traumatic issues? Thank you for publishing this article, and for the ministry of Mark LaFollette.

—David H. White, Asheville, North Carolina, United States

A response to homosexuality in the congregation

I appreciate Bruce Manners' article on ministering to our LGBT brothers and sisters in the church ("Homosexuality: One Pastor's Reflection"—January 2016). If his reflection and counsel were taken seriously by every Adventist

pastor, we would retain hundreds, or perhaps thousands, in the next few years who might otherwise leave Adventism.

My 40 years of pastoral experience in Adventism has taught me that (a) most people know just enough about the Bible to make them dangerous, and (b) that most laypersons honestly believe that homosexuality is a choice, though they don't believe the same about heterosexuality.

It is only when we have come to grips, seriously, with the biblical texts in context that we can begin to, with love and compassion, see that the homosexual is truly our neighbor, our brother, our sister, our friend, our fellow companion on this difficult and mysterious journey called "the Christian life."

—Gary McCary, San Diego, California, United States

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you for Bruce Manners' compassionate article on pastor care for homosexuals. I am the mother of a gay son, and my minister husband and I learned about his orientation in 1990 when my minister husband and I were employed at the General Conference. At that time there was no help or understanding whatsoever, so I decided to write a book about our family's experience. That led to starting a newsletter for other parents and family members.

I also read everything I could find about homosexuality. At first I avoided any theology that didn't agree with what our church teaches, but eventually I read one that presented both traditional and newly studied theology and realized how much sense it made. It answered deep questions I had

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Crossing the language barrier

For more than 85 years, *Ministry*, an international journal for pastors, has been used by God to bless the lives and ministries of Christian leaders around the world. Currently sent to pastors and church leaders in approximately 190 countries and territories, the impact of this journal is global.

One limitation for our journal is the language barrier. While many Christian leaders around the world speak and read English as a first or second language, there are many more who are currently restricted in their access to these excellent ministry resources.

In an attempt to cross the language barrier, we provide free access to our article bank for editors of ministry journals in other countries. These editors select *Ministry* articles deemed appropriate for their local context and oversee the translation and publication process. Currently, *Ministry* articles are translated and published in at least eight languages.

Seven years ago we also began publishing a biannual French edition of *Ministry*, which upgraded to a quarterly journal in 2012. Currently under the able editorship of Bernard Sauvagnat, the French edition of *Ministry* is providing ministry resources to thousands of Francophone pastors around the world.

Recently, we took another small step across the language barrier by adding the Google Translate option on our updated, fully searchable Web site. This provides a rough working translation in more than 70 languages. If you have ever used Google Translate, you know that it's not perfect, but it's improving all the time. Many of our ESL readers appreciate the addition

of this wonderful translation tool. This is one reason why we have seen an exponential increase in our Web traffic at www.ministrymagazine.org.


But our leadership team has decided that it's time to take another bold step forward. We have made the commitment to provide a translation of our lead article each month in a variety of languages. That's where we need your help. We are seeking to build a team of volunteer translators who can join with us in a life-changing initiative for Christian leaders around the world. Do you speak a second or third language? Would you be willing to volunteer your services once a month to translate the lead article of *Ministry* into another language as a source of blessing for pastoral colleagues around the world? Do you know other colleagues who might be willing to help?¹

If your answer to one of these questions is Yes, we would like to hear from you. Write to us at translation@ministrymagazine.org. Let us know the specifics of how you can help. Our goal is simple but bold: to make the lead article of our journal available on our Web site to tens of thousands of Christian leaders around the world who do not speak English.

Every pastor and church leader would benefit from reading the excellent articles we publish. However, many of the Christian leaders serving in the major urban centers of the world do not speak English even as a second language. Only three of the most populous cities in the world have English as a primary language.² So how do we make our articles more accessible? Through

We have made the commitment to provide a translation of our lead article each month in a variety of languages.

the active involvement of committed volunteer translators.

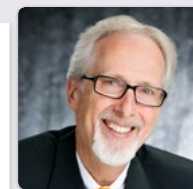
This gospel of the kingdom will be preached as a witness to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, and then the end will come. Pray with us and for us as we help Christian leaders in various language groups to deepen their spiritual life, develop intellectual strength through a careful study of the Scriptures and issues related to ministry, and provide practical resources for pastoral and evangelistic ministry. And pray to the Lord of the harvest to bring conviction to the hearts and minds of volunteer translators who can partner with us in a bold new initiative as we cross the language barrier. 

¹ We would also like to hear from you if you have a language recommendation to be included in our drop-down menu of language options.

² "List of Cities Proper by Population," *Wikipedia*, last modified February 1, 2016, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_proper_by_population.

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Serving Christ *in the city*

Can Christians maintain their spirituality and carry out the gospel commission in one of today's urban centers? Most western cities are dominated by secularism and lifestyles that are anything but Christian. They are case studies for the idea of a post-Christian world.

Disciple making in an urban center requires connecting with people, engaging with the culture, serving sacrificially, living faith publicly, and challenging reasoning. Being present in the city with any meaningful level of relational engagement without being offensive or dismissed as being religious oddities is a difficult challenge in post-Christian culture. Some conservative Christians believe this to be impossible.

But it is simply not accurate to say that spirituality is dead in the secular city. It is organized religion that is threatened. Spirituality is alive. However, there are new gods usurping the primacy of Christian faith. Those gods can be thought of in terms such as opportunity, wealth, technology, or art. Spiritual ideas and dialogue still exist. But the new spirituality of the Western developed world has little regard for organized religion.

Living an incarnational life

The reality of Christian mission is that God has called us to enter into life in the city. God has not called us to hate the city or to abandon the city to evil.

The biblical record of Daniel and his companions offers one of many

biblical illustrations of the summons of God to live in a non-Christian culture and maintain missional witness. The captive Israelites were commanded to pray for Babylon and seek its welfare, even though the city was characterized by idolatry and sinfulness. "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7).¹ The prophet uses the Hebrew word *shalom* in describing this intention of God for the captives and the city. They were to seek *shalom* for the foreign city, and in so doing experience God's blessing themselves. *Shalom* suggests wholeness and blessing, "a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonders as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights."²

The call is complex. It is not satisfied by simply taking up residence in the suburban boundaries of urban areas. Nor can Christians respond faithfully to a missional call by creating Christian enclaves in the city center, isolating themselves in an artificially created foreign culture in urban space. Incarnational living means living in and affecting the culture in the same neighborhood, workplace, or school that others move about in.

How does a Christian go about changing the culture? Relationships are foundational and primary. That is where changing the culture begins. Such relationships require commitment

to a neighborhood, meaning that Christians live among others in that neighborhood. Christians can provide a transforming influence only when joining in the same activities, getting involved in the issues of the community, and becoming known within the community. That cannot be done while living in the suburbs and driving into the city only to work or worship. As Jesus left heaven to dwell with us, so Christian disciples are to move out of protective walls and be with the people of the city. They must know others and be known, in the context of the activities that form daily life. This defines truly incarnational living: working, learning, playing, and engaging in dialogue with others while living among them.

The goal of incarnational living is to serve. Incarnational living in the city does not require disciples to move out of their comfort zone. Some would suggest it does. But for those called to missional life in the city, security in Christ and clarity regarding the call to discipleship provides an appreciation of the city and the empowerment to live in that space with joy. The church can affirm that calling. Affirming the incarnational life in the city celebrates living there, working there, attending to the cultural life of arts, engaging in technology, serving in neighborhood and community organizations, joyfully socializing, making friends, and happily doing so while acknowledging Christ. Incarnational living is experienced on the level of service and friendship rather than exhortation, though doors

will open to speak to the values and teachings of Jesus in appropriate times and ways.

Staying Christian

Living in the city does not mean a Christian has abandoned their faith. Christians do not need to act like their secular neighbors to live happily, serve God, serve their neighbor, or be valued in their community. Too many believe they must make a choice between two options: flee the city or abandon their Christian convictions in order to assimilate into the life of the city. That is not the case.

A word of caution is appropriate at this point. Temptations assault a person on a daily basis, especially in an urban context. The density of humanity means the actions of those who abuse sexuality, those who espouse dishonesty, or those who disrespect humanity in varied ways are evident. Because of the density of population, such behaviors are arguably more apparent in the city. Though sin abounds, most people living in urban contexts seek a responsible, if not righteous, life.

Also, the overt sins in the urban space are easier to avoid than the more subtle. The simple siren song of success is subtle and can lead us to copy the ways of secularism with little warning. Too often financial success or acclaim becomes idolatry that attacks a Christian's worldview. Creativity, while generally a gift of God, can become human in orientation; reason, itself, can become a substitute for faith; and technology can empower humanity beyond a sense of the wonder of God. These are the subtle temptations that can gradually alter the nature of spirituality and lead Christians to worship the false gods of secularism.

Living in the city center without becoming worshipers of such idols requires an energetic and practiced biblical worldview while practicing the disciplines of biblical spirituality. And Christians must have the courage to make their faith evident in the context of the city. "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you

keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15–18).

Changing the culture

Christians who live their faith publicly will impact the culture. If they truly reflect the heart of God, that Christian worldview affects every facet of life. The impact on culture implies they are genuinely, biblically faithful rather than simply reflectors of an institutional religious culture of their upbringing. A biblical Christian interprets what is right, just, beautiful, and good in all they do—they do so even without quoting the Bible or preaching a sermon. Thus, living as followers of Jesus offers society an alternate culture. Little need exists for Christians to judge the effects of secularism in post-Christian culture. Instead, they can serve as advocates for justice, the poor, and the abused. They can value and celebrate diversity. They can demonstrate the heart of God. They can respect those who think seriously about their worldviews, while challenging the gods of secularity. People will see the difference.

There are encouraging demonstrations of Christians working with churches and impacting the urban culture. First Baptist Church in Orlando serves women with unwanted pregnancies in an affirming, extended, and life-changing way. Park Avenue in Boston creates community among artists who use their gifts to glorify God. Fourth Presbyterian in Chicago helps urban residents learn to garden so they can live healthier lives. Paradise Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church helps immigrants in the San Diego area settle into responsible family contexts and thrive in their new community. There are innumerable examples of Christians impacting urban culture. So the challenge is not whether Christians can impact the culture. They can. The challenge is whether they will boldly live publicly for Christ instead of retreating.

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). The life of a follower of Jesus may be recognized in clear contrast to the values of secular culture. Certainly, the disciple of Christ both demonstrates behaviors in the public square that represent the heart of God and speaks to public issues. These issues include marriage, sexuality, health care, education, justice, violence, poverty, racism, and immigration. Christians voice the will of God in public life on such issues and do so skillfully, not in a way that offends or passes judgment. To avoid speaking to issues for fear of destroying relationships would be to deny the witness Christ offers to humanity. But to speak with self-centered judgment or arrogance would undermine Christian witness. Christians must learn to verbalize the principles and practices of God's love in winsome ways.

Providing a presence for Christ in an urban culture is not the total of Christian witness. Such living opens relationships in which the content and ideas of Christianity must be explored. In those relationships, opportunities surface in which the Scripture can be offered as a revelation of God, His will, redemption, and calling for a transformed life.

Making Christianity public

In the process of living as a disciple of Christ, life is experienced without fear of being different. That is, a Christian simply lives as a Christian, reflecting Christian values, ethics, and relationships in public space. Therefore the Christian's life is not private, but seen, heard, and often distinct without apology.

Fear gets in the way of public Christianity. One such perspective on fear is the fear of not being accepted. That worry leads some Christians to privatize their faith—submerging faith in a way that avoids exposure. Naturally, humans shrink from derision or from

disrespect for the worldview they hold. This fear exposes the insecurities that emerge when one sees themselves in a minority.

Sometimes fear among urban Christians takes the form of an excessive concern for being “not of this world.” In this form it is the fear of becoming something loosely described as “worldly.” The result is that matters of faith become hidden and kept separate from ordinary existence in a secular world. Responding to the demands of this fear, spaces are created that

office spaces of financial centers. He marches on city hall to address such issues as police brutality, health care, or gun violence. He sits on boards of public education and seeks the welfare of children. He leads in the public issues of housing, poverty, health care, and art in neighborhoods and municipal government. He serves. He does so kindly, indwelling with His disciples by the Spirit, not as a raging prophet who casts judgment or patronizes with acts of pity and then runs to the suburb or safe walls of the church. He lives with

of sin as the culture becomes increasingly evil.

Ellen G. White reflected on the concerns for Christian life and mission in the city. Her counsel is representative of much of the counsel offered on this question by writers from diverse faith traditions. When she wrote in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most Americans lived in small towns and rural areas.

In 1902, she urged that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination build its institutions for publication of Christian

Being present in the city with any meaningful level of relational engagement without being offensive or dismissed as being religious oddities is a difficult challenge in post-Christian culture.



provide safety and security, untouched by the proximity of darker influences or relationships with those who live secular lives. Fear leads to separation, and in that environment, faith becomes private. The result? The difficulty of living out a Christian life in an urban context is avoided, and in fact, the witness of a Christian life is lost.

Christ boldly lived as God among us. Even today He transforms culture through His disciples and transforms the culture of the city. He relaxes at a Starbucks. He lunches at a Rotary Club. He discusses issues of meaning in the

the people and serves in a public manner. Christianity is public.

Flee the city?

Many sincere and dedicated Christians embrace warnings regarding the dangers of living in the city. The reasons for the admonition to keep a distance from the city fall into three definitions. One is a concern with the visibility and availability of evil in the culture of a city. Second, a concern for raising children in the urban context. Third, the challenge of enduring the emotional and even physical assaults

literature or education of Christian young people outside of the cities. She believed that plan would offer the best opportunity for families with children to serve such institutions who might otherwise not be prepared to live in the city. She urged, however, that families serving these institutions not abandon witness to the city. “Repeatedly the Lord has instructed us that we are to work the cities from outpost centers. In these cities we are to have houses of worship, as memorials for God; but institutions for the publication of our literature, for the healing of the sick, and for the training

of workers, are to be established outside the cities.”³ She frequently advocated such “outposts” to the city.

As do many Christian leaders, Ellen White emphasized the danger of sinful influences that are obviously more apparent in the dense population of a city. Again, in this context, she voiced concern for children: “It is a mistake to call families into the city, where children and youth breathe an atmosphere of corruption and crime, sin and violence, intemperance and ungodliness. Oh, it is a terrible mistake to allow children to come in contact with that which makes such a fearful impression on their senses. Children and youth cannot be too fully guarded from familiarity with the pictures of iniquity as common as in all large cities.”⁴

Ellen White also addressed the loss of the availability of lessons from nature in the education of children in the city. “It seems cruel to establish our schools in the cities, where the students are prevented from learning the precious lessons taught by nature.”⁵

There is, if her original intent is misunderstood, an apparent contradiction in her admonition, because Ellen White also counseled Christians to live in the city: “We all need to be wide awake, that, as the way opens, we may advance the work in the large cities. We are far behind in following the light given to enter these cities and erect memorials for God. . . . And we are to continue the work until a church is organized and a humble house of worship built.”⁶

Obviously, if Ellen White envisioned church buildings in the city for disciples of Jesus to gather in for worship, she intended for disciples to be living in the cities who would use those buildings for weekly worship. Her counsel to Adventist Christians did not advocate abandonment of the city.

In later years of her ministry, Ellen White urged disciples to enter the city and live and serve in that context. In 1910 she wrote:

“The Lord is calling upon the men and women who have the light of truth

for this time to engage in genuine, personal missionary work. Especially are the church members living in the cities to exercise, in all humility, their God-given talents in laboring with those who are willing to hear the message that should come to the world at this time. There are great blessings in store for those who fully surrender to the call of God. As such workers undertake to win souls for Jesus, they will find that many who never could be reached in any other way will respond to intelligent personal effort.”⁷

Her counsel to Christians goes beyond a reluctant acknowledgement that churches are needed in the city. She may have been foreseeing the migration of people to urban areas and the subsequent need for mission in the city. In 1912, she urged that the church support those members planting churches in urban areas: “Let us thank the Lord that there are a few laborers doing everything possible to raise up some memorials for God in our neglected cities. Let us remember that it is our duty to give these workers encouragement. God is displeased with the lack of appreciation and support shown our faithful workers in our large cities by His people in our own land.”⁸

Are these contradictions to her earlier counsel? No. Not everyone is called in their family context or Christian vocation to live in an urban context. Some live for Christ in smaller towns or rural areas. Not everyone should feel they must move to a city.


The challenge of raising children in the city is a serious one. In our time there are areas of our large cities set aside for nature. It is interesting that children from rural areas take field trips to cities to see nature conservatories and to learn from museums. But the reverse is true as well. Rural life offers great advantages for raising children. Every Christian parent must prayerfully consider whether an urban setting is the right place for their family in those years when children are growing up in the home. At the same time, they must

realize that those same children will likely migrate to a city to pursue their vocational life on maturity and must be prepared to withstand the visibility of sin.

Conclusion

God has called some disciples to enter into life in the city. The call is not intended for every disciple. He does not call anyone to a place where they cannot thrive or that would harm their children. Those who do answer the call must live an incarnational life for Jesus in the city and experience the encouragement and support of the church.

Christ needs disciples in the city. Clearly, the idea that Christians should not live in the city is contrary to God’s will. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and strengthened with daily connection with Christ, those disciples who live in the city are able to advance God’s will among the masses of people who now call the city *home*.

Some Christians reason that the end of earth’s history is near, and thus they should leave the cities. But why would Christians abandon their mission to lead souls to Christ because the end is near? The gospel commission to go into all the world challenges disciples to mission in the city. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). 

- 1 All scriptural references are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible.
- 2 Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 358.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Spaulding and Magan Collection* (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn Books, 1985), 186–191.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 186.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 40.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1932), 332.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 32.

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Unlocking the mystery in Ephesians

The epistle to the Ephesians reveals a remarkable use of the Greek noun μυστήριον (*mystērion*), rendered “mystery” or “secret” in most English versions. *Mystērion* is used 27 times in the Greek New Testament,¹ Ephesians having the highest occurrence (6 times).

The way *mystērion* is used in Ephesians is striking. The first *mystērion* is God’s purpose to gather together things in heaven and things on earth in Christ (1:9, 10); the second is the inclusion of Gentiles as coheirs and members of the same body with Jews (2:11–3:9); and the third one, called the great *mystērion*, is the union between Christ and the church in one flesh (5:30–32).

In Ephesians, *mystērion* follows a progressive movement that goes from the vertical movement of heaven to earth, passes through the horizontal movement of Jews and Gentiles, and finds its climax in Christ becoming one flesh with the church. *Mystērion* is displayed in a form of the zoom of a camera and begins with a broad image of unifying heaven and earth. Then this word proceeds to a medium image of unifying Jews and Gentiles and finds its full expression when Christ is finally fused in one flesh with the church, His body.

Meaning of the word *mystērion* and use in the Bible

The Greek word *mystērion* derives from the verb *myein*, which means “to

close” the lips or the eyes.² The first Greek letter in the word is pronounced “mu,” with closed lips. In the Greek mystery religions, a person who underwent the mystery ritual (the *mystēs* in Greek) ought to close the lips in order not to reveal the secret.³

The Bible, however, uses *mystērion* differently. In the Old Testament, the only canonical book that uses the word *mystērion* (in the Septuagint) is Daniel, with nine occurrences (eight in chapter 2 and one in 4:9). All nine occurrences translate the Aramaic word *rāz*, which means “secret.”⁴ In Daniel 2, *mystērion* refers to King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2:18, 19, 27–30, 47), which he had forgotten. Daniel asked his companions to pray that God reveal the *mystērion* to them (2:18), and God revealed it to Daniel (v. 19). Similarly, in Daniel 4:9, *mystērion* refers to the king’s dream that all the wise of Babylon failed to interpret except Daniel (4:8, 18). Thus, in Daniel, *mystērion* is something that can be understood by humans to whom God reveals it.⁵ Once God reveals this *mystērion*, it becomes broadcast.

In the New Testament, *mystērion* is used 3 times in the synoptic Gospels, 4 times in Revelation, 14 times in the Pauline epistles other than Ephesians,⁶ and 6 times in Ephesians. In the synoptic Gospels, the *mystērion*, hidden to the outsiders in parables, could be explained to the disciples (Mark 4:11; see also Matt. 13:11; Luke 8:10). In Revelation, it refers to cryptic symbols

that required explanation⁷ and to God’s eschatological plan of redemption (10:7),⁸ which will finally be disclosed at the seventh trumpet. In the Pauline epistles, apart from Ephesians, the 14 occurrences of *mystērion* show that it is something that was unknown but that God reveals to some people, who must preach it to others.⁹

Thus, in both the Old and New Testaments, *mystērion* is not something unexplainable. In addition, those to whom God reveals it should, then, proclaim it.

With this background, how does Paul use *mystērion* in Ephesians?

Vertical mystery in Ephesians 1:9, 10

The first occurrence of *mystērion* in Ephesians is found in chapter 1:9, 10, “Having made known unto us the mystery [*mystērion*] of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one [ἀνακεφαλαίω] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”¹⁰ Verse 10 defines the *mystērion* mentioned in verse 9.¹¹

The Greek verb ἀνακεφαλαίω (*anakephalaioō*), translated as “gather together in one,” is used only two times in the New Testament, here and in Romans 13:9. In Romans 13:9, Paul lists five of the Ten Commandments as a sample and declares that the commandments are summed up

(*anakephalaioō*) in one. In Christ, heaven and earth are summed up in one.

Some scholars hold that “things in heaven” are the Jews as people of God and “things on earth” the Gentiles,¹² and so they interpret *mystērion* in Ephesians 1:9, 10 as they interpret it in chapter 3. Others see in the summing up of things in heaven and on earth in 1:9, 10 as the unifying of the cosmos in Christ¹³ or the rule of a cosmic Christ.¹⁴

However, though the unifying of the cosmos in a cosmic Christ is implied

of the lost unity between heaven and earth in Christ.

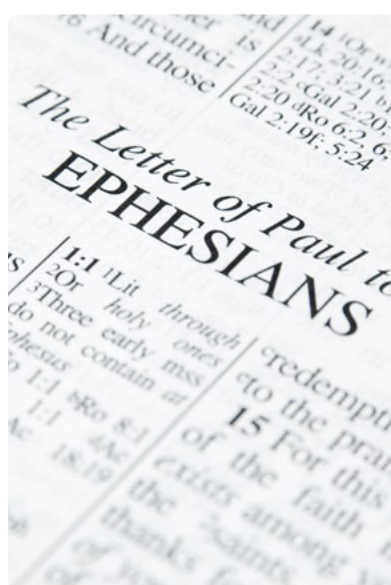
Horizontal mystery in Ephesians 2:11–3:9

Ephesians 3 mentions *mystērion* three times (vv. 3, 4, 9), and it is defined in verse 6 that “the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” In contrast to the vertical mystery of uniting heaven and earth in chapter 1:9, 10, the mystery in chapter 3 concerns the unity between Jews and

the whole world) into “one new man” (2:15), which is the church.¹⁸

One-flesh great mystery in Ephesians 5:30–32

While the first *mystērion* is the unity between heaven and earth in Christ (1:9, 10), and the second one the unity between Jews and Gentiles in Christ (2:11–3:9), the third one is the unity inside the community of believers (5:30–32). In fact, after exhorting wives to submit to their husbands and the husbands to love their wives (5:22–27),



Thus, in both the Old and New Testaments, mystērion is not something unexplainable. In addition, those to whom God reveals it should, then, proclaim it.

in 1:9, 10, the mention of heaven and earth suggests that unity of these two entities is explicitly in view. Other passages support this view. For example, 2:6 declares that “[God] hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Here the earthly family of God is depicted as already united to the heavenly family in Christ (see also 1:3). Moreover, the vertical movement heaven–earth, and earth–heaven found in “he ascended . . . he descended,” with reference to Christ in 4:8–10, shows that union between heaven and earth is in view. However, it will be consummated at the fulfillment of Revelation 21:3, when God Himself will dwell among humans. Thus, the first mystery is vertical, the restoration

Gentiles in Christ. Chapter 2 already introduced unity between Jews and Gentiles culminating in the statement that “he [Christ] is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (v. 14).

Though the “wall of partition” mentioned above is interpreted as the law,¹⁵ it also alludes to the wall that separated the court of Gentiles from the rest of the temple.¹⁶ An inscription was written that any Gentile who would cross the red line has to die.¹⁷ The whole world was divided in two blocks: Jews (people of God) and Gentiles (all the rest of nations). The content of the second *mystērion* is the union between the two blocks (which encompasses

5:28–32 continues: “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great [mega] mystery [*mystērion*]: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Throughout Ephesians, Christ is presented as Head of the church, and the church as body of Christ (1:22, 23; 4:12, 16; 5:23, 30). Believers are “members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (5:30). In 1 Corinthians

12:12–31, Paul uses the way the members of the human body work together as a model of unity that should characterize the members of Christ's body (believers). The church as the body of Christ is one with Christ¹⁹ and shares the same dignity and status with Christ,²⁰ since it is impossible to separate the head from the body.²¹ This is why the church is depicted as having been raised with Christ and sat down in Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6).

It has been affirmed that the phrase the “two shall be one flesh” (5:31) applies to both husband and wife and Christ and the church.²² However, verse 32 specifies that this is a *mystērion* that is “great” (*mega*) and that it refers to Christ and the church. Just as the Word became flesh and tabernacled among humanity (John 1:14), Christ fused with the church and the two have become one flesh. In this mystery, Christ no longer acts as an intermediary through which two entities (heaven and earth, Jews and Gentiles) are united in Him, but rather He becomes one of the two united entities (Christ and church).

Mystery of the gospel in Ephesians 6:19

The last occurrence of *mystērion* appears in 6:19, where Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him that words may be given to him to proclaim the “mystery of the gospel” for which he is an ambassador in chains (v. 20). The Greek genitive τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (of the gospel) in the phrase “mystery of the gospel” is considered by some as a genitive of production or product, which means that the mystery is not the gospel itself but rather *the mystery* stems from or is produced by the gospel.²³

However, it has been correctly observed that “of the gospel” is an appositional genitive, which means that the mystery is the gospel itself.²⁴ In fact, the phrase “mystery of the gospel” is clarified in verse 20. In verse 20, Paul specifies that he is an ambassador on account of the “mystery of the gospel” mentioned in verse 19. Because Paul is

an ambassador, not of something produced by the gospel, but of the gospel itself, the mystery of the gospel for which he is ambassador is the gospel itself. Thus, *mystērion* in 6:19 is not a new one, but rather a restatement of the other mysteries that constitute altogether the gospel that Paul was preaching.

It is striking to notice that the parallel verse to Ephesians 6:19, 20a—“that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds”—found in Colossians 4:3—“that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds”—reads “mystery of Christ” rather than “mystery of the gospel.” This implies that the gospel is Christ Himself. Therefore, the *mystērion* in Ephesians 6:19, which is the gospel that Paul preached, is actually Christ (see Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3).

Conclusion

In Ephesians, *mystērion* is the restoration of the vertical union between heaven and earth in Christ, and the horizontal union between Jews and Gentiles in one body in Christ. Nevertheless, *mystērion* is fully expressed when the aforementioned body and Christ become one flesh; thus the body becomes the body of Christ. *Mystērion* is displayed in a progressive movement that begins broadly with the union heaven-earth, passes through the union Jews-Gentiles, and culminates in the union Christ-church, the great *mystērion*. The disclosure of *mystērion* constitutes the gospel. Colossians equates *mystērion* with Christ Himself. ▮

- 1 There is a possibility of having 28 occurrences rather than 27. However, *mystērion* in 1 Corinthians 2:1 presents a textual problem. Some manuscripts have *mystērion*, where others read *martyrion* (testimony).
- 2 Marvin W. Meyer, “Mystery Religions,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 941.
- 3 Ibid., 942.
- 4 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob

Stamm (2000), s.v. “rāz.”

- 5 G. W. Barker, “Mystery,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 452.
- 6 Assuming that Paul is the author of 1 Timothy, the two occurrences of *mystērion* in 1 Timothy 3:9, 16 are included in the 14 occurrences. This paper assumes also that Paul is the author of Ephesians.
- 7 In Revelation 1:20, Jesus explains to John that the *mystērion* of the seven stars and the seven golden candlesticks are the angels of the seven churches and the seven churches. In Revelation 17:5, 7, the *mystērion* is the name “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth” and the woman seated on the seven-headed beast, which the angel explains to John.
- 8 David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 569.
- 9 James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 1369.
- 10 All the scriptural references are taken from the King James Version.
- 11 Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 30.
- 12 Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: Ephesians* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999).
- 13 Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 33.
- 14 Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 91.
- 15 Charles J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: Critical and Grammatical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2008), 47.
- 16 John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 77.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Sang-Won Son, “The Church as ‘One New Man’: Ecclesiology and Anthropology in Ephesians,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 52 (2009): 19.
- 19 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 590.
- 20 Teresa Okure, “In Him All Things Hold Together’: A Missiological Reading of Colossians 1:15–20,” *International Review of Mission* 91 (2002): 69.
- 21 David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1, 1 to 23* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 443.
- 22 There are three views about the interpretation of *mystērion* in Ephesians 5:32: sacramental, typological, and analogical. The sacramental view connects *mystērion* to human marriage and considers human marriage as a sacrament. The second emphasizes that human marriage is a type of the union between Christ and the church. The third holds that there is only an analogy between human marriage and the union between Christ and the church. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Mystery of Christ and the Church: Head and Body, ‘One Flesh,’” *Trinity Journal* 12 (1991): 82.
- 23 Thomas L. Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ: A Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith* (Milwaukee, WI: Grace Gospel Press, 2009), 469.
- 24 W. Hall Harris III, “The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9–10,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (1994): 204.

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Why young people are sticking with church

It is no secret; young people are leaving the church.¹ And although it is tempting to scoff and declare that this has always been the trend, studies show that, even after having kids and crises—they are not coming back this time.² Churches and administrations are devoting vast sums of time and resources to investigate *why*. Recently, our team conducted a research study for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, asking the opposite question: *Why are they sticking around?* We wanted to find out what keeps vibrant young Christians, who have not left, still active and engaged in church life.

Our study focused on Oakridge Adventist Church (OAC) in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, because—despite trends and statistics—the number of young adults at OAC is increasing. Not just in terms of presence at weekly worship services; young adults are active in all areas of ministry, as leaders, board members, elders, and preachers. They are the crucial group of a unique congregation that represents the surrounding community—a multigenerational, multicultural, and multiethnic mix.

Oakridge Adventist Church

Located in the heart of one of the largest metropolitan centers in Canada, OAC has struggled to establish

its relevance as a community within a swiftly changing urban environment. *The Vancouver Sun* reports, “B.C. [British Columbia] has the fewest Christians on average of any province or territory.”³ Amid the influential waves of secularization and postmodernity, those between the ages of 18 and 35 are the last people anyone would expect to be at church on Sabbath morning. Yet OAC has gained a reputation as a safe haven for young people who are on a spiritual journey. In 2014, survey results revealed that 63 percent of all visitors were between the ages of 18 and 35, the majority unmarried.⁴ About 15 percent claimed to have no Seventh-day Adventist background; 13 percent had no religious background whatsoever. About half of these visitors come with a friend or family member, while the other half learn about the church through an Internet search.⁵

We extended our study of OAC by also examining the trends among young people in the wider British Columbia (BC) Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. We asked a total of 130 young adults 62 questions that reflected eight broad areas of church life, from family connections to spiritual authenticity to community involvement.

Engaging in meaningful relationships

In the first of these eight areas of church life, we asked how relationships

motivate young adults to engage with their local church. As expected, the correlation between personal relationships and church engagement was firmly intertwined. Only 15 percent of young adults at OAC claim to attend church alone. A key characteristic of today's young adults—the millennial generation—is the primacy of relationships. They thrive in teams and refuse to compartmentalize their lives.⁶ They are, therefore, less likely to be secretive about their faith and more likely to live out their spirituality within a community of friendship and support. Within this, the significance of the parents' role, even beyond childhood, cannot be overstated. An overwhelming 81 percent of OAC respondents and 92 percent of BC Conference respondents affirmed the statement “One or both of your parents attends a church.”

Engaging in authenticity

The second area we looked at was church climate, asking whether or not an accepting church will more likely attract young people and what exactly “accepting” means for millennials. Overwhelmingly, young people at OAC affirm statements such as “My church cares about its members,” or “I am proud of my church,” or “My church is hospitable to visitors.”⁷ This is surprisingly positive compared to a broader study conducted by LifeWay, revealing that half or less than half of Protestants

ages 18 to 30 saw church members as “caring,” (51 percent) “welcoming,” (48 percent) or “authentic” (42 percent).⁸

It is important to note that millennials tend to take more liberal and pluralistic positions on social issues. And the church is not exactly keeping up with the changing cultural landscape in attitudes toward race, religion, and sexuality. Currently, 68 percent of millennials favor the legalization of gay marriage, up from 44 percent in 2004.⁹ Their position on social issues, such as gay marriage, has dramatic implications for how they perceive the warmth of their churches. Young adult attendance and engagement hinges largely on being theologically faithful while constantly extending radical hospitality to all people, especially the marginalized.

Engaging in community outreach

The third area pertains to outreach and community involvement. We asked if young adults are attracted to churches

with a strong impact in the community. Because millennials are known for their passionate cries for social justice, we assumed this would be a significant factor for church-engaged young adults.¹⁰ It was. Given the statement “My church serves the community,” 95 percent of OAC young adults agreed. However, only 55 percent claimed to have served the poor through their local church, and when asked to choose their favorite aspect of church, out of six options listed, 0 respondents chose “outreach.” Millennials seem much more attracted to the idea of social justice and community involvement than to the actual active service it requires.¹¹

Engaging in meaningful theology and spiritual disciplines

The fourth and fifth areas dealt with transformative change and spiritual authenticity, asking whether young people feel that the church influences their worldview and whether

church-engaged young adults share a stronger commitment toward spiritual practices. According to a 2011 Barna survey on American Christianity, young adults often leave the church because they perceive Christianity to be shallow, lacking a connection to their everyday life.¹² It might seem obvious, then, that the young adults sticking around to be active in church life have a more intense spirituality. According to our findings, however, this is not always the case. We found that only 19 percent of OAC young adults and 30 percent of BC young adults claim to engage with Scripture daily. The most common answer in regard to how often they read the Bible was “occasionally” (40 percent). This decline in Bible engagement has been noted not just among young adults but also among older generations as some argue the church attempts to heal the wounds of an unhealthy biblicism of previous generations.¹³

Not only are we suffering from lack of Bible engagement, the young adults

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in our congregations, even those in positions of leadership, seem to be lacking solid theological grounding. When it comes to grasping the unfailing grace of God, Seventh-day Adventist youth do not have the best historical track record. In the ValueGenesis II study, when faced with the statement “There is nothing I can do to earn salvation,” only 58 percent of high school and 32 percent of grades 6–8 “strongly agreed.” When we asked similar questions related to a person’s understanding of God’s grace, the results were similar. The statement “I have assurance of my salvation” was affirmed only by 32 percent of OAC young adults and 36 percent of BC young adults; “I am going to heaven” was affirmed only by 24 percent of OAC young adults and 29 percent of BC young adults.

In order for young people to stay engaged in church life, they must first have a genuine conversion experience. Jason K. Allen, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, comments, “Many young adults leave the church because they were never truly converted to Christ in the first place.”¹⁴ Similarly, Rachel Held Evans in a popular CNN opinion blog writes, “We’re not leaving the church because we don’t find the cool factor there; we’re leaving the church because we don’t find Jesus there.”¹⁵ While we might be asking why young adults are leaving the church and why they are staying, maybe we pastors ought to ask a more fundamental question first: are our church members, at every age, converted and having a real relationship with the living God?

Engaging in mentoring and lay leadership

The sixth area of church life we questioned them on was ecclesial leadership, asking what role the leadership, especially the pastor, plays in creating an atmosphere where young adults can engage in church life. Consistently, OAC and BC young adults strongly agreed with such statements as “I trust the leadership of my pastor,” and “I believe the leadership of my church is authentic.” But while the paid staff and visible

leadership are important factors, what seems to be more significant is lay leadership. The Church of England conducted a study between 2011 and 2013 to find out why some of their churches were experiencing incredible growth. According to the study, “Active involvement of lay members throughout the congregation’s ministry was a hallmark of growing churches.”¹⁶ The sustainability of church health depends on the lay leadership of the church, who remain long after the church pastor moves on.

Out of our survey respondents, 60 percent of OAC young adults said they were involved in ministry; however, 50 percent said they had never been asked to serve as a ministry leader. The more active young adults are in the leadership of the church, the greater likelihood they will engage with the whole of church life, but that can be possible only if longtime members intentionally invest in young adults by passing the baton to new, capable leaders. Young adults are willing to serve but are not going to accept token titles of leadership. They want to be respected and entrusted with responsibility; they long to be seen, not as the future of the church, but as competent and reliable leaders *now*. What must be cultivated in congregations—if we want to keep young adults around—is authentic mentoring and discipleship programs, relationship building that spans generations, and providing positions of responsibility.

Engaging in creative ways to talk about Adventism and other faith walks

In the last two areas, we looked into Adventist distinctives and evangelism, asking questions about the young adults’ commitment to the Adventist denomination and its distinct message, as well as whether young adults are concerned about the faith of their friends and family members. While 84 percent of OAC young adults indicated they had a Seventh-day Adventist background, only 66 percent claimed to self-identify as a Seventh-day Adventist. In an age of pluralism, millennials are less likely

to commit to an organized religion and denomination compared with previous generations. A recent study of Adventist millennials, conducted by the Barna Group, found the importance of creating a space for questions. Adventist doctrine has historically been considered absolute, with no place for questions or disagreement. A. Allan Martin says the Adventist study found “the biggest differences were in the areas of feeling like ‘I can be myself’ and of feeling like ‘doubts are tolerated.’”¹⁷ Church leaders are being encouraged to provide a safe place for questions and room for doubts, placing an emphasis on the Christian life as a spiritual journey rather than an after-death destination or a means to an end.

When it comes to sharing their faith, young adults today face a unique challenge. One-third of all millennials say they are not affiliated with any religion.¹⁸ Because these “nones” have no previous religious or church experience, sharing one’s faith with them requires a different set of sensibilities than those used to reach past generations. Every church must wake up to the fact that the church struggles to be relevant to a constantly changing world and culture. One OAC young adult we interviewed for our study voices his frustrations with the Seventh-day Adventist Church: “We’re like an antique chair in a modern condo,” he says. “It’s not relevant. It doesn’t fit in. . . . It doesn’t reflect the world, the culture, the context that we live in.” The three young adults we personally interviewed all said that at some point they had seriously considered leaving the Adventist Church.

Beyond faceless numbers

Young adults retain the same zeal for the gospel and the imminent return of Jesus Christ as did the early founders of Adventism, but they are questioning their place within the church. Some worry that their doubts and fears will make them ineligible to participate in worship services. The vast majority have a different outlook on social issues, and they are worried they will

be perceived as liberal and written off as apostates. Scare tactics are not going to keep them in the pews, nor will a conflated sense of duty. What is keeping them engaged is an active community of friends and family, as well as open and authentic dialogue that happens across generational, racial, and cultural divides. But even these are not enough to keep young adults in the pews and active in ministry. We must be more than community centers and social networks; the church must devote itself to preaching and teaching theology grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, to participate in the abundant life He offers now, to tirelessly work to ensure each member and visitor knows that through His grace, all will be well. ▮

- 1 See David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Christians Are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011) and Roger Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From a 10-Year Study* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1999).
- 2 See Barna Group, "Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts" (November 2011), <http://www.barna.org/millennials/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts>.
- 3 Douglas Todd, "B.C. Breaks Records When It Comes to Religion and the Lack Thereof," *The Search* (blog), May 8, 2013, blogs.vancouversun.com/2013/05/08/b-c-breaks-records-when-it-comes-to-religion-and-the-lack-thereof/.

breaks-records-when-it-comes-to-religion-and-the-lack-thereof/?__federated=1.

- 4 Each week, visitors are invited to the front two pews to receive a free gift bag during a post-service element called "7 minutes or less." In less than seven minutes, a trained hospitality team member welcomes those who come forward and asks them to fill out a brief survey card in exchange for a gift bag. The survey results provide church leaders with crucial information about the visitor's experience along with key demographic information.
- 5 OAC has a strong Web presence through social media and is using strategic methods to maximize its ranking in Internet search engines. In 2014, the church changed its online brand presence to ChurchInVancouver.ca.
- 6 See Karen K. Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani, "Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials' Organizational Relationships and Performance," March 5, 2010, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10869-010-9172-7>.
- 7 When given the statement "I am proud of my church," 95 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (85 percent BC young adults). When given "My church cares about its members," 95 percent agreed or strongly agreed (87 percent BC young adults). Again, the vast majority (95 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that "My church is hospitable to visitors (82 percent BC young adults).
- 8 The LifeWay study surveyed 1,023 Protestants ages 18 to 30 who said they attended church at least twice a month for at least one year during high school. See Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Young Adults Aren't Sticking With Church," August 6, 2007, *USA Today*, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2007-08-06-church-dropouts_N.htm.
- 9 See *Millennials in Adulthood*, "Chapter 2: Generations and Issues," <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/chapter-2-generations-and-issues/> (accessed January 19, 2016).
- 10 See Joshua Stanton, "Social Justice in the Millennial Generation," *The Huffington Post*, February 17, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joshua-stanton/social-justice-in-the-mil_b_2708224.html.
- 11 Joanna Chau, "Millennials Are More 'Generation Me' Than 'Generation We,' Study Finds," *The Journal of Higher Education*, March 15, 2012. See also Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Atria Books, 2007).
- 12 Barna Group, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church," <http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>.
- 13 See Kyle Stiemsma, "The Decline of the Bible," *Converge Magazine*, October 2014, <http://convergemagazine.com/the-decline-of-the-bible-14940/>.
- 14 Jason K. Allen, "3 Reasons Young Adults Are Leaving the Church," *Pastors.com*, August 6, 2013, <http://pastors.com/3-reasons-young-adults-are-leaving-the-church/>.
- 15 Rachel Held Evans, "Why Millennials Are Leaving the Church," *CNN Belief Blog*, July 27, 2013, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/27/why-millennials-are-leaving-the-church/>.
- 16 Lovett H. Weems Jr., "Update: Learning From Growing Churches in England," <http://churchleadership.com>, July 9, 2014. The full report "From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings From the Church Growth Research Programme 2011–2013" is available at <http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/FromAnecdoteToEvidence1.0.pdf>.
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"Revive me according to Your Word"

King Josiah undertook the renovation of the temple in order to bring his people from apostasy to a renewed relationship with God. But however important the restoration of the temple may have been, it was only when the book of the law was found that the work of reformation truly began (2 Kings 22:8).

This paradigmatic event shows that revival and reformation must go hand-in-hand with the Word of God. It is not by accident that the largest and virtually central chapter of the Bible deals almost exclusively with the Word of God. Psalm

119 uses a variety of synonyms to designate God's Word, such as *law*, *testimonies*, *statutes*, *precepts*, and *ways*. These terms emphasize the many aspects of God's written revelation and their relevance to our lives.

But not satisfied with just describing the relevance and beauty of the Word, the psalmist prays: "Revive me according to Your word" (vv. 25, 107, 154, NKJV). God's Word brings revival; this message of comfort, admonition, and hope enables us to face the challenges of everyday life and prepares us for the life to come. "For

the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12, NKJV).

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Revival
and **REFORMATION**
YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY

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Transethics of Jesus and Christian morals: *Is Christian ethics an oxymoron?*

Is Christian morality (ethics) an oxymoron? Does Christian religion reflect and endorse a certain type of morality? Or are Christian beliefs and practices so fundamentally different from any category of moral thinking and praxis that they *transcend* any notion of ethics? How should Christian conviction and praxis surpass the notion of natural morality and philosophical ethics? Finally, what does this have to do with pastoral work?

These questions are not just irenics for me. I will never forget the 1991–1992 dramatic experience in one of the Balkans wars. In combat, I could have used the opportunity to harm the so-called enemy. Nevertheless, even though I desperately wished for revenge, I realized I would not be able to retaliate because I was constantly “praying” to the unknown God (for the first time in my life) that I would not have to murder another human being. This prayer had become a desperate attempt to connect myself with some type of metaphysical or transcendent reality in the midst of this ethical dilemma. I needed something beyond my own sense of morality, and through the grace of God, it came.

This religious experience was transformed into a sacred, mystical encounter with the Unknown Other,

which pressed my *sensus moralis* to do the right thing. My decision to become a pacifist was not based on my natural sense of morality but on the unexpected revelation of the righteousness of God. I felt the wonder and astonishment of the unexpected. It would be very difficult to identify, analyze, describe, or explain either the cause or the result of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, it certainly happened as a result of my striving for freedom from the unbearable tension within my natural sense of morality. I know, firsthand, the reality of Christ’s promise “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7).¹

Years later, as a Yale Divinity School Visiting Fellow, I was fortunate enough to participate in some of the most contemporary discussions in the field of ethics.² I believe that some of the answers prompted by these discussions and offered in this article may enable our spiritual growth, shape our pastoral ministry, and transform church communities.

Background of the problem

Ethics gives a special appeal to religion because it demonstrates a distinctive power to capture the

attention of a believer who wishes to pursue moral perfection. Without an emphasis on morality or a system of ethics, believers can lose their grip on mundane reality and concern for neighbors, and become pursuers of the transcended domain of religion only.³ Monotheistic world religions have ethical components in their vast array of beliefs and guiding principles coming from divine revelation. Ethical norms often represent codes of conduct that drive certain religious practices.

For example, one form of Christian ethics regarding war is *pacifism*, hermeneutically derived from New Testament texts, but especially from Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.⁴ It is a well-known religious stance, though it is not prevalent.⁵ On the other hand, the common mainstream Christian ethics of *realism* is fueled by the idea that every Christian must be *socially* engaged even if it means defending his or her own country at any cost.⁶ Patriotism, as a moral obligation, is, therefore, understood in two different ethical systems in completely different ways.

For a believer who honestly wants to remain faithful to the Word of God, there are two *opposite* ethical interpretations of the *same* divine revelation in Scripture. Each of these

ethical positions is based on *rational* argumentation and invokes God as an active agent, source, and supporter of certain moral positions. We could give many additional historical or modern examples of ethical debates, such as slavery, abortion, women's rights, women's ordination, and gay rights. Philosophical ethics or Christian ethics that follow philosophical methodology in particular and subordinate theology to ethics as a philosophical and hermeneutical extrapolation of biblical teaching may indeed create confusion and ultimately show itself unreliable and implausible.

Theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas claims that Christianity is such a *unique* religion that speaking about *Christian* ethics is not a worthwhile idea.⁷ He criticizes Christian realism as an ethical system based on rationality and Enlightenment sentiment⁸ that has nothing to do with the original apostolic Christian theory or practice.⁹ For that reason Hauerwas supports pacifism.

Taking the Sermon on the Mount seriously is an imperative for every genuine follower of Christ. According to Hauerwas, the purpose of the church is not to Christianize the society by certain types of ethical theory or practice but just to be the church, witnessing to the human community about the mystery of the gospel.¹⁰ Hauerwas fears the possibility that "Christian ethics" may bring Christianity down to the level of ethical dialogue with secular ethics. If this happens, never-ending debates about the nature of the social good or evil will become the sole endeavor of a Christian believer.

Morality and/or faith within Scripture and Christian history

The radical "morality" of Jesus surpasses any moral categories of ethical systems with which we are familiar. It challenges *all* traditional and customary ways of expressing moral behavior for the benefit of self or others. Christ's "ethics" belongs to a different realm, namely, the realm of *faith*, not *morality*.

Here are some biblical examples: "Turn the other cheek"¹¹ and "love your enemy"¹² are examples of trans-ethical commandments based solely on Jesus' call to discipleship and not on ethical thinking or practice. No ethical systems, religious or otherwise, will find these rules of life viable and desirable. In fact, they might even threaten the good life and the life worth living. They urge a self-sacrificial approach to life to such an extent that they may negate the goodness of prosperity and the enjoyment of a flourishing existence.¹³ The call to discipleship is inevitably the call to self-denial and suffering. Moreover, Jesus' *transethics* always goes beyond justice as a normative standard for ethics. Loving the enemy and granting forgiveness, though assuming the standard of justice,¹⁴ also go beyond the traditional ethical expressions of a just action.

The rich young ruler, for example,¹⁵ when confronted by Jesus' radical demand, confirmed his moral "perfection" (keeping the commandments) but failed to grasp Jesus' offer of a new type of perfection that goes beyond any sense or nature of traditional religious morality. It seems that a Christian call comes as a call to discipleship that transcends a notion of morality as such. *Christianity is not a religion of morality, but a religion of sacrifice.* The Christian faith is more than a worldview—it is an adventure.¹⁶

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by deeply "moral" people. They had a sense of morality by which they strove to please God, but they were not led by the Spirit of God and thus were unable to discover the true nature of the One who had been sent. Their efforts to be moral paradoxically ended up in immorality and a desire to assassinate the only One who was able to cleanse them from their guilty conscience and save them. Generally speaking, the Cross demonstrates our inability to lean on our inborn sense of morality. This is the ultimate revelation of the supernatural love of God that can be recognized and lived only by faith and radical transformation.

Paul's theology was also based on this principle of faith beyond the traditional sense of Jewish or Greco-Roman morality. The theology of salvation offered in Paul's writings is primarily based on the fundamental principle of *faith and righteousness by faith* without the contribution of good works or efforts resulting from any inborn morality.¹⁷ Morality is not bad in itself—it can produce some good results—but it is insufficient to produce faith and maintain a faithful and fruitful life in Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Martin Luther, for example, in spite of being misunderstood as antinomian, clearly demonstrated the power of faith that leads to good works. He boldly asserted, "Faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. . . . Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing."¹⁸

Life based on faith, thus, will not minimize the requirements of God but, filled with love, will excel in maximizing God's grace. The discipleship and moral transformation of Christians cannot be grounded in the natural kind of morality that belongs to the "old Adam." Only faith can produce love and good works (or the new form of "morality") worthy of a Christian believer. Christian ethics, therefore, in the philosophical sense, cannot express the nature of the Christian reality of faith.

Søren Kierkegaard, one of the most prominent Christian philosophers, affirmed three levels of human existence: aesthetic, moral, and religious (the faith level). He argued that there was a "teleological suspension of the ethical" in the story of sacrificing Isaac.¹⁹ Universal ethics is an expression of moral purpose; faith, however, transcends the moral meaning and purpose of an action. The faith of Abraham, as a paradox,²⁰ goes beyond the moral

distinction between expression of good or evil. Otherwise, Kierkegaard argues, Abraham would not have obeyed God because he could have argued that the voice he had heard was the voice of the devil. The moral distinction of good and evil based on the cultural norms of Abraham's time was temporarily suspended in his case. He has become the "knight of faith," absolutely and unreservedly obedient *only* to God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran minister and twentieth-century martyr, in his work *Ethics*, spoke about Christian ethics as an oxymoron. His illuminating argument says, "Those who wish even to focus on the problem of a Christian ethic are faced with an outrageous demand—from the outset they must give up, as inappropriate to this topic, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: 'How can I be good?' and 'How can I do something good?' Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: 'What is the will of God?'"²¹

Bonhoeffer recognized the unique nature of the Christian call—obedience and discipleship: it was irreconcilable with the traditional and natural understanding of morality. Jesus' demands are so radical that they go beyond natural understanding and the ability of the human being to do good. Bonhoeffer clearly distinguished Christian faith and commitment from the common human sense of morality. On the basis of religious morality, asking the questions "What is good?" and "How can I be good?" may be quite legitimate, but within the context of Christian experience, faith and obedience to God transcend the understanding and the experience of the ethical. Faith is not concerned with the Law or with morality, though it perfectly fulfills it in a new shape and form.

Drawing upon the wisdom of God gained through Holy Scripture and the history of the church, this article tries to make plain the complex relationship between Christian faith and religious morality and/or ethics. The Christian church of today again has to recognize that only the principle of living faith

in the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus is able to transform, sanctify, and prepare the individual and the community for eternity. Righteousness by faith is a final defeat of our natural ability to distinguish between good and evil and our capacity for doing good. The greatest enemy of Christian faith is not a new wave of atheism or postmodernism but a "Trojan horse" of self-made and self-focused natural ability for morality that claims to be Christian.

Christian morality, therefore, might be an oxymoron. *Christianity is not a religion of morality, but a religion of sacrifice.* Christian faith belongs to a completely different realm; it produces good works and holy life leading to eternity that is qualitatively different from the life of the "good" works that result from our inborn sense of morality. "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it," said the Master (Matt. 7:14, NIV).

Transethics of Jesus and the pastoral ministry

What, then, should this mean for us, as Christians?


First, every believer should be taught to develop a deep relationship with Christ based on the knowledge of grace, faith, and submission, not on the slippery slope of only formally keeping the commandments. In the carnal heart, the temptation to please God by our own ability to act morally is always present. We have to be exposed to the Word and willingly open ourselves to transformation through faith and obedience. The most remarkable "achievement" in Christian life is not a moral action but genuine faith that leads to submission to the Lordship of Christ.²²

Second, the community of faith should be led towards the "adventure" of faith, not only following the prescribed principles and guidelines as any other worldly community does. Let us challenge the church to be willing to go beyond the ordinary as a response to Jesus' specific calls to self-denial. Christianity is a religion of sacrifice.

Circumstances in which we live will always challenge us to be proactive in this regard. Miraculous activities of God, however, are possible only by faith in the extraordinary Christ.

Lastly, engaging the world or "Christianizing" the social order is best done by *witnessing* to a radically different "morality." Being simply moral is not enough. I do not undermine

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the role of good works and service to humankind. On the contrary, faith will produce genuine forms of goodness that will last and make a greater impact. This world knows much about philosophical or natural morality but almost nothing about the living faith and transethical demands of love of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ leading to eternal life. 

- 1 All scriptural references are from the New International Version of the Bible.
- 2 Courses included Introduction to Ethics I and II, Natural Law, Cosmology and Ethics, and others.
- 3 The transcended, "mystical," or contemplative aspect of Christian faith is not much concerned with "prophetic" engagement with the world or the social gospel.
- 4 Matthew 5–7 (see especially 5:38–42).
- 5 Most of the theologians who endorse pacifism are labeled by Christian realists as sectarians who "withdraw" from the world. See Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), preface. Mennonites and Anabaptists, though largely pacifist, do not generally "withdraw from the world."
- 6 Reinhold Niebuhr is one of the examples. He was a supporter of almost all wars of the United States of America and, thus, was labeled as a "Christian realist." Donald Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919–1941* (Wesleyan Publishers, 1988), ch. 13.
- 7 Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 27.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 27, 28.
- 9 Frederick Simmons, Yale Divinity School Class Lectures, Introduction to Ethics II, Spring 2015.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Matthew 5:38–42.
- 12 Matthew 5:43–48.
- 13 A new project of the Yale Center of Faith and Culture is called Life Worth Living; one of its main challenges is to interpret the Cross of Christ, the ultimate suffering of the innocent, and the Christian imitation of this type of suffering. "Bearing the Cross should bring about the state of affairs which corresponds to *movement towards flourishing*." Miroslav Volf, interview with Aleksandar S. Santrac, Yale Divinity School, Summer 2014; see also my project *Witness to Life Worth Living: Miroslav Volf's Ethics of Embrace*, unpublished manuscript, 68.
- 14 Forgiveness always assumes that there was a hurt that has to be healed. The hurt or the harm is the lack of justice, of course. Miroslav Volf, Yale Divinity School professor of theology, explains: "Forgiveness is not simply an act that negates justice; rather, it affirms justice in the very act of transcending justice. If I said to you right now, 'I forgive you,' you would be upset with me and tell me, 'There's nothing to forgive, because I've never seen you in my life, and therefore could not have done you any wrong.' Clearly I would have blamed you by forgiving you, and it is this sense of blame made against the backdrop of affirmed justice which forgiveness needs in order to be forgiveness. By transcending justice, forgiveness affirms it, rather than leaving it behind." Miroslav Volf, "Conversations with Miroslav Volf," part 2, *Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 84.
- 15 Mark 10:17–23.
- 16 Discipleship resembles more a dynamic life adventure of faith than a static rational belief in a given worldview.
- 17 Romans 3:21, 22; Galatians 3:23–25. In these and similar texts the apostle Paul clearly teaches the inability of religious morality to fulfil the standards of God. Only Christ's external righteousness imputed and implanted suffices.
- 18 Luther adds, "Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire!" Martin Luther, "Definition of Faith," an excerpt from *An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Luther's German Bible of 1522, trans. by Rev. Robert E. Smith from Dr. Martin Luther's *Vermischte Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Johann K. Irmischer, vol. 63 (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1854), 124, 125.
- 19 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 1843, tr. Walter Lowrie, 1941, <http://www.whitenationalism.com/etext/fear.htm>.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Clifford J. Green, vol. 6 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 47.
- 22 John 6:28, 29.



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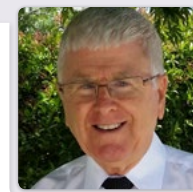


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Searching *for* Jesus

His name was Mark—a young Austrian in his mid-20s. I met him as I was leaving the Hare Krishna temple in New Delhi, India. I had been traveling in India to find out what attracts Western youth to Eastern mysticism. While boarding a bus back to the city center, I met Mark, who had also been at the temple. He fingered a string of Buddhist prayer beads in his left hand while he flipped through some flash cards with Hindu sayings in his right.

In our conversation, he asked me what I did. “I’m a Christian minister,” I said. His eyes lit up and his voice brightened as he said, “I read the Bible and loved Jesus.” I was intrigued. “Why are you into Eastern meditation, which isn’t compatible with the teachings of Jesus?” His reply was quite disturbing. He said, “I started to go to church and lost Jesus.”

If Mark had attended an Adventist church, would his newfound love for Jesus been nurtured, or would he have become a statistic like the more than a third of those who have left the Adventist Church over the past 40 years?¹

Why people leave the church

Adventist researcher Monte Sahlin said survey findings show that the cause of members leaving has less to do with doctrinal disagreements “than with problems people experience in their personal lives.”² This begs the question, if our doctrines are not able

to sustain people in personal crises, is something missing? Did they ever have a personal relationship with Jesus and assurance of salvation?

Lee Venden conducts revival meetings among North American Adventists, with an emphasis on a relationship with Jesus. Speaking of North America, he says, while those joining the church “see our doctrines as biblically sound, . . . *they don’t see Jesus as the core of each. . . . Too many come to church but don’t come to Jesus.*”³ “The majority of Adventists,” he says, “lack assurance of salvation” and “openly admit that they don’t have a daily walk with Christ.” Less than a quarter of attending members “spend any personal time in daily Bible study and prayer.”⁴ The recent landmark survey revealed only about “one in three families conduct daily worship.”⁵

The October 2013 Summit on Nurture and Retention supports Venden’s findings, with its call to build “loving and Christ-like relationships within the local church,” which is urgently needed. Something obviously is missing in many of our churches.⁶ While there are Adventist churches that do have Christlike relationships, how could a young convert like Mark survive if he were to attend a church where this is lacking?

Joining the church and not finding Jesus

How can it be that people can accept our doctrines as biblical and not “see Jesus as the core of each,”

or join our church but not come to Jesus? Arguably, no other teaching in the Adventist Church has undermined a right relationship with Jesus and having Christian assurance more than the view that we have to reach sinless perfection before we are ready for heaven.

The problem with perfectionism is that it focuses us on ourselves instead of on Jesus, causing a denial about the sinfulness of human nature. “We should remember,” says Ellen White, “that our own ways are not faultless. We make mistakes again and again. . . . No one is perfect but Jesus. Think of Him and be charmed away from yourself.”⁷ Let us look at some of the historical views regarding justification.

While White endorsed the 1888 message of “justification through faith in . . . Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God” by Elders E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones,⁸ this does not mean these men were infallible or without error. They both began to go astray after 1888, until they became enmeshed in pantheism.⁹

George Knight points out that Jones, in 1889, definitely held “an objective (i.e., forensic) doctrine of justification.” Jones said that “to be justified is to be *accounted* righteous,”¹⁰ which means that we are *declared* righteous based on the finished work of Jesus credited to us, a righteousness that is in Christ, never in us—what Luther called an “alien righteousness.”¹¹ Sanctifying righteousness in us by the Holy Spirit is the fruit of justification, never the root.

But notice what else Jones said in 1889: “It is only . . . through *Christ within us* that we keep the commandments. . . . When . . . we actually keep the commandments of God, we will never die. . . . If we die now, Christ’s righteousness will be imputed [credited] to us and we will be raised, but *those who live to the end are made sinless before He comes*, having so much of *Christ’s being in them* that they . . . stand blameless without an intercessor.”¹²

“This teaching,” writes Knight, “became a major root for the spread of

sin is limited to actions, rather than the nature we are born with.”¹⁶

The Council of Trent, which formulated Catholic teaching on salvation in 1563, “reaffirmed the views of Augustine,” who defined *justification* from the Latin as “to make righteous.”¹⁷ Trent said: “God cannot consider one just or non-sinner without *making him just [righteous]*.”¹⁸ Trent confused justification and sanctification and included the new birth in justification.¹⁹

In Trent’s view, the Fall was only partial—the will was not affected,²⁰

until perfection is reached.²⁷ The whole system of monasticism, writes R. N. Flew, is considered “the boldest organized attempt to attain to Christian perfection in all the long history of the Church.”²⁸ All theories of perfectionism, says Louis Berkhof, lower the standard of righteousness and lessen the enormity of sin.²⁹

Sin is not just conscious wrongdoing or outward actions. White says that sin is the “inheritance of children.” It has “deranged” the “whole human organism.” We have “a bent to evil,”

The problem with perfectionism is that it focuses on ourselves instead of on Jesus, causing a denial about the sinfulness of human nature.

sinless perfectionism among Seventh-day Adventists.”¹³ By 1905, in *The Consecrated Way to Perfection*, Jones said, “Perfection attained in human flesh,” as “Christ attained it,” is the “Christian goal.” Christ’s “ministry in the true sanctuary” enables us “to attain it.”¹⁴

Waggoner, by 1900, in *The Glad Tidings*, departed from forensic justification, defining the word *justify* as “made righteous.” No professed Christian, said Waggoner, should say “that it is impossible for a Christian to live a sinless life.”¹⁵

M. L. Andreasen, Adventist’s most prominent theologian of the 1930s and 1940s, expanded on perfectionism. He advocated that the last generation of believers “will demonstrate that it is possible to live without sin.” When we gain victory over every sin, through the process of sanctification, we are “ready for translation.” For Andreasen

and depravity is curable in this life.²¹ Inclinations to sin were not considered sin, which was limited to conscious wrongdoing.²² Therefore, Trent could advocate that complete obedience to the commandments is possible in this life: “*For God does not command impossibilities.*”²³

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says: “Both Catholics and Protestants stress that the whole of justification is the work of God’s grace.”²⁴ For Catholics, justification is by grace *both for us* in Christ and *in us* by the Holy Spirit. For Protestants it is *only* by grace *for us*, received by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus. Trent denied that we are justified by faith alone in the merits of Christ.²⁵ The subtle change Trent made to legalism was to make the Holy Spirit our justifier instead of Christ.²⁶

By making justification dependent on progressive sanctification, there can be no justification or assurance

which we “cannot resist” and which is not eradicated until Jesus comes again.³⁰

Andrews Study Bible notes on Psalm 51:5 say: “We are born sinners, alienated from God, with a sinful nature and tendencies to sin. Sin is not only an act, but a state into which we are born.”³¹ The *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* also describes sin “as a state,” and because of “an innate bent toward sin, complete deliverance will be celebrated only at the Second Coming.”³²

What is the answer?

The answer is simpler than many think. *By nature I’m a sinner condemned to death* (Eph. 2:1–3; Rom. 3:23; 5:18; 6:23). Jesus lived a perfect life (1 John 3:5) and died to save sinners (1 John 2:2). As my Substitute, He died for me (Rom. 5:6–8). Because He is my Representative, I died with Him

(2 Cor. 5:14). When I accept Jesus as my Savior, I enter a personal relationship with Him (John 1:12). Immediately I am forgiven (Eph. 1:7), am credited with Christ's righteousness that meets the claims of God's law (Rom. 4:1–6; 8:1–4), am justified freely by God's grace, i.e. declared righteous (3:20–26), am adopted as a child of God (8:14–17), receive eternal life (John 3:36), become a citizen of heaven and a member of God's kingdom (Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:12, 13), and am counted as seated in heaven already in Christ (Eph. 2:6). Christ's victory becomes my victory (Heb. 2:14, 15; Rev. 12:11), and God treats me just as if I had never sinned.³³ All this I receive by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8, 9).

The value of faith is not in having it, but in its object. When we travel by plane, we have faith in the pilot. The object of saving faith is Jesus. To ask ourselves "Do I have enough faith?" is asking the wrong question. It should be: "Can I trust Jesus?" The answer is always "Yes!" White says, "*I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised.*"³⁴

The Holy Spirit's work is to prompt me to accept Jesus (John 15:26; 16:8–15). The moment I accept Him and am justified, the new birth takes place as the Holy Spirit comes into my life (John 3:1–21). This is the beginning of a life-changing relationship of progressive sanctification by the Spirit (Rom. 15:16), which is completed at glorification (1 Cor. 15:51–55). Both justification and sanctification are essential and inseparable, yet distinct, as are Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Our assurance and security are based on Jesus' finished work as Justifier and not on the Holy Spirit's ongoing work as Sanctifier. If assurance depended on the latter, as perfectionism teaches, we could never have assurance until we were perfect. Willing obedience is the response of gratitude for the gift of eternal life (John 14:15) and *never* the basis of salvation.

How do we maintain this life-changing relationship with Jesus? "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross."³⁵

"Kneeling in faith at the cross," is "the highest place" that we can attain."³⁶

"No discourse," White says, "should ever be delivered without presenting Christ and Him crucified as the foundation of the gospel."³⁷ This includes every Sabbath School lesson, sermon, Bible study, and evangelistic presentation. What a difference that would have made for Mark, if he had attended a church like that. ❧

- 1 Andrew McChesney, "Church Membership Reaches 18.1 Million," *Adventist Review*, October 12, 2014, <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/church-membership-reaches-18.1-million>. Over this period 31.8 million were baptized, while 11.4 million (not counting deaths) left the church.
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How does spiritual life grow?—Part 2 of 2

In part 1 of this series, I suggested that there are six possible stages in a person's spiritual maturation.

Just understanding those stages helps us understand where others are and determine where we are in our spiritual growth. In part 1 of this series, published in January 2016, we considered the first four stages. Many, if not most, who call themselves followers of Jesus never grow beyond the fourth level of spiritual maturity in their walk with God. Those who do grow beyond the fourth level almost always experience a profound paradigm-shattering crisis. In such times, everything they have believed and accepted—including their relationship with God and what it means—is reexamined, held up to scrutiny, redefined, expressed, and personalized. Such times can lead to spiritual depression, a journey into a valley of shadow and death from which they fear they will never emerge. If a person is willing to allow God to mature him or her beyond the first four stages of spiritual development, such a maturation process can create a place of joy, peace, and closeness with God that transcends anything they have ever imagined or experienced.

Stage five: Internalizing God's law

In the fifth stage, there is a tectonic shift in what motivates an individual

as a follower of Jesus. Morality is determined by how an attitude or action impacts their relationship with God and fellow humanity, and this is determined on a totally different basis from rules, roles, creeds, or the expectations of religious authorities or group.

While at first glance this stage may appear relativistic and based on situational ethics, it is really the beginning of the stages that have characterized the lives all of the spiritual "greats" throughout history. Suddenly, a greater law becomes the governing principle of a person's life: the law of loving God supremely and one's neighbor as one's self. Now, the life of a follower of Jesus becomes my desire because the law is written on my heart.

Often the person ends up doing or not doing many of the same things that a person might do at another stage of their spiritual development, but for totally different reasons. Instead of living one's life by a list of forensic dos and don'ts on a guilt-righteousness continuum, now things such as whether an action or attitude will bring shame and reproach or honor and praise to God or my fellow man becomes important. And whether something will defile or adulterate my relationship with God or another person becomes the motivating principle, and whether an action or an attitude

will cause me or those around me to fear God or empower them to live rich, full, satisfying, love-filled lives in Him and with each other become of greatest importance.

Stage six: Loving God and others genuinely

In the sixth stage, the important issue for the follower of Jesus is whether or not something brings pleasure to God and grace to others. This is spiritual altruism at its best. Jesus said that the two great commandments are to love God supremely and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In this stage, the focus of a person's life becomes spending time with God, being conscious of His presence while proceeding through the day, and listening for His voice as He guides. A person begins seeing those around him through the eyes of Jesus. The heart rejoices at that which brings Him joy and breaks in the absence thereof.

In this stage, the church exists to provide loving accountability in the relationships in our lives. The church provides a place of fellowship with those who are also on their walk toward an increasingly deeper relationship with God, while at the same time holding up the mirror of God's Word so that we can clearly see how to love and where we may not be loving. The church becomes the place

where we come together to accomplish loving deeds for God in concert with others who share our passion for Him; the place where we go to have our spiritual fires rekindled and our flagging spirits raised, and where we join with others of like passion for God in worshiping Him.

In short, in this stage neither punishment nor reward factor into the equation. Bringing pleasure, glory, and honor to someone we love—human or divine—is all that matters. That is what the angels and unfallen beings live to do. It is their greatest joy. And, it is what will consume us for eternity. It is the highest stage of spiritual growth.

Reaching higher ground

God's desire and purpose for each of us is to lead us beyond the certainty of a rules- and creeds-based religion to the adventure of a relationship based on following Jesus every day. This walk, while rooted in the past stages, focuses forward and constantly strives to move beyond the letter of obedience to the life of a new heart guided and nurtured by the Holy Spirit as we revel in God's presence and meditate day and night on the meaning of His Word. How can we make this journey of faith through each stage of spiritual maturity?

1. *We must be willing to make the journey.* We all naturally shy away from chaos, especially spiritual chaos.

But the life of the Spirit is intrinsically chaotic. This life follows the guidance of the one Jesus likened to the wind that blew in unexpected places and directions. Following Jesus, one cannot relax in the comfort of a settled existence; instead, one constantly experiences the adventure of new life, vistas, and experiences. In the footsteps of the radical Rabbi from Nazareth, we make new relationships based on a new openness to loving and accepting others where they are. We begin to see things outside of the confines of a comfortable orthodoxy and to discover that the life of a follower of Jesus is a constant evolution of understanding God's will. We see people through new eyes that look

beyond the external or immediate to the hidden and what they can be through His grace. The understanding of right and wrong based on creeds or statements of belief is shattered by a morality based on listening to Him through His Spirit and Word in the moment. If we are to grow to become all that God wishes and desires for us, our preconceptions have to be fractured until we emerge from our traditions and settled patterns of living into the glorious light of His constant ongoing presence in all areas of our lives.

2. *We can't be afraid of the journey.* The One who promises to never leave us or forsake us promises to be with us as we journey into increasingly

Suddenly, a greater law becomes the governing principle of a person's life: the law of loving God supremely and one's neighbor as one's self.

Ministerial Student Writing Contest

Ministry, International Journal for Pastors, announces its fifth Ministerial Student Writing Contest. All students enrolled in a full-time ministerial preparation program on the undergraduate or graduate level may participate.

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intimate stages of spiritual growth. Even when we cannot see the path or where it leads, we know that He is our guide. The adventure of faith means trusting God so much that wherever He leads by whatever path He chooses at whatever pace and time, we would not want to be anywhere else with anybody else.

3. *We have to be grounded in the earlier stages of growth.* Children do not become adults at birth. Healthy, balanced adults are such because they have successfully navigated each stage of human development. The term makes it plain—*development*—moving through stages to other places. The human body is not ready for adult activities at birth. The human brain is not ready for abstract thought in early childhood. Human emotions are not ready for romance at puberty. Each stage of a person's development and education is built on successfully making it through those that precede it. In the same way, a person's spiritual development is grown on the stages that precede it.

4. *We cannot be afraid of the naysayers.* Rarely do we find a child who understands or even begins to comprehend the thinking of those in later

stages of their growth. In the same way, it is a rare person indeed who is comfortable with the lives of those in later stages of their spiritual journey. Just as children will often exhibit their insecurity with temper tantrums or manipulation in order to control their parents, so people in the initial stages of spiritual maturation will react, often violently, against what they see as the liberality of those in the later stages of their spiritual journey.

Jesus, the radical Rabbi whom we claim to follow, was rarely understood or appreciated by the orthodox spiritual leaders and people of His day. He suffered violent reactions to Himself and His ideas. He went in new directions. He made friends with those whom the traditional church wanted nothing to do with. He went places where good followers of God were not supposed to go. He said things that offended and caused negative reaction. He worshiped in ways that few understood—all in the service of God.

5. *We must be committed to growth.* It is so easy, so sinfully natural, to want to settle down at every comfortable place in our spiritual journey. Growth can very often be painful and unsettling, but it is absolutely necessary

for life. Whatever does not grow is dying—even if it imagines that it still lives. Spiritual growth means intentionally exposing myself to new ideas and experiences and then evaluating them by God's Word; it means allowing the Spirit to replace the dry, unstretchable skin of my preconceptions and traditions with a new spiritual skin, flexible and usable by God.

6. *We must act on our stated desire to grow.* It is much easier to live a life based on rules and commands than to listen for the still, quiet voice of God's Spirit as we move through our daily lives. It is also much more comfortable to have a checklist posted on the wall of our minds than to feel for the gentle wind of the Spirit on our hearts. We feel more comfortable to break down the people we meet and interact with, and the circumstances we encounter, in shades of black and white than to come to terms with the fact that virtually every person and circumstance is a gray mixture of the two.

Like petulant children, we do not want to grow, to give up our childish things and ways of thinking and interacting with God and others. But we must grow if we are to become all that God want us to be. 📖

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LETTERS

Continued from page 4



about why a loving God would allow a considerable minority of His children to have this affliction; yet, in nearly all cases, refuse to answer their desperate prayers to be changed and condemn them to a life of loneliness.

—Carrol Grady, Snohomish, Washington, United States

Israel

I applaud Kim Papaioannou for an article well researched and written ("All Israel Will Be Saved: Establishing a Basis for a Valid Interpretation"—November

2015). His scholarship is beyond my grasp.

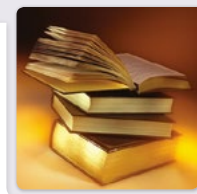
My concern, however, is this: Why are so many scholars reluctant to follow Paul to the conclusion of his thoughts in Romans 11? Might it be if we allowed Paul to finish, we might have to reexamine our favorite "theory" of atonement?

—David Twedt, Wardensville, West Virginia, United States

The article "All Israel Will Be Saved" by Kim Papaioannou follows the

sound theological tradition of the late Hans LaRondelle on the unity of the Christian church with the Old Testament community of faith, thereby forming one covenant people of God. An interesting implication of Papaioannou's truly biblical exegesis of Romans 11:25, 26 is that the very name "Israel" for the modern state of Israel, is a deceptive misnomer misleading millions of Christians subscribing to the unbiblical and futuristic interpretation of dispensationalism.

—Johasn A. Japp, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 📖



Understanding Ellen White

edited by Merlin D. Burt, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2015.

Understanding *Ellen White* is a fascinating new book sponsored by the Ellen G. White Estate that includes some of the latest research from 16 Adventist scholars. Edited by Merlin D. Burt, the volume highlights the historical context in which Ellen White lived. The book also presents current apologetic responses to negative material.

The 17 chapters begin with an introduction about Ellen White's two major themes: God's love and the primacy of Scripture. Chapter 1 discusses the prophetic office in both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), and how the work of a prophet differs from that of an apostle in the NT—even though both offices demonstrate divine guidance from God. The second chapter describes Ellen White's view of inspiration and emphasizes her incarnational view of inspiration. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the relationship of Ellen White's writings to the Bible. The author affirms that Ellen White's "writings were secondary and subject to Scripture" (48) since they must be tested by the Bible even though no difference exists in terms of their source or even degree of inspiration. Chapter 5 suggests nine points that must be understood in order to appreciate Ellen White's writings properly.

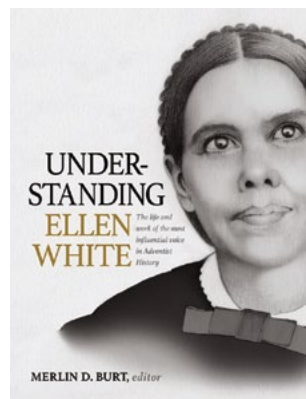
The subsequent four chapters present Ellen White as a human being. They explore her role in the development of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine and even the process through which she wrote. Chapters 6 and 7 argue that prophets cannot control circumstances, situations, places, and times when messages are revealed to them. Chapter 8 explains how Ellen White correlated early Adventist beliefs such as the second coming of Jesus, state of the dead, three angels' messages, sanctuary, and Sabbath doctrines.

No doctrinal belief originated from Ellen White's writings. Her role was

repeatedly to confirm and clarify beliefs as she directed their attention back to Scripture. Chapter 9 examines three aspects about how Ellen White expressed God's messages: spiritual experience, the use of sources, and employing literary assistants (119). The latter two options enhanced, but did not control, her writing process, and she used them to help her best express God's messages that she received.

The next five chapters explore common accusations from critics about why some argue she was not a true prophet. Chapter 10 reviews the history of D. M. Canright, the foremost antagonist against Ellen G. White's ministry during her lifetime. Chapter 11 refutes the accusation that most of Ellen White's writings were plagiarized. Although she did borrow, she was also deliberate in how she used sources in order to best convey the divine message that she received. Chapter 12 surveys the development of Ellen White's understanding about the "shut door."

Chapter 13 discusses 13 statements that, at first, appear to contradict science. They show that Ellen White had "a positive attitude toward the study of science" (180). The book concludes that the principles behind her messages "are valid and readers who follow them in a correct manner are benefited" (193). Chapter 14 notes two arguments as to why Ellen White upheld vegetarianism, health, and ethical concerns. After her 1863 health vision, she applied vegetarianism, although she was flexible to allow for occasional meat. After 1894 she stopped eating meat entirely. Once again, Ellen White's understanding of health




reform developed over time. Perhaps for this reason, she urged health reformers to be patient with others and not to set themselves as a criterion for others.

The final three chapters relate the gift of prophecy to the present. Chapter 15 offers insight into the historical development of Ellen White's wills

as a background for the establishment of the Ellen G. White Estate. Chapter 16 argues that the prophetic gift will continue until the end of time. Some argue that the gift of prophecy could potentially mix with false and true prophecies since there are modern prophets who purport to have such prophetic insight. Such a view has no biblical support. Chapter 17 reveals that there is a tendency toward indifference with regard to Ellen G. White's writings, especially among Adventist youth. The author of that section suggests that Ellen White's writings remain relevant because they bring renewed interest to the Bible and offer practical ways to see the world from a modern biblical perspective.

Altogether, this book provides rich insights into Ellen White's life and thought. One minor quibble relates to the organization of the book. The wide range of topics can make it difficult to grasp the overall contributions and arguments. Perhaps it would be helpful to organize the book into more cohesive units of thought. At the least, a detailed index would enrich any future editions of the book in order to easily locate important concepts or personalities.

—Donny Chrissutanto is a PhD candidate at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines. 

► Leonardo Asoy, Southern Asia-Pacific Division president, succumbs to rare bone marrow disease

Silang, Cavite, Philippines—Leonardo R. Asoy, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD), passed away at age 56 on January 12, 2016, from complications due to myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a rare bone marrow disease in which the bone marrow is unable to produce adequate healthy blood cells.

Asoy was raised in Mindanao, Southern Philippines, and graduated from Mountain View College in 1983 with a degree in theology. His dedication and commitment for the Lord led him to serve as a district pastor and then youth director in the church's Western Mindanao Conference in Ozamis City. He served in the South Philippine Union Conference (SPUC) as youth director, Sabbath School and personal ministries director, and ministerial secretary.

Asoy accepted a call to serve as the director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division Sabbath School/Personal Ministries in 2007. Beginning in 2011



Photo courtesy of Southern Asia-Pacific Division

until July 2015, he led SPUC as its president. Under his vibrant tenure, evangelistic initiatives and practical member programs flourished. At the 2015 General Conference Session, he was elected SSD president.

His wife, **Elma Vasques Asoy**, their grown children, and countless family members and friends mourn his passing and look longingly to the resurrection. [Southern Asia-Pacific Division Communication Department]

Adventist digs included in top TEN biblical archaeology discoveries of 2015

Collegedale, Tennessee, United States—Two of the top ten biblical archaeology discoveries of 2015 reported by *Christianity Today* came from excavations sponsored by Southern Adventist University.

"Archaeological discoveries made public in 2015 have given us new information about biblical events and people," reported *Christianity Today*,



Photo by Nick Lindsay / The fourth expedition to Lachish



a leading Christian magazine in the United States.*

Number five on the list is the Eshba'al inscription found at Khirbet Qeiyafa, located in the Elah Valley in southern Israel. The inscription dates back to the days of Saul and David and mentions a man by the name of Eshba'al, the same name as one of King Saul's sons.

"This name only occurs in tenth-century B.C. contexts in the Bible, which means that the biblical text fits very well with the archaeological data in Judah," said **Michael G. Hasel**, professor of Near Eastern studies and archaeology at Southern Adventist University and a director in the excavation. "It also confirms, with the other inscriptions found at the site, that Hebrew writing was well established in Judah by the early tenth century B.C."

Khirbet Qeiyafa has become the crucial site in the ongoing debate about

the early history of Judah. New data from the site, including this inscription, have established an early date for the monarchies of Saul and David, which some scholars wish to dismiss from history.

Number four on the journal's list is a Canaanite ostrakon found at Tel Lachish. This is the first time a proto-Canaanite inscription was found in the past 30 years of archaeology in Israel. The context of the inscription

was a Late Bronze Age Canaanite temple at Tel Lachish, one of the most important cities of Canaan during the period of the judges. "The fragmentary inscription is very difficult to read but provides important information about the development of the proto-Canaanite alphabet as it progressed from Hebrew, Greek, and then Latin," Hasel said.

[Southern Adventist University/
Adventist Review]

This is the first time a proto-Canaanite inscription was found in the past 30 years of archaeology in Israel.

In the Dominican Republic, Adventist radio station is nationally recognized for its daily family program




Photo courtesy of Radio Amanecer

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic—The Seventh-day Adventist Church's radio station in the Dominican Republic was granted a national award by the government last month for its positive contributions to health on the island. The

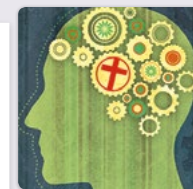
National Medical Award, a recognition granted once a year to doctors and institutions who perform positive contributions to society, was the first that the church's Radio Amanecer received for its daily program called *Let's Restore the Family*.

The one-hour daily morning segment consists of a panel of family therapists who speak on issues affecting the modern family and take live questions on the telephone and social media comments and concerns from listeners. The program has been running for ten years.

Radio Amanecer has been operating through the radio waves for 33 years on the island, reaching 85 percent of the country, with 7.9 million estimated listeners, says **Miqueas Fortunato**, director of Radio Amanecer. [Libna Stevens/IAD] 

* Gordon Govier, "Biblical Archaeology's Top Ten Discoveries of 2015," *Christianity Today*, December 30, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/december-web-only/biblical-archaeology-top-ten-discoveries-of-2015.html?start=1>.

Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is associate director of the General Conference Health Ministries Department, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Willpower: *Essential to keeping good resolutions*

The flurry of making New Year's resolutions is past. Are you still working on them? Or have you become discouraged and disregarded some or all of the items on your list?

Perhaps your list included things like:

- I'm going to relax and not worry so much.
- I will eat less and exercise more so I can lose weight.
- I will spend more time each day in Bible study.
- I'll spend more quality time with my family.

I had to ask myself a question the other day: Why are some of my resolutions the same as last year and the year before? The answer is very disconcerting. They certainly were important and worthy, so I included them again this year.

Our brains have enormous "plasticity." That means we can create new cells and pathways in the most remarkable ways. At the same time, our brains create strong tendencies to do the same things over and over again. These pathways persist for a lifetime, never completely going away.

Lasting change requires establishing new pathways, and that takes a lot of practice. Brain scientists tell us it takes six to nine months to create new pathways that are stronger than the old ones. Sadly, there are no weeklong programs that magically change us for good.¹

We find it easy to make a list of resolutions but far harder to put them into practice. Sometimes though, we fall into common resolution pitfalls like:

- Being vague about what we want. The more specific the resolution, the easier it will be to accomplish (for

example, I will not snack between meals versus I will eat less).

- Not making a serious commitment (for example, sometime this year I will . . .).
- Becoming discouraged and turning slip-ups into give-ups. All of us blow it once in a while. Remember, we only fail when we fail to try again.

To truly change requires willpower, which is a finite commodity that gets depleted as we use it. Yet at the same time, it becomes strengthened by repetitive use. In many ways willpower is like a muscle. Doing a whole lot of pushups and then immediately jumping up to see how much you can bench press does not work. Yes, over time muscles can be strengthened, but in the short run, they get fatigued.

A book by Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*, provides some fascinating insights into how our brains work to bring about change in our lives. Willpower is a precious commodity, so how can we best manage it? The book suggests several ways:

- *Know when it is freshest and strongest.* Willpower is at its peak in the morning after a good night's rest.
- *Spend it wisely.* Prioritize what you spend it on. Do not waste it on insignificant, worthless endeavors. Spend it to cultivate right habits.
- *Be aware of decision fatigue.* Few people are aware of this phenomenon. Yet this affects all of us. The more decisions you have to make, the greater the risk of a foolish one.
- *Set goals, but not too many at one time.* Working on too many changes at one time usually leads to discouragements and failure.

Too often we try to make our resolutions reality by ourselves. The help of family and friends can be crucial to success. However, too often we overlook God in our change process.

The Bible teaches that God is the great restorer of the will. Prayer, Bible study, and meditation on His love restores, and does not deplete, willpower. This one act of will actually replenishes willpower.

"It is our privilege, as children of God, to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. At times the masterly power of temptation seems to tax our willpower to the uttermost, and to exercise faith seems utterly contrary to all the evidences of sense or emotion; but our will must be kept on God's side. We must believe that in Jesus Christ is everlasting strength and efficiency. . . . Hour by hour we must hold our position triumphantly in God, strong in His strength."²

It is for you to yield up your will to the will of Jesus Christ, and as you do this God will immediately take possession and work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Your whole nature will then be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ, and even your thoughts will be subject to Him.³

It is not easy for me to surrender my will and admit that I need His help. Paul said it best in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV).

As I look at my resolution history, I need that help. How about you?

1 For some fascinating insights into how our brains work to bring about change in our lives, see the book by Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

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