

International Journal for Pastors

March 1996



# Interpreting Scripture

*Integrating the  
Elements of Truth*

## In appreciation of *Ministry*

I think very highly of *Ministry* publication, which I often read from cover to cover. The issues that are discussed, as well as the manner in which they are presented, are intellectually stimulating and spiritually enriching. The people on your staff, along with the individuals who contribute articles to the publication, are quite perceptive in their approach to serious matters. This is actually an important distinction.—Paul John Keyishian, Jr., Port Chester, New York

■ Just a brief note to tell you I appreciate receiving *Ministry* magazine. Thanks and God bless you.—Pastor Levie H. Rice, Baltimore, Maryland.

■ Enclosed is a check to be used as you see fit. This is but a wee bit in return for the joy and inspiration I have received from your publication.

After fifty years in ministry I still enjoy being challenged by the material that you present in *Ministry*. Thank you.—Pastor W. L. Hutton (retired), Church of God, San Jose, California.

■ *Ministry* is spiritually meaningful to me. Thanks for faithfully sending it this way.—Harry T. Sinks, United Methodist, Lebanon, Ohio.

■ I have been receiving your journal for several years and have been blessed beyond measure as a result of reading it.

You are doing a superb job. Please keep up the good work.—Rev. M. E. Brantley, Tucson, Arizona.

## Measuring success in ministry

Thank you for printing the article by Steve Willsey "Measuring success in ministry" (January 1996). I appreciate his honesty and your recognition of the importance of sharing his experience.

During a number of years in denominational work I have prayed

earnestly for pastors who did not realize their ambitions. Embittered toward church leaders, ineffective in ministry, critical and unwilling to listen to counsel, even blatantly rebellious—these were some of the negatives observed. Healing, amazing grace shone forth at other times, resulting in positive growth in humility and service after what was at first perceived as painful rejection.

Let's pray for one another, brothers and sisters, in church leadership. Only with the Lord's help can we "die to self" and "rise in newness of life."—Name withheld.

## Cracks in the evolutionary facade

Thanks to John Baldwin for his summary of the new scientific light on biblical creationism. However, a couple of cautions:

If by "strict concordist" Dr. Baldwin means finding science and what Seventh-day Adventists believe about origins in perfect agreement, then most of these scientists won't help us. For example, while some are finding scientific room for belief in a fiat creation, those with whom I am acquainted are not generally fitting it into Bishop Ussher's 6,000 year chronology as Adventists, following Ellen White, have sought to do. So while grateful for their work, we should be cautious when citing them that we do not try to suggest they agree with us in matters where they do not.

Second, we will be disappointed if we expect that these theories will prove the Bible to unbelieving scientists, leaving no room for objection. Science, according to its own method, *must* seek a natural explanation for unexplained phenomena. In many scientific endeavors—let's say, designing an airplane—we are grateful that practitioners adhere to scientific method; an engineer who said, "This wing isn't aerodynamic, but I'm trusting in Divine help to keep the airplane in the air" would not serve us well. So in this instance, we can expect that to the extent the neo-creationists' objections to Darwinian theory are

found valid, other scientists will be seeking natural, non-Divine explanations. Faith will be no less necessary after validation of the new theories than it was under the previous ones.—Loren Seibold, Palo Alto, California.

## Legal Abortion

The Universal Law is to love one's neighbor as one's self. But America is suffering for its failures to heed this law. Legal abortion has ruptured the ties that bind us, delivering the message that human lives have value only when wanted by those more powerful. This has deepened the alienation, anger, rebellion, and hopelessness that feed crime and other social ills. "Every child a wanted child" has made every child a conditional child to immature parents, contributing greatly to postnatal child abuse (contrary to popular myth, abused children were wanted—for the wrong reasons—more often than those not abused). Abortion's easy availability has exposed women and young girls to increased sexual exploitation and subsequent coercion to use this deadly cover-up. It has been disastrous to the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of women, the breast cancer connection alone now killing far more women than illegal abortion ever did. A more powerful vehicle for the abuse, subjugation, and suffering of women could hardly be imagined.

Human history is littered with failed attempts to mistreat others without consequences. How much must it cost us before we concede that the Universal Law is as real and immutable as the laws of physics?—Alfred Lemmo, Dearborn, Michigan.

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**This month's cover** is another example of the thought, superb expressive artistry, and applied skill that have gone into *Ministry* covers for the past three and a half years under Review and Herald cover designer, Trent Truman. This month's issue is the last one Trent will be doing for us. Along with this loss, we will no longer have the services of Jim Paxton, our cover illustrator. Looking at this issue, it is not difficult to feel how much all of us will miss the ministry of these two men. We look forward with anticipation to the work of Harry Knox, our new designer.

An old joke tells of the preacher responding to a critic who questioned his hermeneutics with the flippant reply "Oh, I had those surgically removed 10 years ago."

When we invite readers of all denominations to look over our shoulder, we are inviting you to observe our challenges as well as our successes.

When a Bible-believing denomination grapples with the reality that differences of interpretation can mean differences of application, the struggle over hermeneutics moves beyond either classroom or comedy. No longer are hermeneutical principles something to be endured as a point in passage on the journey from seminary to parish, or a convenient peg upon which to hang nativistic ignorance.

Requesting several scholars to help us struggle with the issues, our team has compiled a group of helpful articles ranging from the technical to the inspirational. Perhaps none are more convicting than George Knight's assertion that we can "prove" more than we intend when we misuse or ignore basic hermeneutical principles.

Our readers of other denominations will better appreciate Knight's thesis within the context of our denomination's fundamental belief that states:

"One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)"

Clergy readers of other denominations who desire additional information about this fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists may request a complimentary copy of the book *A Gift of Light* through our editorial office.



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# Interpreting the Bible: a commonsense approach

Will Eva

Last July, along with thousands of others, I attended the Fifty-sixth General Conference session in Utrecht, Netherlands. It was a great gathering of all kinds of expectant people. Few leave such meetings, however, without significant pondering, replaying in their minds the satisfactions and dissatisfactions that are the natural residue of being together from literally every part of the planet.

Along with many others, my afterglow ponderings centered on the session's discussion of women's ordination. But I want to clarify here and now that my main concern in this editorial is not the question of women's ordination, but a crucial underlying issue that was dramatized in the ordination discussion at Utrecht.

Toward the beginning of the debate two respected scholars presented opposing biblical viewpoints regarding the permissibility of ordaining women to full-time ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In making their presentations, Raoul Dederen and Gerard Damsteegt unintentionally exposed this issue. Let me clarify.

These two men have a lot in common. Both have served or are serving the church as professors at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. They are both longtime Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Each has been exposed to similar biblical perspectives and schools of textual interpretation. Both men come from neighboring European cultures and have each spent years under almost identical theological and cultural influences in the United States. Above all, they have the most crucial element in common:

they both read the same Bible. Yet when asked to articulate their views on whether or not the Bible allows for the ordination of women to full-time ministry, it became clear that their views have little in common.

I am not, of course, taking issue with these men. If anything, at Utrecht they simply portrayed the demography of the church when it comes to our various ways of approaching Scripture, and our resulting facility for coming up with quite widely differing interpretations of the Bible.

## The heart of our challenge

Last July we saw strikingly how the twentieth-century church is confronted with issues increasingly different from those faced during the centuries that cover the biblical time frame. We saw how for this reason our generation finds itself inescapably constrained to interpret and apply Scripture more skillfully and responsibly than ever before. The necessity of having to do this inevitably affects all Christians, regardless of their theological leanings. In this milieu it is not surprising that we tend to disagree among ourselves as to what is valid and what is not in our hermeneutical approach to the Bible, and thus to disagree over what the Bible is saying to us on important issues. All this often leads us to distrust and label one another, to divide and feel alienated.

The concern could be summarized this way: What is the best way of taking the biblical data and laying it upon the contemporary scene so that it becomes clear to us what course should be taken when dealing with particular aspects of truth or situation? And just as important,

how may we do this while still maintaining the integrity and normative authority of the Bible?

Because the articles on hermeneutics in this issue of *Ministry* look at some of the more technical aspects of biblical interpretation, I am purposely taking a more "commonsense" approach. This is done not because I believe that a commonsense approach, without the benefit of careful scholarship, is the interpretive path to follow. Instead, I do it because I feel that the commonsense perspective is one that easily gets lost in the casuistic intricacies of trained scholarship, and needs to be resurrected.

## Two divergent hermeneutical approaches

I want to look at just two of a number of hermeneutical approaches that are presently practiced within Adventist and other communities. The first school of thought tends to focus upon the specific biblical statements and scriptural cases that seem to relate to a given contemporary issue or question. These biblical cases or statements are then placed together and applied in such a way as to throw light on a given issue faced by today's church.

Proponents of the second hermeneutic tend to process the biblical data in such a way as to expose the general principles they find inherent in Scripture. They do this by looking at the Bible as a whole, concentrating upon its central events, trends, and issues. They also search out the historical and cultural dynamics that may have influenced the inspired Bible writer. Combining these findings, they attempt to apply them to any contemporary concern in question.

Those who follow the first hermeneutic tend to view the others as ignoring clear biblical data and rationalizing or compromising undeniable scriptural evidence and authority. Those who follow the second hermeneutic tend to see their counterparts as ignoring the central thrust of the combined biblical evidence while they adhere to positions the Bible never intended to be so dogmatically applied.

### A suggested approach

As we interpret Scripture we must try to be eclectic, adopting what is helpful in both approaches. This suggestion is made not only because we need to come together hermeneutically, theologically, and ethically, but also because we are required by the craft of hermeneutics to weigh carefully and honestly all that is in the Bible relating to a given question.

With this in mind, five commonsense interpretive bases need to be covered:

- Search out the broad principles and movements of Scripture, applying and relating them to any question that we find sufficiently addressed in the Bible.

- Nevertheless, deal seriously and contextually with the statements and cases of Scripture that are relevant to the study we are doing.

- Hold the redemptive act of Christ and its implications as a thematic key to understanding the thrust and progression of the Bible.

- Allow the historical, cultural, and social context surrounding the times in which the Bible was written their due weight in clarifying the text and thus our contemporary situation.

- Adopt a comprehensive willingness to yield to the findings of Scripture, allowing the full biblical text ultimate normative authority in deciding how particular questions of truth or behavior should be settled.

Although this hermeneutic does, for obvious reasons, necessarily appeal to a careful understanding of the historical and social dynamics surrounding the life and times of a given inspired Bible writer, it is definitely based in the

biblical data itself and bows in love and respect to the constraints and authority found there. The truth is that every interpreter of the Bible, regardless of theological orientation, is undebatably forced by the sheer nature of things to address the historical and social dynamics behind the text in one way or another. The question is To what extent and how justly is such a background study done?

### The hermeneutical role of faith

Another crucial and closely related aspect of hermeneutics that often gets lost in the more technical discussions of the subject is the supernatural core reality that comes to life when a person opens the Bible with faith, expectation, respect, and humility. It is clear from Scripture itself and from experience that this dynamic is foundational to making any kind of worthwhile progress in our struggle to understand the Bible. Speaking from a simply human viewpoint, this element may be described as the intuitive faculty of our nature.

A merely rational approach denies, among other things, this important subjective element we human beings naturally use when processing almost any stimulus that comes our way. Yet in many strongly established circles it is considered enlightened to purposely suppress our subjective perceptions in the interests of objectivity. In developing the scientific method, we have tended to become enamored with objectivity, even when studying the Bible. Instead we should have allowed reason, logic, and objectivity their very worthy place in the scheme of things, while doing the same with their natural counterparts—our God-given, instinctive, subjective, devotional side. Truth—and for that matter, life itself—cannot be perceived accurately or completely without the function of this untaught part of our being.

Human beings cannot and therefore do not think in merely logical terms. We are made so that we perceive life and truth through a use of all our faculties. Thus we may say that hermeneutics is

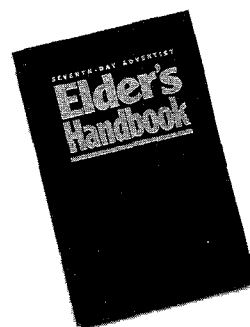
as much an art as it is a science, and that indeed it is much more than art and science put together, especially when the divine realities are present.

After all, what is a sunset, delicate fronds of grass blowing in a summer breeze, or your 1-year-old's delightful laughter without this elemental way of perceiving the full dimensions of such things? And what is truth, the Bible, and the magnificent person and work of Jesus without it?

Can we even know the basics of biblical meaning without a living, responsive, active faith that works from love and brings life back from mere existence? How can we, for example, plumb the depths of that magnificent phrase "God so loved the world" without this crucial element?

It is for us to reassert unapologetically and more consciously this radical faith principle into our struggle to understand the Bible. Then under God we can justly blend it with our honest scholarly pursuits so that handling "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, NIV) will be done with unfeigned insight, integrity, and power. ■

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# The crisis of exegesis

Lee J. Gugliotto

## Six exegetical principles that help our understanding of Scripture



Lee Gugliotto is senior pastor of the College Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church at Canadian Union College in Alberta, Canada. He recently authored the book *Handbook for Bible Study* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD).

In 1675 Sir Christopher Wren laid the foundation stone for St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Thirty-five years later Queen Anne toured the magnificent structure and made her royal pronouncement: "It is awful. It is amusing. It is artificial."

Today some might consider these words humiliating, but not so Sir Christopher. In his day these words meant *awesome, pleasing, and masterful*. Without an understanding of what the words meant at the time they were used, we run a risk of misinterpreting and misunderstanding their original intent. That just about sums up the reason for responsible biblical hermeneutics.

### Meaning of hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting "literary productions of the past." Its special task is "to point out the way in which the differences or the distance between an author and his readers may be removed." And "this is properly accomplished only by the readers' transposing themselves into the time and spirit of the author."<sup>1</sup>

Biblical hermeneutics is the science of biblical interpretation. A study of Scripture should "follow a hermeneutic, a sound system of principles that allows the text to speak for itself through exegesis, a procedure that consistently leads the truth out of Bible texts."<sup>2</sup>

Despite centuries of interpreting Scripture, the Christian community is currently experiencing an exegetical crisis. A shift in presuppositions has generated dissatisfaction with time honored principles of biblical interpretation. "At the heart of much of the debate . . . is the problem of how the

interpreter can relate 'what the text meant in its original historical context' to 'what the same text means to me.'"<sup>3</sup>

Some have advanced the idea that texts should be understood in the context of what it means to me the reader rather than what it meant to the author. Hans Georg Gadamer, the father of this "new hermeneutic," noted that only a merger of two hermeneutical horizons—that of the text and that of the reader—can produce true interpretation.<sup>4</sup> To do this, however, one has either to modify or to do away with conventional exegetical strategies and use methods that generally limit the Bible in authority and scope.<sup>5</sup>

### Principles of sound exegesis

But what is sound exegesis? Exegesis is a process rather than a list of techniques. It consists of a series of analyses that are both cumulative and progressive, with each step building on the preceding one and leading to the next. This tried and proven procedure, if implemented in its entirety, will effectively get to the truth. Any attempt to circumvent the process will likely produce inaccurate results.

Exegesis is also "a process in which God speaks and man listens."<sup>6</sup> Whether God supplied or supervised its writing, the Holy Spirit is ultimately responsible for all of Holy Scripture (2 Peter 1:21). So any biblical interpretation must take into account both the human and the divine dimension of the Scriptures. Berkhof says it well: "In the study of the Bible, it is not sufficient that we understand the meaning of the secondary authors (Moses, Isaiah,



Paul, John, etc.); we must learn to know the mind of the Spirit.<sup>77</sup>

How can we be certain that we are doing correct exegesis? Here are six principles to bear in mind.

**1. Begin with the context.** Context is that body of material that surrounds the text. The general context includes the author, the time, the place, and his or her reason(s) for writing, audience, theme, and key statements. It then traces the author's flow of thought, focusing on natural breaks in the text that divide the book into sections, and isolating related blocks of thought. The immediate context defines the neighborhood of a text, fixes its place in the author's scheme, and uncovers its connection with the rest of the book.

Some consider this to be all the context they need. Such a limitation forces them to adopt historical-critical or historicogrammatical methodologies that cannot put a text's sociohistorical-cultural factors in proper perspective as only a complete contextual analysis can.

Contextual analysis is incomplete until it relates the text to the rest of the Bible. Beyond the local is a canonical context, a single, overarching biblical theme, "that unifies every moment of history into one divine working plan, uniting every biblical verse into a single, powerful message. This all-inclusive motif would thus be the main setting for every Bible study—the ultimate context even for individual verses."<sup>78</sup>

God's self-disclosure "did not complete itself in one exhaustive act, but unfolded itself in a long series of successive acts."<sup>79</sup> Because this divine self-disclosure is attached to the divine activity of redemption, revelation doesn't just occur in history; history is revelation. And since "revelation is the interpretation of redemption, it must therefore unfold itself in installments as redemption does"<sup>80</sup>—historically and progressively.

Thus while the historical context is important, it is equally critical that we take into account God's unfolding plan as it appears throughout the Scriptures. Every word of God is for all God's people regardless of their nationality or era.

**2. Understand each book's unique style.** Each writer has a system and style of his own. Identify the author's special characteristics, the literary-grammatical trail, as he or she organizes views and arguments.

Analysis of the structure of the text helps to focus on the author's ideas from start to finish as they affect the central theme. Take, for example, Jude 3, 4. The two verses are actually a single complex sentence, with three subordinate clauses connected to a main clause. Jude's concerns fall into three areas: (1) occasion (verse 3a); (2) effect (verse 3b); and (3) cause (verse 4). But all these concerns are really building blocks of a single thought.

**3. Focus on particular words and details.** After identifying the author's overall theme and context, we are ready to focus on particular details. Although certain words play a key role in the passage, exegesis requires a careful look at every word, beginning with its root meanings and proceeding to its relationship to the passage, the book's theme, and its relationship to the rest of the Bible picture. For example, compare the uses of the root *aei* ("always," "uninterrupted") in Jude 7 and 2 Peter 1:11. Jude uses the word to describe the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah as *eternal*. Since the fire is no longer active, it is eternal in the sense that its results are irreversible, not that the fire itself is unquenchable. On the other hand, Peter applies the word to the *everlasting* "kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," because the kingdom is *indestructible* and will never end.

Of course, the language of the Bible "should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure [of speech] is employed."<sup>81</sup> As signs, pledges, or tokens that suggest rather than state meaning, symbols often require clarification—even to the writers themselves. For instance, God used food in Acts 10:11-13, not to recommend a change in diet, but to show Peter that he "should not call any man impure or unclean" (verse 28, NIV). The vision simply opened Peter's eyes to the fuller significance of what Jesus had

accomplished on the cross and made him aware of the mission to the Gentiles.

**4. Reconstruct the background to the passage.** Authentic exegesis involves an honest reconstruction of the background to the passage from information within the passage and from reliable outside sources like extrabiblical literature and archaeological findings. The Bible is God's self-disclosure, but "communication apart from cultural influence is impossible. When God spoke to men, He used their cultural situation to help convey to them what He wanted them to know."<sup>82</sup> But in studying biblical customs and their relevance to a Scripture passage, we need to be aware of two extremes: "One tends to level out all features in the Bible, including its cultural institutions and terms, and to make them into normative teaching on par with any other injunction of Scripture. The other extreme tends to jump at any suspected culturally conditioned description in the Bible as an excuse for reducing the teaching connected with that text to a mere report of a now defunct situation."<sup>83</sup>

When handling sociocultural-historical factors, we need to remember: (1) God is the ultimate source of the message (2 Tim. 3:16a); (2) God authorized the entire Bible (2 Tim. 3:16b); and (3) the context is the final arbiter.

Consider 1 Corinthians 14:34. Does Paul say here that women should not speak in the church? The answer seems to be yes, but on closer inspection of the context, we discover a theme. Paul has already advised speakers in tongues (verses 27, 28) and long-winded prophets (verses 30-32) to keep silent too. And verse 35 specifies that it is loud conversation with their husbands, not public speaking, that women should refrain from during services. So what is Paul really saying here?

First, he had a higher purpose in mind than merely singling out these three groups: the end of confusion at public meetings (verse 33). Second, he makes an inspired application of a divine norm to the Corinthian situation, namely, "Let all things be

done decently and in order" (verse 40).

So Paul's counsel for women to keep silent is not a timeless standard, but an inspired example of how to apply a divinely ordained norm to real-life situations. To distinguish timeless truth from what is temporary or contingent, Kaiser suggests the following tests:

■ Is the author describing something, setting a background for an abiding principle, or prescribing something for his or her time and afterward?

■ Is the author using an illustration from the culture of the time to impart a theological principle?

■ Is there a cultural equivalent today for the same theological principle?

■ Does Scripture apply a different form in a later historical situation to the same content?

■ Is the ground for the injunction or practice rooted in God's unchanging nature?

■ Is this an instance in which circumstances may alter the application of an unchanging law?<sup>14</sup>

**5. Apply the broader context of the redemptive plan.** To develop the whole story, an exegete theologically analyzes the passage to take advantage of the local as well as the canonical context. By placing the passage in the broader context of the plan of salvation, the interpreter may trace it along the path from promise to fulfillment—to see where it is coming from and going to. By considering the text's Old Testament roots and/or New Testament developments, he or she finds it possible to use earlier passages to understand later ones and later texts to capture the fuller sense of earlier ones.

**6. Bring out the author's meaning.** Homiletical analysis searches for ways to present what exegesis has learned so that present listeners are able to make sense of the text and reach a decision concerning its message.

Interpretation must aim to understand the text from the situation in the Bible writer's day to what is happening where we are. To accomplish this, we have to strip away differences so that our listeners can identify with the people in

the text. For example, the first chapter of Daniel reports the difficult circumstances of four young Jewish exiles, isolated from their Temple and homes, and subjected to the whims of King Nebuchadnezzar. In modern terms, however, it is the story of teenagers who have been cut off from family, friends, and church and placed at Babylon High, a boarding school with a Babylonian curriculum designed to crank out Babylonian graduates.

By contemporary application like this, you can make your points as "here and now" as possible. The audience must see each point as fresh counsel and not as something over and done with or out-of-date. We must do everything we can to draw the attention away from *then* so that the audience will not miss anything that is happening *now!*

### Hermeneutical principles

Finally we arrive at where we began. Exegesis and hermeneutics are intertwined. Good hermeneutical principles are essential for sound exegesis. The late Gerhard Hasel, professor of Old Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, proposed some general hermeneutical principles that we would do well to bear in mind in order to understand the true meaning of the Bible.<sup>15</sup>

1. The Bible is its own best expositor.
2. The Bible must not be interpreted on the basis of a principle derived from a selected part of Scripture at the expense of the entire message of the Bible.
3. Each passage must be studied within its immediate and larger contexts.
4. Texts (scriptures) must be compared with other texts (scriptures) by the same author.
5. Difficult texts on a given subject must be explained on the basis of those that are plain or clear on the same subject and not vice versa.
6. The unity of the Bible must be maintained.
7. Exegetical possibilities should not be used to establish biblical teaching, church doctrine, and practice.
8. Scriptures that are circumstantial or

culturally conditioned and tied to a command or injunction are not necessarily of limited or temporal application.

9. Some New Testament texts are both contextual commands (injunctions) and normative principles, expressed by appeal to (a) creation, (b) the law, and (c) the argument from the Fall.

The crisis of exegesis can be solved by adopting a sound hermeneutic. ■

<sup>1</sup> L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Lee Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1995), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, in David M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in A. Berkley Mickelsen, ed., *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Hasel, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics, and the Role of Women" (unpublished paper prepared for the Commission on the Role of Women, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Md., March 1988), p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Berkhof, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Gugliotto, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Vos, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 599.

<sup>12</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> Kaiser, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>15</sup> Hasel, pp. 51-54.

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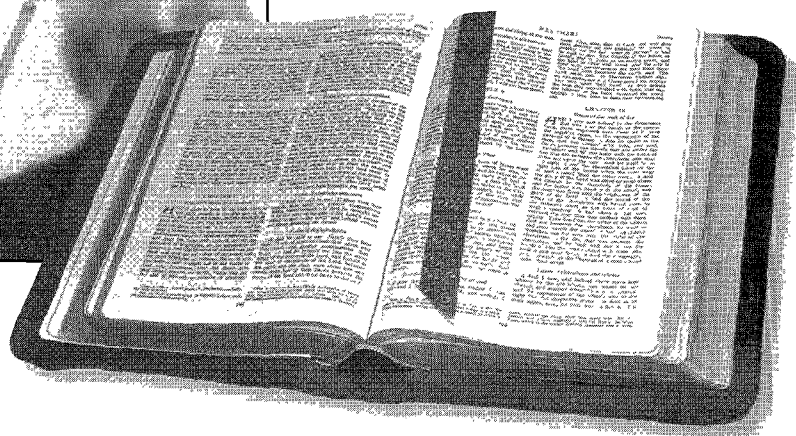
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# How shall we understand the Bible?

**William H. Shea**

## **An examination of historical-critical and historicogrammatical method**



*William H. Shea, M.D., Ph.D., is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.*

**T**wo main theories dominate today's discussion on how to study the Bible: the historical-critical method and the historicogrammatical method. The latter says that we should pay close attention to grammar and language of the Bible, including ancient languages in which the Bible was written. The former would agree with that, but with an addition: such study should be done not only for the sake of language and grammar but also for sources of the biblical text. In the historicogrammatical methodology, history means the canonical history of how the Bible came to us. In the historical-critical method, history means the history of biblical events as they have been recreated and reconstructed by scholars using this methodology.

How should we, then, look at the biblical text? A number of factors bear upon the answer to this question.

### **Language**

The Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek, and no perfect translation is possible. Some Christians believe that we should study and use only the KJV. I honor them for their sincerity, even though it is a bit misguided. At the time the KJV was translated, the translators had less than 20 main manuscripts from which to work. Today, according to the American Bible Society, 5,300 manuscripts, complete or in part, are available for translators. In addition, we have the Dead Sea scrolls. More and more future Bible translations will take into account these scrolls and their fragments. The reason for this is obvious. Before 1947, when these

scrolls were discovered, the oldest copy of the Hebrew Bible was dated A.D. 895. Some of the Dead Sea scrolls come from the first and second centuries B.C.

Naturally, Bible translators must pay close attention to the language of the text. If one really wants to be accurate about the meaning and significance of the language of the Bible, the best procedure to follow is to go to the original. Lacking the ability to do that, try using one of the more literal translations, such as the NASB, NIV, RSV, or NKJV.

### **Literary structure**

Another factor that bears upon the study of the Bible is its literary form. The historical-critical method uses an approach called form criticism. That is not what we are talking about here. We are referring to a modern approach known as structuralism: a type of philosophical linguistics, the order and way in which biblical thought was expressed.

To illustrate: one third of the Old Testament is poetry, and a basic technique of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Hebrew parallelism appears in three primary ways. First is direct parallelism, where the same thought is repeated with slightly different words. Second is antithetic parallelism, which gives the opposite idea in the second line. This is common in Proverbs, such as: "A righteous man is like X, but a wicked man is like Y." Third is synthetic parallelism, which extends the idea with a new idea in the second line.

The poetic technique of parallelism is often used in biblical prose as well. A failure to understand this fact has led

to some misinterpretations of scriptures. When critics see the same idea twice in somewhat different ways, they assign these two passages to different literary sources, sometimes centuries apart.

Consider an example in Job. There each of Job's three friends gives his speech three times. This makes a total of nine speeches, not including Job's responses. Then along comes Elihu with his speech. To the modern literary critic, Elihu's speech comes from a different literary source when in actuality it is simply an extension of the principle of parallelism of thought (his speech says the same thing in a different way, making the same point). To the modern reader, piling up this many speeches of the same type may be boring; to the ancient reader it heightened the climax.

#### Literary sources

Modern literary critics divide up biblical sources. This process has been applied to the Pentateuch. During the past two centuries scholars of the critical method worked out an elaborate system of sources called the documentary hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, there were four main sources—J, E, D, and P—who composed their different narratives or bits and pieces of narratives. These were finally edited together by one editor or a series of editors. According to this approach, the first five books of the Bible were not the work of Moses, nor do they come from his time.

But is this theory correct? Evidence shows it is not. Consider again the book of Job. It begins with prose, continues with long stretches of poetry, and ends with prose. Literary critics hold that the frame story and the prose elements at the beginning and the end were written later than the poetic sections. The theory is that poetry is early and prose is late. Further, it is suggested that the prose narratives came from a different source and did not originally belong with the narrative poems.

One way to check out such a theory is to see whether in contemporary literary sources such a distinction can be found. The code of Hammurabi provides us a

good example as it starts with a poetic introduction, continues with prose, and ends with a eulogy of poetry. Here is the pattern of poetry-prose-poetry from a Semitic literary source of the eighteenth century B.C. The same can be said for a number of Egyptian literary sources that have survived since the twentieth century B.C.

Moses, living in Egypt, was no doubt well aware of this literary technique. The testimony of Jacob is given in poetry in Genesis 49, and its context is that of the circumstances upon which his will and testament were given. The Exodus is told in prose in Exodus 14 and in poetry in Exodus 15. The oracles of Balaam in Numbers are told in a series of short poems set in a prose matrix. Without understanding the poetry-prose-poetry structure common in the time of Moses, to divide up the first five books of the Bible between different and widely separated sources seems arbitrary.

Another major way in which the study of literary structure comes out with a very different answer to textual questions than the sources the literary critics use is a technique known as chiasmus. This word is taken from the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like an X. The technique is really an inverted parallelism. Normal and direct parallelism would follow the order of A:B::A:B. Chiasmus reverses the internal elements in relationship to each other, yielding the order of A:B::B:A. This technique in English literature is called palindrome. The technique was common in ancient Semitic literature.

The Bible uses this technique in a number of places and is significant for deciding literary sources. The Flood story of Genesis 6-9 is a case in point. When literary critics approach this story, they break down the text into 20 small literary units that are supposed to have come, in alternating order, from J and P sources. This was standard doctrine for the documentary hypothesis of the literary critic for more than a century.

Then came the Jewish scholar U. Cassuto with his commentary on Genesis. Cassuto argued that these units actually come in pairs and they form an ascending and descending sequence, a

chiasm. The darkness and clouds of the storm build over the story until it reaches its climax at Genesis 8:1. There the ark lands upon the mountains of Ararat and "God remembered Noah." As is typical of chiasmic structures, the climax of the story is emphasized by its literary order. From that point onward there is a decrescendo in the statements of the story, and they match those in the first half of the story, except that they reverse those statements.

I have added a small observation to Cassuto's excellent work to note that the frame of the story is balanced in a similar order. The frame begins with the genealogical statement for Noah in Genesis 5:32. But this is only half of a genealogical statement. The other half is found in Genesis 9:28, 29. Thus what the author has done is to take the whole genealogical statement and split it apart and insert the Flood story between the two halves of this type of statement. Then comes the story of human wickedness before the Flood in Genesis 6:1-8. This is balanced by the story of human wickedness after the Flood, which is found in Genesis 9:20-27, where it involved the family of Noah itself. People have questioned why this story is in the Bible. Actually, there is a balance here showing that there was wickedness both before and after the Flood. The Flood did not eradicate wickedness, and even in the best and most righteous of families it can still be found. Then comes the second genealogical statement. It is found in Genesis 6:9 at the beginning of the story and in Genesis 9:18, 19 at the end of the story. In these genealogical statements the emphasis is upon Noah's three sons. Thus the frame of the Flood story is:

A. First half of first genealogical statement, Gen. 5:32

B. Wickedness before the Flood, Gen. 6:1-8

C. First half of second genealogical statement, Gen. 6:9

D. The Flood story proper, Cassuto's outline

C. Second half of the second genealogical statement, Gen. 9:18, 19

B. Wickedness after the Flood, Gen. 9:20-27

A. Second half of the first genealogical statement, Gen. 9:28, 29

Why should this type of literary structure be used? And what effect does it have upon the analysis of the story? What it shows is that form complements function. These elements are laid out in a particular way so that they balance and they talk about very similar elements at the beginning and the end of the story. These elements show a relationship, and thus they serve to explain each other.

Now the two contrasting views. On the one hand there is the literary critic who says that there are 20 separate bits and pieces in the Flood story and that it took half a millennium or more to be edited into this final canonical form. On the other hand there is the neat and integrated literary structure of the story, that of a chiasm. What this literary structure shows is that the whole story of Genesis 6-9 is one whole integrated story from which the building blocks could be removed only at the expense of the overall outline and structure. Thus this story is the work of one hand at one time; it did not come from different literary scribal schools working over centuries to complete it. When literary structure is compared with literary sources here, the former shows that literary critics have handled the latter wrongly because of their lack of appreciation of the former.

### Archaeology

In recent years archaeology has opened up new vistas for the understanding of the Bible. Consider the work of Paul-Emile Botta, a French physician working in the court of the Pasha in Mosul in the 1840s. He was intrigued by the large ruin mounds across the river, so he began to excavate there in 1842. Given the size of the ruins that we now know to be Nineveh, he had little success there. So he moved to Khorsabad, 20 miles to the northeast. Even though Botta thought it was Nineveh, it actually was Dur-Sharrukin, or Sargon's-burg. This was the capital city of Sargon II of Assyria (722-705

B.C.). Not only did Botta's excavations open up ancient Mesopotamia to our view; his work also shed light upon one particular verse. Isaiah 20:1 mentions the year that Sargon sent his general to Ashdod and the Assyrian forces with him conquered that Philistine city. Sargon was one of the names of the kings of antiquity that had been lost from later transmitters like the Greek and Roman historians. For that reason, critics of the early nineteenth century held that this was a mistake in the Bible and that some other king was actually to be understood. This misinterpretation was corrected by the findings from Botta's excavation.

A recent sequel to this story is the findings at Ashdod by Israeli excavations conducted in the early 1960s. The excavators found a fragment of a victory stela of Sargon that told of his conquest of the city. Now the puzzle is complete: Isaiah 20:1 is illustrated by findings from Sargon's capital city in Assyria, excavated in the 1840s, and from Ashdod itself, excavated 120 years later.

While archaeology has shed a lot of light upon the biblical history as we now know it, it has also created some controversies of its own. Consider the case of Jericho.

British archaeologist John Garstang's excavation from 1930 to 1936 produced a biblical profile of Jericho. There were the fallen walls and the burned royal palace on the east side of the city near the gate. There were the scarabs from the Egyptian pharaohs of the fifteenth century, the time of Moses and Joshua, according to the biblical chronology for the destruction of that city at the end of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. But the matter was not to rest there.

After World War II Kathleen Kenyon, also from the British School of Archaeology, led an expedition to the site intermittently between 1952 and 1958. She came to the conclusion that Garstang was wrong, that he had misdated Jericho's walls, that the scarabs were unimportant for dating the city, etc. According to her interpretation of the archaeological data, she said that

Jericho suffered massive destruction in the middle of the sixteenth century and was not occupied again until the middle of the fourteenth century, and even then very scantily. Thus according to her, Jericho was occupied neither in the fifteenth century, according to an early date for Joshua, nor in the thirteenth century, according to a late date for him. Thus her interpretation of the archaeological data contradicted the biblical record. Scholars of the historical-critical method welcomed these findings since they had shown that the Bible was incorrect in this major account of the book of Joshua. But that is not the end of the story.

Another scholar, Bryant Wood, traveled to Liverpool, Paris, and Jerusalem to examine Garstang's old pottery bags that are still stored in those places. Kenyon's assertion that there was no occupation of Jericho in the time of Joshua was based on her reading of pottery. Wood criticized her pottery reading on three counts: (1) she paid too much attention to imported painted pottery; (2) she paid too little attention to unpainted locally made pottery; and (3) she missed what painted pottery there was because she did not examine Garstang's pottery bags in detail and because she did not dig in the palace. Imported painted wares were luxury goods and thus were found by Garstang in the palace. Since Garstang had already excavated the palace, Kenyon could only excavate adjacent to it, and the houses there were more normal, ordinary homes that did not contain luxury goods.

The problem now is this: everybody admits that the final destruction of Jericho was a massive event that fits the character of the Israelite destruction there, if the pottery date is correct. Kenyon says the pottery date is not correct; Garstang and Wood say that the pottery date is correct. Who is correct? This can be determined only by examining the pottery.

I tell this story in part to illustrate the problem with getting conservative, Bible-supporting studies published in the liberal biblical press. Wood sent his detailed study of the pottery of the last

stage of Jericho to the literary organ in England for the British School of Archaeology. They rejected the manuscript and would not publish it. Wood thought that would be the most appropriate place to publish it because that was the journal that had published much of Kenyon's work, but they did not see fit to do so. The work has now been accepted for publication by one of the leading American journals of archaeology.

This raises an important point. Scholars who employ the historical-critical methodology often criticize scholars who employ the historicogrammatical methodology as uncritical and subjective, while they characterize themselves as much more objective. My personal point of view is that we should simply put such studies out in the marketplace of ideas. But critical scholars are no more willing to do this than are conservative scholars. This raises the question: Who is objective and who is not?

### Summary

Let us return to the two principal methods in which the biblical text has been examined in recent times. Up to a certain point, the two methods run parallel. Both recognize that the original language and text of the Bible must be taken seriously. Both agree that the study of literary structure is important to understanding the Bible. The two methods diverge, however, when it comes to the acceptance of hypothetical sources that are supposed to lie behind the present canonical text. Historical-critical scholars hold that even though much of the work done from that viewpoint in the nineteenth century can now be recognized as mistaken, nevertheless the framework of those studies, the documentary hypothesis, should be maintained intact. Historicogrammatical scholars reply that if the reasons for the construction of the hypothesis have largely disappeared, the method too should be discarded.

Then there is the matter of history. The historical-critical scholar comes to

the text with a natural bias against the historicity of the events described therein. The historicogrammatical scholar comes to the text with a natural bias in favor of the historicity of the events described therein. How, then, shall the matter be settled? There should be a neutral ground upon which the matters involved could be examined dispassionately and objectively. Unfortunately, there is not.

That brings us back to the matter of presuppositions. It is something of a surprise to see that the subject of hermeneutics eventually comes back to

the matter of presuppositions, but that is indeed the case. As far as the presupposition of the historicogrammatical method, that presupposition is ultimately one of faith. I commend that presupposition to the readers of this journal. When that presupposition is adopted, scholars are freed from their procrustean bed to examine all of the evidence that comes to bear upon the interpretation of God's Word. One is not limited to the use of special sources and forms and an antihistorical bias in order to explore the breadth and depth of God's Word. ■

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# The historical-critical method: the Adventist debate

**Robert K. McIver**

**The debate provides an opportunity to affirm a common ground, avoid the perils, and get on with our primary mission.**

**H**ow shall we understand the Scriptures? The question has been debated in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in recent years. This is not surprising in a church that bases its beliefs on Scripture, for a shift in the way Scripture is approached has the potential to influence significantly many aspects of church life. A recent publication states: "At stake is the very authority of the Scriptures and the continued existence of the Seventh-day Adventist people as a Bible-centered, Bible-based movement and church."<sup>1</sup>

An essential element of the debate is whether it is appropriate for Adventists to use the historical-critical method. In this article I plan to trace briefly the history of this specific aspect of the debate, within Adventist circles, to sketch the concerns of the different parties in the debate, to outline the common ground between the parties, and to close with some of my own personal convictions.

## **History of the debate**

Known as "higher criticism," right up to the early 1970s the historical-critical method was perceived as highly suspect by almost all Adventists who were aware of it. This suspicion is reflected in the 1919 Bible and History Teachers Conference. From that time on, the attitude has surfaced intermittently in some leading Adventists who reveal strong sympathy with many in the Protestant Fundamentalist movement in the United States who oppose higher critical scholarship.

By the 1974 Bible conferences, however, it was clear that the Adventist scholarly community had become much

more aware of the methodological issues raised by the historical-critical method. At the conferences one of the major papers, presented by E. E. Zinke, dealt with an extended history of approaches to the study of the Bible. This paper is a history of biblical exegesis and theology, starting with Origen, dealing with the Antiochine school, and moving through the Reformation to the period of modern theology, beginning with Friedrich Schleiermacher. It also covered the form criticism of Hermann Gunkel (OT) and Otto Dibelius (NT). For Zinke the methodology and conclusions of such writers was clearly "outside" of Adventism, although he showed a clear grasp of the relevant literature. Some of the other papers presented at the conference likewise revealed a knowledge of the issues raised in the general scholarly literature. The historical-critical method was still an enemy "out there," but it was a better-known enemy.

## **The debate in recent literature**

Soon the issue of whether or not Adventists should use the historical-critical method took center stage, particularly during the meetings known as Consultation 1 and 2, held in 1980 and 1981. These meetings between church administrators and Bible scholars took place at a time of theological and administrative ferment in Adventist circles. Both consultations considered the appropriateness of the historical-critical method. At Consultation 2, for example, each of the discussion groups addressed the issue: "Should an SDA college or university

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employ as a Bible teacher a person committed to the historical-critical method [including such methods as form criticism, redaction, criticism, tradition criticism]?" According to the minutes, several of the groups suggested that the terminology, historical-critical method, was so easily misunderstood that perhaps Adventist biblical scholars should adopt a different name for what they did. Several of the methodologies, however, were generally considered helpful if used apart from their negative antisupernatural presuppositions.

Since these consultations, there have been several important Adventist studies dealing with the legitimacy or otherwise of the historical-critical method. The December 1982 issue of *Spectrum*, under the theme "Ways to Read the Bible," ran two articles advocating that it is possible to use the methodology without its antisupernaturalist presuppositions. Gerhard Hasel's 1985 book *Biblical Interpretation Today*<sup>2</sup> was written "to describe in as succinct a fashion as possible the origin and growth of the historical-critical method and its usage today," as well as to develop a more suitable methodology appropriate for Adventists.<sup>3</sup>

The 1986 Annual Council voted to approve the document "Methods of Bible Study."<sup>4</sup> This document rejects any use of the historical-critical method as classically formulated, although it does carefully outline that biblical study should take into account the original language, historical context, and literary form of the passage concerned.

The year 1987 marked the formation of the Adventist Theological Society, with its clear "criteria" for membership based on certain beliefs, including the following: "I reject the use of any form of the 'historical-critical' method in biblical study."

While Aiden Thompson's book *Inspiration*<sup>5</sup> is about the more theological topic of inspiration of the Scriptures, at times it does deal with issues of methodology and approach, and on occasion specifically with the historical-critical method. Some involved

in the hermeneutical debate have perceived this book as the archetypical product of historical-critical methodology. At the 1991 meeting of the Adventist Theological Society this book was discussed at length, and several of the papers from that meeting have been included in their publication *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*.

The debate is not over.<sup>6</sup> However, within the literature discussed above, several key concerns emerge. It is to these we now turn.

#### **The key issues: one view**

Several recurring themes evident in the literature raise the alarm against the use of the historical-critical method by Adventists. First, such writers emphasize the danger of putting human reason above Scripture. For Adventists, Scripture is God's Word and the source of authority, not human reason. A related problem for many is the element of subjectivity that inevitably accompanies any human sifting of a particular passage of Scripture.

A second danger is that the historical-critical method removes the divine from Scripture, leaving only the human. This has the effect of causing the exegete to lose sight of the overall unity of Scripture, which in turn reduces the spiritual value of Scripture.

In their reaction to Thompson's book, published in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, several of the writers take exception to his willingness to find contradictions and downright errors in the Bible. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim deals with the issues of numbers and provides a possible reconciliation of the different numbers recorded for the two different accounts of the census of Israel done by David, as well as a defense of the statistic that 2 million Israelites left Egypt (pp. 51-60). Randall W. Younker criticizes Thompson for ignoring other possible explanations for the date of the Exodus, Amram's prolific brothers, and the universal flood (pp. 174-193). The basic concern that appears to underlie these and other defenses of the historicity of the biblical account is that religious truth is related to historical

truth. If the Bible is not true in the history it presents, then how can it be true in anything else that it says?

Finally, there is serious concern that the acceptance of the historical-critical method will inevitably lead to acceptance of its presuppositions. In other words, use of any of the methodology means a writer or researcher is in effect agreeing with the principles of "scientific exegesis," such as correlation, analogy, and criticism as defined by Ernst Troeltsch.<sup>7</sup> Thus the concern is that any use of the historical-critical method means an antisupernaturalist stance and is therefore an abandonment of retaining a faith relationship with the Bible as the Word of God.

#### **The key issues: another view**

Other thought leaders in the church express a different set of concerns. First, there is the concern that our doctrine of inspiration and our methodology be consistent with what we find in the Bible and not be something forced on the Bible despite the evidence. They point out that even though the liberal scholars were the first to bring attention to these matters, we still should not allow that to blind us to the fact that there is a distinctive human component in Scripture and that there is *both* an underlying unity together with an actual diversity of viewpoint in the Bible. For example, the four Gospel writers, as Brunt points out,<sup>8</sup> do emphasize different things as they report on the same historical events or teachings of Jesus. At the root of this concern is the traditional Adventist value of truth, although this specific concern is, as stated below, common to both sides of the debate. These are matters growing out of the nature of Scripture, and we must not hide from them.

Second, there is a pastoral concern for what will happen to those who have been given an inadequate view of Scripture. Will they lose their faith unnecessarily when they actually read the Scriptures for themselves and find that they are different from what they had been led to believe? In this, one

can often hear the pain of the writers. Many of them have had to work through this specific issue in their advanced degree studies. They have had to come face-to-face with the phenomena of Scripture and been forced to attempt to reconcile these phenomena with their conservative stance toward the Bible.

Third, there is the insistence that one can use many of the tools of modern exegetical methodology without accepting the antisupernaturalistic presuppositions.

### Is there any common ground?

Everyone agrees that the stakes are high. But amid the heat of controversy it is possible to miss seeing the large amount of common ground that almost all of the participants share. First and foremost, this is a debate among Adventists, and therefore all participants share a common background. This background normally includes a common Adventist schooling and Adventist professional ministerial training. Almost all involved in the discussions have been pastors for part of their career, and almost all have had a background in teaching. All in the debate are committed to the Adventist Church and desire its prosperity. They share in a common quest for truth.

Second, their Adventist roots and the essence of their personal faith have endowed them with a conservative approach to the Scriptures. All would readily agree on the power and presence of the supernatural and the reality of miracles and that the Bible is foundational and normative to their faith and practice. All would vehemently reject the extreme skepticism of such scholars as Ernst Troeltsch and Rudolf Bultmann.

Third, all agree on the divine/human or incarnational model of inspiration. They might criticize their Adventist partners in dialogue for overstressing either the human or the divine aspect, but both sides of the discussion agree that the inspiration of the Bible is like the incarnation of Jesus: a union of the divine and the human. All wish to

emphasize that the Bible is the Word of God and that there are human elements in Scripture.

Finally, all agree that a knowledge of archaeology, history, original languages, and the like facilitate a better understanding of Scripture.

The debate centers partly on whether or not these should be called by the label "historical-critical method" and partly on the legitimacy of some of the more radical approaches that can be taken to Scripture. But this debate should not obscure the fact that many of the same approaches and information bases are used by all participants.

### As I see it

A characteristic of early Seventh-day Adventists was their willingness to debate important issues freely and openly. Therefore, because the issue of how to understand Scripture is so fundamental to the very basis of Adventist belief and practice, the current discussion regarding hermeneutical method is to be welcomed, if, that is, it is conducted in an open manner.

There is, however, a danger in serious debate over important issues: that of dividing the participants into "good guys" and "bad guys." We must not ignore how this has happened in the experience of other denominations such as the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. This "them and us" attitude makes it all too easy to assume one's own side has all the right, while the other side is quite wrong in most everything it says. All too easily the debate degenerates into each side taking up a position and defending it against all comers, while doing everything possible to outwit and outmaneuver the "opposition." But each side of this debate has legitimate concerns, most of which are shared by all the participants. Indeed, one could even question whether the large amount of common ground shared by participants in the debate might not mean that what we have here is not so much an impasse as an opportunity to find a better basis from which to work.

I would also wish to stress the danger

of uncritically accepting of the assumptions shared by many liberal scholars who use the historical-critical method. As Adventists we cannot adopt an antisupernatural approach to Scripture. To the best of my knowledge, no participant in the debate thus far has suggested that we should. So while we are interested in the historical background of a passage of Scripture, we do not limit our understanding of events as things merely historically conditioned. Adventists wish to maintain that the Bible *is* the Word of God, a record of God's acts within history.

On the other hand, I would like to stress the dangers inherent in some approaches to Scripture. For example, a faith in the Bible that is based simply on its inerrancy is very fragile. It can be destroyed by only *one* discrepancy that cannot be explained to the satisfaction of the individual believer. Adventists rightly wish to maintain a conservative attitude to the Bible. They are inclined positively to the historical and theological information contained in it. But it is important to avoid a one-sided overemphasis on the divinity of the Bible, because there *is* undeniably a human dimension to Scripture. Our theory of inspiration should not be one that has to be imposed on Scripture. We should study the Bible to see what an inspired book is like, not bring a preconceived notion of what it should be like.

Finally, may I suggest that it might be time to drop the terminology "historical-critical method" from the debate. The term is so loaded and so often misunderstood that it has come to be an inadequate description of what is under consideration. One group uses the term in one way, and another uses it differently. Indeed, a good part of the heat of the debate grows out of this matter of definition. To me, it would be much better if we abandoned debate about the "historical-critical method" and focused our attention on how we all might understand Scripture better.

This is a suggestion that has been made before,<sup>9</sup> and I acknowledge that

it will not instantly resolve all the rather complex issues surrounding our approach to the Bible. It would, however, remove one of the larger causes of misunderstanding in the debate so that attention can be focused on the essential elements.

The debate concerning the best way to understand the Bible is one of critical concern to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As with all such debates, there is a significant opportunity for the church to advance in its understanding of truth. There is also the risk that the church will step away from where the Spirit would lead it. ■

<sup>1</sup> Frank B. Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds., *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> See *Ministry*, April 1987, pp. 22-24.

<sup>5</sup> Alden Thompson, *Inspiration* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1991).

<sup>6</sup> The spring 1993 volume of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* has two articles dealing with the dangers of the historical-critical method: Gerhard Hasel, "The Origin of the Biblical Sabbath and the Historical-Critical Method: A Methodological Test Case" (pp. 18-46), points out that if one accepts the dating of the different Old Testament writings assigned by historical critics, then the reasons for believing in the divine origin of the Sabbath would be fatally compromised. Bruce Norman's article, "Presuppositions: The Key to the Formulation of Biblical Doctrine" (pp. 47-54), concludes that "the acceptance of the historical-critical method, even in whatever modified form, will inevitably mean the acceptance and use of its presuppositions" (p. 59). See also Mario Veloso, "Modern Scientific-Critical Method—A Testimony," *Adventist Perspectives* 6, No. 2 (1992): 29-35.

<sup>7</sup> See Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today*, pp. 73-78. Troeltsch's "scientific" exegesis involves three principles: correlation, analogy, and criticism. Correlation means that events should be explained in terms of historical processes, not in terms of supernatural intervention. Analogy means that history is homogeneous and that sociological and economic models developed to explain contemporary societies are of use in explaining the ancient world. Criticism means that our judgments can claim only probability, not truth.

<sup>8</sup> See Brunt.

<sup>9</sup> See George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 35-40; I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 84-86; Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 136-150.

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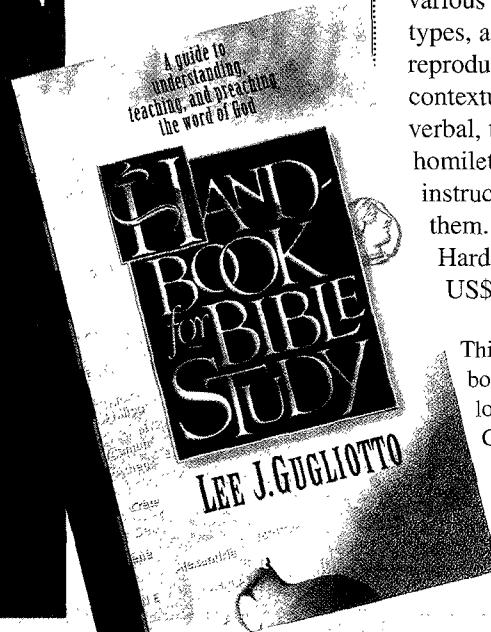
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**CRISIS**

# The crisis of divorce

**Robert Peach**

**Divorce is no longer a distant statistic. It is people within the congregation, needing pastoral help.**

**F**or a while I thought I was going crazy. Sometimes I'd cry for hours. Then I'd get scared, I mean really terrified. Once I found myself fantasizing about killing myself and my mate. That was when I began to think I was really losing it.<sup>1</sup>

"I had a knot in my stomach for weeks. I knew I was on overload, but didn't know how to get off of it. There were so many major decisions to make, and my feelings were like riding a roller coaster. I felt like a frayed knot."<sup>2</sup>

These are voices of pain. Voices that describe the trauma of divorce. But is divorce a crisis? Consider the definition of crisis offered by Swihart and Richardson: "It is the disequilibrium produced by a perceived threat or adjustment that we find difficult to handle."<sup>3</sup> If this is the definition of crisis, few experiences in life qualify for the label "crisis" as much as divorce. Its impact thrusts disequilibrium not only upon two persons, but on many others. The difficulties brought about are often devastating.

Holmes and Rouhe's life-change scale, measuring the level of stress in a person's life, places divorce and marital separation second and third from the top in their stress-causing impact, the top being the death of a spouse.<sup>4</sup> Research indicates that psychiatric admissions and suicide rates are higher for those who have suffered divorce than either single or married persons. Illnesses are also more frequent as the immune systems of divorcing people are impacted by the toxic stress attendant to divorce.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Epstein, social science researcher on divorce, says, "To go through a divorce is still, no matter how smooth the procedure, no matter how 'civilized' the conduct of the parties involved, no matter how much money is available to cushion the fall, to go through a very special private hell."<sup>6</sup>

Statistics show that in the United States divorces equal almost half the number of weddings performed each year. A 300-member congregation could expect one or two divorces a year. Thus an average pastor will have to deal with the crisis of divorce every now and then. Paul's counsel is appropriate for pastors: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2, RSV). Wherever there are burdens, pain, and fear, wherever people need to know that God loves them, wherever they need to be encouraged with God's investment in their lives—there the pastor must bring the ministry of healing.

This article will deal with the pastoral ministry in the crisis of divorce. It will deal with goals for intervening, losses in divorce, stages of grieving, divorce complexities, and finally, the role conflict encountered by pastors ministering to the divorcing.

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*Robert Peach, D.Min., is the director of the Kettering Care Center and its Ministry Care Line program.*

## Goals of intervention

Among others, six of the following goals are essential for pastors to be aware of as they minister in a divorce situation.

1. *Listen carefully* to whatever pain and frustration is expressed.

2. *Ensure safety.* Make sure that the parishioners are not at risk of hurting themselves or someone else.

3. *Assess the possibility of saving the marriage.* Because a couple is talking about divorce in forceful and emotional terms, do not assume that there is no chance of preserving the marriage. The crisis situation means that people are often being reactive and irrational. Ask them to think of any possible changes that could allow continuing the marriage.

Talk to each spouse privately about the relationship. This eliminates the possibly provocative presence of the partner and encourages a rational discussion of issues. In some cases a suggested reading about the effects of divorce might be beneficial.

4. *Focus on making quality decisions.*

5. *Assess the person's coping skills.* If necessary, suggest how they could fortify their emotional strength and behavior.

6. *Make an effective referral for professional counseling, if appropriate.*

## Handling losses

Divorce obviously leads to many kinds of losses, some obvious, some not so obvious. Pastors need to identify these losses and minister to the ones hurting. Some of the losses that require pastoral attention are loss of self-esteem, identity, role mastery, and nurturance. Pastors can employ powerful resources to help a person handle such losses. It is important to communicate that the pain divorcees suffer matters to God and to other Christians.

## Grieving the divorce

From the time divorce happens through to recovery involves seven stages: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and rebuilding.<sup>7</sup>

Shock comes with the fact of separation or divorce. A certain emotional numbness insulates the person from reality. Then the individual moves into a stage of denial in which he or she behaves as if the divorce was not really happening. Anger often follows denial as emotions become more forceful to deal with the reality of the situation. As the couple faces the reality, they may attempt to bargain with the facts. This could be good if they are willing to change their own relationship-harming behavior. If the strain is allowed to continue and relationships are continually subject to hurt, a stage of depression may set in. However, if the couple see that their marriage is ended and begin to work at a bargain, they are ready for the next stage, acceptance.

The couple accept the reality of the death of the marriage.

The spouse is not coming back again. The relationship, as it once was, is dead. And even though there may be continuing contacts because of shared children, there is no longer a marriage relationship. The final stage is rebuilding. In this stage a person is able to move into the future without the old relationship. The individuals, hopefully, face themselves, accept the change, and achieve the growth necessary to prevent the problems of the past from arising once again.

## Understanding divorce complexities

Another way to consider how the pastor can be a helper in the crisis of divorce is by understanding the multiple aspects of its complexity. As Paul Bohanan points out, there is (1) the emotional divorce, (2) the legal divorce, (3) the economic divorce, (4) the co-parental divorce, (5) the community divorce, and (6) the psychic (or personal identity) divorce.<sup>8</sup> One might add, as David Thompson does, a seventh: the spiritual divorce.<sup>9</sup>

In crisis counseling, pastors need not assume process responsibility for each of these multiple aspects of divorce. This would be the task of more in-depth counseling. Pastors, however, would want to understand that any of them singly or in combination could precipitate an emotional crisis. People respond differently to the different aspects of divorce. Knowing something about the various components of the divorce will prepare the pastor to intervene most effectively.

*The emotional divorce.* This aspect is easiest to recognize because it is the most expected. Common sense indicates that emotional relationships, forged over many

years, will not be easily altered in a short time. What surprises people is the unexpected *intensity* of such emotions. If two have become one, even in a relatively restricted sense, severing the relationship will produce significant pain. Anger, fear, guilt, loneliness, relief, happiness—a roller coaster of emotions is possible.

Pastors should be especially observant of “relapses” of destabilizing emotional turmoil erupting some time after the divorce is initiated or even after it is final. Adjustments and confusion can continue for some individuals for a number of years after a divorce, even after a person has remarried. If the person becomes too dysfunctional, pastors need to be more directive, objective, and specific with them to ensure their safety and immediate needs and those of any dependent children. However, always encourage them to assume responsibility for their own life and decisions. This is often hard for pastors if their divorcing parishioner is pressing, “Tell me, what should I do?” Provide them with various alternatives for their consideration. Let them weigh the options carefully and make decisions for themselves. People want advice from their pastors, not decisions.

**Divorce leads to many kinds of losses. Pastors need to identify these and minister to the ones hurting.**

*The legal divorce.* Attorneys, judges, and the courts are there to complete the legal process. But things can become very complicated. The legal divorce brings with it the resolution of many specific issues: child custody and visitation, economic support, property division, rights to retirement plans, etc.

The judicial system is based upon an adversary relationship. That is to say, there is a plaintiff, who claims to have been wronged, and a defendant, who is accused of perpetrating the wrong. Even in states with no-fault divorce laws, it is unusual for the two sides to approach resolution of legal issues in a nonadversarial way. It is easy to escalate emotions and pain in the adversarial environment. Pastors can help by recommending attorneys whose orientation is to minimize an inflammatory adversarial approach. Such attorneys may be found in your own church, through the recommendation of other clergy in your community, or a local Christian counselor. Suggest the couple put off the legal process until they have determined that there is no hope of reconciliation. If they are responsive, refer them immediately to a local Christian marriage counselor.

*The economic divorce.* Two households cannot be maintained as economically as one. Financially, things will be tighter than before the divorce. Experience indicates that it is the woman who suffers more in terms of the economic divorce. Alimony is less frequently given today than in the past. Even if the wife receives some alimony, it will often be for a limited time. It is quite common for the custodial parent to receive child support, but collecting it is not easy. Worries and fears might be significant but hidden behind a facade of "everything's just fine." Here the church can be a wonderful support, with short-term financial help, baby-sitting, recommendations for employment, food, etc.

*The co-parental divorce.* Children can suffer terribly over the divorce of their parents. Young children have a tendency to assume responsibility for the divorce. "Daddy left because I didn't clean up my room like he told me to last week." This is a terrible burden for a child to bear. Adults are often unaware of this, and it is recognized only when they are tuned in and listen carefully. Christian educators must be alerted to the pain through which their young students might be going. Assure them their parents' divorce is not their fault. Also, children can become the unfortunate pawns in the unresolved emotional battles still being waged between ex-spouses. Encourage divorcing parishioners not to use their children as weapons in any unresolved battles. Help them find better ways to deal with their anger and hurt. Help them recognize that under normal circumstances their children need them *both* to be involved in their lives.

*The community divorce.* Fellow church members, friends, neighbors, relatives, coworkers, and almost everyone around a divorcing couple are affected by the crisis. Many divorcing people withdraw from their network of support when they most need it. Others aggressively force mutual friends to choose whose "side" they are on. For some people, divorce places their jobs in jeopardy.

*The personal identity divorce.* Redefining and accepting themselves as a divorced person is another complexity of the divorce crisis. The individual must learn to think about himself or herself in new ways. It takes time for people to reach this stage of adjustment.

*The spiritual divorce.* Resolving the damage that can occur in a divorcing person's relationship with God is important. Questions about the sovereignty of God, why He allows bad things to happen to people, His trustworthiness, are often part of the divorced church member's baggage. There also might be issues of repentance and forgiveness, and the challenge of surrendering one's feeling for revenge. A listening ear is critically important. At times people in crisis express their anger against God. This can be very challenging to pastors.

## Pastor's role conflict

Being free to do pastoral care for the divorcing is critical. However, this ministry is often impeded by the conflict that exists for many pastors between their roles as people helpers and as administrators of church discipline. God hates divorce (see Mal. 2:16) and the pain it causes His creatures. The church seeks to acknowledge this fact through its ecclesiastical regulations. However, pastors, as they try to be both confidential counselors to the divorcing and administrators of church discipline, can experience frustrating role conflict. This role conflict must be addressed if pastors are to be effective helpers of the divorcing people within their congregations. A pastor cannot be both confidential counselor and administrator of church discipline. It is an untenable dual relationship.

I believe that the pastor must choose which of the roles will be dominant in his or her ministry to a divorcing person. If a counseling role is chosen, then the task of administering church discipline must be clearly on someone else's shoulders. If, however, the pastor bears the discipline responsibility, then it is critical that the divorcing parishioners understand. The minister can do pastoral care, but will have to arrange a referral to a local marriage professional for confidential counseling. ■

<sup>1</sup> John P. Splinter, *The Complete Divorce Recovery Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Judson J. Swihart and Gerald C. Richardson, *Counseling in Times of Crisis* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> See Diane Medved, *The Case Against Divorce* (New York: Donald I. Find, Inc., 1989), p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> See George Levinger and Oliver C. Moles, eds., *Divorce and Separation: Context, Causes, and Consequences* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pp. 185-192.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Epstein, in Medved, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> Splinter, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Bohanan, in Levinger and Moles, p. 181.

<sup>9</sup> David A. Thompson, *Counseling and Divorce* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), p. 81.





## CONTINUING EDUCATION EXERCISE

## The crisis of divorce

1. In what ways does a divorce represent a crisis?
2. Who can be significantly affected by a divorce crisis? Why?
3. Make a list of all the people affected by divorce in your congregation during the past 12 months. How could you have helped these people cope with their crises?
4. What goals should a pastor have in mind when intervening in a divorce crisis?
5. Make a list of several counselors and attorneys to whom you might appropriately refer people affected by a divorce crisis.
6. What arrangement could be created in your congregation that would eliminate the conflict between the role of pastoral counselor and discipline administrator?

## Suggested reading

1. Medved, Diane. *The Case Against Divorce*. New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc., 1989. Written by a clinical psychologist with extensive research background in divorce, the book helps couples look at some hard facts about divorce. Not written from any religious bias. A helpful book for couples open to preserving their marriage.
2. Oden, Thomas C. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. Cambridge: Harper and Row, 1983. An overview of pastoral practice from a current, historical, and theological perspective. Sections on pastoral counsel and crisis ministry are very helpful for clergy.
3. Splinter, John P. *The Complete Divorce Recovery Handbook*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992. Provides programs, methods, procedures, a pastor could use in the ministry to those involved in a divorce.
4. Swihart, Judson J., and Richardson, Gerald C. *Counseling in Times of Crisis*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987. Good overview of counseling ministry in crisis circumstances.
5. Thompson, David A. *Counseling and Divorce*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989. Part of Word's Resources for Christian Counseling series. Helpful summary of main issues to be considered in pastoral counseling to the divorcing.
6. Weiner-Davis, Michele. *Divorce Busting: A Revolutionary and Rapid Program for "Staying Together."* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992. Written by a well-known marriage and family therapist. Examines the problems encountered by divorcing people and suggests a brief therapy approach to solving marital issues.

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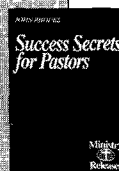
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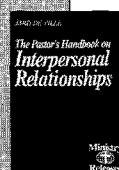
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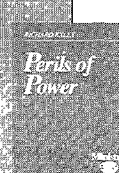
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# “Outsiders” in a hearing church

Joyce Rigsby

## How shall we minister to deaf individuals?



Joyce Rigsby is a freelance writer from Hanford, California.

I've worshiped in Adventist churches from Cape Town to Cairo, from Addis to Ife. I've enjoyed old brick churches and new grass churches. As a missionary child and later as a wife, I've always felt *a part* of the church—until I lost my hearing. Now I struggle with feeling *apart* from church.

An estimated 95 percent of the deaf community are unchurched. And yet they are souls to be won, persons to be reached with the good news. But the church has failed in its responsibility. Deaf people have become outsiders in a world controlled and conducted by those who can hear. “Deaf people, though, are not alone in their status as outsiders. Many groups of people have had to contend with a world that was largely created, and now is controlled, by someone else. . . . Therefore understanding the deaf as outsiders in a hearing world increases our understanding of other outsiders as well. Further, drawing on the experiences and situations of other outsiders is likely to help us understand the deaf.”<sup>1</sup>

### The way it was

Aristotle believed that those “born deaf become senseless and incapable of reason.” Socrates, fortunately, had a different vision: “If we had neither voice nor tongue, and yet wished to manifest things to one another, should we not, like those which are at present mute, endeavor to signify our meaning by the hands, head, and other parts of the body?”<sup>2</sup>

For hundreds of years it was believed that anyone who could not speak had no soul. There were even separate cemeteries for “soulless” deaf persons.

When Cardan, the sixteenth-century philosopher-physician, suggested that the understanding of ideas was not dependent upon *the hearing* of words, the idea struck his peers as revolutionary. It took almost 200 years more for Cardan's insight to be put into practice, when Abbé de l'Épée, a Frenchman, took upon himself the task of teaching deaf people.

De l'Épée met deaf-mute twins and could not bear the thought that they would live and die without ever knowing the Word of God. He “paid minute attention to his pupils . . . acquired their language . . . and by associating signs with pictures and written words, he taught them to read, and . . . opened to them the world's learning and culture. . . . For the first time, it enabled ordinary deaf pupils to read and write French, and thus acquire an education.”<sup>3</sup>

Schools patterned after his method spread throughout Europe. In the early 1800s Laurent Clerc, himself deaf but well trained in teaching deaf pupils, left Europe for the United States to join Thomas Gallaudet in his work. In 1817 they established the first school for deaf children in America at Hartford, Connecticut. By the middle of the century, schools multiplied all over the country, and more than 40 percent of the teachers were deaf themselves.

For decades the goal of deaf education was to teach the students how to speak. Samuel Gridley Howe and Horace Mann wanted to do away with sign language schools. Alexander Graham Bell, whose deaf wife did not want to identify with others who were deaf, also advocated oralism. The

International Congress for the Deaf in Milan (1880) passed a resolution against the use of sign language in schools. But pure oralism threatened the learning freedom of deaf children and the employment of deaf teachers.

It took another 100 years for linguists to accept sign language on a par with spoken language. But the stress on vocalization as opposed to communication during those years meant that thousands of deaf children reached adulthood "undereducated."

It was the Episcopalians who took the lead in meeting the religious needs of the deaf community in North America, beginning in 1841 by establishing educational centers in major Eastern cities. In 1874 the Lutherans opened the Evangelical Institute for the Deaf in Detroit. In 1906 the Baptists, under the direction of John Michaels, "headed south, and entered the foray between the devil and the deaf."<sup>4</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a slow start in its ministry for the deaf populace, even though Ellen G. White wrote in 1875 that our duty to persons with disabilities was "God's test of our character."<sup>5</sup> Of course, there had been individuals who had shown a burden for deaf people. But it was not until 1954 that the General Conference asked the Home Foreign Committee to "develop workers to preach the present truth in sign language." The first deaf Adventist minister, Arthur Griffith, was ordained in 1970.<sup>6</sup> Several more have been ordained since then.

### The way it is

The need for direct ministry to the deaf community cannot be over-emphasized. The present demographics and challenges in this area can be summarized as follows.

*The deaf population.* The House Ear Institute in Los Angeles has estimated that 10 percent of Americans are deaf or hard-of-hearing. William Yount estimates that in any given area the deaf population "approximates 0.1 percent of the overall population of that area."<sup>7</sup> And then there are those who wish to

remain unidentified and those who lose their hearing after language acquisition and those whose hearing loss is moderate.

*Lack of opportunities.* Many deaf people have grown up with little or no participation in the decisions affecting their lives and thus have not learned to take responsibility for themselves. They face unemployment at a rate three and one half times that of the general population. One of their frustrations is that they are not hired, promoted, or fired solely on the basis of their ability and job skills. Potential employers fear possible communication problems and often conclude that something other than deafness is wrong.

Not many deaf individuals speak well enough to be understood by most people. One deaf man who could speak said, "You can never relax when you don't hear what you say." Besides, "lipreading is a precarious and cruel art which rewards a few who have mastered it and tortures the many who have tried and failed."<sup>8</sup> It is actually a combination of observation, inference, and inspired guessing. At most 30 percent of speech is on the lips. So outside of the deaf community a deaf person often receives only fragmentary information or one-way communication.

*Additional pressures.* The deaf community has three additional pressures that other cultural minority groups do not have. They need to overcome the negative stereotype that goes with a label of medical pathology. They need cultural reinforcement because a majority belong to a different cultural group than their hearing parents. They have to overcome the challenges of learning a sign language.

*Christian Record Services.* Our church has come a long way in meeting these challenges. In 1980 the church began Deaf Services at the Christian Record Braille Foundation, which in 1989 was reorganized as Christian Record Services (CRS). Unfortunately many in our church, clergy and laity alike, are amazed to learn CRS has anything to do with deaf ministry. The deaf branch in Lincoln, Nebraska, is

very active, but there are only four workers with a worldwide task. CRS is a good resource center in which materials are prepared and printed for deaf individuals, but there is not adequate personnel to plan and implement evangelism for those with hearing loss.

*Church fellowship.* According to a CRS list, between 40 and 50 Adventist churches in the United States make interpretation available. Myron Widmer wrote in the *Adventist Review*, June 20, 1991: "Lack of provision for the deaf in most churches is what is keeping many deaf persons from either joining the Adventist Church or attending once they become members."

While I don't believe that every church can or should have a deaf ministry, I am saddened that more are not ready to receive deaf worshipers with confidence and love. Most members don't know what to do with us. Some time ago I visited a large church. My confidence that there would be an interpreter was misplaced. Later the gracious young receptionist shared her embarrassment with an older deaconess. "No one ever told me what to do if a deaf person came." Can that church better accommodate other types of disabilities?

Working with the deaf constituency poses a unique mix of challenges. The North American Division probably has less than 1,000 deaf members. These members are scattered, with little chance for Christian fellowship that includes communication. It takes a very strong person to give up the social life available in the deaf society outside the church when there is nothing in the church to replace it.

Because of gaps in their educational background, many deaf persons are not able to pick up a book like *The Desire of Ages* and read with understanding. Fortunately CRS has translated it into easy English. They also translate Sabbath school quarterlies.

*New opportunities.* Despite these challenges, now is a favorable time to be deaf. Modern technology affords deaf persons telephone usage via

telecommunication devices (TTY). SDAs On-line helps deaf Adventists keep in touch with what's going on in the church. Laptop computers can further improve communication. Closed captioning on television is another helpful tool.

### The way it could be

The ministry to the deaf community can make a difference only as we on all levels become *aware* and *concerned*. Perhaps the following suggestions would help.

*Structure.* Leaders need to change the present denominational structure if the deaf work is to succeed. Such modification should receive input from the deaf, and should transcend local conference boundaries to cover larger areas such as a union conference.

Deaf Adventists are widely scattered, and the only time they get together in any number is at deaf camp meetings. Members who can afford to go, travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to attend. For many, it is the only time they hear the message directly from the preacher. Last year a deaf group from Arkansas totaled their car on the way to camp meeting at Milo Academy in Oregon. They were so eager for Adventist fellowship that, despite bruises and cuts, they boarded a bus for the rest of the trip.

A new structure could encourage deaf ministers to function as itinerant preachers, all answerable to one organization (such as CRS), instead of to different conferences, as now.

*Better communication facilities.* More conference offices should have TTYS. Where a competent interpreter is not available, a skilled typist with a laptop computer could type most of the sermon as it is being preached. If there is a large group of deaf worshipers, the computer could be hooked to a suitable monitor. One church transcribes the sermons for deaf members. Pastors could provide notes, outlines, or even typed sermons. Developing technology will open the way for further services for the deaf.

*Educating hearing members.* Hearing members have a role to play in the ministry to deaf persons. They need to understand the needs of deaf individuals. They could read books on deafness, available in local libraries. They could learn sign language. Churches can become more user-friendly for the sake of deaf members and visitors.

Upon request, Thompson Kay from CRS conducts workshops to help churches set up ministries for the deaf community. These seminars can be adjusted to specific needs and include how to find deaf interests in your local area and how to conduct Bible studies.

Explore ways of communicating with deaf people even if you don't know American Sign Language (ASL). Your desire and creativity are the only limiting factors. Learn the ASL alphabet and finger spell. Be willing to use pad and pen. Phone a deaf person on relay services available through your phone company. Better yet, buy a TTY for your church and call direct.

John Blake, a hearing minister in Canada who has two grown deaf children, has a dream that hearing and deaf members will join together and sponsor closed captioning for the Media Center programs—maybe making that a Global Mission project. In his conference a group of deaf believers are already saving for this.

The ministry to the deaf community is a challenge that can be met only when we all join forces to reach out to them. The church should never have any "outsiders." ■

<sup>1</sup> Paul C. Higgins, *Outsiders in a Hearing World* (Troy, N.Y.: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 27, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Jack R. Gannon, *Deaf Heritage* (Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of the Deaf, 1981), p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 3, p. 511.

<sup>6</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), p. 380. (Italics supplied.)

<sup>7</sup> William R. Yount, *Be Opened* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976), p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Shanny Mow, in *American Deaf Culture*, ed. Sherman Wilcox (Silver Spring, Md.: Linstok Press, Inc., 1989), p. 35.



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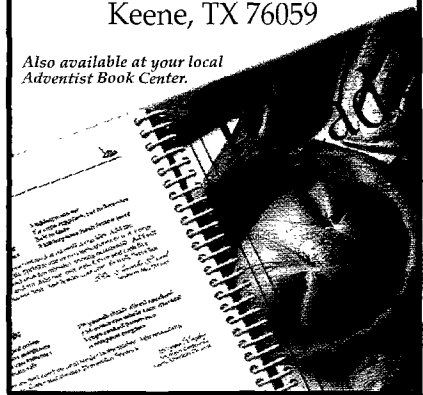
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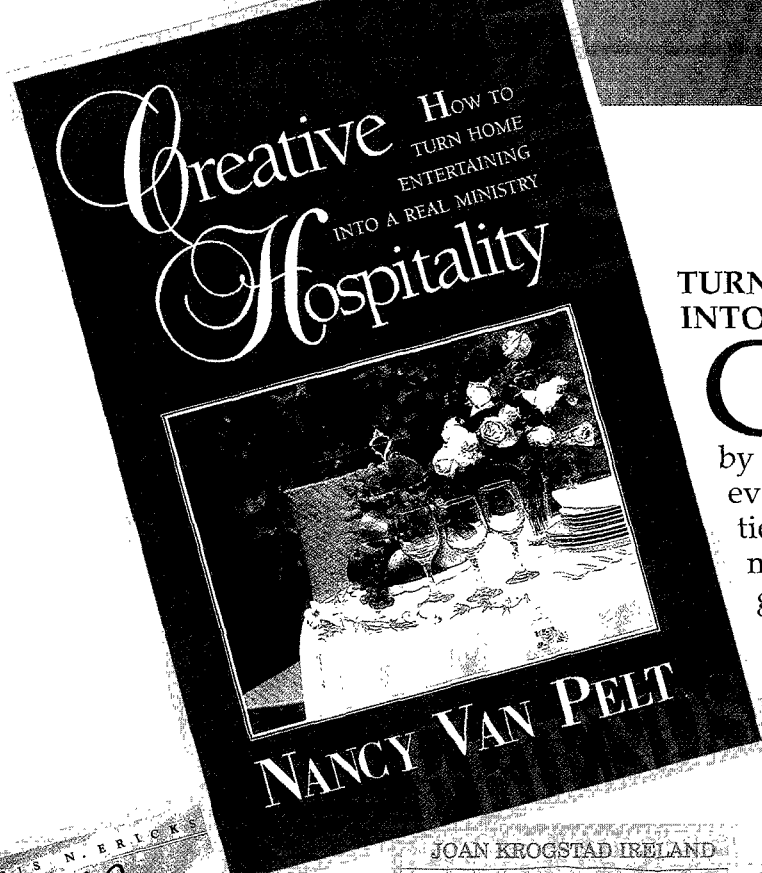
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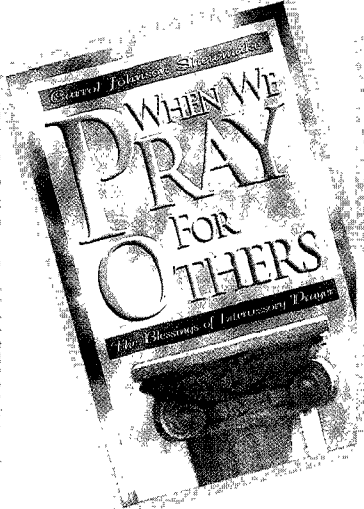
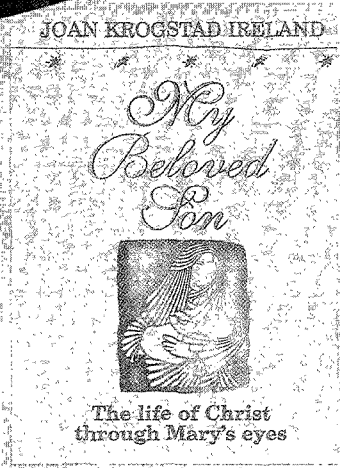
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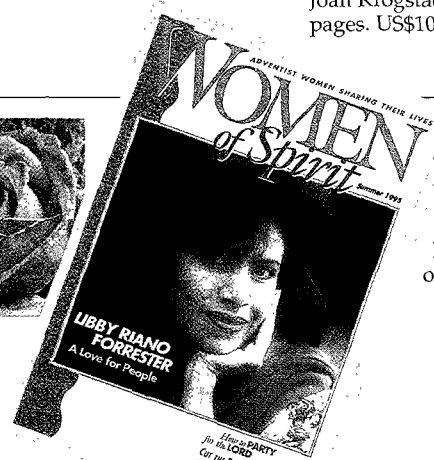
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# Proving more than intended

**George R. Knight**

**There is a major difference between using the Bible to prove a point and developing a sound biblical argument.**



*George R. Knight is professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

**S**urprising as it may seem, we sometimes prove more than we set out to if we extend our methodology to its logical conclusions.

## **The case of jewelry**

For example, some have argued that one of the best reasons for modern Christians not to wear jewelry is that we are currently living in the antitypical day of atonement.

In the Old Testament the annual Day of Atonement was the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar. It was a day of self-examination, judgment, and cleansing. And it wasn't just a day for the priests to offer special sacrifices. Every individual had to be involved, lest he or she be "cut off." Repeatedly the Israelites were told to "afflict" themselves on that most solemn day (see Lev. 16:29, 30; 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7, RSV). "Whoever is not afflicted on this same day shall be cut off from his people" (Lev. 23:29). It was a serious day indeed.

"The commandment to 'afflict yourselves,'" writes Gordon Werham, "underlined the need for every individual to examine himself and repent of his sins."<sup>1</sup> Others have argued that part of this affliction would be humility and plainness of dress. Thus those truly searching their hearts would put aside their jewelry.

I find this to be an interesting position. But it seems to me that it is simpler to prove that one shouldn't have sex on the antitypical day of atonement. After all, Leviticus 15:16-18 says that those who have sexual intercourse are ceremonially unclean until evening. That implies that they would be disqualified from performing the religious duties of the annual Day of

Atonement. When that interpretation is extended to the antitypical day of atonement, it becomes even more fascinating. It is one thing to not have sex on a holy day; it is quite another not to participate in it during the entire time of the antitypical period. Of course, those with a proclivity toward such an application can also find eschatological justification for their position. After all, doesn't Revelation 14:1-5 teach that the 144,000 will be "virgins"? While some may jump for joy over such an interpretation, others would probably see it as more "affliction" than they are happy to deal with.

Of course, it is even more easily proved by the above line of logic that all work is forbidden on the antitypical day of atonement (Lev. 23:28, 30, 31; Num. 29:7). But while that point is most easily proved, the average mind doesn't find its consequences nearly so interesting to contemplate as the no-sex argument.

At this juncture it is important for me to point out plainly that I am not arguing either for or against jewelry, sex, or work. My point has to do with the proper use of Scripture. Specifically, I am pointing out that we sometimes inadvertently prove more than we intend through our use of logic as it relates to the Bible. It is important also to note that I do not doubt the sincerity of those who have set forth such arguments. The issue is one of methodology rather than sincerity. There may be excellent arguments against the use of jewelry (and sex and work) in the Bible, but it seems to me that the argument related to the antitypical day of atonement is not one of them. Typology (as is also true of parables), while valid for many inferences, has definite limitations.



### The case of the ordination of women

Another illustration of an argument that proves more than intended has to do with the ordination of women. The Seventh-day Adventist Church (along with several other denominations) has seen a great deal of argumentation on both sides of the topic for the past few years.

One speaker recently based his argument against women's ordination on the fact that the Adventist Church is a church of the Bible and thus "God's Word must be our focus." Given that solid foundation, he quite appropriately quoted Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

He next guided his hearers to the "timeless message" of 1 Timothy 2, emphasizing especially verse 12: "I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man" (paraphrased). That was followed by a threefold argument favoring male leadership.

This speaker was quite certain that Paul's advice had nothing to do with culture. To the contrary, the counsel was set forth as a universal moral imperative, and transgressing it means nothing less than "the derailment of a mission-driven church."

The real issue, he asserted, was that we trust the Bible writers. At that point the argument became even more intense and certainly more interesting from a hermeneutical perspective. "Now, the question is," he said to his audience, "How do we interpret the Bible?" His reply was that *the Bible doesn't need interpretation*. Or, as he put it: "*The Word of God is infallible; accept it as it reads. We have plenty of counsel about the danger of modifying God's instructions. . . . What we need as Seventh-day Adventists, friends, is submission to the Word of God, not reinterpretation*" (italics supplied).

Subsequently, he cited Ellen White as saying that "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms." He concluded his study in part by claiming that he was against the ordination of women to ministry because "*it violates*

*the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures by not accepting Scripture as it plainly reads*" (italics supplied).

### What was really proved?

There is no doubt that he was speaking the honest convictions of his heart. Yet I sat dumbfounded as I read and contemplated his forceful presentation. For one thing, 1 Timothy 2:12 says absolutely nothing about ordination. Then again, I could hardly believe the presentation came from a Seventh-day Adventist; maybe a conservative Calvinist, but not an Adventist. After all, Adventists have the phenomenon of Ellen White. *I was struck full in the face with the fact that if one accepted his presuppositions, what had actually been demonstrated was that Ellen White is a false prophet.*

Roger Coon illustrates my point well when he relates his experience with an itinerant evangelist who came to Napa, California, and placed a large advertisement in the local newspaper promising to destroy the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a presentation on Thursday evening and demolish their prophet the following week. Coon attended both sessions. In the second the evangelist "proved" the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a false church because one of its primary founders was a woman who defied the teachings of the apostle Paul forbidding women to speak in Christian churches.

Adventists, for obvious reasons, have always resisted that interpretation. The church has traditionally justified Ellen White's public ministry by noting that the counsel given about women being silent in church in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 was rooted in the custom of time and place and was not to be woodenly applied now that conditions had changed. Thus, as *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* puts it: "Because of the general lack of private and public rights then accorded women, Paul felt it to be expedient to give this counsel to the church. Any severe breach of accepted social custom brings reproach upon the church. . . . In the days of Paul, custom required that women be very much in the background."<sup>2</sup>

Let's return to our Adventist speaker and examine a bit more carefully his use of 1 Timothy 2. The first thing to note is that he read only that portion of the passage that suited his purpose. The words immediately preceding the partial verse he quoted were: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission" (1 Tim. 2:11, NIV). And the words immediately following the "timeless message" he read merely reinforce that sentiment. His paraphrase also left out the words "to teach or" since his only focus was on the restriction dealing with "authority." Let me quote verse 12 in full: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (NIV).

Now it is obvious that if one is testing everything in the strictest sense by the words of the law and the testimony, and if one is not "modifying" God's instructions (or reinterpreting them), but simply accepting Scripture as it "plainly reads," then it is a necessary conclusion that Ellen G. White must be a false prophet of the most serious type.

To put it mildly, she seldom remained silent in church. In fact, she *taught authoritatively to men and women everywhere she went*. She was the ultimate transgressor if in fact 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 is expressing a "timeless message" that doesn't need interpretation.

Let's face it: after one examines all the arguments on headship and/or the significance of Eve's sinning before Adam—and after one is exposed to all the fine points of argument coming from the biblical Greek and Hebrew and the scholarly German and French—the plain fact is that the Bible says in unmistakable English that women are not to teach, that they are to be silent.

Of course, if one's hermeneutic allows for the consideration of the time and place in which Scripture was written, then the problem isn't nearly as serious. But our friend allowed himself no such out. Thus he is stuck with the fact that when tested by a "plain reading" of the Bible, Ellen White is a false prophet. *He had proved more than he intended.*

On the other hand, if one concedes that the part about silence needs to be

“modified” a bit (should I be bold enough to say “interpreted” or “contextualized” to time and place?), then one must also grant that such license *must* be extended to the whole verse. But that, of course, would lead to an undermining of the *entire* argument. While that might seem frightful to some, the only alternative is to be stuck with a false prophet.

The fine points of my argument seem to have been missed by two recently published books that follow the same general line of argument as discussed above. Both see 1 Timothy 2:11-14, along with the somewhat parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, as being crucial texts in the case against ordination (even though neither passage mentions the topic), both see the issue as being one of biblical authority, and both take the position that the Bible can be faithfully read only *as it is*.

Having said that, however, they immediately begin to modify and interpret the part about women being silent in church. As one of the volumes points out, “the issue here is not muzzling women into silence.” The other book claims that the 1 Corinthians passage certainly *doesn't really mean* that women have to be silent in church, since that “would contradict other Pauline teaching.” “The conclusion is that the restriction” on women speaking in church “must be in reference to *authoritative* teaching that is a part of the pastoral *office*, the position of leadership and spiritual authority over a congregation.”

Now, that is an interesting interpretation, but it doesn't get Ellen White off the false prophet hook. After all, she spoke quite authoritatively even to the leading ministers both in the church and out. In fact, she found herself often enough in public conflict with male ministers, and managed to argue quite authoritatively in spite of Paul's injunction.

It is an interesting point that for some years Ellen White held ministerial credentials and her credentials were those of an ordained minister, even though she was never technically ordained by the laying on of human hands. She was (and is) the most

“authoritative” minister the Seventh-day Adventist Church has ever had. If anyone in Adventism—male or female—has ever spoken with authority, it has been Ellen White.

When the second volume comes to explaining the significance of the statement about women being silent in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, it arrives at the apex of modification and adapted interpretation. “What is prohibited to women,” our author tells us, “is teaching in the worship services as a part of the ecclesiastical office of pastor, which involves the exercise of spiritual authority. *Women who are asked to participate in worship services, whether by praying or exhorting, do so on the basis of the authority delegated by the male pastor who holds the ecclesiastical office and whose spiritual authority is derived from Christ*” (italics in original).

So much for not interpreting, and for reading just the plain words of the Bible.

Even that *massive reconstruction of the text* doesn't get Ellen White off the hook. She exercised spiritual authority in public and in private, and her hearers were both male and female. Of course, people can continue to finesse their definitions so as to make Paul come out with their conclusions, but doing that is hardly a reading of the “plain words” of the Bible. And such a procedure most certainly fails to follow its own hermeneutical method to its logical conclusions.

### Some final thoughts

Before moving away from the stimulating topic of women's ordination, perhaps I should share one more argument that proves more than intended. One day in my pastoral formation class one of my students came up with the “airtight answer” to the issue of women's ordination. “Read the Old Testament,” said he. “Every ordained priest was a male.”

“True,” I replied, “but you have proved too much if you stick to your argument. If you follow your logic, you will have to conclude that very few, including you, are biblically eligible for ordination, because the Old Testament

approved only the ordination of male Orientals. And even at that, not just any Oriental would do. They had to be Hebrew, and then only of the Aaronic line of the Levitical family.”

“Well,” say some who want to extend the argument, “look at Jesus. He appointed only male disciples.” True, but it can just as truly be argued that He appointed only non-Diaspora Jewish disciples. Let's be faithful to the logic of our own arguments.

“But,” says another, “Paul was a male from the Diaspora who was ‘kind of’ a disciple, even though not one of the twelve.” Yes, but some of the original non-Diaspora male disciples might point out that Paul is where all the trouble began. After all, look at the problems he raised when he began to apply the gospel to the context of first-century Gentiles. He nearly split the New Testament church. “But,” yet another suggests, “that's why Paul's experience is in the Bible. With him all justifiable contextualization must cease. After all, you can't go to extremes on this business of applying the Bible to new times and places.”

And the arguments can go on and on. And they will.

In closing I want to say again that the topic of my article is not jewelry, sex, work, or the ordination of women. Rather, it is a caution to examine the full consequences of our theological method lest we prove more than we intend; it is a plea to be faithful to our own logic and to the totality of the texts selected to demonstrate our point. Thus jewelry and ordination merely provide contemporary illustrations that prompt a call for the sound use of Scripture. After all, *there is a major difference between using the Bible to prove a point and developing a sound biblical argument*. A “high view” of the Bible demands a wholesome hermeneutic. ■

<sup>1</sup> Gordon J. Werham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957, 1980), vol. 7, pp. 295, 296.



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# How do you handle truth?

James A. Cress

*"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).*

When desiring to encourage, or even to mandate, increased Scripture study, pastors and evangelists everywhere have utilized Paul's admonition to the young minister. With typical proof-text fervency, we have used the text as an imperative to require Bible study in terminology that almost says "saved by the work of study" in order to gain God's approval.

While I have no doubt that God approves of Bible study and uses this process as the primary method of communicating His will to humanity, I'm convinced that this text has greater implications than merely stressing the requirement of scriptural study.

Without diminishing a commitment to encouraging both members and potential converts to study, or my conviction that God does, indeed, approve of studying His Word, the greater issue requires much more of me. The initial, easier reading compliments me for orthodoxy—rightly dividing the word of truth. The second, more challenging, reading requires me to journey into the depths of my own soul—to ask how the truth has impacted my life and to apply the searchlight of Scripture to my own personal life.

**Does God approve?** Removed from the easier imperative to measure time spent in study, this question inquires as to whether my study has impacted my behavior. Can I measure

my actions, my motives, my accomplishments, and my attempts on the scale of God's approval? Can I honestly face the query "Does God approve?" regarding my own behavior?

One of the greatest applications of this principle is the theme of Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps*. In this classic, members of a congregation purpose, before embarking upon any action, to ask themselves the question "What would Jesus do?" Then as the story unfolds, the radical claims of the gospel affect their actions.

This is our need as ministers today. Personally, I need to daily ask, "What would Jesus do?" As I meet individuals I should first determine how Jesus would respond. His example should be my guide in treating individuals.

Personally, I've discovered that determining that which God approves is not the difficult task. The demanding responsibility is that asking if God approves means I must act in harmony with the conclusion. Too often I am tempted to want God's endorsement more than His approval. My temptation is to pray for the success of my ventures rather than to risk changing my plans based on the hard conclusion.

**Am I ashamed?** When the apostle spoke of an unashamed workman, he had experienced the reality of his assertion. As a maker of tents, the quality of Paul's workmanship determined his financial success. Prospective purchasers would tug the seams and test the stitching of Paul's products. Not only the immediate sale, but his long-term reputation stood or fell on this inspection. Can

my work withstand close inspection? Would I be ashamed for someone to know the shortcuts I take or the opportunities I skip?

**Is it the truth? Is it the truth rightly handled?** Rightly dividing the Word means more than correctly parsing the original language. The NIV admonishes the pastor to be one "who correctly handles the word of truth."

First, I have the responsibility to make certain my proclamation is accurate. My assertions must be based on God's Word and must reflect God's intent. Proof-texting my way to the conclusions I wish may appear to be based on the Word, but fail to reveal the intent of Scripture.

Courts of justice expect witnesses to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is not sufficient just to tell the truth partially. Teachers of the Word must tell the whole truth, and the implication of "nothing but the truth" means their testimony must not be compromised by half-truths or crucial evidence that has been withheld. No wonder the same apostle, Paul, warns that not all should seek to become religious instructors.

Beyond accuracy, I have a further responsibility to handle the truth carefully. A member once approached me with his concerns about the life of a fellow parishioner. He spoke the truth. There was no doubt about the accuracy of his assertions. But he failed the larger responsibility to speak the truth in love! In fact, the most unloving thing possible was to broadcast the truth of which he was certain.

Scriptural study, if anything, must impact my relationship with Jesus and His creation in real-life daily existence. Hermeneutics confined to academia are dangerous; liberated in service, they are beautiful, life-filled, and life-giving.

In life as well as hermeneutics, when tempted to seek the easier course of proof-text answers, it is helpful to remember that the challenge of the gospel is to seek heaven's more demanding, in-depth intent behind my initial reaction. ■

## Kettering CPE residencies

Kettering Medical Center in Ohio offers four positions (\$15,500) in a one-year residency in clinical pastoral education (CPE) beginning August 28, 1996. The program is designed for persons who wish to improve their pastoral care and counseling skills for parish ministry or to obtain certification in specialized ministry, such as hospital chaplaincy. A seminary degree (preferably Master of Divinity) and at least one unit of basic CPE are prerequisites for the residency.

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For further information and application forms, contact Chaplain Henry Uy, Kettering Medical Center, 3535 Southern Boulevard, Kettering, OH 45429. Or phone 513-296-7240.

## Happiness to-do list

From my 49 years of ministry, I would like to suggest the following seven-point "happiness to-do list" for pastors:

1. Choose to ignore an insult. This saves you from being consumed by negative energy.

2. Interrupt your routine once in a while. Try new ways of getting ready in the morning, new roads to drive to work, new strategies to organize your time. This will open you up to new ways of solving problems.

3. Stop judging others. It will only distance you from people.

4. Confront the things you fear. Whenever you avoid

dealing with something, ask yourself why. If it's because you fear failure or how you will look to others, force yourself to try it. You can learn valuable lessons.

5. Give up your anger. Channel your excess energy by running, working out, or writing in a journal. Understand why you're angry, learn from it, then move on.

6. Learn to forgive. Don't let past negative experiences hinder you from moving ahead with your life and relationships.

7. Smile more. If you're doing all of the above, smiling will become a natural part of your life and make you more approachable.—Dan Tohline, Jonesboro, Louisiana.

## Overhead song scroll

Partially sighted people may find it easier to read text from an overhead projector than from a hymnbook. Joybells has prepared plastic sheets that may be scrolled on many overhead projectors. Children delight in keeping the "musical river" flowing in time with the tune.

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## Pastoral day of prayer

For a long time I wanted to pray meaningfully for each family unit in our congregation. This finally became reality with my "day of prayer." I pray for one family per day, Monday through Friday (holidays and vacations excepted), until I go through the entire congregation.

A few weeks beforehand I write the family a personal

letter informing them of my plans on a particular day to have special prayer for them. My letter is handwritten and "chatty." I may comment on current events in my life or theirs. For those involved in the ministry of the church, I may write a "thank you" for their hard work. Along with every letter I include a special form I've drawn up that has spaces for them to send me their prayer requests. I place all this in the church mailbox for these families, stapled with an envelope addressed back to me, marked confidential. Our members have a couple of weeks to send me their prayer requests. I've found about half do so. I keep a master list in my devotional Bible so that each morning I will be praying for the designated family.

Many positive responses have come from the congregation thanking me that intercessory prayer has a high priority in my ministry. I also have benefited, since through these prayer requests I get to know my people more intimately. Some are struggling with things I never would have known. Others ask me for my personal requests and pray for me. (One lady, bless her heart, each year includes a \$10 bill, telling me to take my wife out.)

I save the prayer requests and the following year return them and ask the people to note how God has answered them. For many, this is ex-

citing.—Henry A. Ozirney, Stonewall, Manitoba.

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John and Beverley Carter are from the "Land Down Under". They have seen tens of thousands of Russians and Ukrainians accept Christ during the past three years.