

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication July-September 1987

## The Church Aflame





Being with people who share your ideals is as important as a good education, say Cheri and Melody, who met at WWC.

## Friendships didn't bring Cheri here — but they'll keep her here.

When Cheri came to Walla Walla College, she didn't know anyone. But not for long.

Cheri met Melody in speech class and they became instant friends — friends who can keep each other awake to study accounting until midnight, who double date, who play mud football with the guys and top it all off with a weekly

scoop of Baskin-Robbins ice cream.

"We have a lot of fun doing things together, but our friendship goes much deeper. We talk about where we're going in life and how to make the best of it. We talk about

God. It's great to find someone who feels the same way you do — someone you're not afraid to talk to or pray with."

"We may not solve the problems of the world but it's good to have someone there who cares, listens and understands."

"I have a common bond with my friends here. They help me be the kind of person I want to be."

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# THE CHURCH AFLAME

## Studies in Acts

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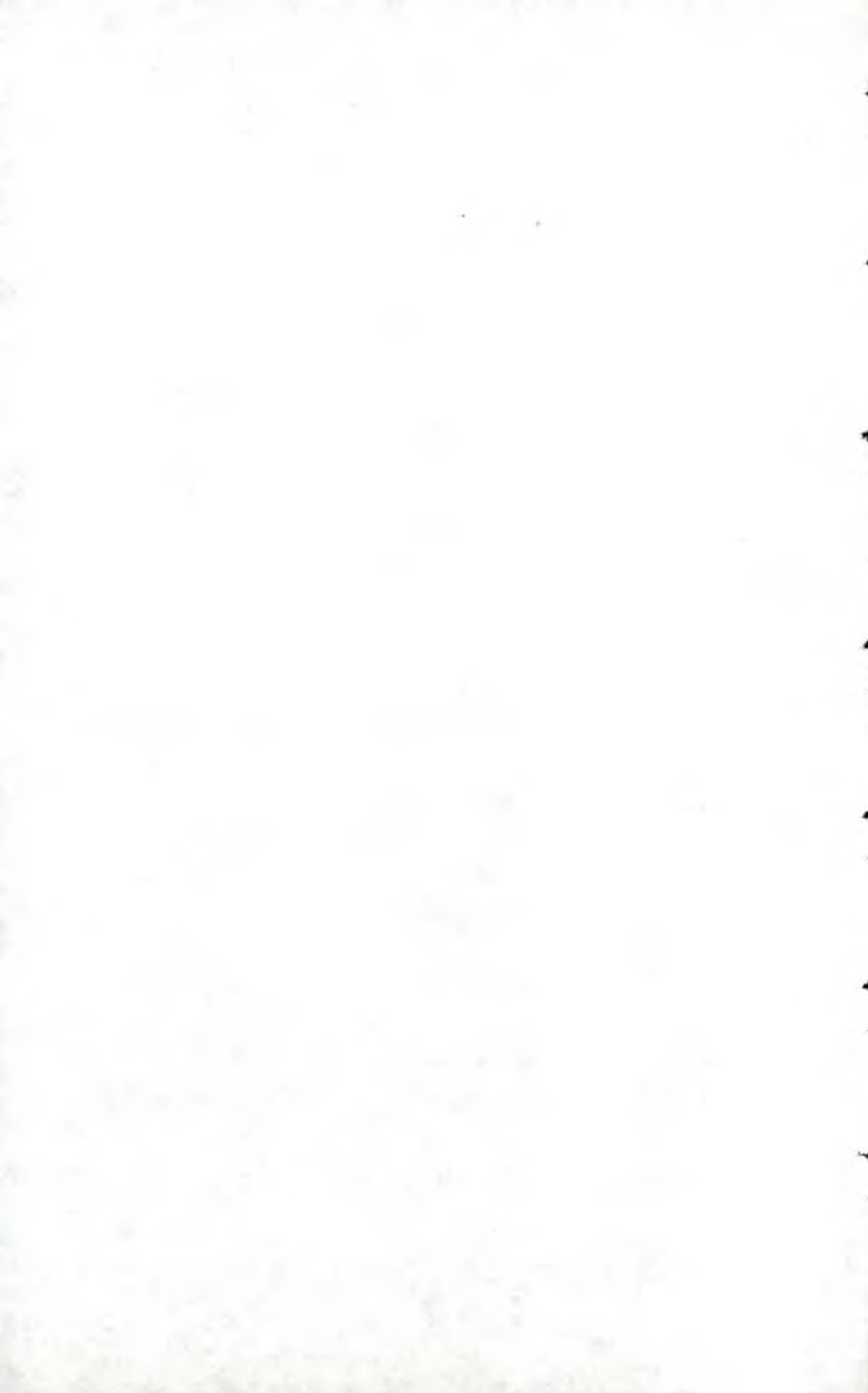
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# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

## Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

## Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained by your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

**Introduction** (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

**Logos** (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

**Testimony** (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

**Evidence** (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most "scholarly" article of the week.

**How To** (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

**Opinion** (Friday) is a personal viewpoint on the lesson, meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

## The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church. Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views are expressed which are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions.

## INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

The book of Acts has no inspired title. The Gospel of Luke and Acts were originally two volumes of a single work. Whatever title was originally prefixed to the Gospel probably served for both books. During the second century A.D. the second volume (Acts) began to circulate independently of the Gospel, and various titles were used to designate its contents.

Neither the Gospel of Luke or the book of Acts names their author, but it was more than likely "Luke the beloved physician," a friend and companion of Paul.

Acts, like the Gospel of Luke, is addressed to Theophilus. Theophilus was a Gentile convert to Christianity, and Luke wrote to give him a greater knowledge of the Christian faith. Strictly speaking, Acts is not a history of the early apostolic church. Luke tells us nothing about the churches in Galilee (Acts 9:31) or about the evangelization of Egypt and Rome. His story is not the Acts of the Apostles, for only three of the original twelve disciples appear in his narrative—Peter, James and John—and the latter two are only mentioned in passing. The book of Acts is really the acts of Peter and Paul. Furthermore, Peter is practically dropped from the story after the conversion of Cornelius, and we are left wondering what became of him. Luke gives no explanation about the rise of elders in the church (11:30), of how James came to a place of leadership in the Jerusalem church (15:13), of what Paul did in Tarsus after his conversion (9:30; 11:25), and many other important historical matters. In other words, Luke is telling a story, not writing a "history."

Luke states his purpose for writing in (Luke 1:1-3) and demonstrates in Acts how the risen Lord is continuing to do from heaven what He had commenced on earth. Christ had said to His disciples, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18, NIV), and in Acts we see Him doing it. The light of Christianity that dawned in Bethlehem brightened and spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, to Ephesus, to Troas, to Philippi, to Athens, to Corinth, and to Rome. City after city is caught by the rising sun, until the church is aflame, like beacon fires from the capital of Judaism to the capital of Paganism.

# Truth at All Costs

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56, RSV).





# Truth at All Costs

by Rebecca Waring

The nose of my little Volkswagen instinctively pointed toward the 7-11 store in response to my midmorning hunger pang. Really, it was just a small nudge for satisfaction that the usual soft drink and bag of Frito chips could keep in check. The familiar slurp and crunch were initially comforting and pleasing, but for some reason they weren't enough this time. A real pang of hunger sent echoes rumbling through my stomach. "Oh, well," I reasoned, "I'll get something substantial later." At Wendy's I purchased French fries and washed them down with a milkshake and soda. Ahhhh . . . yet instead of filling my pit of a stomach it only turned it into a deep crevasse. I walked out feeling exhausted, still hungry. "No big deal, I can still splurge on a real meal at Hot Shoppes." By evening I was weak-voiced, excitedly ordering my five-course meal with great expectation and mounting hunger. Even as I shelled out my last few quarters for the tip, pain in my midsection doubled me over. Grimacing apologetically, I moved for the door. The hostess scowled. This sort of thing was bad for business. Quickly a bus boy opened the door and stronghandedly pushed me into the night. My head spun, eyes blurred. Deliriously I groped for my Volkswagen in a sea of parked cars. In pain and frustration, I abandoned my search. Stumbling out of the parking lot, I headed in the vague direction of home. Time

slipped by as the blackness of night crashed in on me. My mind screamed for escape, welcoming semiconsciousness. Hope surged through me when a dim light pierced the night. Rallying all my strength, I ran for the beacon, hoping to find relief for my pain. A crazed fear of mirage gnawed my numbed mind. But it was real! The light, the simple building, the dull pain in my shoulder, as I fell against the door. My body crumpled onto the cool bare floor in the warmth of the lights. And what else? Something roused my senses: the sweet aroma of fresh-baked bread. The ovens radiated heat, and I was quite conscious. But with consciousness came hunger. "Please, I'm so hungry." Someone must hear me! Yes. It was the baker who bent over me and soon had me seated at a small table laden with fragrant bread and a pitcher of water. Quickly, I consumed a whole loaf. With warm eyes the baker only smiled and shook his head as I reached for my empty wallet. He motioned me to a cot, and deep, peaceful sleep quickly came over me.

I awoke feeling contented. Last night's table was still spread. More would be good, but I couldn't pay. The baker appeared.

"What do I owe you?"

"Did you enjoy your sleep?"

"Yes, but what's the cost of my meal?"

"Accept it as a gift."

"But I want to do something in return for your kindness."

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Acts 6:1—8:3**

Rebecca Waring is an ADRA employee and elementary education major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

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"Distribute bread for me to others who are hungry. Just give it to those who are searching for something that really satisfies."

"Of course."

"Fill these flour bags and begin."

"How easy! It'll be great to help ease the pain of fellow hungerers."

"No, not easy. That's the

price. It will be difficult for you. This bread truly satisfies and will threaten those selling false substitutes—fast foods. They'll want to take the bread and destroy it. They may even threaten you. Will you still go?"

My mouth full of fresh bread, I gulped, hesitated. So this was the price. Could I pay?

# The Wisdom and Courage of the Early Christians

by James Londis

LOGOS

**Theme:** The church may expect guidance from the Spirit—both in dealing with internal situations and in meeting opposition from without—when it remains fearlessly devoted to its mission.

**Read Acts 6:1—8:3**

Until Acts 6, we know little about the structure of the early church. It seemed to evolve as the need arose. No detailed blueprint from the Holy Spirit existed on how to solve the many problems it faced. On the contrary, needs were simply identified and prayerfully met.

At this point in its history, Jews of two kinds belonged to the church: Aramaic-speaking Jews (most of them natives of Palestine) and Greek-speaking Jews (whose daily language was Greek, many of whom were either natives of the lands outside Palestine or had affinities with the Greco-Roman culture). In the Jewish culture of that time a tension existed between "Hebrews" and "Hellenistic Jews," which carried over into the early church. That tension came to a head over a trivial matter.

Since the early believers had all things in common, distribution was made to the poor out of the common funds. The widows (most of the poor then [and now] were widows) who spoke Greek complained they were not getting treated as well as the widows who spoke Aramaic. It is speculated that the responsibility for distribution was in the hands of "Hebrew" Christians; thus, even if it was fair, the *perception existed that it was not fair*. To take care of the problem, seven men with *Greek names* are chosen, suggesting they belonged to the Hellenistic group.

The fact that reorganization was necessary indicates that the church was enjoying phenomenal growth. In addition, 6:7 states that large numbers were joining from Jerusalem itself, even from among the priests. Placed as it is just before the introduction of Stephen, this report may have special significance. By telling us that the church (still a Jewish sect in many respects) is so popular that even the priests are confessing Jesus as Messiah, Luke may also be telling us that the ties of the early Jewish Christians to the Temple service and traditional Judaism were still quite strong. It may even be that these priests still functioned in their offices; it certainly does not say they did not.

However, Stephen seems to be one of the earliest leaders to recognize that there was no way this being both Jewish and Christian could go on indefinitely. The new message was inconsistent with the old in too many fundamental respects. Preaching his understanding of the gospel as a reality in tension with Judaism, his arguments provoked sharp debate. Scholars believe that at some point a full debate may have been scheduled.

In that debate, Stephen would have taught a radical doctrine: namely, that if Jesus is Messiah, then the Temple service and the ceremonial law were unimportant. In this regard he probably went beyond other Hebrew Christians. Stephen saw (as Paul would later

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see) that Judaism could not both revere the law and confess Jesus as Messiah.

Powerful and brilliant in his rhetoric, Stephen clearly won the arguments in the synagogue. Assertive, young, and a gifted speaker, the only way the Jews opposed to the church could silence him was by arrest. Like Jesus, he was falsely accused of blasphemy. The major complaint seemed to be about his language against the Temple (6:13, 14). Remember: Jesus' statement "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" had infuriated the leaders. Since any threat to the Temple was a threat to the livelihood and religious interests of the leaders, the charge was designed to antagonize the people of Jerusalem.

Fearing that the population would unequivocally support Stephen, the chief priests hired false witnesses to testify that he attacked the "holy place," the law, and the customs handed down from Moses.

In his defense, Stephen made the following points:

1. The presence of God is not restricted to any one place or building. Witness the number of places the ark dwelt. Therefore, religion is not limited to the Temple. God's true people have always been ready, like Abraham and Moses, to go where God leads and to change their ideas as God reveals His will to them.

2. Since the law came *after* God's promise-covenant, the promise of the covenant is more fundamental than the written law. That promise has been fulfilled in Christ, who gives salvation by faith, not works.

Stephen then moved from a defense of himself to an attack on the Judaism of the chief priests.

3. Israel's history is replete with examples of the nation's resistance to God's attempts to save them. "'You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!' he shouted. 'You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!'" (7:51, NIV).

The suddenness of his outburst caught the audience by surprise. Some suggest that something may have been said to Stephen in the midst of his speech that angered him, that made him realize they could not be reasoned with, that they were closed to the truth and interested only in self-justification.

Outraged, the leaders snarled at Stephen and lost control. Still, the power of the Holy Spirit kept Stephen calm. As they accused him of blasphemy, he threw the charge right back in their faces. Finally, when he said "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (verse 56, NIV), they covered their ears so as not to hear his words and dragged him out of the city to stone him.

Why did they wait until he was outside the city? Because killing someone in the Temple would have defiled it. They were so careful not to break their taboos. Killing someone without hesitation was appropriate if it was not done in a restricted location.

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Sensing death was near, Stephen knelt in prayer as one stone after another was either thrown at him or dropped on him from above. He died both seeing and revealing Jesus. Praying that his persecutors would be forgiven, Stephen's faithfulness shook Saul of Tarsus, one of the instigators and witnesses to his death. Had Stephen lived, he might have become one of the greatest figures in the early church.

From the many themes in these chapters, let us highlight three: First, it is important for church leaders to see not only that fairness is done but that people *perceive* it is being done. Ethnic differences in Adventism will always tempt the most disadvantaged (the Hellenistic widows) to think they are not being treated fairly *if those in charge are not of their particular background*. This incident suggests that the power to administer the church's resources must be shared particularly with those who most need those resources. This creates trust where there was once suspicion and builds the "unity of the faith" between differing groups.

Second, the Christian gospel is always in tension with whatever power structures exist, *both inside and outside the church*. Jesus the Christ calls us all to account for the deeds we have done. Had the chief priests been more willing to accept criticism of their traditions they would not have killed either Stephen or Jesus. The best in the world and the best in the church will always fall short of the ideal of God in Christ Jesus.

Last, when the world is in rebellion against God and the church decides truly to speak God's word to it, the world (even one full of praying, evangelizing people) will hate and want to kill the church. Religiosity is not necessarily faith, nor is leadership in the community necessarily faithfulness.

# Faith in Opposition

by D. Edward Keyes

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Acts 6:12 and  
7:56-60

One of the ways our character is strengthened is through having our faith tested. This is also true for the church as a whole. From the time the church was founded, during the worst times of testing and trial, the church was guided in a special way by the Holy Spirit. As Stephen faced opposition from the Jews in Jerusalem, God poured His Spirit on him, enabling him to witness fearlessly for Christ.

Ellen White provides many insights concerning the opposition that the early Christians met. She also tells us what we, today, can expect in the way of opposition.

Speaking of the early church, Ellen White remarks, "Notwithstanding the fierce opposition that the disciples met, in a short time the gospel of the kingdom had been sounded to all the inhabited parts of the earth."<sup>1</sup> There in Jerusalem the disciples of Christ were given the Holy Spirit with power, in early-rain proportions, to deal with opposition.

But how does this same Holy Spirit lead us today when we face opposition? "You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, and will develop a rich experience."<sup>2</sup>

From this statement we learn that opposition drives us to our Lord and in turn strengthens our faith. We also see, as in the case of Stephen, it is in labor for others that we will be most fiercely opposed. "Often the Lord's workers are bitterly opposed, and their work is hindered. They do their best; with earnest, painstaking effort they sow the good seed. But the element of opposition becomes fiercer and fiercer."<sup>3</sup> But regardless of the problems we encounter, the gospel must be carried to a lost world. "The gospel is to be carried forward by aggressive warfare, in the midst of opposition, peril, loss, and suffering. But those who do this work are only following in their Master's steps."<sup>4</sup>

If faith is strengthened by opposition encountered while sharing our faith, then we need not fear opposition. Our best example for meeting opposition is found in Jesus Christ:

"When in controversy with Satan in regard to the body of Moses, Christ durst not bring against him a railing accusation. He had every provocation to do this, and Satan was disappointed because he could not arouse in Christ a spirit of retaliation.

"The course of Christ in dealing even with the adversary of souls should be an example to us in our intercourse with others never to bring a railing accusation against any; much less should we employ harshness or severity toward those who may be as anxious to know the right way as we are ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT:

How can we handle opposition tactfully and still be aggressive in our witness?

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D. Edward Keyes is a theology student at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 15.  
2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 80.  
3. *Gospel Workers*, pp. 409, 410.  
4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 678.  
5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 239, 240.

# Response to Change

by Betty Howard

Victorian philosopher John Stuart Mill suggests society may oppose change simply to avoid disruption. In his essay "The Subjection of Women," Mill argued that a primary reason inequities existed between men and women was to be found in the fact that change would result in disruption of social patterns. Since Mill's time social patterns have been disrupted. Creative responses to disruption have resulted in more justice in human relationships and better utilization of women's minds.

Creative response to disruption can reap positive results. Acts 6:1, 2 tells of disruption in the young Christian church. The Jewish tradition of caring for widows disturbed the Grecian Jews who feared that the widows in their community were not receiving the same care as the Aramaic-speaking widows. Verses 3-5 report that the church responded creatively by appointing deacons who ministered to the needs of the Grecian widows and relieved the disciples, who were attempting to guide a rapidly growing church. Order was restored, and the value of caring for one's own was retained.

Though much Jewish history and tradition points forward to the Messiah, many Jews refused to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. Stephen, in his final speech to the Jewish council, reminded the Jews of their history. They must have listened smugly until Stephen accused them of betraying and murdering the Messiah just as their forefathers had persecuted the prophets. By refusing to recognize that Jesus changed the perspective of all that had come before, the true meaning of the law and the prophets was lost. The decay of values brought disorder. Acts 8:1-4 hints at the chaos caused by those who refused to accept change, and rejoices in the growth of the young church that was open to change.

The Adventist Church has grown from a small group of young believers in New England to a worldwide church with schools, hospitals, and other institutions on every continent. Yet a recent Gallup survey in North America indicates that many people know little about Adventists. Fully 73 percent of survey respondents could not think of anything positive about the church. Adventist pioneers had no access to Gallup polls, modern mass media, or public-relations techniques. But times have changed. William G. Johnsson, editor of the *Adventist Review*, in a recent editorial challenges the Seventh-day Adventist church to utilize current communications techniques to tell the old, old story.

"I'm not interested in public relations simply as selling. But because I believe the Lord has raised up this movement and given us teachings and a way of life that can make people healthier and happier, as well as providing a hope for the future, I'm troubled that we are hiding our light under a bushel. I think the Lord is calling us to consecrated assertiveness born of a healthy confidence and self-respect."<sup>\*</sup>

**EVIDENCE**  
**Key text:**  
**Acts 6:1—**  
**8:3**

<sup>\*</sup> *Adventist Review*, Ju  
 1986, p. 5.

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# Modern-Day Heroes

by Randal Wisbey

## HOW TO

Key text:

Mark 10:43-45

Everyone loves a hero. Public figures who are bigger than life—broad-shouldered giants who leap tall buildings in a single bound. For the early Christian church Stephen was such a hero. Standing straight and tall before this auspicious group of chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law, Stephen led them through their spiritual history, powerfully concluding that, as members of the Sanhedrin, they were guilty of murdering the Son of God. True hero talk.

As Christians, we may not be put in a situation where we will have to defend our faith publicly. It does not seem likely that many of us will have to suffer martyrdom as Stephen did. Yet Jesus asks today that we be faithful to Him, as Stephen was, in our walk and in our talk.

And how are we to be faithful? Jesus doesn't leave us guessing. As He shared with His disciples, so He shares with us: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43, 44, NIV).

Jesus came to serve. If we are His followers, our lives should reflect this attitude, as well. He asks that we:

1. *Listen to those around us.* As we watch Jesus interact with people, we immediately sense how well He listened. We can learn much from His example. This week practice your listening skills. Learn to ask questions—rather than give answers. When we open our ears, as well as our hearts, it is amazing what we will discover.

2. *Watch for opportunities to be involved in people's lives.* Take your boss to lunch. Bake some cookies for a friend who is serving overseas as a missionary. Offer to babysit your neighbor's kids. Help a classmate with his or her homework. Jesus asks that we be faithful in the little things, as well as the big things.

3. *Translate our life into acts of simple justice.* Spend one evening a week helping to prepare food at a soup kitchen. Visit the local jail or prison. Sponsor a hungry child. Serve as a volunteer at the hospital. In the end, our desire for justice will show how just we truly believe God is.

Jesus asks us to live extraordinary lives. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the hurting individuals of our world, and to share God's grace with all who need our help and interest. By rendering such service we can be modern-day heroes who stand tall for what is right and true. Jesus has never said it will be easy—He has not even told us it will be fun. But He has told us that it will bring eternal satisfaction, not only to us but also to those whom we help.

## REACT

In Matthew 25 Jesus challenges us to reach out to the "least of these." In your world, who do "these" consist of?

---

Randal Wisbey is the chaplain at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.



# In Contact With Mission Control

by Arthur Hauck

**OPINION**  
**Key text:**  
**Acts 7:56, RSV**

Toying with titles can be tremendously tempting. For example, the caption for this quarter, "The Church Aflame," could be renamed "Ignition for Mission" and the title for this lesson, "Truth at All Costs," could be relabeled "In Contact With Mission Control"—space-age metaphors for a movement that is targeted for an imminent millennial excursion into the limitless universe. The key text focuses on the critical moment of "cost" and "contact" in context: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56, RSV).

Living by the imperative "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, RSV), the fledgling followers of Jesus had scarcely taken their first steps in organizing for action when the full fury of the organized church was turned loose on them. In the cataclysmic collision of two universal forces, one represented by stones and the other by prayer, one of the first deacons became the first Christian martyr. Even as the death-dealing stones pummeled his battered body, Stephen remained in direct communication with the life-giving Spirit of Mission Control. His "Roger, over and out" sign-off message—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit . . . Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:59, 60)—sounded like an echo from the darkened crest of Golgotha where the church-condemned Son of man hung dying, in shame, on a blood-spattered Roman cross. After sensing the awful anguish of the severed communication in sin's separation Jesus paid the ultimate cost.

Whatever age, whatever stage, the issue, the forces are the same. Earth's history will close in a final confrontation between an apostate religion and those on Heaven's mission, willing to share the truth at all cost until Heaven suddenly and finally intervenes to terminate the conflict.

When Jesus tried to explain His beaming into space to prepare a place, His return, and His momentous rendezvous in the sky, Thomas asked Him how and where. Jesus replied, "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). Jesus taught that He *was* the truth *lived*. The method of Heaven's mission is a living truth—we witness what we are. The cryptic cost of that witness is mirrored in the Greek word from which it is translated—*martur*.

Since this is an OPINION article, a final opinion. The designers of this lesson seemed to have ended one verse too soon. Maybe the strange logic of witnessing seemed too elusive, especially to speak of unmerciful persecution followed by a therefore: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

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# Drama on the Damascus Road

“For Paul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the nations and before kings, as well as to the people of Israel”  
(Acts 9:15, TLB).



# Zealous— but Not Listening

by Maxine Newell

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Acts 9:15

Everyone who knows me will tell you that I am a zealous person. Even as a child I was enthusiastic about whatever I did. (You know the kind of person I'm talking about.) If I was going to do something, I thought it was best to do it wholeheartedly and enjoy it, rather than moaning and groaning and making it more painful than it really was.

I grew up with that same spirit, especially where the teachings of Judaism were concerned. Whatever my teachers taught me I accepted as truth. I never doubted them, because I knew they were led by God. Whenever anyone challenged their authority it only made me determined to prove that my teachers were right.

I was what you would call a *real Jew*. I would have defended my faith with my life if I needed to. That was the reason I could not understand these people who called themselves followers of Jesus. I felt sorry for them because I knew they had it all wrong, and I was going to set them right.

I soon realized, however, that there was no changing their minds. I worked to show them the light, but they would not listen, so I resorted to a different approach. If they wouldn't listen to me, then I would have to get rid of them. Little did I know that my attempts to wipe them out would only cause them to grow.

As I look back I realize that

those followers of Jesus really had the truth. Like the Bereans, they had searched the Scriptures and had found the Way. But while I persecuted them, I was pleased with what I was doing, and so were the church leaders—so much so that they sent me to Damascus to do my thing there.

It was on that trip to Damascus that my life took a strange turn. A bright flash of light blinded me, and God actually spoke to me from the sky, making me realize that all along I had been going the wrong way. After that experience I was no longer a persecutor, but became a follower of Jesus, thus adding to the ranks of God's children.

From then on I also became one of the persecuted. But despite persecution, the church grew from strength to strength. Everything mushroomed, and Christ's name was spread far and wide.

So that you don't make the same mistake I did, you need to think about these questions: First, are you the persecutor or the persecuted? Second, have you searched the Scriptures and decided to follow the truth enthusiastically? I am still zealous for the Lord's cause and I am still persecuted. But I thank the Lord for my persecutions, because they force me to depend on Him every day.

With Christian greetings,  
Paul.

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# “Have Spirit— Will Travel”

by Richard Fredericks

## LOGOS

**Theme:** When Christ has a people utterly committed to Him, even Satan's weapons—persecution and a persecutor [Saul]—become instruments used by God for the spread of the gospel.

### 1. Down and Out—to the World! (read Acts 8:1-40)

Even as Jesus' death resulted in a good thing (salvation for humanity), persecution against the early church (a terrible thing), resulted in more people's hearing of Christ's saving grace (Acts 8:1-5). Here is the glory of God's sovereignty. Even in the midst of evil actions, God is carrying forward His redemptive purposes. Before Stephen's martyrdom and Saul's attacks on the early believers (7:58—8:3), the new church existed only in Jerusalem, and its spokespeople were a selected few. But at this point in the book of Acts multitudes of disciples are squeezed out of the ancient city into the rest of Judea and Samaria, taking with them the message of a risen Christ (8:5-25).

Luke uses the adventures of Philip (a displaced “layman”) to illustrate the results of this scattering. Driven from his home (imagine how you would react to such a crisis), he heads for “a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ” (8:5, NIV). The Spirit is on hand to help through miraculous manifestations of power, thereby illustrating and confirming the greater miracle of new life in Christ. Remember, the Spirit's gifts are to uplift the gospel. If the gospel is lost, ignored, or even given secondary priority, then the gifts quickly disappear.

Philip's witness to Christ results in many conversions. But again (remember Ananias and Sapphira), not all are genuine. Simon, a sorcerer, “boasted that he was someone great” and had accepted the title of the “divine power known as the Great Power” (8:10, NIV)—that is, God in human flesh—in case you missed it! It was a hard blow when he was confronted by the genuine article through Philip's teaching. But, being a shrewd man, he professes faith, bides his time, and later tries to buy the Holy Spirit's power from Peter (8:13-24). Simon wanted power, but divorced from absolute surrender. He wanted it for self-aggrandizement.

Peter's condemnation of Simon is stern, but he leaves the door open for repentance. In the Greek, Peter is actually saying: “To perdition with you and your money! . . . Repent of this wickedness” (8:20, 21). Verse 24 suggests that Simon did not repent. He sought to escape only the negative consequences of his greed and lust for power. Indeed, history records that Simon Magus went on to become one of the earliest and greatest enemies of the gospel. He tried to ignore an inescapable law of life: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other. . . . You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matt. 6:24, NIV).

Meanwhile the positive adventure goes on. The Spirit teams up with an angel to put Philip in touch with the treasurer of Ethiopia. He is pondering the prophecy of the suffering Lamb in Isaiah 53

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while heading home in his chariot (8:26-40). What an opportunity! Philip begins with the man's questions (a good principle), and leads him to see Jesus as Lord.

## 2. The Beloved Enemy (read Acts 9:1-42)

This chapter teaches many powerful lessons, including the comforting one that Christ sees even a quiet, less dramatic ministry as so important He will perform a mighty miracle to sustain it (verses 32-42). But above all else, this chapter contains the most important event for post-resurrection New Testament history: a face-to-face encounter between the risen Christ and a persecuting Pharisee named Saul (verses 1-19).

It happened just outside Damascus. Filled with murderous zeal against the sect of Christ, Saul is laid in the dust by a brilliant flash of light and stares straight into the face of the One he thought was dead, an imposter, and the object of his hate. It was one of two faces that forever remained etched on his consciousness. The other face was Stephen's (Acts 7). In Stephen's eyes he first saw the peace of one *dying with Christ*. Now, in Jesus' eyes he beholds the forgiving love of the One who *died for him*.

The brief exchange between the smitten Pharisee and the risen Christ laid the foundation for Paul's gospel; a presentation of Christ and Him crucified that was destined to turn the world upside down. Imagine the explosion in Saul's mind as he looked at that omnipotent face and heard the words: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting [by persecuting the Christian community—what Paul would later call the *body of Christ*]" (9:5, NIV).

After that awesome moment of revelation Saul experienced three days and nights of deathlike darkness without food or water (verse 9). Surely during this dark time Saul's mind saw every prophecy and symbol from Genesis to Malachi in the light of two new realities: that the crucified Nazarene was Messiah, the incarnate Son of God; and that redemption into God's kingdom had come through His death for sins on a criminal's cross.

After three days came Saul's "resurrection" through the Spirit into a new life and baptism into the Lord Jesus (verses 10-19). It is interesting to note in this situation how God 'redeems' two *names* associated with infamy—Judas (who housed the smitten Saul) and Ananias (who gave him his apostolic commission and was Paul's first Christian friend after conversion).

Notice especially verses 16, 17 and compare them with Acts 22:14-16. Christ calls Saul to be His "chosen instrument" to carry the gospel across all cultural and racial barriers, and even to penetrate the highest power structures of his day with the message of a crucified Saviour. But notice the next thing the risen Lord says: "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name (9:16, NIV)." Conversion is not presented here as a warm, gushy feeling, an emotional high, or a ticket to ease and affluence. It is a call to

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commitment, to “follow the Lamb wherever He goes”—even to a cross.

The love of Christ, which forgave and healed sinners, was a sacrificial, suffering love that entered into the hurt and hate of the world. Jesus never ignored needs. He didn't seek prestige, security, or self-fulfillment. Paul's call to suffer was a call to share in Christ's sacrificial love. Paul did suffer much. But never in history has one life known *more* fulfillment, satisfaction, and meaning.

The temptation for us today is to desire, above loyalty to Christ, to be comfortable, coddled, and esteemed by society. But Christ knows our deeper needs. He calls us to serve Him, to suffer for Him, and to share His healing love in a broken world. As we say Yes, His Spirit removes the scales from our eyes (9:18), and we too begin to understand life as it really is.

# Paul's Magnificent Obsession

by Richard Fredericks

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Gal. 6:14

Five times Paul received the horrible "40 lashes minus one" of the Roman whip, three times he was beaten by mobs, three times shipwrecked and once "stoned" but not killed (2 Cor. 11:24, 25). Yet he pushed on doggedly, determined to share his 'magnificent obsession.'

What made Paul tick? Why would the greatest and mightiest apostle of history say of *himself*: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners— of whom I am the worst" (1 Tim. 1:15, NIV); and of his successful ministry: "God forbid that I should boast about anything . . . except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14, Phillips).

In the following selections, taken from three chapters in *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White eloquently explores the motivating force that gave this short, bald, bow-legged Pharisee the dynamic power and fulfillment of ten lives! It began in a flash of light "above the brightness of the sun" on the road to Damascus:

"While the light continued to shine round about them, Saul heard 'a voice speaking . . . in the Hebrew tongue' (Acts 26:14), 'saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. . . .'

"Filled with fear, and almost blinded by the intensity of the light, the companions of Saul heard a voice, but saw no man. But Saul understood the words that were spoken, and to him was clearly revealed the One who spoke—even the Son of God. In the glorious Being who stood before him he saw the Crucified One. Upon the soul of the stricken Jew the image of the Saviour's countenance was imprinted forever."<sup>1</sup>

". . . in Paul's day the cross was regarded with feelings of repulsion and horror. To uphold as the Saviour of mankind one who had met death on the cross, would naturally call forth ridicule and opposition. . . .

"But to Paul *the cross was the one object of supreme interest*. Ever since he had been arrested in his career of persecution against the followers of the crucified Nazarene he had never ceased to glory in the cross. At that time there had been given him a revelation of the infinite love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ; and a marvelous transformation had been wrought in his life, bringing all his plans and purposes in harmony with heaven. From that hour he had been a new man in Christ. He knew by personal experience that when a sinner once beholds the love of the Father, as seen in the sacrifice of His Son, and yields to the divine influence, a change of heart takes place, and henceforth Christ is all in all.

"At the time of his conversion, Paul was inspired with a longing desire to help his fellowmen to behold Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of the living God, mighty to transform and to save. Henceforth *his life was wholly devoted to an effort to portray the love and power of the Crucified One*. . . . If ever his ardor in the path of duty flagged, one glance at the cross and the amazing love there revealed, was

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enough to cause him to gird up the loins of his mind and press forward in the path of self-denial."<sup>2</sup>

"If those who today are teaching the word of God, would uplift the cross of Christ higher and still higher, their ministry would be far more successful. If sinners can be led to give one earnest look at the cross, if they can obtain a full view of the crucified Saviour, they will realize the depth of God's compassion and sinfulness of sin. . . .

"Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour's love, and *when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain. . . .* Can we wonder that Paul exclaimed, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'? Galatians 6:14. It is our privilege also to glory in the cross, our privilege to give ourselves wholly to Him who gave Himself for us."<sup>3</sup>

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1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 114, 115.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 246. (Italics supplied.)

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 210. (Italics supplied.)



# On Being Spirit-led

by Dale L. Walker

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 8:26-40

The drama in this passage centers on two individuals: Philip and the eunuch. The scene is a desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza. We will focus our attention on the actions taken by both men and what can be learned from these actions.

The book of Acts does not contain much detailed information about Philip and his activities, but what is provided shows him to be a man willing to be led and used by the Spirit. Philip was working successfully among the Samaritans when the Spirit gave him directions for an unusual assignment. At this same point and again at a later point in the narrative, Philip's response is immediate and decided. In verse 27 we see Philip setting out in the direction in which the Spirit guided him. In verse 29, Philip is again given a directive by the Spirit; this time it is to join the eunuch in his chariot. Philip's response is immediate.

We now focus our attention on the eunuch returning from Jerusalem to his home in Ethiopia, where he served as the treasurer in Queen Candace's court. The fact that the Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem suggests that he was a Gentile interested in Judaism. It is probable that he was a semi-proselyte, because as a eunuch he could not be a full proselyte (see Deuteronomy 23:1).

One is struck by the directness of the eunuch's initial question concerning Isaiah 53:7, 8—the passage he is reading. He asks Philip of whom the prophet spoke. The eunuch is not concerned with lesser issues; he wants to know the identity of the person referred to in Isaiah. The determination of the eunuch to be baptized immediately also is noteworthy. Taking the initiative, he has no hesitation as demonstrated by his query, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" (8:36).

As the story closes, Philip is drawn away, and the eunuch disappears in the distance. Other than the final comment that the eunuch rejoiced, we know nothing more of him. But how meaningful is the statement of his response to having accepted the gospel. One can be assured that he did not keep the message of the gospel to himself.

When Philip is called away from his work among the people in Samaria and is led to this individual it is a clear demonstration of the importance that Christ places on a soul. We often encounter such opportunistic situations as Philip did. The Spirit may guide us to someone, someone may make a comment or ask a question, or we may have opportunities to share the message of the gospel, which can create in that person the same joy that the eunuch experienced.

## REACT

What should our response be when an opportunity for sharing the gospel presents itself? How can we be Spirit-led in order to take advantage of these opportunities?

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# Me? Chosen of God?

by Steven Blackburn

## HOW TO

**Key text:**

**Acts 9:15**

Stoning—I'm not sure I can imagine a more gruesome death. What kind of person would stand by and condone the stoning of someone for his religion? "And Saul was there, giving approval to his [Stephen's] death. . . . Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:1-3, NIV). Wouldn't it seem likely that God would look upon Saul as one of the most vile of sinners?

And yet, God says, "This man [Saul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15, NIV).

Something is wrong! God isn't reacting "logically"!

When you think about it, God frequently does not react the way our frail, human logic expects. And aren't you glad? How many times have you felt as if God couldn't possibly love you after all you've done? How many times have you questioned His promised forgiveness?

You see, God knows the potential that is locked inside each of us. Acts 9:15 shows us His ability to look beyond our shortcomings. Let's apply this verse by using a simple, two-part "How to":

1. Like Paul, believe that you are specifically chosen of God. No matter how you feel about yourself, your worth to God is established by the fact that He chose you. "As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John 15:19, NIV). "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13, NIV). "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter. 2:9, NIV).

2. Believe in your responsibility to share the gospel with others. Separatism has no place in today's Christianity. Saul was commissioned of God to communicate His message to the Gentiles and their kings. Sharing the gospel with your community and its leaders, whether local, national, or international, builds confidence. "God is there, looking beyond today's failures at tomorrow's accomplishments." This is a message our world desperately needs to hear.

With the kind of faith and trust God has in you and me, how can we be anything but the most confident of His children? Armed with such confidence, no prejudice, no persecution, *nothing* will halt the progress of God's message in us, and His message to the world.

What a promise, and what a future, we have to look forward to!

## REACT

What people can you think of in your lifetime that might appear to be terrible sinners, and yet may be seen in God's eyes as modern-day Sauls?

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# The Soul Under Scrutiny

by David S. Scholey

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 9:22

The ninth chapter of Acts begins with a startling transition. "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" (NIV). The next verse tells us that he obtained from the high priest "letters" [arrest warrants, that is] "to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem." Then, no more than eighteen verses later, the account concerning Saul states that "at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God."

Since the Bible is a veritable *Reader's Digest* of the early history of God's people, it is not uncommon to run across such condensations and compressions of incident. But what happened in between?

First of all, the populace knew Saul for his persecution of Christians. He was relentless, fanatical. He had been present and had given approval to the vicious, public death of Stephen (8:1). And "on that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem. . . . Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off people and put them in prison" (8:1-3, NIV).

Saul's reputation for partisan hatred preceded him to Damascus. Thus, his behavior in the synagogues—that of preaching Jesus as the Son of God—brought about reactions of astonishment. "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

How often have new Christians, ancient and modern alike, had to face their friends, their acquaintances, and had to behave contrarily to what was expected by those close to them? Here is the awkward, naked moment when belief sets the believer apart, and every inch of him or her is called into question under a harsh, scrutinizing light. "What do you mean—you *won't* anymore, you *don't* anymore, you *can't*? Who do you think you are?" Here is perhaps the most intense loneliness of Christianity aside from the longing for a perfect communion with God.

"Yet Saul grew more and more powerful," (9:22), and he baffled those who had ridiculed him "by proving that Jesus is the Christ" (NIV).

Nevertheless, Saul continued to do battle with his reputation. Later, in Jerusalem, "he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple" (verse 26, NIV). Saul's fortune at this tense moment was Barnabas. Because of Barnabas' testimony about Saul's Damascus encounters, the apostles acknowledged Saul as a fellow believer, and he began practicing his faith with confidence throughout the city.

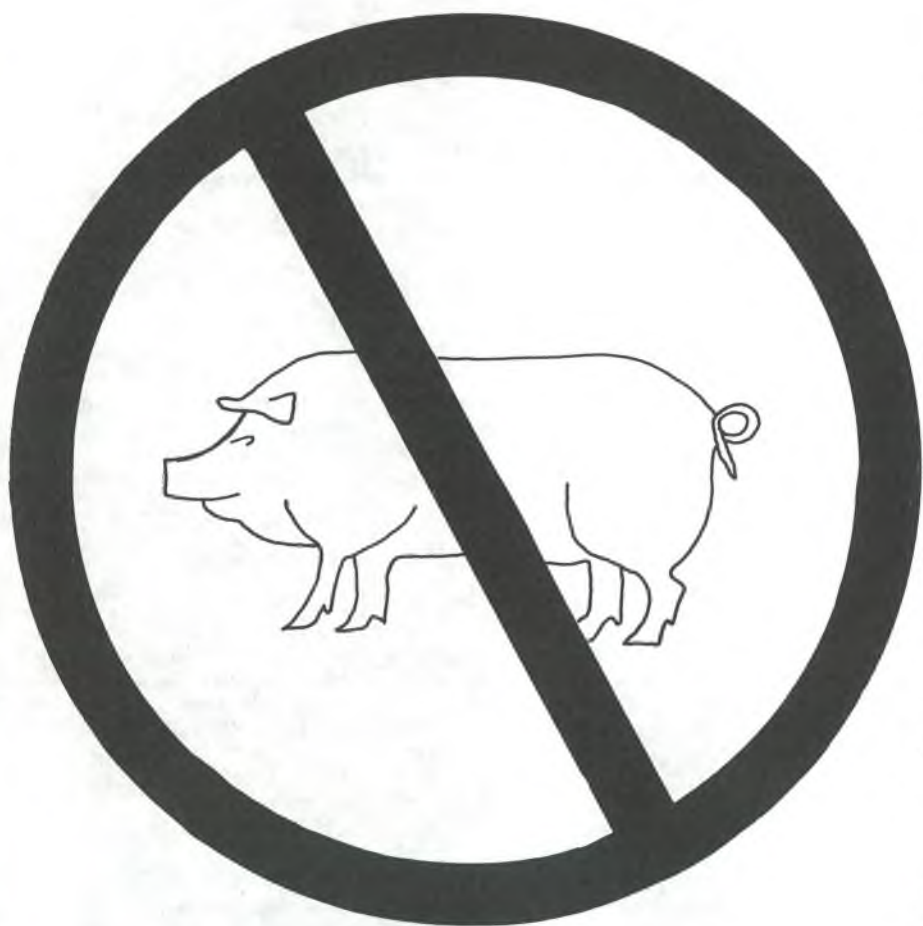
For the novice Christian today, Jesus Himself can be the Barnabas to take the case before those in doubt. He remains the seemingly silent, yet always pleading, partner to every believer. He is the advocate for the awkward, naked figure beneath the spotlight of acrimony.

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# The Gospel to the *Goiym*

“Whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to” (Acts 10:35, GNB).



# Of Baal Worship and the Church Board

by Trina J. Magi

"Trina, I think I'm going to quit the board. You just would not believe these people!"

My friend was just elected to a church office and a seat on the board. Last night was her first meeting.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Everything started out okay. We talked about Vacation Bible School and how to pay for the arts and crafts, and then we looked over the minutes from the last board meeting."

"And—what happened?" I urged.

"We were all reading through the minutes when the elder sitting next to me said: 'I'd like to know what authority you had to do this. I can't believe you would let our holy sanctuary be used for *devil* worship!'"

"Fifteen pairs of eyes riveted on the elder. He waved the photocopied pages and proclaimed: 'When Christ was on this earth, He would never have allowed Baal to be worshiped in His Temple.'"

"I stared in disbelief, knowing what he must be referring to. The board had voted to rent the church on Sundays to a local congregation. I just could not keep quiet: 'They aren't *Baal* worshippers—they're Christians. They

worship *Christ!*'"

"He wrinkled his face and shook his head: 'I don't know what they are. But if they worship on Sunday, they're Baal worshippers. Haven't you read Daniel and Revelation?'"

"Trina, I just don't understand."

Her story reminded me of something I heard years ago: Saint Peter was leading a group on a tour of heaven. He pointed out the gates of pearl, the streets of gold, and the river of life. As they rounded the bend he paused, lifted his finger to his lips, and whispered, "Shhh. We have to be quiet going through here. This is where the Adventists live, and they think they're the only ones here."

Tolerance. Sometimes it seems Seventh-day Adventists have a particularly tough time understanding what that means. Is it because we've concentrated so long and hard on being different from other Christians that we are afraid to acknowledge that in many ways we are similar?

Have we forgotten that there are other people who worship God? People who love Him, pray to Him, and sing about Him. And have we forgotten that God, our Father and theirs, loves them, too?

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Acts 10:28 and  
Acts 10:34, 35

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# The Beginning of the Gentile Mission

by Bertram L. Melbourne

## LOGOS

**Theme:** In breaching the wall of separation between Gentile and Jew with the message of Christ's salvation, God showed that in Jesus all human beings are one.

### 1. Peter in Western Palestine (read Acts 9:32-43)

Peter's missionary itinerary took him among the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (9:31). Luke outlines Peter's activities in Lydda and Joppa, for they specify his location and mental attitude for the Gentile mission. At Lydda, Peter meets a paralytic (Luke employs precise medical terminology to describe his condition<sup>1</sup>) to whom he announces healing by Jesus. After at least eight years of having others prepare his pallet, Aeneas, at Peter's command, performs the task himself. This miracle results in a tremendous inflow of souls from Lydda and Sharon. The news spreads also to Joppa, twelve miles away.

At Joppa, the members are mourning the loss of Dorcas, whose charitable deeds have impacted positively on the city. They therefore send for Peter. On his arrival he dismisses mourners and speaks with God. Following his prayer, he says, "Tabitha, rise" (verse 40, RSV<sup>2</sup>), and assists her in rising. Can you imagine the joy of the saints when Peter presents her alive? Tremendous evangelistic benefits are derived from this miracle, for many believe on the Lord.

Luke now describes how Peter gets to Caesarea, the point from which he will be summoned for the Gentile mission. Interestingly, Peter is staying at the house of Simon, a tanner. For Peter to be residing with Simon when tanning was a despised profession among the Jews<sup>3</sup> indicates some progress of thought in respect to Jewish scruples.

*Why do you think there are not more miracles like the raising of Dorcas in the church today? How would you define a miracle?*

### 2. Cornelius' and Peter's Visions (read Acts 10:1-33)

The first specific indication from God authorizing a Gentile mission was marked by a number of supernatural manifestations. First, God gave two visions—one each to Cornelius and Peter. Cornelius, a Roman centurion in charge of 100 men (comparable to a modern noncommissioned officer<sup>4</sup>), was a "God-fearer" (not a full proselyte, since he was neither circumcised nor baptized), and he received the first vision. As he was having his evening devotions, an angel informed him that God was about to reward his piety, so he should send to Joppa for Simon Peter.

While the messengers were en route, a hungry Peter went onto the housetop to pray as he awaited his meal. While there, he received a vision. Three times he was directed to kill and eat from a four-cornered sheet that descended, filled with various kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds. Each time he refused but was told that he should not call common or unclean that which God had cleansed. As

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he tried to figure out the meaning of the vision, Cornelius' envoy arrived. As Peter listened to their story he realized that God was telling him not to call the Gentiles common or unclean as Jewish scruples required. They too had a share in the gospel, for the wall the Jews had erected separating them from other nations was now breached. He therefore accompanied the men to Cornelius' house, where he found a waiting audience, for Cornelius had begun missionary work and had extended invitations to his friends and relatives.

### 3. The Gentile Pentecost and the Jewish Response (read Acts 10:34—11:18)

After listening to Cornelius' story Peter acknowledges that God is not discriminating against anyone in the composition of His church, but is seeking the pious and devout from all nations. He outlined to the assembly "the apostolic kerygma in a nutshell," including some details about the ministry of Jesus that the Gentiles might not have known. Interestingly, the scope of the kerygma outlined here corresponds to that of Mark's Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Peter's presentation is interrupted by what has fittingly been described as the "Pentecost of the Gentile world."<sup>6</sup> The evidence for this designation is precise as the following comments indicate:

a. The companions of Peter were amazed that the gift of the Spirit was poured out "even on the Gentiles" (10:45);

b. Peter admitted that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit "just as we have" (10:47), and that it fell on them "as on us at the beginning" (11:15);

c. Peter's statement that "'God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed.'" (11:17);

d. The application of Jesus' words "'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (11:16) to the experience.

Not only did Cornelius and his companions receive the Spirit but they spoke in tongues. God had decisively acted to demonstrate to the circumcision party His will regarding the salvation of the Gentiles.

An interesting parallel with Acts 2 is detectable. While at that Pentecost the gift of the Spirit was preceded by conviction of sin, repentance, and baptism in the name of Jesus; here the outpouring of the Spirit preceded baptism. It served as that decisive factor which heralded the baptism of Cornelius and the inflow of the Gentiles.

The Jerusalem brethren's response to the conversion of Gentiles is noteworthy. They did not criticize Peter for baptizing Gentiles, but for socializing and having table fellowship with them. The crucial issue concerned whether the Gentiles should become Jews in order to enter the church or whether they should be accepted without preconditions. Peter's delineation of God's decisive actions on the Gentiles' behalf silenced his opponents for a while at least (11:18).

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Rather than rejoicing at the expansion of the gospel and the inflow of the Gentiles, some Christians were more concerned about ceremonial purity. Could it be that today while God is working for the progress of the gospel there are those who are more concerned about maintaining barriers of class, culture, race, status or gender? To such the message is clear: God recognizes no national, racial, social, or gender barriers in His church. Christ demolished the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14) and requires a demonstration of unity in His church as a witness to the world (John 17:20-23).

*What am I doing as an individual to make all God's children welcomed and at home in His Church?*

#### **4. The Christians at Antioch (read Acts 11:19-30)**

While these events were transpiring, God was working in another way for the inclusion of the Gentiles. Some Hellenistic Jews went to Antioch and began to work among the Gentiles. God prospered their efforts (11:21) and many Gentiles were converted. Barnabas had to be sent to Antioch as a missionary. The growth was tremendous. Soon he sought the help of Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle to the Gentiles and the one who was most instrumental in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The influence of these believers was so positive, and their imitation of and witness to Christ so effective, that soon they were dubbed "Christians." It is noteworthy that this branch of the church did not grow in isolation of the Jerusalem church. When they learned of the impending famine they sent aid, thus demonstrating Christian concern.

*What impressions of Christ am I leaving with those with whom I interact daily? What can I do to foster a spirit of unity and fraternity in God's church today?*

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1. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 210.

All scriptural references are taken from the RSV. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Times of Jesus* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), pp. 303-310.

1. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 215.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

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# When God Loves Destruction

by Joy C. Cassano

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Acts 10:28, 35

Our God is one of creation, not of destruction. This fact is common knowledge in the Bible, where destruction of life is called God's "strange" act. Yet this same God crops up again and again as a destroyer in a different sense—a destroyer, not of life, but of obstacles to it. We can see Him as a sort of cosmic demolition expert who razes our cherished "walls of partition," shreds our labels, and blasts into oblivion our favorite misconceptions about our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, and culminating in the book of Acts, God, through His servants, has worked to shatter the barriers that humanity has erected to separate people from one another.

The following quotes from Ellen White are a few examples of the destruction God loves.

**RAHAB.** "The advancing hosts of Israel found that knowledge of the mighty workings of the God of the Hebrews had gone before them. . . . [In wicked Jericho] 'Rahab perished not with them that believed not.'"<sup>1</sup> "All the inhabitants of the city . . . were put to the sword. Only faithful Rahab, with her household, was spared."<sup>2</sup> "And her conversion was not an isolated case of God's mercy toward idolaters who acknowledged His divine authority."<sup>3</sup>

**THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.** "God bade His servant [Elijah] to find refuge in a heathen land." The woman with whom Elijah was to stay "was not an Israelite. She had never had the privileges and blessings that the chosen people of God had enjoyed;" yet "when there was no safety for Elijah in the land of Israel, God sent him to this woman."<sup>4</sup>

**NAAMAN.** "Centuries after Naaman returned to his Syrian home . . . his wonderful faith was referred to and commended by the Saviour as an object lesson. . . . 'Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet,' the Saviour declared; 'and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.'<sup>5</sup>

**THE CENTURION and THE PHOENICIAN WOMAN.** "During His earthly ministry Christ began to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to all mankind. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans. . . . He rewarded the faith of the centurion at Capernaum. . . ." and "healed the daughter of the Caananite woman" in Phoenicia.<sup>6</sup>

**THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.** "The hatred between Jews and Samaritans prevented the woman from offering a kindness to Jesus. . . . [But] the King of heaven came to this outcast soul, asking a service at her hands."<sup>7</sup> "The plain statement made by Christ to this woman could not have been made to the self-righteous Jews."<sup>8</sup> "Christ's message to the Samaritan woman" bore fruit. The woman heard and called "the men of the city," and "they went with her, heard Jesus, and believed on Him. . . . The Jewish converts gathered a precious harvest from among those who had once been their bitterest enemies."<sup>9</sup>

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*THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.* "Philip was directed to go to the Ethiopian and explain to him the prophecy that he was reading." The "Ethiopian was a man of good standing and of wide influence. God saw that when converted he would give others the light he had received"<sup>10</sup>

"Today in every land there are those who are honest in heart, and upon these the light of heaven is shining."<sup>11</sup>

"No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to abolish every wall of partition, . . . that every soul may have free access to God."<sup>12</sup>

### REACT

1. How does the command, "Come out of her . . . that ye be not partakers of her sins" relate to God's destruction of "walls" between people?

2. Is there a point for Christians where passive resistance to prejudice and discrimination is no longer enough? Explain.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 369.
2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 491.
3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 369.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 253.
6. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 19.
7. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 184.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
9. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 106, 107.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
11. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 253.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 369, 370.

# The Gospel Breaks Barriers

by Kendra Haloviak

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 10:43

What a wealth of interesting, action-packed experiences is told to us between Acts 9:32 and Acts 11:30. Together they tell us about the barriers that were being shattered by the Holy Spirit as the church responded to a growing understanding of the implications of the gospel. As the early Christians saw more and more clearly the cross of Calvary and its meaning, God was advancing the church to new horizons.

Barriers were not shattered without a struggle, however. Exclusiveness and prejudice are persistent foes, and the early church had its struggle with those enemies. The time was ripe, however, for the church leaders to recognize clearly that the story of the gospel was to be presented in a manner that would impact internationally; in a way that would cross racial, ethnic, and cultural lines.

The stories in this portion of Acts seem to build toward a final impact that surrounds the story of Cornelius. We first are told of the healing of the cripple Aeneas (9:32-35) and then of the raising of Dorcas from the dead (9:36-42). God doesn't call only the strong and beautiful. Those whom society rejects are viewed as valuable by the followers of Christ. The story of Aeneas is of a weak man made strong following acceptance into a growing community of believers. In the story of Dorcas we see the inclusion of women in the ministry of the early church. Here another barrier is shattered by the early Christians. "Dorcas had been of great service to the church, and God saw fit to bring her back from the land of the enemy, that her skill and energy might still be a blessing to others and also that by this manifestation of His power the cause of Christ might be strengthened."\* Breaking these initial barriers not only brought new life to those who suffered but also added strong cooperation within the church. The miracles themselves also convinced many that the Lord was indeed leading this body of Christians, and many came to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (9:35, 42). The healings became the basis for renewal; and the breaking of barriers, as the result of the impact of the gospel, yielded results.

The next barrier to be addressed was that of racism. God directly intervened and gave a vision to Peter. Peter is once again made personally aware of the power of God. The Almighty is of such a nature that He can change an individual's status from unclean to clean. Peter was made fully aware that Christ's words "It is finished" meant that provision for the salvation of all people was complete. And, just as the impact of the vision was surrounding Peter, servants from the home of Cornelius knocked on his door. The miraculous action of God that brought Peter and Cornelius together became the basis of hope to non-Jews around the world. Christianity was responding to direct light from Heaven and exhibiting a new insight into the gospel.

In 10:43 we see the message of hope as it is shared with the family and friends of Cornelius: "... that through His name EVERY ONE who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins" (NASB).

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Everyone. Peter became so thoroughly convicted of this truth that it broke through his prior biases. The Holy Spirit then came upon the Gentile company, and Peter recognized the workings of the Spirit and baptized the Gentile believers.

Peter's decision didn't pass without opposition, but God was so obviously active in Peter's actions, that his decision stood. Peter capped the discussion with the following statement: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality" (verse 34, NASB).

What a remarkable statement for a man of the first century to make! Only the events that preceded his statement enabled Peter to state and really believe what he had said. It is only as the Holy Spirit points men and women to the cross that they see how level the ground is there; how equally loved and valued each person is.

My name is Peter.

During various times in my life it has been a struggle for me to accept a non-Jew.

Then I remember a sheet full of unclean animals,  
and a voice from heaven.

And I remember a rooster crowing  
and how unclean I am.

Then I see my brothers and sisters  
as we really stand  
shoulder to shoulder  
at the foot of our Lord's cross.

# The Exclusive Gospel

by Joan Angelo-Adams

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Ephesians 3:6

"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6, NIV).

The exclusive gospel?

Her blue eyes sparkled as she related to me her recent experience at a pentecostal church service. Having been educated and employed in Adventist institutions, Amy recently changed jobs and made new friends. These friends were intrigued with her faith.

As the friendships blossomed Amy's friends were invited to her church, and they reciprocated.

Many young Adventists find sharing their faith makes their own greater and stronger. Many of us, just like the apostle Peter and Amy, have never seriously thought of mingling, eating, or worshipping with the Gentiles (*Goyim*).

Peter had a vision he didn't quickly understand. He needed an explanation, he needed to be led; led to those that he had been "conditioned" to believe were not worthy of being part of God's church. The early Christian church had a problem similar to what some Adventists in the '80s face. They felt that the Gentiles were "inferior" and not worthy of salvation. Let's regain the vision and courage of Peter. We need to go to the Corneliuses of the world. We might begin to think how to break down the barriers of our "exclusive" gospel.

1. Know what you believe! How can change be effected if you aren't sure where you are? (See 2 Tim. 3:16, NIV.)

2. Reach out! Remember the Sabbath School song about hiding your light under a bushel? Let it shine! Recall that the apostles, during the building days of the church, did not cloister together, but traveled and studied and were witnesses of God's love and guidance.

3. Pray! Peter found the power of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and we can too. This power will lead in the right direction and guide us as we witness and study. It is the channel to power. (See Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2-6, NIV.)

4. Remember God gives gifts directly as men and women are ready to receive them. (Acts 10:35, NIV.)

## REACT

Are we exclusive? If so, does this make us forget that there are many just waiting to have the gospel "laid out" for them, "pure and simple"?

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Joan Angelo-Adams is the vice-president of alumni at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

# Contention in the Church

by W. A. Criswell

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 11:2, 3

*"So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them'" (Acts 11:2, 3, NIV).*

"What a marvelous revelation of human nature. Whenever there is trouble in the church, it will seldom be over any great commitment or doctrinal statement, but will be over some minutiae issue that is not worthy to be mentioned. They said to him, 'You ate with a Gentile.' They did not mention the marvelous salvation of grace that was extended to the Gentile people. Nothing was mentioned about God's mercy for the whole world, but they condemned Peter because they said, 'You visited an uncircumcised man and you ate with him!' Lest we think that was the church in Jerusalem, we can see that is exactly like the churches of today. Many of our altercations are also over little issues. . . .

"One time I preached in a church that had a vicious split right down the middle. Some of the people left and organized another church. What they split over was whether the piano ought to be in front of the pulpit or on the side by the choir. Such are people!

"These Jews accosted Peter with an unbelievable statement. This is the church that began 'with one accord,' as the Bible says: 'And they were all with one accord, loving God, praising the Lord.' Then they got into an altercation over the Hellenists and the Aramaeans, the Greek-speaking Jews and the Aramaic-speaking Jews. Now they are in conflict over the issue of eating with a Gentile.

"The only way Peter could exonerate himself was to tell them what God had done. Then our story continues: 'Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,' then he followed through what God did. 'The Lord told me to rise; kill, and eat. The Lord told me not to call any man common or unclean. The Lord God said, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common."' The Spirit bade me, "Go with these men, nothing doubting." And the Holy Ghost fell upon them while I was preaching to them. God gave them the like gift as He did to us at Pentecost. Who was I that I could withstand God?' The only way Peter could exonerate himself was to say, 'God did that.' The entire plan, purpose, revelation, and commandment was from heaven. God did it." \*

\* Taken from *Acts, 3 Volumes in One* by W. A. Criswell, pp. 360, 361. Copyright © 1978, 1979, 1980 by the Zondervan Corporation. Used by permission.

# RECOMMENDED READING

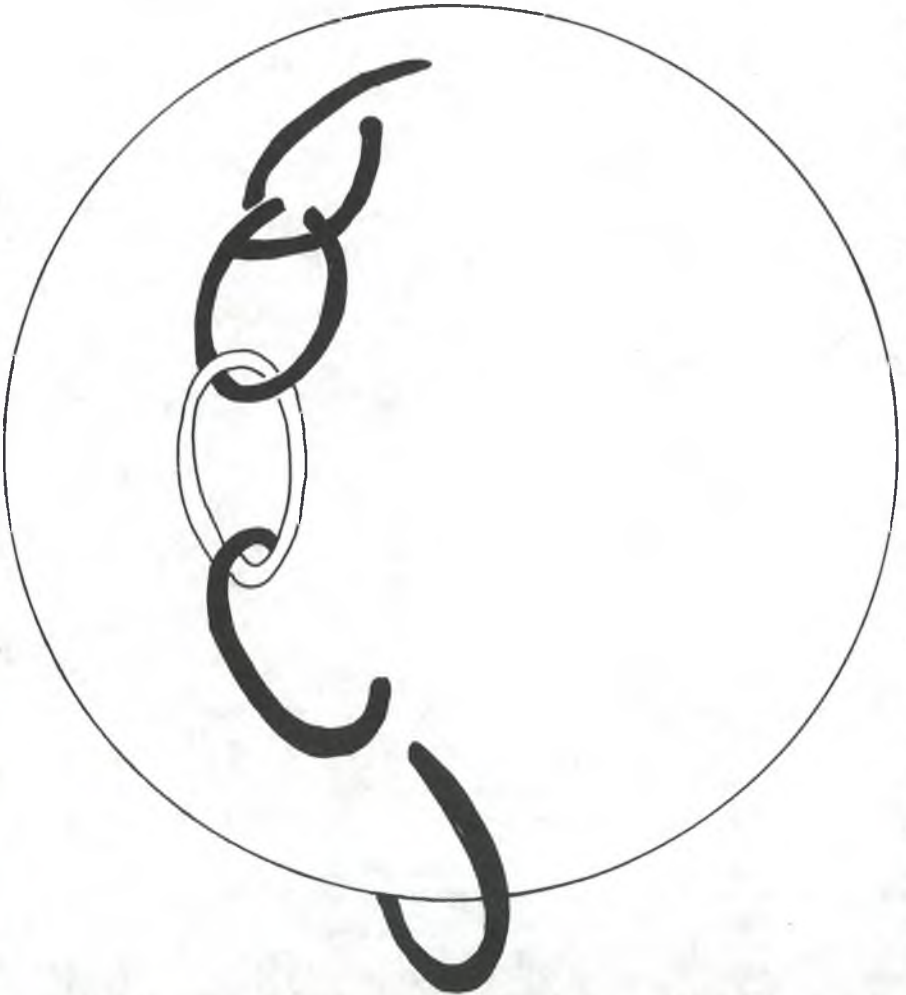


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# Pioneer to the Pagans

“ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’ ” (Acts 13:47, NIV).





# New Colonies In a New World

by Christopher L. Litten

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Acts 13:47

"Raleigh, you have our permission and our blessing to establish a colony in the New World. The land you discover shall be claimed for England and shall be called Virginia in honor of me, England's virgin queen."

Sir Walter Raleigh knelt and kissed Queen Elizabeth I's signet ring. "I humbly thank you, gracious queen. I promise you and England a rich reward."

A month and two days after the charter was granted, a ship set sail on April 27, 1584. On July 13 the expedition established a base on Roanoke Island, which is now part of North Carolina. In 1585, 108 men sailed from Plymouth, England, to fortify Roanoke Island and to establish the first English colony in the New World.

The colonists became discouraged when they discovered that the New World did not flow with milk and honey, nor with the wealth promised by Raleigh. When Sir Francis Drake visited the colony, most of the colonists returned to England.

Sir Richard Grenville attempted to resupply the colonists; however, he discovered a deserted Fort Raleigh. Grenville left 15 men at the fort with a two-year supply of provisions.

Despite the failure to establish a thriving colony in Virginia, Raleigh recruited 115 colonists, including 17 women and 11 children. On July 22, 1587, the colonists discovered a

deserted "Cittie of Raleigh in Virginia." The City of Raleigh was rebuilt, and new homes were added. Hope rose among the colonists on August 18 when they celebrated the birth of Virginia Dare, the first English child to be born in the New World; nevertheless, their exultation turned to despair when they realized their supplies were inadequate to survive the harsh winter and their relationship with the Algonquin Indians was worsening.

When a rescue ship finally landed on Roanoke Island in 1590, instead of finding jubilant colonists, the relief party found deer roaming the fort. The only clue cryptically describing the colonists' fate was one word carved on a tree: "Croatan," the name of an Indian Village.

The experience of the early Christian church paralleled the experience of England's first colonization attempts. Peter, like Raleigh, encouraged people to join a fellowship of believers and to establish communities of believers. The early Christians, like the Elizabethan colonists, discovered their mission thwarted by tribulations and the deaths of Stephen, James, and other believers. And the Christians, similar to Raleigh's lost colony, were scattered.

England successfully established permanent colonies in the New World in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the first Christians persevered and established permanent

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communities throughout the world in response to the preaching of Peter and Paul.

The only record left by Raleigh's Lost Colony was one word; however, the first Christians recorded their endeavors to share the gospel

with every community and to "bring salvation to the ends of the earth" in the book of Acts.

Read the acts of the first Christians and vicariously participate in their heroic attempts to fulfill the Holy Spirit's mission.

# A Light in the Darkness

by Randal Wisbey

LOGOS

**Theme:** As God's people cooperate with the Holy Spirit, the church's mission to share the gospel with every community and every nation is accomplished.

## 1. Prayer and God's Action (read Acts 12:1-25)

*"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5, NIV).*

It hurt. The salty bitterness stung at their cheeks as this band of Christians fell on their knees, once more asking God for His protection and the assurance of His love. James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was dead, beheaded by Herod Agrippa I, posing as a champion of the law.

It is of interest to note that this Herod was a direct descendent of the Maccabees through his mother; educated at Rome, he had "sedulously cultivated the good graces of the Jewish people by meticulously keeping the Law and all Jewish observances."<sup>1</sup>

His efforts applauded by the Jewish leaders, Herod proceeds to have Peter arrested and thrown into prison, intending to bring him to trial following the Passover.

But as verse 5 reveals, the early church prays. Earnestly. In fact, the word used for prayer by Luke is the same Greek word used in reference to Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemene (Luke 22:44). And, as Acts 12:12 states, it is a prayer that God miraculously answers while they are still on their knees.

Aroused from his sleep by an angel of the Lord, Peter is led from his prison cell to the streets of Jerusalem. Suddenly alone, and realizing for the first time what has happened to him, he hurriedly makes his way to the house of Mary. According to church tradition traced back to the fourth century, this is the setting of the last supper, as well as the headquarters of the Jerusalem church.<sup>2</sup> As Peter is finally admitted, one can only imagine the joy of this faithful group as they see the reality of their answered prayers standing before them.

But Herod is angry! Unable to find Peter, Herod orders that the guards be executed. Luke immediately compares the earthly "power" of Herod with that of God. Robed entirely in silver<sup>3</sup> and accepting the praise and adulation of his subjects, Herod is struck down by an angel of the Lord and dies.

In telling these three stories, Luke provides an interlude, between 11:30 and 12:24, vividly linking the power of prayer and God's action.

*The early Christian church knew how to pray, and today their prayers appear to have been most effective. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, can we expect this same effectiveness? Do we?*

## 2. The Mission Begins (read Acts 13:1-12)

*"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit*

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said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them to set them off" (Acts 13:2, 3, NIV).

The mission to the world now begins. Directed by the Holy Spirit, this small company sends Barnabas and Paul off on the first missionary journey. It is thrilling to note that Luke's list reveals the universal call of the gospel. Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus; Lucius came from North Africa; Simeon was also a Jew, but his Roman name, Niger, indicates that he would have felt comfortable in Roman circles; Manaen was an aristocrat with courtly connections; and Paul himself was a Jew from Tarsus and trained as a Rabbi. These men, coming from diverse backgrounds and lands had discovered the secret of "togetherness" because they had discovered the secret of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

William Barclay makes an interesting suggestion. What if this Simeon called Niger was the same Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26)? What a marvelous thing if the man whose first contact with Jesus was the carrying of the cross—a task he must have resented—was indeed one of the men directly responsible for sending out the story of the cross to all the world!<sup>5</sup>

It is to Cyprus that Barnabas and Paul are first directed to go. This is of special interest, for Cyprus was the home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). What a joy it must have been for Barnabas to take the message of Jesus to his people.

Things appear to be going well—that is, until they arrive in Paphos. There they encounter Elymas the magician, also known as Bar-Jesus. As the personal wizard of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, Elymas has a lot to lose if his boss should like what he hears. Confronting Elymas as a child of the devil, Paul declares that he will be struck blind. The proconsul, witnessing what has taken place, and convinced by both miracle and message, believes.

At this point (13:9) in the book of Acts, Luke refers to Saul as Paul. Luke is emphasizing that Paul has now entered the Gentile phase of his ministry.

*In what ways are we needing as individuals and as a church, to enter a "Gentile phase" in our ministry? How can we be more open to those around us? How willing are we to take risks in order effectively to reach across cultural, racial, and gender barriers?*

### **3. Paul's Preaching Convicts and Converts (read Acts 13:13-52)**

*"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47, NIV).*

It is the Sabbath, and Paul and Barnabas make their way to the local synagogue. Asked whether they have a message of encouragement for the congregation, Paul can be pictured winking at Barnabas as he stands to preach. Did he ever have a message of encouragement!

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This is a most insightful passage, as it is the only full-length report of a sermon by Paul that we have. It is quickly evident that this sermon has many similarities to both Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-40) and Stephen's sermon (Acts 7:2-53).

Paul begins by making the point that Jesus is the promised offspring of David. As he recounts the history of Israel, he concludes: "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent" (Acts 13:26, NIV). As Paul shares Jesus' rejection and crucifixion, he challenges his audience, and each of us, to realize that the resurrection is ultimate proof of God's purpose and power. He continues by stating that Jesus is now freely offered to the citizens of Pisidian Antioch as Saviour: "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38, NIV).

But what is good news to some is bad news to others. On the following Sabbath, as Paul again prepares to speak to a large crowd, Luke tells us in verse 45 that the Jews are jealous and have begun to talk abusively against him. But even for this Paul and Barnabas are prepared: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:46, 47, NIV).

While the Gentiles were delighted with Paul's announcement, the unbelieving Jews were furious. And just as our lesson began with persecution, so it ends. Yet even as Paul and Barnabas are seen leaving the city, there is joy. "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52, NIV).

*William Barclay states that the "Jews were intent on shutting the door. From the beginning the Christians saw that the door must be opened wide. As it has been said, 'The Jews saw the heathen as chaff to be burned; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped for God.' And His church must have a like vision of a world for Christ."<sup>6</sup> How can the church encourage its members to dream of a "world for Christ"? What are practical steps you can take to insure the survival, and continuation, of this vision?*

1. William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 99.  
2. *The Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, "Acts" (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1982), p. 159.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 162 [The historian Josephus describes a silver robe, dazzlingly bright (Antiquities XIX.8.2).]

4. William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 104, 105.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 115.

# A Light to the Gentiles?

by Tom Boggess

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Acts 13:47

"An angel visits the earth to see who are prepared to welcome Jesus. But he can discern no tokens of expectancy. He hears no voice of praise and triumph that the period of Messiah's coming is at hand. . . .

"There is no evidence that Christ is expected, and no preparation for the Prince of life. In amazement the celestial messenger is about to return to heaven with the shameful tidings, when he discovers a group of shepherds who are watching their flocks by night, and, as they gaze into the starry heavens, are contemplating the prophecy of a Messiah to come to earth, and longing for the advent of the world's Redeemer."<sup>1</sup>

"The light of God is ever shining amid the darkness of heathenism. As these magi studied the starry heavens, and sought to fathom the mystery hidden in their bright paths, they beheld the glory of the Creator. Seeking clearer knowledge, they turned to the Hebrew Scriptures. . . . In the Old Testament the Saviour's advent was more clearly revealed. The magi learned with joy that His coming was near, and that the whole world was to be filled with a knowledge of the glory of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

"The priests and elders of Jerusalem were not as ignorant concerning the birth of Christ as they pretended. The report of the angels' visit to the shepherds had been brought to Jerusalem, but the rabbis had treated it as unworthy of their notice. . . . Now pride and envy closed the door against the light. If the reports brought by the shepherds and the wise men were credited, they would place the priests and rabbis in a most unenviable position, disproving their claim to be the exponents of the truth of God. These learned teachers would not stoop to be instructed by those whom they termed heathen. It could not be, they said, that God had passed them by, to communicate with ignorant shepherds or uncircumcised Gentiles."<sup>3</sup>

"Such is the sure result of neglect to appreciate and improve the light and privileges which God bestows. Unless the church will follow on in His opening providence, accepting every ray of light, performing every duty which may be revealed, religion will inevitably degenerate into the observance of forms, and the spirit of vital godliness will disappear. This truth has been repeatedly illustrated in the history of the church. God requires of His people works of faith and obedience corresponding to the blessings and privileges bestowed."<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

Why was it that the priests and rabbis failed to be the light that they were to have been? How was it that the news of the birth of Christ was revealed to the shepherds and wise men? Keeping in mind Acts 13:47, how does the last quotation relate to the church today, and to each of us individually?

*The Great Controversy*,  
p. 314.  
2. *The Desire of Ages*,  
pp. 59, 60.  
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.  
*The Great Controversy*,  
p. 316.

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# Picnics and Tribulation

by Charles Scriven

Being the church is no picnic. Yet there is every reason for the church to *have* picnics.

This occurred to me when (during picnic season) I was preparing to write about Acts 12 and 13. In these chapters we meet King Herod—and it's not because he wants to give some Christian a medal or ask some preacher to pray. Herod appears in the story as a killer; the church irritates him, and he makes James the first disciple to suffer martyrdom. He is nicer to Peter—he merely throws him in prison.

Peter escapes, it's true; but don't forget, James loses his life. And after the story of Peter's escape we meet yet another episode of Herod's pride and cruelty.

The church grew up in the midst of tribulation. Picnics don't call for true grit, but this did. And, somehow, the grit, the unyielding courage, paid off. Despite the tribulation, "the word of God grew and multiplied," according to chapter 12, verse 24.

Now, with the start of chapter 13, attention shifts from Peter to Paul, and we read about the commissioning of him and Barnabas for the first missionary journey. According to the story, the two travelers soon found themselves preaching before a government bigwig named Sergius Paulus—only to be contradicted by one Bar-Jesus, a "son of the devil." But he became temporarily blind, and Sergius Paulus believed. So despite the tribulation, the word of God grew and multiplied.

A couple of stops later Paul spoke at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. Basically, he told the gospel story, and this itself is about enduring tribulation. Jesus, he said, suffered execution despite being innocent of a capital crime. Yet despite all this, Paul said, "God raised him from the dead."

This so impressed the listeners that they asked for more the next Sabbath. Yet when a huge crowd turned out, jealousy arose, creating first ridicule of Paul's message and later persecution of him and his partner Barnabas. Still, many believed, and when the disciples left town they "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:52, NIV).

Despite the tribulation . . . well, by now you see the pattern: struggle and achievement, struggle and achievement. We must, I think, be prepared for struggle in our life together, and plenty of it. Being the church is no picnic. Yet the big story that underlies our own, the story, that is, of the first believers, reminds us that the struggle is worth it. It will be no picnic, but there will be reasons for *having* picnics.

## REACT

Is life easier when one is a Christian? Explain.

**EVIDENCE**  
Key text:  
Acts 12 and 13

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# How to Report for God: Some Tips on a Written Witness

by Edna Maye Loveless

## HOW TO Key text: Acts 12

Even the most ethical journalist lacks total objectivity. Although Luke shows a sophisticated awareness of what constitutes an eye-witness report in Acts 12, the slant of his story indicates his conviction. Imagine Luke submitting his report to an editor:

"Luke, is this passage all you can say about James? I mean, he was one of the inner circle around Christ."

"Facts about James are elsewhere in the record, sir. *I have an overall theme for the story. James's obituary doesn't fit here.*"

"Then why mention him at all?"

"Read to the end of the story and you'll see."

"You mean this bit about Herod's death?"

"Exactly, sir. We need to document his villainy."

"True, Luke, but did you need to be so explicit about his death?"

"You tell me all the time: *Avoid circumlocution. Tell it straight.*"

"I guess you're right. Now here, in verse 19, you need to explain where the delivering angel was when Herod ordered the execution of the guards."

"I maintain a consistent point of view, sir. I wasn't in heaven; neither were my sources."

"But James loses his head, and the guards get an unfair death sentence. Doesn't that weaken your story?"

"Sir, you can't kill off a villain until he's demonstrated his treachery; even God observes that restriction."

"Back to your story, Luke. Why the lengthy account about Peter?"

"It's human interest. *No point in presenting truth unless it's packaged attractively.* Our Master Editor told a good story . . ."

"Yes, yes, OK. The character development of Peter here. It doesn't sound like the Peter you wrote about a couple years ago."

"It's not the same Peter, sir. I mean, the guy's changed."

"Why don't you comment on the change? You could say, 'Observers say . . .'"

"I compliment the readers: they know all about Peter. I offer details; they make inference."

"You think they'll see this impetuous fellow's become calmer?"

"Sir, I offer a striking contrast. The people say impetuous things: 'You must be crazy' and 'It must be Peter's guardian angel at the door' (NEB). My readers know Peter as the guy who cut off a person's ear in impatience. Now he goes on knocking while the flurry inside continues."

"Now tell me what you're trying to say in the story."

"Look, there's no trivia like 'It was a sunny day' or 'You'll be interested to know that I attended a fishing seminar with Peter.' *Every sentence advances the idea:* Here's how an evil person works—compared to how God works; and at the end we're reminded of who's in charge."

"Luke, I'd suggest you change it to: Here's how God works, compared to the way an evil person works."

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# A Timely Story

by Barry Casey

Here's a free story-line for everyone (and you know who you are) who harbors fantasies of moving to Hollywood and writing screenplays. This one's a winner. No guns, no sex, no violence (well, maybe a little), but plenty of action and a satisfying finish.

*The local oppressor, one King Herod, attacks a tiny band of partisans who follow the memory of their leader, a charismatic peasant from the hill country of Galilee named Jesus. This Jesus, who has attracted a large following among the curious and the poor, has recently been the subject of intense public scrutiny. Convicted on all counts, he is crucified. Within 72 hours of his death his followers claim he has appeared to them, given them instructions to meet him later at a secluded location, and vanished. Later, after the group has met with him and received his assurances that he will be back, he disappears, not to be seen again. The group continues to tell the story of its relationship with him and to speak of his mysterious healing powers. Many people believe them and their number grows daily.*

*They themselves become the target of police investigations. One of the leaders, James, is taken into police custody during a Jewish festival. He is later brutally beheaded in prison under the express orders of Herod. A second leader, Peter, also one of the original band of Jesus' followers, is arrested and placed under heavy guard. Political observers speculate Peter is to be subjected to public trial and humiliation in order to discourage any widespread movements by the "people of the Way" to recruit new members.*

*Despite the heaviest security measures ever ordered for a single political prisoner during the Herodian regime, Peter escapes. Slipping out of two sets of manacles, he follows an accomplice through three secured doors and past a total of 16 soldiers. When they reach the street the accomplice disappears. Suddenly realizing that it's not a dream, but a reality, Peter makes his way to a friend's house where a number of his friends are gathered to mourn his arrest and await developments. He arrives to an incredulous and joyful reunion. Speaking swiftly, he informs them of his miraculous escape, tells them to pass the word to the rest of the group, and disappears into the night.*

*The next morning, amid confusion and accusations of betrayal, the palace admits the political prisoner has escaped. Later that day, sixteen members of the crack anti-terrorist squad assigned to guard Peter are executed.*

Once again the Bible surprises us with its understated wit, dramatic pacing, and persuasive technique.

Perhaps this story comes as a reminder for those of us who live under the easy tolerance of bemused indifference toward religious groups in this country, that in less benign regimes faithful Adventists and other Christians are suffering and dying. We need to hear this story to remind us of our good fortune and to move us to act on the gospel. If we join "The Way" it should be because Christ matters more to us than anything, including our citizenship, including our religious affiliation, including life itself.

## OPINION

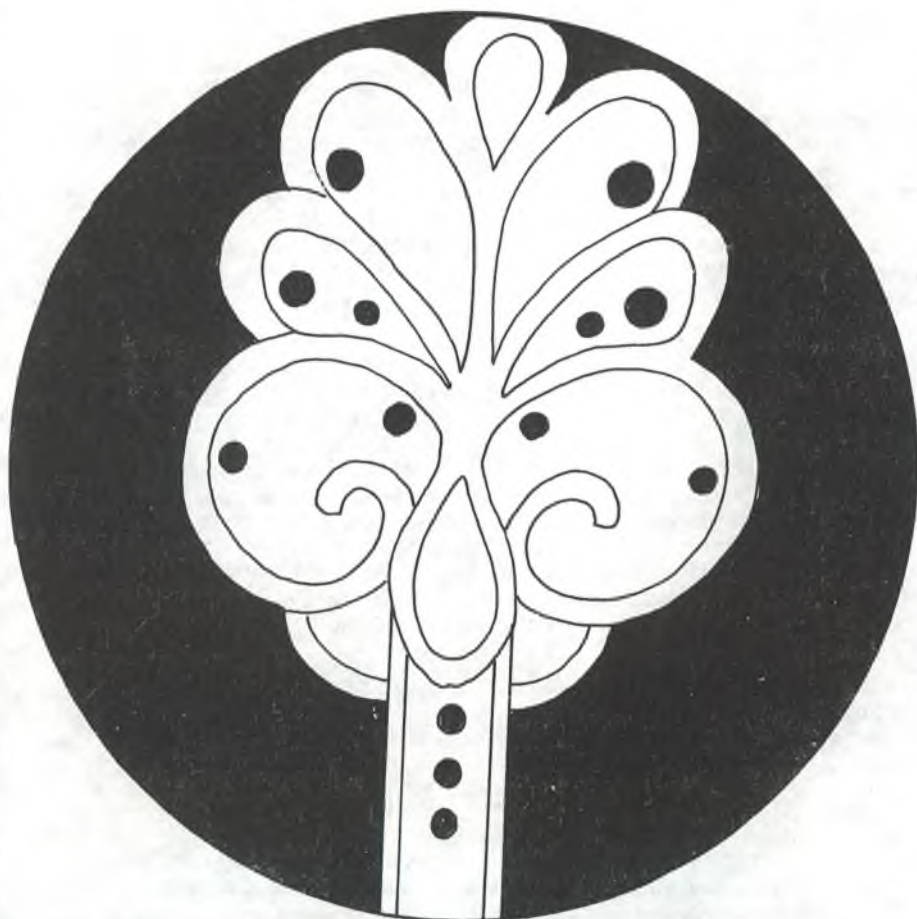
Key text:  
Acts 12:1—13:5

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# G. C./49 A. D.

“ ‘After this I will return, says the Lord, and restore the kingdom of David. I will rebuild its ruins and make it strong again’ ” (Acts 15:16, GNB).



# Looking Below the Surface

by Kathy Eikens

Remember the "Twilight Zone"? The television show from the 1960's that explored the fifth dimension? It was recently resurrected with re-makes of old episodes joining some contemporary visits to the zone. The story lines are pure fantasy, but can still have meaning for those who would look below the surface. Let me give you an example.

Bob was an out-of-work trucker. He sought out a friend who owed him a favor. The friend could get him a trucking job. The pay was good, just don't ask too many questions. The route went straight to hell. The cargo—human souls.

They were a noisy bunch, too. Always moaning and complaining, begging Bob to let them out of the trailer. At the truck stop other truckers whispered that something wasn't right. The loads kept getting larger and larger.

When Bob finally reached hell he stepped out of the cab to unload his freight. The occupants ran up to him claiming they didn't belong there, wouldn't he please help them? Guards noticed the interaction between Bob and the inmates, and the following morning he was called to the supervisor's office.

The supervisor had only words of praise for the job Bob was doing; however, he cautioned against getting too close to the cargo. Bob told him what the souls had said, and he

wondered at the number of them. Ah yes, the world was just becoming so wicked, the supervisor explained. The Big Boss didn't have the time to sort through all the souls, so the supervisor was helping Him out, getting rid of the riff-raff that certainly wouldn't fit into heaven. Did Bob understand? He understood, more than he wanted to.

On the next run, Bob stopped his rig midroute. He went back to the trailer and began asking the souls what they had done to deserve this fate. One young woman was a junky, but she claimed not to have hurt anyone but herself. A man in the back said he was gay, but couldn't believe that was the reason he had been sent. An elderly lady pressed against the side claimed her only crime had been in fighting to save some censored books at the local library. Others had similar stories. Bob set them all free, and supposedly is still doing what he can for the victims of the supervisor.

Obviously, there is no truck route to hell, but there are many supervisors in action today, trying to give God a hand in who should and who should not be saved.

Everyone is a supervisor at one time: the General Conference, the church board, the Pharisees in the week's lesson, even you and I. It takes God's help to look below the surface.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Acts 15:8, 9

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Kathy Eikens is the circulation supervisor at Weis Library, Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

**LOGOS**

**Theme:** Reactions to the message of the gospel may be mixed, producing great anger on one extreme and great joy on the other. The gospel advances, overcoming internal conflicts and surviving opposition.

**1. Gentile Enthusiasm (read Acts 14:1-18)**

*"And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks" (14:1, NASB).*

Paul and Barnabas must have been made of pretty sturdy stuff. What happened in Iconium is pretty much the same thing that happened to them in Antioch. Consider the effect of these situations on Paul and Barnabas' blood pressure, to say nothing of their mental health: they had to deal with adoring mobs storming the gates just to hear and see them, only to have them replaced by gangs of rowdies piling up rocks for the kill.

To preach the gospel, then as now, was to risk misunderstanding, and Paul and Barnabas were probably as deeply misunderstood as was Jesus. They obviously were tormented by both misplaced love and hate, and in this passage they plead simply to be treated as human beings. Soon after leaving Iconium to the thuds of a stoning meant for them, they arrived in Lystra, where in the name of Christ they healed a chronically ill man known well to the community. The man's recovery was so complete that the incident was touted as a "sign and wonder." The townsfolk in Lystra didn't have sticks and stones for Paul and Barnabas, but words of praise. They made noisy speeches with the extravagant claim that the "gods have come down to us in the likeness of men" (14:11, RSV). It is not surprising that the people of Lystra should make this particular error; their local history contained an account of earlier "visits" from two gods, and they greeted these apostles as a sign that they had been blessed again.

Meanwhile, angry detractors from Antioch and Iconium caught up with Paul and succeeded in inciting a riot against him. This time he did not escape the stoning. Despite his injuries, he continued with Barnabas the next day to Derbe and preached the gospel to that city with great results. They then returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where Paul optimistically reports, "They put fresh heart into the disciples, urging them to stand firm in the faith, and reminding them that it is 'through many tribulations' that we must enter into the kingdom of God" (14:22, Phillips).

*How can one keep his or her priorities in focus when he or she is either excessively admired or maligned? How seriously can one take the opinions of others in such a situation?*

**2. Summons to Jerusalem (read Acts 14:19-28 and 15:1-3)**

*"And when they had arrived and gathered the church together,*

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they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27, NASB).

After all the stress of traveling from city to city and enduring trouble and persecution from outside the church, Paul and Barnabas are now called on the carpet. This time they are confronted by the elders of the church over an internal squabble, a case of bitter infighting that called into question Paul's assumptions about the very nature of the church. While Paul and Barnabas' only joy was the opening of the "door of faith unto the Gentiles," there were those in the church insisting that all Gentile believers must identify themselves as Jews by submitting to the rite of circumcision. It was a difficult time in the life of the church. Many were uncertain just what should be done about the new Gentile converts. Other Jewish leaders thought it absurd that the gospel could make Christians of Gentiles without making them Jews.

Such attitudes greatly alarmed Paul, who contended that if the church consisted of two classes of people, then it would never represent Christ. Hence his proclamation in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NASB).

The issue of circumcision as a prerequisite for membership is one of the basic themes of the book of Galatians and has come to be called the "Galatian problem."

*What Galatian problem do you see in the twentieth-century church? How might we resolve questions of various "classes" of individuals in the church built around national, racial, or gender differentiations?*

### 3. Dissension Resolved (read Acts 15:4-35)

*"And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (verses 8, 9, NASB).*

As in any church council called to resolve a controversial issue, there were speeches in Jerusalem. We are told that the Christian Pharisees had their say in the matter. Apparently these men were believers in the resurrection and were allowed membership in the church when they added to their belief the conviction that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Unlike Paul, they held fast to their legalistic traditions of the past. It is not surprising that this group became the leaders of the "circumcision" movement in Jerusalem.

After a significant amount of questioning, Peter rose to make his speech. It is important that Luke includes the content of the message, as well as James's testimony, which followed. Peter recalled that the principles with which they were wrestling had been decided ten years earlier, when Peter had given the good news to the Gen-

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tiles in Cornelius' household! Why, he inquires, should new conditions be imposed on the Gentiles now? The very adherence to the law we are asking of the Gentile Christians is a yoke we and our fathers were unable to bear. Peter's use of the word *yoke* is significant, for it was used often in connection with the burden of fulfilling the requirements of the ceremonial law and the "yoke" of Jesus was referred to as light in comparison (see Matt. 11:29, 30).

Some scholars believe that when James the brother of the Lord rose to speak, the Pharisees were relieved because he was known to be more conservative than either Peter or Paul. He was a well-known and respected leader in Jerusalem, and his buttressing of Peter's argument may have come as a surprise to many assembled there. James not only quoted Peter but used further persuasion by calling on the record of the prophet Amos, saying this prophecy is fulfilled by a change in our understanding since Jesus came to rebuild what David established, and then to extend it to all the world.

In verse 19 when James stated, "It is my judgment . . .," the decision was made, so much was he respected in Jerusalem. It was the decision of the council that Gentiles were welcomed into the fellowship of Christ on *His* merits, not on an outward sign demanded by an earlier system. However, James did ask the Gentiles to make some compromise to accommodate the Jewish Christians. He asked that in matters of food they continue to observe the Jewish practices and to maintain a high level of moral behavior between the sexes. This was James's way to maintain the principle of salvation through the unmerited grace of Jesus and to restore Christian unity within the church.

*What guidelines would you use to differentiate between principles that must not be altered and practices that can accommodate the weaker church member without sacrificing principle?*

*What steps might you suggest to bring greater unity between different nationalities, races, and sexes within the church?*

# Victory Amidst Opposition

by Kenneth L. Coleman

Paul and Barnabas went from city to city preaching the gospel of Christ. The message of the Saviour's love and sacrifice touched many hearts. Their success, however, met with opposition from the Jews who would not accept the marvelous truth.

In *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White writes, "The increasing popularity of the message borne by the apostles, filled the unbelieving Jews with envy and hatred, and they determined to stop the labors of Paul and Barnabas at once. By means of false and exaggerated reports, they led the authorities to fear that the entire city was in danger of being incited to insurrection. They declared that large numbers were attaching themselves to the apostles and suggested that it was for secret and dangerous designs."<sup>1</sup>

"Through the opposition that the disciples met, the message of truth gained great publicity; the Jews saw that their efforts to thwart the work of the new teachers resulted only in adding greater numbers to the new faith. 'The multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.'

"So enraged were the leaders among the Jews by the turn that matters were taking, that they determined to gain their ends by violence. Arousing the worst passions of the ignorant, noisy mob, they succeeded in creating a tumult, which they attributed to the teaching of the disciples. By this false charge they hoped to gain the help of the magistrates in carrying out their purpose. They determined that the apostles should have no opportunity to vindicate themselves, and that the mob should interfere by stoning Paul and Barnabas, thus putting an end to their labors."<sup>2</sup>

The apostles' work was not an easy one. Their lives were in constant danger from opposition stirred up in the hearts of the people by Satan and his angels. Nevertheless, souls were reached that had longed for such truths, and joy and praise could be heard on their lips for the light that had been given and that would never be put out.

Today, God's messengers also face opposition in preaching the gospel. But if they persevere in sowing the seeds of truth, many souls will be harvested.

"In every age and in every land, God's messengers have been called upon to meet bitter opposition from those who deliberately chose to reject the light of heaven. Often, by misrepresentation and falsehood, the enemies of the gospel have seemingly triumphed, closing the doors by which God's messengers might gain access to the people. But these doors cannot remain forever closed, and often, as God's servants have returned after a time to resume their labors, the Lord has wrought mightily in their behalf, enabling them to establish memorials to the glory of His name."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

When God's people are falsely accused by those who wish to hinder the spread of the gospel, what should be their reaction?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Acts 14:1

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 178.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 179.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

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# From Strength to Strength

by Elizabeth Wear

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 14:1; 15:35

In Iconium Paul and Barnabas had great success preaching the good news about Jesus. Despite their success, however, a certain number of unbelieving Jews who were not persuaded by their arguments, stirred bitter reaction against both the preachers and the new converts. After narrowly escaping stoning, Paul and Barnabas fled several hours southwest, to the city of Lystra.

In the city of Lystra again we see the same love/hate reaction to the gospel with a new variation. Paul was mistaken for the Greek god Zeus, chief of the gods who was believed to be a kind deity that would one day return. Barnabas was assumed to be the god Jupiter. Plans were laid by the temple priests and city residents for a sacrificial celebration outside the city gates. Paul and Barnabas, suspicious of the activity, rushed to the scene, rent their clothes in protest, and eloquently persuaded the people that they were not gods, but humans.

Meanwhile, antagonistic Jews from Antioch arrived (having traveled more than 100 miles) and stirred up some of the people of Lystra, who now decided that Paul and Barnabas were demons and proceeded to stone Paul. Many disciples were raised up, but the preachers were forced to move their point of operation.

Later in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas faced another challenging situation. With James serving as presiding officer, the council in Jerusalem sat in session to settle the question posed by Jews from Antioch: "Why are Gentiles coming into the Christian church without first conforming to Jewish ceremonial law—in particular the practice of circumcision?" New converts were confused. They had been taught that they were saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by their works.

Peter stated to the council that individuals are saved by the grace of the Lord, and not through conformance to the law. No one stood to dispute him. Principle had been established. The council was now able to settle other ceremonial disputes using this principle as a basis for resolution.

The early church faced many difficulties, and yet its leaders were courageous, bold, and effective. Major issues were handled diplomatically through due process exemplified by the Jerusalem Council, and yet when resolution was needed the church leaders decisively summarized and simplified the matter. The church moved forward with new strength.

## REACT

1. Jesus predicted that preaching the truth would cause division. Why would this happen? Why does spiritual truth leave hatred in its wake? Why does the gospel arouse anger and often draw out the worst in individuals?

2. The stance of the Jerusalem Council was that we are not saved by our deeds, but through grace. In the light of this decision, how would you react to this statement: "We are no more lost by our deeds than we are saved by our deeds"?

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Elizabeth Wear is a professor and assistant academic dean for adult evening programs at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.



# A Formula for Maintaining Conflict

by William Loveless

In its straightforward account of an early-church conflict, Acts 15 offers a model for conflict resolution. Examine it alongside these tips on ways to be irresponsible in church conflicts.

1. Label the opposition with negative terms. If you're liberal, call him or her a *conservative*, *diehard*, or *sorehead*. If you're conservative, call him or her *liberal*, *subversive*, or *dangerous*. To call the opposition "certain persons" is too neutral; to name their position objectively fails to rouse feelings that engender conflict.

2. Nurse the controversy in private meetings where you talk about, but don't invite, the antagonist. If the person were there, their story could weaken your position. Raise questions in cloakrooms and hallways by deriding decisions of groups inadequately represented by your "in group"—lay persons, pastors, MBA's, youth, singles, women, or Tibetan immigrants.

3. Avoid mediators, especially those with constituted authority like apostles and elders. The trouble with submitting conflict to mediators is that you may resolve it. If you're conflict-habituated you'll miss the stimulation of a good yelling match and may find mere constructive pursuits boring.

4. If good things have happened in your organization or relationship, disregard them as irrelevant. Attention to them can defeat your dedication to the conflict and squander time you could give to supporting your cause. Remind your opponent that statistics and examples can be used to support almost any position.

5. Deny your opponent opportunity to debate. It jeopardizes your commitment to exploring only the "right" side of the argument.

6. To tighten up entrance into your "in group," insist that a Gentile become a Jew to accept salvation, and that an Oriental become a Westerner, a Catholic become a Protestant, a twentieth-century convert a nineteenth-century practitioner. If someone quotes Peter ("It is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, and so are they"),\* banish such a person; otherwise you'll find it hard to support your point.

7. Ignore listeners' interests and concerns. Let a couple of adventurers like Paul and Barnabas play to the crowd, and the charm of their story can beguile the listeners. Watch out for the student who is sensitive to the interests of his or her roommate. They will probably get people to listen just because, well, they're interested and interesting.

8. Keep the results of the mediation sessions hazy. If you let someone sum up and name the issues along with solutions, conflict may falter. Put a resolution in writing, especially if it is sympathetic to people who have felt oppressed, and you'll have a challenge to keep your pet idea alive and a continuing subject of conflict.

## REACT

Name a circumstance you've observed or been in where one or more of the rules above were violated or observed.

**HOW TO  
Key text:  
Acts 15**

\* (Acts 15:11, NEB).

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# Stop Fighting Over the Gospel

by Wayne Judd

## OPINION

Key text:

Acts 14:1; 15:35

Fights over definitions of the gospel are as old as the gospel itself.

Paul and Barnabas faced a sizable number of tough legalists who disagreed with them on what the gospel was. These were not "outsiders," but churchly insiders. They had accepted Christ and were convinced that the gospel required ritual acts for salvation. Paul and Barnabas insisted that they were wrong.

Any Seventh-day Adventist Christian young person who has gone to more than a month of Sabbath Schools or who has gone to an Adventist academy for a week, has probably heard the arguments. How much faith, how much works? How much justification, how much sanctification? How much freedom, how much authority? How much trust, how much action? How much does God do, how much do we do? How much, HOW MUCH?

Wrong question. Absolutely the wrong question, and until we stop asking, How much, the church is doomed to failure, both within and without its denominational borders. Indeed, in the past half dozen years, young Adventists have heard theological debates, ad nauseam, on the relationship of justification to sanctification. They have watched churches split up, ministers and teachers get fired, old friends become enemies, and other compounded spiritual atrocities within the church.

Such young people have expressed their conviction that the promised apocalyptic persecution of Adventists by antichrist is not nearly so dangerous as the persecution of Adventists by Adventists. People who are not required to die for their faith kill for it instead. Jim Ayars, of Heralds Quartet, sings a solo about the phenomenon, "Shoot Your Own Side First." In the debate over the gospel, with the roar of verbal cannons and the explosions of artillery, many kids say that all they hear is confusion, not truth. "If these folks who are trained in theology can't agree on what the gospel is, how can we ever hope to know?" They slink away from the field of battle, if not from their church membership, to find a quiet place to shake the din from their heads and the heaviness from their hearts.

All because we don't seem to have sense enough to stop asking, "How much?"

*How much* has already been answered. The gospel tells us that God has acted in history to save people. God's act is the gift of salvation. Period. *How much* is irrelevant. It's not, "Accept the gift, behave, and be saved." It's "Accept the gift, be saved, and behave." And until we unify the Christian life into one substantial relationship with God and our fellow humans we will continue to quarrel about the meaning of the gospel.

Maybe we need another Jerusalem Council to set the record straight and get on with being the people we claim to be.

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Wayne Judd is vice-president for college advancement at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.



# GREAT contemporary gospel music



SPECIAL DELIVERY

## CHANGES

If you enjoy contemporary Christian gospel music, don't miss these four top-quality releases.

From new gospel recording group Special Delivery comes CHANGES. A 1986 Angel Award winner,

this excellent album combines the musical talents of Pete and Jasmine McCleod with those of Lisa Brinegar. Songs include "Change My Heart," "Friends," and "Then Came Jesus," plus six more songs.

INSPIRATIONAL GUITAR AT ITS BEST, by Rick Foster, is a blend of rich guitar music with full orchestral accompaniment. Rick's music has touched many people's lives. Among them is Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni writes: "Jesus said, 'Come with me by yourself to a quiet place,' and Rick Foster's music can be that quiet place." Discover Rick's special music. Songs include: "What Child Is This?" "I'm a Poor Wayfaring Stranger," "How Great Thou Art," and others.

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Sam Ocampo



# Unlocking Spiritual Prisons

“ ‘Men, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’ ” (Acts 16:30, 31, NIV).



# The Sentence: Believe

by Caroline Euahnenko

Prison. Stifling hot, one cement-walled room, stark bunks, no windows, bored faces. And we sang. We sang of salvation, of Jesus, of hope, to those bored, hopeless faces. No violent earthquake, no loosened chains, just songs of praise. They listened, but now I wonder whether they understood. Did they think that those words were meant only for us in our Sabbath finery and not for them in their prison robes?

Other prisons. Jeers, shifty eyes, endless locks and keys and corridors, "no-civilians-are-allowed-in-that-wing" explanations, solitary confinement, depressing. I've seen a few prisons on class trips and volunteer projects. Deplorable. I'm glad I'm not a prisoner.

But, we are all prisoners from time to time in one prison or another. Prisons of pride that bristle and flaunt when someone doesn't give recognition to our high calling or position. Prisons of prejudice that build walls between us and those whose skin color, or language, or customs, or gender may be different from ours. Prisons of disgust toward a fellow church member who may be struggling with an

"immoral" sin. Prisons of intolerance for crosses or waving arms that depict a style of worship different from ours. Prisons of theory that place more importance on philosophical theologizing than on a relationship with Jesus. Prisons of apathy that keep us comfortable within our secure denominational circle and oblivious to the social and spiritual issues surrounding us. Prisons of selfishness that prevent us from taking the time to care. Prisons of conceit that steal another's dignity by squelching their self-respect. Prisons of judgment that look at criminals and say "They deserve it! They should have known better."

From real prisoners the charges: theft, break-and-entry, murder, rape, fraud. Their sentences vary depending on the law, the customs, the judge, the country.

Our charge while in prisons: pride, prejudice, disgust, intolerance, theorizing, apathy, conceit, selfishness, judgment. Our sentence: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." It doesn't vary according to race, religion, gender, age, income, intelligence, or profession. Simply believe.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Acts 16:31

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Caroline Euahnenko is the director of guidance and counseling at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

# Everyone is Involved

by Bruce Buttler

## LOGOS 1. Common Goals, Yet Diverse Personalities (read Acts 15:36-41)

*"And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other" (Acts 15:39, RSV).*

Acceptance of the gospel in the hearts of Paul and Barnabas did not prevent them from disagreement. According to the Jerome Biblical Commentary, the Greek "noun implies actually a bitter quarrel between Barnabas and Paul."<sup>1</sup> Acts 14:14 describes both men as apostles, which, along with elders, was the highest designation in the New Testament church (see Acts 15:22). The result of this deep disagreement was two evangelistic journeys instead of one.

*Do disagreements between Christians today result in more good than otherwise would have happened?*

## 2. Common Goals, Yet Diverse Application (read Acts 16:1-5)

*"Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him" (Acts 16:3, RSV).*

First Corinthians 7:18, 19 and Paul's statement regarding Titus in Galatians 2:3 appear inconsistent with having Timothy circumcised. However, 1 Corinthians 9:20 may reconcile the different approaches by suggesting that different cultural groups need to be approached differently.

*How should the different groups that your church could contact be approached?*

## 3. Which Route? (read Acts 16:6-15)

*"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night, . . . 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" (Acts 16:9, RSV).*

We can only speculate on the reasons for the vision. Some possibilities: a larger number of people prepared for the gospel; less danger to Paul and his companions; an answer to prayer; et cetera.

Note in verse 10 that the writer has switched pronouns from "they" to "we." It has been suggested that Luke joined Paul's group at this point.

Having left what is now Turkey, Paul and his companions arrive at Philippi, part of what is now Greece. As was his custom, Paul began sharing his message with Jews. W. H. C. Frend points out that "Paul's real impact was on the Hellenistic-Jewish and 'God-fearing' communities that existed wherever he preached."<sup>2</sup> These communities were spread throughout the Roman Empire and formed the basis for the rapid spread of Christianity. Perhaps that is why Paul was guided to Europe.

*What are other possible reasons for the spread of Christianity in Europe?*

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#### 4. Salvation is a Seismic Event (read Acts 16:16-40)

"Men, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30, RSV).

The prison keeper did not need 290 segments of doctrine to study in order to be saved, but needed only to believe in Jesus Christ. Then came study of the Word of the Lord. Most important is the implication that salvation is available to all.

#### 5. Opposition (read Acts 17:1-9)

"The Jews . . . , taking some wicked fellows . . . , set the city in an uproar . . ." (Acts 17:5, RSV).

Paul's success aroused opposition not only in Thessalonica but elsewhere. It not only forced him out of the city but followed him to Berea. Frend describes the anguish of Paul's Jewish opponents. "If he was right, Moses was wrong and the promises to Abraham were in vain. If Paul went free, the ideal of Jewish universalism was dead, and the communities of the Dispersion would be a prey to discord and schism."<sup>3</sup>

*Would Paul's success be less if he had been ignored?*

#### 6. Who Responds? (read Acts 17:10-15)

"Now these Jews were more noble . . ." (Acts 17:11, RSV).

The gospel confronts three groups: the credulous, who believe almost anything; the Bereans, who examine the evidence and make their decisions accordingly; and the closed-minded, who decide on a basis other than the evidence.

#### 7. Not Much Success in Athens (read Acts 17:16-34)

"But some men joined him and believed . . . and a woman . . . and others . . ." (Acts 17:34, RSV).

Paul does not present a simple gospel, but rather proclaims a reasoned and philosophical argument. His assertions focus on a monotheistic salvation available to the Greeks and did not meet with much success.

*When is it important to present a message based on evidence, and when to proclaim it based on assertion? (See Testimony section of lesson.)*

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1. Raymond E. Brown, et al., eds. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), vol. 2, p. 197.  
2. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 99.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

# The Strongest Argument

by Keith Clouten

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
1 Cor. 13:1-3

The scriptural account of Paul's second missionary journey is a kaleidoscope of adventures for Christ all the way from Antioch to Athens. The reader is left breathless by the vigor and courage of the travelers as they experience victory and violence, preaching and prison, in rapid succession.

We cannot but be impressed by Paul's uncanny ability to adapt his gospel methods to people from widely differing cultures and backgrounds. His converts on this journey included a successful businesswoman, a prison keeper, a philosopher, and a congregation of Bible-believing Jews. To the Jews at Thessalonica, Paul preaches convincingly from the Messianic prophecies; to the wretched jailkeeper's cry of need, he responds with the simple statement, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"<sup>1</sup>; to a crowd of the world's most brilliant thinkers on Mars Hill, he presents a magnificent oration.

In reference to Paul's discourse before these Greek philosophers, Ellen White suggests that something was missing from his presentation:

"The experience of the apostle Paul in meeting the philosophers of Athens has a lesson for us. In presenting the gospel before the court of the Areopagus, Paul met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. The wisest of his hearers were astonished and silenced. His words could not be controverted. But the effort bore little fruit. Few were led to accept the gospel."<sup>2</sup>

Why was Paul's confrontation on Mars Hill almost totally ineffective? Notice the following comments by Ellen White:

"Those who stand high in the world for their education, wealth, or calling, are seldom addressed personally in regard to the interests of the soul. Many Christian workers hesitate to approach these classes. But this should not be. . . . Many would receive help if the Lord's workers would approach them personally, with a kind manner, a heart made tender by the love of Christ.

"The success of the gospel message does not depend upon learned speeches, eloquent testimonies, or deep arguments. It depends upon the simplicity of the message and its adaptation to the souls that are hungering for the bread of life."<sup>3</sup>

"Some are especially fitted to work for the higher classes. These should seek wisdom from God to know how to reach these persons, to have not merely a casual acquaintance with them, but by personal effort and living faith to awaken them to the needs of the soul, to lead them to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

Barriers to the penetration of the gospel are as varied as languages, cultures, and backgrounds. The most effective method of demolishing all barriers is the demonstration of loving concern for another person. "The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."<sup>5</sup>

1. Acts 16:31.

*The Ministry of Healing*,  
p. 214.

*Christ's Object Lessons*,  
pp. 230, 231.

*The Ministry of Healing*,  
p. 213.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 470.

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# Productive Disagreements

by Wendell Buck

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 15:36-40

Disagreements between Christians, especially leaders, are unpleasant to contemplate. Yet they have been common throughout church history, and we can expect them to crop up in our own time. So it should be instructive to look at how Paul and Barnabas handled a disagreement that might have marred their ministry.

The fact that Luke records this difference says something about his honesty. He seems to understand that what he is writing is not just a recital of the glorious deeds of saintly men and women following unerringly the blueprint dictated by the Holy Spirit. He, like the other Bible writers, gives us a "warts and all" portrait of these two great men of faith. But unlike the stories of David's crimes and Moses' impatience, this text doesn't tell us who was in the wrong. Luke didn't feel the need to judge between these two great men. Instead, he simply records the facts as he knows them. He doesn't use diplomatic language to soften the impact of his report; "there arose a *sharp* contention, so that they *separated* from each other" (Acts 15:39, RSV).

Paul had good reason to leave John Mark out of the planned missionary trip. Besides the usual hardships of first-century travel, he could expect persecution along the way. A missionary needed companions he could trust in all circumstances. John Mark had already demonstrated that he wasn't a reliable companion (see Acts 13:13). There simply was no room for a mamma's boy on such a trip. If Barnabas couldn't see the flaws in his cousin's character, then let him risk his own neck.

Barnabas, however, felt that Paul wasn't being quite fair. He saw a potentially great missionary in John Mark, someone who with the proper training, guidance, and encouragement could overcome his flaws and contribute much to the spread of the gospel. In hindsight even Paul finally came to recognize the value of the mature John Mark. (See Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 23.)

How did Paul and Barnabas handle their "sharp contention"? Surely they tried to discuss matters rationally and each convince the other of the rightness of his own point of view. But as often happens, they were not able to resolve their differences. The longer they argued, the more convinced each became of his own position. Finally the only thing to do was to agree to disagree and go their separate ways. There is no record that either of them took this failure to agree as a sign that the Lord was not leading; they both continued in the work of evangelism.

Now, instead of one missionary group, there were two. It's dangerous but interesting to speculate about what might have happened if either man had given in. It is possible that if Barnabas had agreed with Paul, John Mark might not have developed into the missionary he became. And if Paul, contrary to what we know of his personality, had given in to Barnabas, then he might not have discovered Timothy's remarkable talents. Either way the church would have been the poorer. (To next page)

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Wendell Buck is the supervisor of audio-visual services at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

# “When In Doubt”

by Patricia Johnson

## HOW TO

Key text:

Mark 9:24

We're all born with a need to believe in something or someone. Even disbelieving is a form of believing.

But how do we learn to believe in someone? It's a term that implies trust and total acceptance of the source of information as reliable. In the world in which we live that's hard to do. We've been had by people who aren't up front with us. They misrepresent themselves for personal gain and they stretch the truth until it screams. It's no wonder we've become cynical and joined those who say, "I don't believe anything I hear and only half of what I see."

So how do we learn to believe in God? In Christ? He claims to have the truth. In fact, He claims to *be* the truth (John 14:6). That's pretty heavy duty. If it's true, then it's the best news ever. If it isn't, then it's the worst. Oddly enough, God invites us to check up on Him. In Malachi 3:10 He says, "Prove me."

We learn to trust by spending time getting to know the One we're trusting and by acting on the information He gives us. This business of relationship has been hammered at us so much that we're tuning out. I think we don't believe it can be that simple. But I can tell you from experience, it's the only thing that works.

If you make Christ first in your life, first in your day, and first in your affections, then you will be amazed at what happens. It's not the easy way out. Giving God permission to take over is scary. The fight of faith is a tough one. It means taking risks. It means letting God take control. It means fighting the temptation to fight the battles that He has already won for you. But as you realize that He *is* playing straight, that He *has* done what He said He would do, and that He *will* do what He says He will do, something begins to happen. You become a witness, not to a set of facts, but to the good news that there *is* Someone to "believe in."

## REACT

1. Do I blindly accept what others tell me about God or do I check it out for myself?
2. Do I try to make what I believe fit the way I want things to be?
3. Am I willing to follow the truth or do I want to lead it?

*(Continued from p. 63)*

So what can we learn from this episode for our lives in the twentieth century? Perhaps we shouldn't insist on total unity in all matters within the church. Perhaps we shouldn't let it bother us that Elder X doesn't agree with Dr. Y. When people disagree we often decide that one or the other or both must not be following God's blueprint. God's plan is probably larger than we think. Of course, it is good and pleasant for brethren and sisters to dwell together in unity, but sometimes it is impossible for even very dedicated Christians to do so. God can use even our honest disagreements to spread His work.

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Patricia Johnson is a behavioral-science major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

# Why Go?

by Doug Matheson

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 16:30

If Acts were "written" today, it would likely be a series of "Mission Spotlights."

Stories of the work of spreading the gospel—Acts is full of them, and most of us grew up with them. Yet, how thoroughly have we thought out the reason for missions? Why was Paul "out there"; why are we?

The gospel commission comes quickly to mind. We were *told* to go. If we agree that the quality of work increases as the workers' understanding of the reason(s) behind their directions increases, then we can certainly hear Jesus' commission and constructively ask: "Why?"

I have seen "missionaries" (at home and abroad) with an immense burden to reach people with the good news or those people will be lost. One can find seeming support for this burden in Paul's reply to the jailer; in order to "believe on the Lord Jesus" one must at least have *heard* of Him. I would suggest that the missionary's burden would be at least changed if he or she had a broad understanding of salvation and the reason(s) behind the gospel commission.

What does it take to be saved? What consistent criterion will God use to determine who will make safe citizens for eternity? Does the happenstance that a missionary goes to one village and not to the next change the chances of salvation for individuals in those towns? And what of those who have heard of Jesus? Their concepts of Christ and their decisions about Him are heavily influenced by real, live Christians ("good" or "bad"). What then if they reject a distorted Christ?

The answer is obvious. It is not the *amount* of light, but our *response* to it that will be significant in God's evaluation of our cases. There is abundant support for this view. But what does this realization imply about the gospel commission and do for the burdened missionary?

Jesus' statement, "I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly" gives us one hint. I hear Him expressing a concern for the quality of human life here and now, not just eternally. Basically we don't affect the odds of others' salvation by giving them more light (nor should we feel that burden), but we certainly can affect the quality of their lives. Not insignificantly, when they see caring action, and perceive a loving God, their response to Him will likely improve.

A paraphrase: "Go, care actively."

## REACT

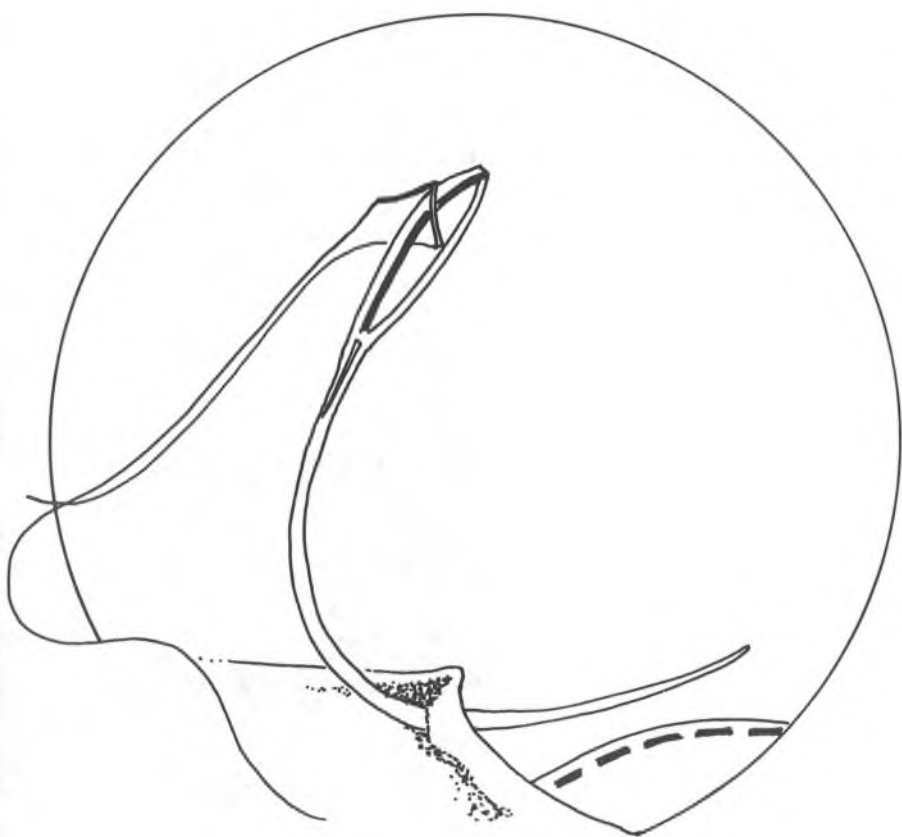
Arriving as a missionary in a part of the world where the gospel has never been preached—what would you do to share Christianity with the people? Discuss possible approaches that could be used to reach these people with the gospel.

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Doug Matheson is a biology teacher at Parkview Adventist Academy, College Heights, Alberta.

# Recipe for Riot

“ ‘Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking and do not give up, for I am with you. No one will be able to harm you’ ” (Acts 18:9, 10 GNB).



# Another Page in the Family Album

by Isaac Johnson

This week we continue Paul's third missionary journey. As always in Acts, our task is to make these travelogues more than historical anecdote or quaint geography. It would be good, then, if these events in Acts and our own circumstances could be brought together in our imaginations. Toward that end, a few questions.

Paul's practice was to go to the synagogue regularly to debate from Scripture the nature and authority of Jesus. Should the conference evangelist make a practice of walking into Lutheran and Methodist churches to debate Adventist doctrine with the minister and elders? If you don't like that, what *do* you think Paul's practice implies?

People took to the sick any cloth that had touched Paul, and the sick were consequently healed. What do you want to do with that? If your immediate inclination is to make it unique to the early church, then ask yourself why that is your inclination. What, specifically and honestly, makes you uncomfortable about these early "prayer cloths"? If, on the other hand, you like them, ask yourself why faith healing was not a

prominent part of Paul's message (Paul's synagogue debates were not about faith healing; his instructions to new believers did not mention it).

In conflict with Jews (Acts 18:12-17) and with Pagans (19:19-41), Christians were protected by civil authorities who took what we would call today "civil libertarian" positions. ("These people have the right to think and say what they like as long as they are peaceful and law-abiding.") What does this mean?

Are these kinds of incidents from the adolescence of the Christian movement a unique element of a movement's adolescence? Is it possible for a well-established institution to have such a liberating effect on its members; can a well-established institution transform its society? As we see Paul founding churches, debating the nature and authority of Jesus, and coping with both Jewish and Gentile opposition, are we browsing through the family album? Are we looking at a blueprint?

Let us ask God for honesty as we continue to review the story of our beginnings; let us ask Him for imagination as we see the first stones laid for the giant edifice one room of which we are decorating.

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Acts 18:10**

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# Actors in Acts

by Ted Wick

## LOGOS

**Theme:** As the great conflict between Christ and Satan moves through time, God continually acts to aid His faithful servants and His church, even though Satan may stir up opposition and cause setbacks.

**Meet the Characters in this Week's Lesson (read Acts 18:1-19:41)**

**Aquila and Priscilla**—*"There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them" (Acts 18:2, 3, NIV).*

When visiting Rome in 1985, I was told that the ancient Roman state had imported 30,000 Jews from Israel as slaves to build the great coliseum in the imperial city. A generation later all Jews are ordered to leave the Roman capital. In that exodus Aquila with his wife moved to Corinth. Here they met Paul. We have heard much about Paul's working with his hands. It appears however that this lasted only a short time, for "when Silas and Timothy came . . . Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching" (verse 5, NIV).

Aquila and Priscilla were well versed in Scripture as they became instructors to the noted evangelist Apollos (see Acts 18:26).

Their hospitality made them prominent in the life of the early church. (see Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; and 2 Tim. 4:19).

They followed Paul to Ephesus and settled there. Later Paul left them in Ephesus as he visited other places.

**Crispus**—*"Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord . . ." (Acts 18:8, NIV).*

For some weeks Paul was received in the Jewish synagogue where he preached each Sabbath. After an unspecified time some of the Jews became abusive to him. He pronounced a traditional curse on them and said, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (verse 6, NIV). In the home of Titius Justus, next door to the synagogue, Paul continued teaching. Crispus the synagogue ruler became a Christian.

**Sosthenes**—*"Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court" (Acts 18:17, NIV).*

When Crispus left the synagogue, Sosthenes was selected to take his place (see Clarke's Commentary, vol. 5, p. 836). Early in his role as leader, Sosthenes gathered the men of the synagogue together and took their grievances against Paul to Gallio, the Roman Proconsul, for trial. They were literally 'laughed out of court.' The men of the congregation then took their frustration out on Sosthenes by beating him in public. Gallio apparently turned a blind eye on the incident, leaving them to their own kind of 'justice' in turning on Sosthenes.

**Gallio**—*"While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. . . . Just as Paul*

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was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, 'If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.' So he had them ejected from the court" (Acts 18:12-16, NIV).

Gallio has been portrayed as a character who is indifferent to religious things, because of this brief episode. I disagree. He handled the Jewish charges wisely. He was the brother of Seneca. Seneca wrote two treatises in his (Gallio's) honor. One on the subject of anger, the other on 'The Blessed Life.' History's record on Gallio portrays him as a very kind and good-natured leader, a 'favorite.'

**Apollos**—"Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:24, 25, NIV).

Alexandria was the center of Hellenistic thought. It was an educational center noted for great scholarship and learning. The Septuagint, the Old Testament translation into the Greek by 70 scholars—hence its name, was translated in Alexandria. Some believe that Apollos learned his eloquence at the school of Philo. It is also thought that Apollos learned about Jesus from a disciple of John the Baptist. (See Lange's Commentary, Vol. IX, Sec. IV, p. 345.) Apollos, although a powerful preacher, was willing to be taught by lay persons, Aquila and Priscilla. He was given letters of recommendation to preach in other cities (18:27). Paul spoke of his ministry as "watering" what Paul "planted" (1 Cor. 3:6). Luther believed Apollos wrote the book of Hebrews (The Pulpit Commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 18, p. 96).

Apollos was an effective Christian worker with an incomplete knowledge of New Testament Christianity. He did not understand the work of the Holy Spirit, and yet God used him. William Miller and Martin Luther were mighty men of God, but they too did not possess a complete knowledge of the Scriptures. As Seventh-day Adventists we too do not understand all the truth about God. But with our limited knowledge and gifts, God still has a place for us in His plan.

Though Apollos is spoken of in very positive terms in Acts 18 and 19, we do not hear much more about his work and influence. His name is mentioned in several verses without much information about his ministry (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4, 5, 6, 22; 16:12; Titus 3:13).

**Demetrius**—"A silversmith named Demetrius] called them together . . . and said: 'Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia'" (Acts 19:24-26, NIV).

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We think of Demetrius as a troublemaker, a labor-union activist. He was the primary influence inciting a riot in Ephesus, which is illegal under Roman Law. This demonstration tells a very important story. Paul's preaching of the gospel had such a profound effect that it was hurting the silversmiths' source of income. What a testimony to the power of the gospel. I was preaching a series of evangelistic meetings in a small Colorado town where there was no Adventist church. The pastor of a major church there became alarmed because some of his members were attending the meetings. He printed a flier warning that these meetings were presented by Seventh-day Adventists. He put these under windshield wipers around town, including the cars that parked at the meetings. He was an effective advertizer for us. The attendance increased.

Demetrius became a publicity agent for the church in Ephesus.

Like Shakespeare's character Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, who said, "The lady doth protest too much me thinks." (Hamlet, Act III, scene 2. While this usage is not exactly in context in the play, it has become a common phrase used to describe the psychological phenomenon of overreacting that reveals a deeper issue.)

Paul's statement in Philippians 1:18 is applicable to this riot incident in Ephesus. "What does it matter? One way or another, in pretence or sincerity, Christ is set forth, and for that I rejoice" (NEB).



# The Horrible Cross

by Lloyd Best

"In preaching the gospel in Corinth, the apostle followed a course different from that which had marked his labors at Athens. While in the latter place, he had sought to adapt his style to the character of his audience; he had met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. As he thought of the time thus spent, and realized that his teaching in Athens had been productive of but little fruit, he decided to follow another plan of labor in Corinth in his efforts to arrest the attention of the careless and the indifferent. He determined to avoid elaborate arguments and discussions, and 'not to know anything' among the Corinthians, 'save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' He would preach to them 'not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor. 2:2, 4).

"Jesus, whom Paul was about to present before the Greeks in Corinth as the Christ, was a Jew of lowly origin, reared in a town proverbial for its wickedness. He had been rejected by His own nation, and at last crucified as a malefactor. The Greeks believed that there was need of elevating the human race; but they regarded the study of philosophy and science as the only means of attaining to true elevation and honor. . . .

"In Paul's day, the cross was regarded with feelings of repulsion and horror. To uphold as the Saviour of mankind one who had met death on the cross, would naturally call forth ridicule and opposition. . . .

"But to Paul, the cross was the one object of supreme interest. Ever since he had been arrested in his career of persecution against the followers of the crucified Nazarene he had never ceased to glory in the cross. At that time there had been given him a revelation of the infinite love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ; and a marvelous transformation had been wrought in his life, bringing all his plans and purposes into harmony with heaven. From that hour he had been a new man in Christ. He knew by personal experience that when a sinner once beholds the love of the Father, as seen in the sacrifice of His Son, and yields to the divine influence, a change of heart takes place, and henceforth Christ is all and in all. . . .

"Love for the Lord of glory, whom he had so relentlessly persecuted in the person of His saints, was the actuating principle of his conduct, his motive power. If ever his ardor in the path of duty flagged, one glance at the cross and the amazing love there revealed, was enough to cause him to gird up the loins of his mind and press forward in the path of self-denial."\*

## REACT

1. Can a Christian who has not had a dramatic conversion experience view the cross as the one object of supreme interest? Give reasons for your answer.

2. When considering that death on the cross is comparable to death on the electric chair today, how logical was the cross?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
1 Corinthians  
2:1-5

\* *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 244-246.

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# Preaching in Ephesus

by Ted Wick

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 19:1

Ephesus of Paul's day was a prominent city of great beauty in Asia Minor. It was a center for religion and business. A magnificent boulevard, the Arcadian Way, ran through the heart of the city from its harbor to its great open-air theater that could seat 24,000 people. This street was lined with fine buildings and columned porticos. The temple of Artemis ("Diana" in Latin) was located one and a half miles northeast of the city.

The great harbor became filled with silt, and the shipping business declined. The temple of Artemis became Ephesus' primary basis for wealth and continued prosperity.

The temple became a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.

The temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. It took 220 years to build. It was built of cut marble, the dimensions were 425 by 225 feet in floor size (not all authors agree on the dimensions). It had 127 columns, many provided by the kings of the region. Pliny says that they were 60 feet in height (or at least some of them were). The pillars were adorned with many statues. One writer states that gold was used as 'mortar' between the great marble stones to hold them in place. The "cella," or holy of holies, was 70 feet wide and open to the skies. The ruins of this magnificent structure were discovered by J. T. Wood during the middle of the last century and can be seen today in the British Museum.

Artemis was believed by many to have fallen from the skies like a meteor, further 'proof' of her divine origins. A large statue of her likeness was located at the entry of the temple. She had a turret-crown upon her head. Her outstretched arms were supported by two staves. At her feet were two stags, back to back.

The Sun is represented on the right side of her head and the crescent moon on the left side. There is disagreement on what the statue was made of. Pliny says ivory (big elephants?), others say cedar or wood of the vine, whatever that might be. The crown on her head was festooned with flowers and fruit draping down and around her shoulders. Her torso is covered with many breasts, on some portrayals you could count as many as 19. Sculpted into the swathes of her clothing are the images of birds and beasts, even reptiles. There is no question that she represents 'mother nature.' She was the goddess of fertility.

Artemis was considered among the Greeks and Romans to be one of the 12 major gods. They also believed in a host of minor gods. The major gods generally adored throughout the Gentile world in those days were Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, Mars, Mercury, Vulcan, Juno, Vesta, Ceres, Diana (Artemis), Venus, and Minerva.

In that kind of religious climate you can imagine how radical the idea of one god, or even of a trinity, would be. For the townspeople of Ephesus, especially the silver artisans, you can see that Paul's teachings posed a threat to their economy.

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Ted Wick is chaplain at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

# “How to Live the Way”

by Pat Wick

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Acts 18:9**

“How to what?”, I ask myself. “How to live the Way,” comes back the answer from Paul in the book of Acts.

For Paul the Christian faith was family, the church believers his support group, and God his companion on the journey.

As Adventists, we tend to become so comfortable in our churchliness. If this is not always a comfortable family, at least it is fairly constant. Adventism is a way of life, an ethnic background, a safe country to inhabit. For some! For some time! But for others a very dangerous and painful journey. “Do you consider Christianity and Adventism synonymous?” a friend asked. “Not always,” I answered. It is difficult to make the distinction—and yet because of the way some Adventists live we must.

Paul had a message very pertinent to his time and place: “Jesus is the Christ” That was the gospel according to Paul. And what is your message? You do know, don’t you, that you are a piece of this puzzling experience? The gospel according to YOU. How do you “find” your message?

## 1. Are you willing to be Spirit-led?

To be part of a church group who believe the same as you is one thing; but to be willing to believe alone is quite another. Are you willing to be a “one-man band”? Will you integrate faith and action?

## 2. Do you recognize God’s leading in your life?

Are you aware that God works through your choices? That He speaks to you through the good impulses and ideas that come into your mind? That your awareness is God-inspired? You are an important piece of life’s puzzle. Are you willing to submit your perception so that the picture can be clearer?

## 3. Do you have a support group?

This may seem contrary to the first question we asked. While we need to step out in faith and act on what we believe is true, we also need human support. Ask God to open your eyes to people in your life who believe as you do. You will be amazed at who appears. We need a group (3-5) around us that will listen, challenge, encourage, support, and disagree!

Paul was willing to step out, he preached the gospel and had a support group. He still got discouraged (and so will we). The Lord said to him (and to us) in Acts 18:9 “**Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and, . . . I have many people in this city**” (NIV).

Yes, there are many believers. Sometimes where we least expect to find them. Sadly, not always in the pew. Do you listen to prayers in your church? I often hear, “We long for Your coming, Lord Jesus, in clouds of glory”. . . and I think, “How amazing.” We pray for the Second Coming, without acknowledging that God is HERE in our midst. I do believe that when we recognize His presence, and only then, will we be ready for anything more amazing.

Jesus promised. “I am with you!” May we be those who truly KNOW and dare to SEE what others question!

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# Determining God's Will

by Graham Bingham

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 19:21

"Paul decided to go to Jerusalem" (Acts 19:21, NIV).

Many of us want to know and do the will of God. But many believe that God's will is complex, difficult, and hard to find.

The Scriptures demonstrate the opposite. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30, NIV). If we meet God's conditions we can "approve what God's will is" (Rom. 12:2, NIV).

On several occasions God revealed to Paul what he wanted him to do. On one occasion God spoke to Paul directly during the Damascus road experience. He told Paul, "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6, NIV). On another occasion God communicated to Paul through a night vision (Acts 16:9, 10).

Very few of us have had the experience of God's talking to us directly or communicating to us through a vision. But God does speak to us through His Word (Ps. 119:105). Further, the Holy Spirit leads us, as He did Paul (Acts 16:6).

But the will of God is also personal—only the one led can know what God's will is for him or her. Others may give guidance and counsel, but in the final analysis each individual is responsible to know God's will for himself or herself.

In the case of Paul, some did counsel him not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4, 11, 12), even though he purposed and felt bound to go (Acts 19:21; 20:22; 21:13). As to who was right, only the Lord knows for sure. Paul had many warnings against going. But the opposition does not mean that he was not doing the will of God.

Paul's example shows that even Christian leaders struggle with knowing God's will. All of us should seek good and godly counsel for the problems and struggles we face. But in the ultimate sense, we are responsible for the decisions we make; therefore, we need to make them according to God's will as best we see it.

"It is . . . more excusable to make a wrong decision sometimes than to be continually in a wavering position, to be hesitating, sometimes inclined in one direction, then in another. More perplexity and wretchedness result from thus hesitating and doubting than from sometimes moving too hastily."\*

## REACT

1. In what sense does God reveal His will corporately through the church?

2. In determining God's will what are the dangers of taking the attitude, "*the Lord showed ME.*"

\* Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 497.

Graham Bingham is editor of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY.

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# Jerusalem or Bust

" 'Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified' " (Acts 20:32, NIV).



# A Full-Course Meal of Christian Love

by Dick Duerksen

They came in small groups. Some on horseback, some in carts or the chariots of Roman officials. Others came walking briskly toward the meeting to which they had been summoned.

The courier had ridden in with Paul's message: "Please have the church elders come to me in Miletus. I'm going to be here for a couple of days and would love to see them."

Since he was in such a hurry to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost, Paul had decided to sail on by his friends in Ephesus. "You cannot, after all, see everyone while you're traveling through."

But he *wanted* to see them. He missed them. And as the ship sailed in and out of the harbors of Assos, Mitylene, Chios, and Samos, Paul's pastoral thoughts went more and more to his friends in Ephesus.

When they docked at Miletus, the captain called the passengers together and announced that there would be at least a two-day delay until the cargo could be unloaded and the new cargo put in its place. That was all the opportunity Paul needed. If he went the 30 miles to Ephesus, he might miss the sailing of the ship, but maybe they would come to him.

Paul's excitement was obvious. For the occupants of each chariot and cart, for every horseman and for the groups of happily exhausted hikers, he was ready with a full-course meal of Christian love. The

yard was filled with tremendous, strong Asian bear hugs and handshakes that turned into holy kisses all around. "Ah, there's nothing like being together with good friends."

Each face in the tightly packed room told part of the story of Paul's ministry during the years in Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla sat together near Paul's chair, obviously pleased to be working as a team for Christ. There were several of the disciples of John whom Paul had baptized with the Holy Spirit, still filled with the same intense exuberance for The Way.

The city leaders were there; rich and powerful men who had spent so many lazy afternoons in the school of Tyrannus listening, agreeing, arguing, and searching for truth. And next to them sat the Romans. Even though their clothes immediately marked them as Roman officials they were sitting as equals with tentmakers, carpenters, silversmiths, and Jews. There was no hint of superiority or control, just a palpable fellowship of love.

The others. Some who had been healed by holding Paul's handkerchief. Itinerant Jewish exorcists converted to Christ.

The words of encouragement and hope, the reminder of God's promised grace, the expectation of the inheritance, all tumbled together and choked Paul's throat as he looked into the eyes of friends. Friends he would never see again.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Acts 20:1—21:1

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# Paul Begins His Journey to Prison

by H. Roger Bothwell

**LOGOS** **Theme:** Even with advanced knowledge of impending persecution, Paul continues to press forward to accomplish God's will for his ministry.

## **Section One (read Acts 20:1-6, NIV)**

Dr. Luke begins a fairly detailed account of Paul and his traveling companions' journey back to Jerusalem. This will bring to an end Paul's third missionary journey. From this point forward the only definite accounts of Paul traveling will be as a prisoner. There are some scholars who believe that he was able to make a journey through Latin-speaking Spain, but we have no definite record of this.

Paul closes his ministry in Asia Minor by traveling through Macedonia on his way to Greece. Verse 2 records a ministry of encouragement (the only kind—that which does not encourage is not ministry).

Dr. Luke includes himself in the narrative with the use of the word "we" (see verse 6). He dates the story by telling us that they "sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread." The year is A.D. 57. Passover (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) was April 7-14 that year. They were hoping to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, which came the last week of May.

## **Section Two (read Acts 20:7-12, NIV)**

"On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul . . . kept on talking until midnight." According to Hebrew reckoning the day began at sundown and continued until the next sundown. This would place this meeting on a Saturday night, with Paul planning to leave by ship Sunday morning. Paul does not seem to be limited by the twentieth-century mentality that demands speakers to be brief and succinct. He continued on far into the night, until Eutychus interrupted the meeting by falling out the third-story window.

## **Section Three (read Acts 20:13-38, NIV)**

Upon receiving word that Paul was at Miletus the elders from the church at Ephesus come to meet him. It is here that we have the first record of a sermon Paul preached to Christians.

Paul begins his sermon with a defense of his actions among them. It is obvious that Paul was constantly criticized, because he is continually defending himself. He does it with great regularity.

He speaks of prison and hardship awaiting him in Jerusalem. But he will go despite this. "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (verse 24). Months later he wrote that he had run the race and finished the course (see 2 Tim. 4:7). Obviously during the intervening months he was satisfied that he had fulfilled God's plan for his life.

"Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men" (verse 26). Here Paul exhibits a great confidence in the faithfulness of his proclamation of the message. While he knows that not all who have heard have believed, he knows that he shared

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with them what they needed and that if they did not accept they would have to bear the responsibility for their decision. He had done his part. "I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (verse 27).

"Be on your guard!" (verse 31). Satan has always sought to destroy the church. It is the apple of God's eye. Enemies from without and within will attempt to steal away souls that had been purchased with "his own blood."

Paul concludes his discourse by quoting a line that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself used. It is the second-most-used sentence from Scripture. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We would hope that John 3:16 is quoted more often.

"When he [Paul] had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed" (verse 36). Prayer always was Paul's most effective weapon against Satan. In several passages we note how eagerly he resorts to calling upon God for help and strength. Note the use of prayer here and also at Tyre in the passage that follows (Acts 21:5).

#### **Section Four (read Acts 21:1-17, NIV)**

The journey to Jerusalem is filled with visits to old friends, prayer, and much concern about what will happen to Paul once he arrives at Jerusalem. In Caesarea he "stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who [had the gift of prophecy]" (verses 8, 9). "Half a century later, after Philip's migration to Phrygia, some of his daughters lived on into old age and were highly reputed as informants on persons and events from the early days of Palestinian Christianity."\*

On this occasion "a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it" (verses 10, 11). In the spirit of Ezekiel Agabus acts out an object lesson for Paul. Paul must not miss the import of the message. If he continues on to Jerusalem he will become a prisoner. "The people there pleaded with Paul not to go" (verse 12). Once again Paul proclaims his absolute faith that "The Lord's will be done." He will proceed to Jerusalem.

#### **Section Five (read Acts 21:18-26, NIV)**

Paul was received warmly in Jerusalem by the church and reported in detail to them all the wonderful things that the Holy Spirit had been able to accomplish among the Gentiles. In an effort to appease Paul's critics, for they had arrived in full force, Paul now participated in the fulfillment of a Nazarite vow. Paul was to bear the expense for four men. The cost was for ceremonial shaving and the sacrifice for cleansing (see Num. 6:9-21). Paul's participation was to demonstrate visibly that he was not an "apostate." But this was not very convincing.

*Should Paul have gone to Jerusalem? Could he not continue to serve the Lord more effectively by taking a fourth and fifth missionary journey instead of deliberately placing himself in a place from which he had been warned to stay away?*

\* F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* p. 343.

# Never a Dull Moment

by Ted Wick

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Acts 21:20-26

In Acts 21:20-26 Paul was advised to enter into temple purification rites for himself and to sponsor four other men in order to pacify Jewish Christians who were zealous for the Mosaic laws and critical of Paul's work among the Gentiles.

"This concession was not in harmony with his [Paul's] teachings, nor with the firm integrity of his character. His advisers were not infallible. Though some of these men wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, yet when not under its direct influence they sometimes erred. It will be remembered that on one occasion Paul withstood Peter to the face because he was acting a double part."<sup>1</sup>

In Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin after he had been arrested by Lysias and the Roman soldiers stationed at the fortress of Antonio, he was ordered to be hit in the mouth by the high priest. In Acts 23:3, Paul pronounced a curse upon the priest for acting contrary to Sanhedrin rules of order. "'God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!'" (Acts 23:3, NIV). "Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul uttered a prophetic denunciation similar to that which Christ had uttered in rebuking the hypocrisy of the Jews. The judgment pronounced by the apostle was terribly fulfilled when the iniquitous and hypocritical high priest was murdered by assassins in the Jewish war."<sup>2</sup>

During Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin he recounted his conversion experience. He tells of his behavior toward followers of "The Way" before he was converted.

"As many are today, so (before his conversion) Paul was very confident in an hereditary piety; but his confidence was founded on falsehood. It was faith out of Christ, for he trusted in forms and ceremonies. His zeal for the law was disconnected from Christ and was valueless. His boast was that he was blameless in his performance of the deeds of the law; but the Christ who made the law of any value he refused. He was confident that he was right. He says: 'I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them' (Acts 26:9, 10). For a time Paul did a very cruel work, thinking he was doing God service; for he says, 'I did it ignorantly in unbelief' (1 Tim. 1:13). But his sincerity did not justify his work, or make error truth."<sup>3</sup>

There were Jews who, with the knowledge of the chief priests, took an oath to assassinate Paul when he was to be brought to the Sanhedrin a second time on the pretext of need for further questioning. The matter was reported to Paul and to Lysias by an unnamed nephew of Paul, his sister's son. Being warned and believing the truthfulness of the report, Lysias arranged to secretly remove Paul from Jerusalem.

*Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 214.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.  
3. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 346.

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# Concerns

by Vernon C. Kaiser

Paul had a real burden for the believers, those whom he had met and had won to Christ on his previous visits. The content of Paul's messages may have varied from church to church on his third missionary journey but we do get some indication of his concerns for the believers at Ephesus as recorded in the book of Acts.

Paul realized that after his departure there would be those who would attempt to destroy the flock, and he pleaded with them to be on their guard. He commended to them the Word of God's grace, which was able to build them up. He reminded them that it was more blessed to give than to receive. These people were like children to Paul, and what might have gone through his mind as he ended his discourse with prayer and tearfully embraced those whom he was leaving behind, one can only imagine.

Having five children of my own, I have a good idea of how I would feel if I had to say goodbye to them for the last time on this earth. My heart would ache at the thought of knowing that the devil would try to destroy them; of how he would try to keep them from developing a relationship with their God; of how they would be tempted to neglect the Word of God; of the heartache they would have to go through until they were willing to surrender themselves completely to God; of the pain they would suffer by making wrong decisions. If only I knew that my children whom I was leaving behind would have a continually growing, trusting, loving relationship with God I could bid them farewell in peace. As I contemplate what my feelings might be as I said goodbye to my loved ones, not knowing for sure whether I would ever see them again, I can begin to comprehend what must have gone through Paul's mind.

If we could sense the intensity of feeling associated with the concerns that Paul expressed that day we might be able to understand in a small degree what God experiences with each of us as He sees us making decisions that He knows will cause us pain; and as He sees us neglect the abundant provisions He has made for our well-being.

O that we might have the same concerns for our "children" as Paul had for the believers at Ephesus. That we might live in such close communion with God ourselves that His concerns for them would be evident. What a privilege we have—to know the Saviour and to make Him known. Let's take advantage of all God has to offer us.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 20:1—21:

# Purina Friendship Chow for Growing Friendships

by Ian Bothwell

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Acts 20:35

As we read the stories of the early Christians we cannot but be impressed that they possessed an inner strength in meeting the many hardships they encountered. Unquestionably, this inner strength was the strength of Jesus. In what ways did these early Christians tap into Jesus' strength? Fellowshiping was one. The Christians of the early church found great strength in fellowshiping with the bride of Jesus Christ—fellow believers. These friendships, which cut across nationalities, economic status, and social classes, were so strong as to transcend other human relationships.

So it is today. Friendship with fellow Christians is one of earth's priceless treasures. But how does friendship occur? Does it merely happen? As if almost magical? Is it simply the right chemistry between two people? Or are friendships made? Do you work at making a friend? Do you look at someone and say, "I'm going to be that person's friend?" and set about to work on it? Regardless of how friendships occur—whether they "merely happen" or are "worked at"—it does seem that they will continue only if nourished. If we are to keep our friendships they must be fed good wholesome "Purina Friendship Chow." The essence of that nourishment is found in Acts 20:35. "Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving" (NEB). Giving flowers, candy, money, socks, ties, after-shave? No doubt, even at this level, giving is more rewarding than receiving. However, Jesus told us in John 15:13 that the greatest thing we can give those we love is our life—happiness lies in giving of yourself by:

1. *Being yourself.* Do not be afraid to let your friends know who you are. Friendship cannot survive when one person is always in hiding. This requires that you must be honest with your friends. Yes, it even means

2. *Being vulnerable.* You cannot truly give of yourself without creating the possibility that you may be hurt in some way. Perhaps that is what makes giving of yourself the greatest gift. Part of the process of being vulnerable means

3. *Allowing your friends to be themselves.* You will not expect them to fill a need that you have by being something that they are not. Accept them exactly as they are, and rather than expecting them to fill your needs you will be

4. *Looking for ways to fill the needs of your friends.* This may mean listening to them, affirming them, encouraging them, or it may mean helping them in material ways, as well. Material things are not inherently bad! However, when filling the needs of your friends it is important to do so

5. *Never expecting anything in return.* This means that friendship is a 100-percent—not a 50-50-percent relationship. True friends give all.

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# All in a Word

by Dayton Flick

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 20:32

Ephesus had worked well as the model church as long as it had an apostle in church leadership. Had they been so disposed, the Ephesians could have sneered at all the factionalism and sensuality in some of the other early churches, such as Corinth or Jerusalem. But Paul had labored hard and long with the believers at Ephesus, and the fruits of success in that city had not come from a hasty, hit-and-run evangelistic campaign. Through his daily tearful exhortations and unflagging perseverance with the flock, he had molded them into a strong and Spirit-filled body, devoted to the faith and full of love for one another.

There would be no more exhortations. Paul was speaking to his beloved elders for the last time, and he knew that, bound in chains, he was soon to be taken from all further ministry and laid to rest. If the church at Ephesus was dependent upon a charismatic preacher and reliable miracle worker for their faith, then the congregation would soon dwindle to a few fading saints singing about "that old-time religion."

The apostle had faith in a Power greater than the legend of St. Paul for the perpetuation of his work. He directed the elders of Ephesus toward the same Power that had spoken the cosmos into existence, still available to speak life from the dust into a human soul.

Because we know nothing about creating worlds, we can accept by faith that creation rose with a spoken word. But we are hearers and not doers when it comes to putting the Word into action in the creation of new life within us. We are accustomed to books, and the printed word doesn't seem to have that kind of genetic power. But to understand the creative power of the Word, we need only look at the creative power of the human word.

The mind is so receptive to the power of words that it may actually create a reality for us. By calling someone a fool we may cause that person to be perceived as a fool by others. Unless personal experience changes their impressions, they may never overcome the image we have instilled in them. As James tells us, the responsibility for our words is far-reaching. In our children, with words alone we may create a perception of truth that may take a lifetime to overcome. The values and judgments we establish create a world view that becomes reality for them. Further, self-fulfilling prophecy may dictate that a child who is continually told that he or she is superior or that he or she is more stupid than others will actually live out that word. All sources with a high credibility, such as pastors, teachers, or parents, may, with a word, shape our conception of truth itself. Distortion, when it comes, need not be intentional, but may be merely a product of the view of reality that was, in turn, created by someone else.

With this knowledge that words, as well as experiences, are building the world of our perception and character, we can see that we are easily led astray. Our "truth" becomes easily individualized. The only reliable reference point we have is the Word that creates an eternal reality.

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# Paul in Chains

“ ‘You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard’ ” (Acts 22:15, NIV).



# Common Witness

by Dayton Flick

Paul could always be counted on for an engrossing testimony. With his life ever on the cutting edge of the sword of the Spirit, each journey was filled with melodramatic deliverance and breathtaking examples of the power and love of God. Pagans were converted in the most improbable circumstances, and churches seemed to rise from out of the citadels of Satan. Little wonder that packed houses shouted praise to God whenever he spoke to the believers back in the home churches.

Our praise is more muted to the testimony. We all like a good pot-boiler that turns on a moving deliverance from drug addiction, or a harrowing conversion of cannibals who had other plans than eating the Bread of Life, but such tales simply make good stories for us, and we often feel more like applause than praise. For that matter, most of us have a story or two of our own—an evil past now long forsaken, a near accident, an answered prayer—but that was awhile back. Not much has happened recently.

We would all love to have the testimony of an apostle. When our daydreams take a spiritual turn, we fancy the determined stand, held against the fires of persecution, or the word of power, converting the multitudes and healing the infirmed. That, hopefully, is our testimony for the future, but today, we had to study for a test, make a living, or take the kids to the doctor. To-

morrow will probably be the same.

Yet power and praise need not depend upon blood-and-thunder. Our ordinary lives are filled with the miraculous and the divine. When we are really alert—when we are not merely slouching through the day toward quitting time and TV dinners, but living in an awareness that each moment is a choice, each day a decision—we are provided a testimony of the power of God, working in a life such as is common to humankind. With our blindness evaporated we can see that in the intruding question of a child, in the exasperating job well handled, or in our myriad of relationships with those around us, resides victory or defeat, testimony or lesson. We have no power except the power we exercise to make it through the day.

We grow weary thinking of such responsibility. We would rather dress for success, discuss the possibilities, and attend another seminar. But the testimony of Paul began a day at a time, in those long years that followed Damascus, before he became the "apostle to the Gentiles." In the fleeting trivial moments of each day, Paul grew in the power of God into a character that could impact the lives of millions.

Our lives may yet tell greater things. But the testimony of today can be a glory to God, or it may be another witness to self-defeat. His glory depends upon the decision of the moment.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Acts 21:19,  
22:15

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# Bound but Bold

by Warren S. Ashworth

**LOGOS** **Theme:** All Christian service should be for the glory of the Lord, not for the praise of self. Paul was a successful missionary, and he rightly directed all glory to God. After he had saluted the elders at Jerusalem, he, "reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God" (Acts 21:19, 20, NIV).

## 1. The Cost of Compromise (read Acts 21:17-36)

*"You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who believed; they are all zealous for the law. . . . What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. . . ."* (Acts 21:20-23, RSV).

Paul had just delivered such a thrilling blow-by-blow account of his evangelistic conquests among the Gentiles during his third missionary journey that the leaders of the general council in Jerusalem were prompted to glorify God with him. The joy of the leaders was tempered, however, by their concern for Paul's reputation. It was rumored that he had taught the Gentiles to forsake Moses, ignore the venerable customs of the Jews, and leave their males uncircumcised (see verse 21). Unfortunately for Paul, some of the council leaders also believed the rumors. Thus, instead of acknowledging the undeniable evidence of God's power attending Paul's ministry and standing unitedly in his defense, they urged on him a pacifying compromise. Neither the leaders nor Paul could foresee the dismaying results of their plan. But it cost Paul his freedom and definitely impeded his ministry.

*Was Paul's decision to accede to the council leader's plan a wise one?*

## 2. Courage in Christ (read Acts 21:37—23:10)

*"Brethren and Fathers, hear the defense which I now make before you"* (Acts 22:1, RSV).

The Jews believed themselves to be infinitely superior to the Gentiles. Dust from a Gentile's sandals was enough to render a Jew ceremonially unclean. Though Paul was fully aware of the utter disdain the Jews felt for the Gentiles, he convincingly related his conversion story, culminating with his call by God to evangelize the Gentiles. What an absurd thought. Gentiles were unsavable! Kill Paul, away with him!

Inside the barracks Paul narrowly escaped "examination" by scourging as he declared his Roman citizenship. It was fortunate for him. The leather whip studded with sharp bits of bone and lead was so lethal that many died under it, and of those who survived most lost their sanity. A Roman citizen could not be bound or scourged, and had the right to appeal his case to Caesar.

*"Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day"* (23:1, RSV). Paul was filled with holy boldness before the

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Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Judaism. Composed of mature, married men, the members were selected for their sterling qualities and calm, balanced judgment. Ananias, the high priest, ostensibly the best human representative of Christ on earth, presided. He was, in fact, a Sadducee, an unscrupulous political conniver, noted for his gluttony, dishonesty, and greed. Paul, nonetheless, included him in his salutation, "Brethren." But Paul's greeting and declaration of innocence infuriated Ananias, who, in ordering his men to strike Paul on the mouth, violated Jewish law, which said, "He who strikes the cheek of an Israelite, strikes, as it were, the glory of God."

When Paul was rebuked for reviling "God's high priest" (verse 4, RSV) it is possible that Paul's courteous response veiled his implication that Ananias was totally unworthy of his high office. Paul may have been insinuating—"That man! I never knew such a man could be a high priest." Some, however, suggest that he sincerely didn't recognize Ananias because of Paul's severe nearsightedness.

Paul's next maneuver was well calculated to destroy the facade of unity among the high court's members. Pharisees believed in angels and the resurrection, Sadducees did not. Pharisees accepted the written and oral law in addition to the Old Testament. The Sadducees accepted only the Old Testament. Though Paul was not really on trial for his belief regarding the resurrection of the dead, that is what he asserted.

*Were Paul's remarks before the Sanhedrin ill-advised, dishonest, or Spirit-prompted? (See Matt. 10:19, 20.)*

### **3. Heavenly Companionship (read Acts 23:11-35)**

*"The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome' " (Acts 23:11, RSV).*

Paul had been through two days of close encounters with death, and God had sustained him unfailingly. Now, as he no doubt was praying his heart out, "the Lord stood by him." This heavenly apparition was apparently Christ Himself (cf. chaps. 9:5, 6; 22:17-21). If Christ be for us who can be against us? With renewed courage Paul met the light of another day.

In this passage we see the intensity of hatred against Paul and the power of heavenly companionship. Given certain conditions, Jews countenanced murder. If a person was a public threat to life or morals he or she could be eliminated. So forty men made a *cherem*—a vow. On taking such a vow, each would say, "May God curse me if I fail to do this." Once again, however, Paul witnessed heavenly intervention. How else could Paul's nephew have learned of the plan?

Secreted away to Caesarea under heavy guard, Paul and his fate were placed in the hands of Governor Felix.

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# Felix

by Ted Wick

**TESTIMONY**  
**Key text:**  
**Acts 24**

Ellen White paints a vivid character picture of Felix, the Roman procurator of Judea and Samaria, before whom Paul appeared for trial.

"The character of Felix was base and contemptible. . . .

"An example of the unbridled licentiousness that stained his character is seen in his alliance with Drusilla, which was consummated about this time. Through the deceptive arts of Simon Magus, a Cyprian sorcerer, Felix had induced this princess to leave her husband and to become his wife. Drusilla was young and beautiful, and, moreover, a Jewess. She was devotedly attached to her husband, who had made a great sacrifice to obtain her hand. There was little indeed to induce her to forgo her strongest prejudices and to bring upon herself the abhorrence of her nation for the sake of forming an adulterous connection with a cruel and elderly profligate. Yet the Satanic devices of the conjurer and the betrayer succeeded, and Felix accomplished his purpose."<sup>1</sup>

"Toward the close of this time there arose a fearful strife among the population of Caesarea. There had been frequent disputes, which had become a settled feud, between the Jews and the Greeks, concerning their respective rights and privileges in the city. All the splendor of Caesarea, its temples, its palaces, and its amphitheater, were due to the ambition of the first Herod. Even the harbor, to which Caesarea owed all its prosperity and importance, had been constructed by him at an immense outlay of money and labor. The Jewish inhabitants were numerous and wealthy, and they claimed the city as theirs, because their king had done so much for it. The Greeks, with equal persistency, maintained their right to the precedence.

"Near the close of the two years [presumably Paul's two years in prison at Caesarea], these dissensions led to a fierce combat in the market-place, resulting in the defeat of the Greeks. Felix, who sided with the Gentile faction, came with his troops and ordered the Jews to disperse. The command was not instantly obeyed by the victorious party, and he ordered his soldiers to fall upon them. Glad of an opportunity to indulge their hatred of the Jews, they executed the order in the most merciless manner, and many were put to death. . . .

"These daring acts of injustice and cruelty could not pass unnoticed. The Jews made a formal complaint against Felix, and he was summoned to Rome to answer their charges. He well knew that his course of extortion and oppression had given them abundant ground for complaint, but he still hoped to conciliate them. Hence, though he had a sincere respect for Paul, he decided to gratify their malice by leaving him a prisoner. But all his efforts were in vain; though he escaped banishment or death, he was removed from office, and deprived of the greater part of his ill-gotten wealth. Drusilla, the partner of his guilt, afterward perished, with their only son, in the eruption of Vesuvius. His own days were ended in disgrace and obscurity."<sup>2</sup>

*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pp. 235, 236.  
 2. *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 246.

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# The Only Thing That Counts

by Bill Mundy

Just a few months before his arrival in Jerusalem for Pentecost, Paul had declared in his Epistle to the Romans that "circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom. 2:29)<sup>1</sup>; that "no one will be declared righteous in his [God's] sight by observing the law" (3:20). He further asserted that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him (10:12).

Nearly a decade earlier the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) had exempted the Gentiles from most Jewish ritual (Acts 21:25), but even though Paul accepted the compromise at the time he "never referred later to its stipulations. Even when discussing one of the chief points the decision dealt with, that of the use of food offered to idols, he did not apply the council's decree (1 Cor. 8:10). Indeed, his counsel in respect to eating food would hardly be considered in full harmony with the council's decision. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

So when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, James (who is thought to be described by Hegesippus "as a Pharisee and ascetic so pious that his knees were like camel's knees from frequent praying in the temple on behalf of the people"<sup>3</sup>) and the brethren expressed their concern about the impression that Paul had created among the Jewish Christians who "are zealous for the law." These believers had been informed that Paul taught "all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our [Jewish] customs" (Acts 21:21).

These rituals still served as a distinction and barrier between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

The Jewish believers apparently still did not realize that the time had come "when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" but that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth . . ." (John 4:21, 23). They still did not realize that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6).

## REACT

1. Was Paul inconsistent when he agreed to go to the Temple as requested? How do you think the Gentiles at Galatia or Rome would feel about his participation in the cleansing rituals even if there had been no arrest?

2. Paul, who wrote that there was neither Jew nor Greek, also said that there was neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). Did he understand the implications of this? Do we?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 21:17-25

1. All scripture quotations are from the NIV.  
2. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 321.  
3. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 9, p. 411. See also *SC Bible Commentary*, vol. pp. 272, 273.

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# Freedom in Prison

by James Kempster

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Luke 12:31

Freedom! It's the stuff daydreams are made of. At some point in our lives it may become a consuming passion—we have to be free to do what we want to do. But some of us soon discover that freedom is the result of having some form of power. If we are powerless it is difficult (make that impossible) to be free.

We seek all kinds of power: financial, political, educational, physical, and spiritual. A prison seeks to thwart our freedom by denying us power. In prison, money is meaningless, political connections are fruitless, a Ph.D. is pointless, and muscles atrophy; but, as Paul demonstrates, our spiritual powers can continue regardless of temporal circumstances. Paul used spiritual power, power that is available to any of us through the Holy Spirit, to transcend the restrictions of imprisonment.

Prisons with their chains and concrete, however frightening, are not nearly as threatening to our personal freedom as the prisons we build through our own choices. We are constantly faced with choices that have the potential of making us powerless. If we choose not to educate ourselves we lose our intellectual power. If we choose to be slothful we can lose our financial power. If we refuse to be involved in community or social issues we may lose political power. We may even lose our physical, moral, and spiritual powers by abuse—the use of drugs or harmful health patterns, for example—or by the failure to listen to the spiritual side of our nature. We can make our own prisons or break our own chains, it all depends on how we relate to spiritual power. (Of course we do not “do it” on our own, but that's another topic.)

How can we gain or retain real freedom?

### 1. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.”

Notice the use of the word *kingdom*. It implies power, spiritual power. By searching out the “ways of God” we develop this spiritual power that is a freeing force. Prayer, meditation, Bible study, and worship are all “spiritual aerobics.” Spiritual power is superior to all other powers, while the lack of it undermines all other powers. This is one of the lessons of Paul's experience.

### 2. Consider your choices.

The emotion of the moment may prompt you to make a decision that will turn out to be a future prison. Look ahead. Will your decision aid in obtaining freeing power, or will you find yourself “boxed in” tomorrow by your choice today? Slavery to tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or even your passions, is slavery under any circumstances.

### 3. Praise God.

Paul had financial power, political power, and intellectual power commensurate with his position as a Jewish leader, then he met the Christ. The working of the Holy Spirit in his life developed his spiritual power and brought a freedom that superseded all he had before. He acknowledged the source of that power to the world, and the world listened. When we acknowledge our source of power others will listen too.

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# Tolerance

by Dorothy M. Richards

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 21:24

Emerson once remarked, "To be great is to be misunderstood," and there is probably no better example of this maxim than the apostle Paul, whose personality no doubt often caused others to doubt the wisdom of his actions.

One of the most interesting aspects of this week's lesson concerns Paul's differing reactions to the various groups he faced. Truly, Paul practiced what he preached, namely: "All things are lawful . . . but all things are not expedient" (1 Cor. 10:23), and "To those outside the law I became as one outside the law" (9:21 RSV), and again, "To the weak I became weak" (verse 22, RSV). And yet these characteristics, which were written for our inspiration, were the cause for the serious difficulties Paul faced—difficulties that, ironically, came from within the religious organization of the day, (from the Jews), and came with attending plottings, intrigues, and violence.

Briefly, Paul is being attacked by those who consider themselves orthodox. He is attacked for being too lenient and broadminded (tolerant?), as he converts the Diaspora Jews—that is, those living in a Gentile community and considered somewhat outside the pale of strict orthodoxy—and the Gentiles. The criticism against Paul was that he was not insisting on a strict adherence to Levitical law.

Notice the expedient reaction of Paul and his church leaders. The brethren advised Paul to go through the purification rites so that everyone will know "that you are a practicing Jew and keep the Law yourself" (Acts 21:24, NEB). The problem is old but unfortunately still within the church. To keep up appearances, to keep peace, many church leaders and members feel compelled to go through certain motions, rituals, practices, before those members who believe themselves to be the only preservers of the faith, will allow a true conversion experience to the former.

Each of Paul's answers is a classic response. To the Jews, his answer is lengthy and involved—he was indeed a Jew. To the Romans, he answers briefly—a Roman by birth. When brought before the council he deliberately asks a highly diverting, if somewhat irrelevant, question.

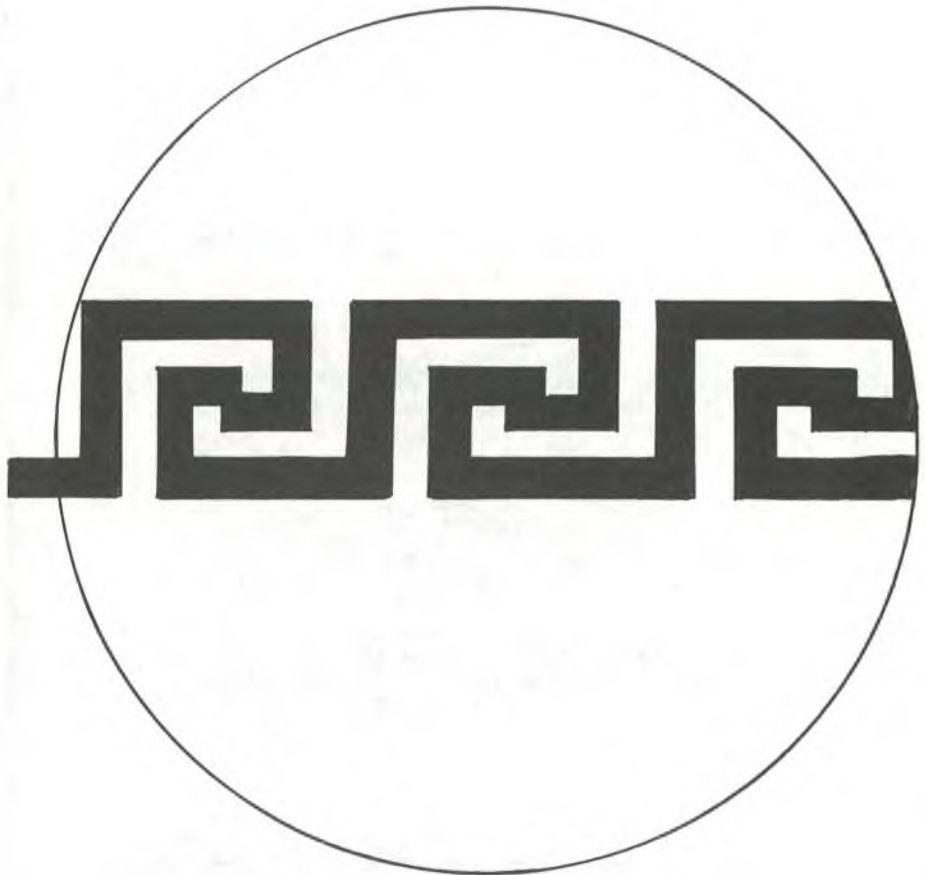
These answers bring up another interesting point: when does moral expediency become situational ethics? The last is a phrase not bandied around as much today as it once was—because we have settled it . . . expediently? However, it is still an issue that each must resolve for himself or herself. Perhaps most important as far as expediency is concerned is this one point that seems to be the guiding principle for Paul throughout his life and is exemplified in today's lesson. The pivotal issue appears to be that not one of us should condemn, criticize, or depreciate another for not being "zealous for the law," for zealotry could possibly be overindulged at the expense of brotherly and sisterly love. We must permit ourselves a flexibility of thought, a tolerance of the practices of others, and a Pauline expediency as we deal with the problems that arise within our church structure.

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# No Apologies

“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (Acts 24:16, NIV).



# Clear Conscience

by Jeannie Schnaible

"I wept and as I lay there weeping, I questioned could Jesus really love me, someone who had hurt so many people?"

"And it was then it seemed He appeared with me in that cell answering my questions, saying, 'Yes, I do love you and I died on the cross for your sins, too. Won't you let me come and give you a brand new life?'"

"Right then and there I asked Him into my life. . . . I confessed my sins to Him and I asked Him to forgive all my dirty past. . . . He came into my life that night. . . . Ever since I've been telling others of His love—I can't hide it—I have to share it."<sup>1</sup>

Velma Barfield, the first woman in twenty-two years to be executed in the United States, was convicted of murdering four people, including her mother and fiancé. She never denied her guilt, having experienced conversion in her jail cell while awaiting trial.

From our lesson, we read that Paul was also facing a most difficult situation before the Roman authorities. Unlike Velma Barfield however, Paul was not guilty as charged, yet he continued to stand firm even with the threat of death hovering over him.

What should be the attitude of a Christian when placed in a difficult and trying situation—a place of severe testing? There can be but one attitude! A simple and unwavering trust in God! A refusal to look at the difficult circumstance, but above it. The only sure way to achieve this is to live close to

God. The Christian who walks with God according to the dictates of conscience, obeying what God says, will remain strong even during the toughest times of life.

As with Paul and Velma, today's faithful servants of God will be faced with similar situations, positions of profound difficulty, leading into tight corners—from which there appears to be no way of escape.

During such periods the actions of Paul and Velma take on added significance. Our willingness to walk acceptably in the present with a "conscience clear before God" (Acts 24:16, NIV), in the light of the future, is the secret to a faithful and powerful Christian witness. At the time of test and trial we must take God at His word.

When Velma Barfield was placed in the small, windowless death cell across from the gas chamber, with a light bulb burning twenty-four hours a day and two guards constantly monitoring through a glass wall every move she made, she continued to witness to them about her beloved Saviour, leading them in the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has won the victory over death, that we might have eternal life!

Velma learned what Paul knew—that we have eternal life, based on our faith in God's word.

"When the darkness is deepest, the light of a Godlike character will shine the brightest."<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Acts 24:1—25:2

1. Velma Barfield, *Woman on Death Row* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1985), Foreword 2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 432.

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# Quibbling Over Truth?

by John S. McIntosh

**LOGOS** **Theme:** As Christians we are to look to the future, "that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:15, NIV); and we are to walk acceptably in the present with a "conscience clear before God" (24:16). Living in the present, in the light of the future, is the secret to a faithful and powerful Christian witness.

## 1. Error Attacks Truth (read Acts 24:1-9)

*"The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger'" (Job 1:12, NIV).*

Here God's Word focuses on the "great controversy between Christ and Satan" in microcosm, a battle in which all Christians may expect to find themselves involved from time to time.

We see the ensuing struggle between right and wrong, truth and error, as God reaches out to save humanity. Evil is constantly attacking right. Error always impugns the truth. The wicked attack the righteous and place the worst interpretation possible on everything they have said or done.

In turn, truth and right do defend themselves, not by attacking error and evil, but by the truth and righteousness revealed in the obedience and trust of God's faithful followers.

## 2. Truth's Defense (read Acts 24:10-21)

*"So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16, NIV).*

Paul, in his defense before Felix, emphasizes those points of belief in Scripture in which he has full faith and confidence "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (verse 14). He unhesitatingly identifies himself with his people. He reasons with Felix of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment." He emphasizes the righteousness in conduct and wholesome attitudes necessary to stand safely in the judgment. Felix's conscience is greatly stirred as he reflects upon his own misconduct and his lack of self-control in the mastery of his appetites and passions. Scripture says that "Felix trembled"; the Greek word *emphobos* denotes the mental agitation of *terror*. It seems whenever evildoers have their characters revealed to their conscience by the Holy Spirit, they are *terrified*. Such was the case with others (see Acts 16:29).

But Felix could not bring himself to deal with the issues before him. He said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (verse 25). Never before in his wicked life had he had the truth brought home so strongly to his heart.

God is longsuffering toward sinners and gives them every possible chance to believe and repent. For two years after his first interview with Paul, Felix was in contact with Paul, but he continued to slight

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God's offer of mercy until he was no longer open to the invitation of God's love.

*How evil must a person be before God will no longer give him or her a chance to repent?*

### **3. The Venom of Sin**

*They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way" (Acts 25:3, NIV).*

In this verse the venom of sin is clearly seen. The high priest and the Jews were not content that Paul was in prison. They were determined not to give up until they had his blood. Festus, a heathen unbeliever, had the ability to see through the situation that blind, bigoted eyes could not see. While he had some sense of propriety and was convinced that Paul was not guilty, Festus was, nevertheless, unwilling to set Paul free, hoping to use his continued imprisonment as a ploy to gain the popularity and favor of the Jews.

*How do we relate to the criticism of a person when we know the criticism is unjust and cruel? Do we remain silent or do we defend the person?*

### **4. God's Providential Leading**

*"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11, NIV).*

Acts 24 and 25 deal with Paul's appearances before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. These accounts show graphically that God is no respecter of persons, whether they are rich or poor, strong or weak, good or bad. He is, "the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9, NKJV). Through Paul, God reached out to these men. In their response to the gospel we perceive the power of sin to deceive and control those who acknowledge the truth but are not willing to surrender to it. God appeals to every man and woman through the Holy Spirit. How dangerous it is to say, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you" (Acts 24:25, NIV). "It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell."\*

Familiarity with compromise makes it just that much harder to stand firm when a person comes face to face with a moral decision.

It is always safe to stand for the truth as Paul did, trusting God's providential care, rather than to quibble over truth for the sake of popularity and favor.

*Is there any hope, then, for a person who has made wrong decisions about moral issues?*

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\* Patriarchs and Prop  
p. 596.

# Paul's Concern

by Fred Veltman

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
1 Cor. 3:10-15

Paul's accusers charged that he had disobeyed the external laws of the Jewish religion. In his defense he argues that the core of true religion goes beyond outward behavior and takes into consideration a person's motives and attitudes. Ellen White in commenting on Paul's speech and true religion wrote:

"The apostle realized that the gospel had a claim upon whoever might listen to his words; that one day they would stand either among the pure and holy around the great white throne, or with those to whom Christ would say, 'Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity' (Matt. 7:23). He knew that he must meet every one of his hearers before the tribunal of heaven and must there render an account, not only for all that he had said and done, but for the motive and spirit of his words and deeds."<sup>1</sup>

"Paul dwelt especially upon the far-reaching claims of God's law. He showed how it extends to the deep secrets of man's moral nature and throws a flood of light upon that which has been concealed from the sight and knowledge of men. What the hands may do or the tongue may utter—what the outer life reveals—but imperfectly shows man's moral character. The law searches his thoughts, motives, and purposes. The dark passions that lie hidden from the sight of men, the jealousy, hatred, lust, and ambition, the evil deeds meditated upon in the dark recesses of the soul, yet never executed for want of opportunity—all these God's law condemns."<sup>2</sup>

"Bible religion is very scarce, even among ministers. I mourn day and night for the coarseness, the harshness, the unkindness in words and spirit, that is manifested by those who claim to be children of the heavenly King, members of the royal family. Such hardness of heart, such a want of sympathy, such harshness, is shown to those who are not special favorites; and it is registered in the books of heaven as a great sin. Many talk of the truth, they preach the theory of the truth, when the melting love of Jesus has not become a living, active element in their character."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

What does Paul's concern tell us about the nature of sin and what it meant to him to believe and preach faith in Jesus as the Christ?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 423.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

3. *Special Testimonies Series A*, p. 9.

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# Political Intrigue

by Ted Wick

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 24:18-21

Antonius Felix was born a slave. He was freed by Antonia, the mother of Emperor Claudius. Felix's brother Pallas was a freedman. He became a friend of young Prince Claudius. It was through this friendship that Felix received the appointment of a small governorship under the provincial government in Samaria where Ventidius Cumanus was in power. In A.D. 52 Cumanus was deposed through the intrigues of Felix and Quadratus, governor of Syria.

It was unusual for a former slave to be appointed to major public office. It was usually reserved for freemen of the Roman equestrian order.

Considering the unusual cruelty and violence of Felix's rule of the Jews, the comment in Proverbs 30:21, 22 takes on special meaning!

"At three things the earth shakes, four things it cannot bear:  
a slave turned king,  
a churl gorging himself,  
a woman unloved when she is married,  
and a slave-girl displacing her mistress" (NEB).

Felix had three wives, each was a princess. Wife number one was the granddaughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra. This made him the grandson-in-law of these notable historical persons. Claudius, who became emperor, was their grandson. The second wife remains nameless also, there is only the comment that she was 'in her own right a princess.' Wife number three is described by Ellen White in *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pp. 235, 236.

Roman law (LEX IULIA) imposed heavy penalties upon accusers who abandoned their charges. When accusers disappeared, the charges were usually withdrawn. Paul argued that the Jews from Asia who had accused him "ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me" (Acts 24:19, NIV).

Felix and Ananias both delayed any legal action, but for different reasons. Felix wanted a bribe from Paul or his friends (see verse 26). Ananias wanted to wait for another governor to replace Felix from whom he could get more favorable action.

Roman law allowed the Sanhedrin to execute non-Romans who had defiled the Temple, so they were laboring diligently to get the venue changed from Caesarea to Jerusalem, and there hoped to persuade the Roman judiciary to allow them to try Paul before the Jewish tribunal.

Roman citizens had the right to a Roman trial. To this Paul referred in Acts 25:10, "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried" (NIV). When Festus asked Paul whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem for trial, he appealed to Caesar (*provocatio ad Caesarem*). In Paul's time this appeal was granted only in cases of violent crime and/or where capital punishment might be involved. In retrospect it is unusual that Paul would appeal to Nero, who is known as the great persecutor of Christians. In

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A.D. 60 this side of Nero had not yet become general knowledge. During his early years in power (A.D. 54-62) he was influenced by the stoic philosopher Seneca—this period is referred to by some scholars as the 'Golden Age' of Roman government.

It would have been in harmony with Roman law for Festus to have acquitted Paul, even after he appealed to Caesar. This appeal was only needed if he were found guilty. On the other hand, it would have been illegal for Festus not to let Paul go to Rome once he had made that appeal. Now He had a dilemma. If he chose not to acquit Paul for political reasons to appease the Jews, then he would have to come up with charges of illegal conduct that would stand up in a Roman court of law to justify sending Paul to Rome. For this he asked Agrippa's advice.

A word about Bernice, who was with Agrippa at Paul's defense. She was Agrippa's younger sister by one year. She had been engaged to Marcus, the nephew of the philosopher Philo. She was later married to her uncle Herod, king of Chalcis. At his death in A.D. 46 she came to live with Agrippa. There were rumors of incest both in Rome and in Palestine. To stop the rumors she married King Polermo of Cilicia in A.D. 63. Three years after the marriage she returned to live with her brother. Later she became the mistress of Titus, the Roman general, near the end of the Jewish war. She went to live with him in Rome, but it produced such a scandal there that he sent her away. When Titus became Emperor in A.D. 79 she returned to Rome, but it was still not in his political interests to have her present, so she was returned to Palestine.

When Paul stood before Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice, he portrayed a pure, unselfish life in the presence of decadence that was scandalous, even to the pagan Romans. Light shines brightest in the dark.

For further study see:  
*The Expositor's Bible  
Commentary*, (Grand  
Rapids: Zondervan  
Publishing House, 1981),  
vol. 9, pp. 539-548.

# Living in the Present

by Evert McDowell

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Acts 24:16,  
17, 25

If the long-awaited "Sunday Law" would finally be pronounced tomorrow, I think Adventists, of all people, would be most happy. Not so much because of the spiritual implications of this event, but because we will have at last been vindicated. Small and insignificant by the world's standards, we and our variant theology would at last be proved paramount. The events in our recent history that have propelled us through a scrupulously painful inquisition, causing us to put in question the reason for our existence and the hallmarks of our uniqueness, these too will be thoroughly trounced in triumph.

But if you are reading this then the announcement did not come tomorrow and our theology continues to be seen as "variant." We are still judged small in the movement of worldly events, much like an old and balding preacher standing humbly in a corner of Nero's court awaiting judgment as the debauched palace pomp swirls by.

Yet, Adventists we remain. Though small and challenged, our identity stands. We are the people of the Apocalypse. As our history dictates we are the ones who live in the present in the light of the future. We are ADVENTists. So in the face of passing time, while standing under judgment from the world and ourselves, how do we live with this heritage and purpose?

**1. Don't be preoccupied exclusively with "last-day events."** These cannot be a basis for faith or action. True, Christ did give insights on the end times, but most of these are general and given with the intent to promote a readiness in *each* generation. Following headlines to mark off a celestial calendar takes one's focus away from present needs and in time brings discouragement.

**2. Become preoccupied with the righteousness of Christ.** Doing this produces a sure and true faith. In becoming so infused with His thoughts, His actions, in making the study of His life and words our focus, we become changed. Our consciences become pure by His virtue, and our lives are yielded to His control.

**3. Give attention to the needs of others.** By constantly seeking to meet the needs of others, condemning judgments lose their significance. Many of the petty squabbles over shades of doctrine become lost in the void of insignificance. And concern for the coming judgment is not based on how I will fare, but rather on how to show another that he or she has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

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Evert McDowell is a store manager working in Takoma Park, Maryland, and a former editor of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY.

## “Will to see . . . ”

by Pat Wick

### OPINION

Key text:  
John 18:37;  
John 16:13

Do you hide the truth? Of course you do—we all do—and it is our continuing effort to be open-eyed and open-minded that brings growth.

Each of us has the capacity—the marvelous capacity—to view truth in a little different way. We bring our own unique perspective to any incident, whether it has just happened or is something recreated from history. This is another marvel of truthfulness—when we share our view of truth, we then give a gift to the recipient. We add to their knowledge of truth and give them our own creation of the very same thing so that our picture widens and our horizons are broadened.

In order to perceive truth, one must have an open heart and an open mind. Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32, NIV). So often much of our time is spent hiding from truth—the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, the truth about our past, the truth about our future (if we do not make some course corrections), and the truth about the present dilemma in which we find ourselves entwined. We hide from truth because the truth is difficult to handle.

In our interactions with those we love we often veil the truth. Last night I wanted to be about ten places at once. My daughter had a choir concert, my husband needed help, friends had invited us to dinner, my body needed to go to bed. This was just part of my dilemma. At the close of the evening I hadn’t made it to the dinner, or the choir concert, or to communion, or even to bed. My daughter, for one, was disappointed. “You said you’d come, Mom, and that’s what disappointed me,” she said. I began making excuses: I hadn’t known how to find where they were singing (the truth was that there was a map in the mail and I’d been too busy to open the mail), I had so many things to do. But the truth is that I did not want to disappoint her, and the truth is that people cannot always meet the expectations of others—no matter how they would like to be able to do that. The truth was that I should not have made promises that I could not keep. And the truth was that—even though I was not able to attend—I still loved her very much; and the truth was that I needed to do some loving and caretaking of myself—and so you see the facets of truthfulness. If I could have seen the truthfulness of my dilemma clearer at the beginning, then I wouldn’t have said I would come to the concert. I could have been more truthful with my daughter.

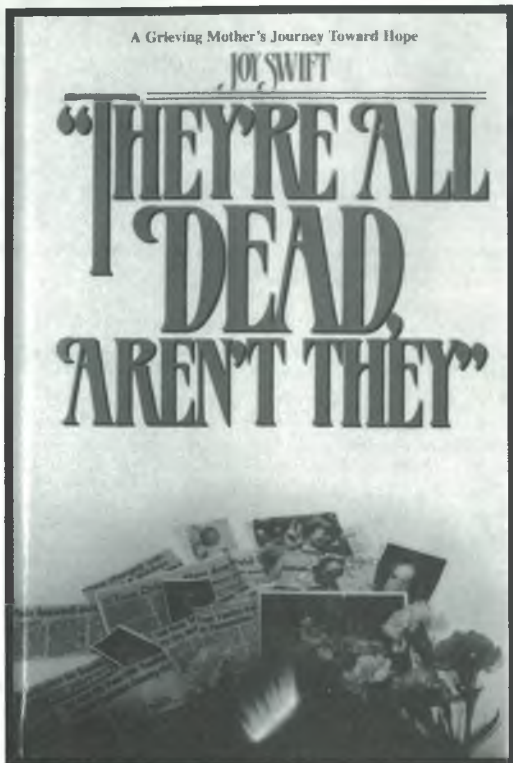
I was not willing to see clearly then . . . and now? Well, now I have a little clearer picture of truth (reality) and as Jesus said, “When you know the truth, it sets you free.”

May you have glimpses of truth today—and may each spell freedom.

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# "They're All Dead, Aren't They"



If you read only one book this year, it should be this book! This is the powerful autobiographical story of Joy Swift and her family. Awful tragedy unexpectedly struck this poor but happy family. This book is the stunning story of that tragedy and the tenacious search by this grieving young mother for meaning and hope. Without a doubt the most powerful book to come from Pacific Press in many years. Don't miss it! Hardbound with an attractive slip jacket. 223 pages. **Special Introductory Price US \$9.95.** Regular Price US \$13.95.

**See you at your local ABC.**

# Almost Persuaded

“And Paul replied, ‘Would to God that whether my arguments are trivial or strong, both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am’ ” (Acts 26:29, TLB).





# Paul's Road to Rome in Three Scenes

by Ted Wick

## Scene I

We are in a large Roman audience room in Caesarea. King Agrippa, ruler of a nearby province, and his sister, Bernice, are present. They are making a state visit to welcome Porcius Festus to his new dominion. They sit on regal chairs. The Romans didn't know what to do with Paul, and would have released him, since there were no charges worthy of prison or death. To gain political favor with the Jews, Felix had left Paul in prison for two years until he moved away, avoiding a tough judicial decision. Now Festus, Felix's replacement, is attempting to conclude the unfinished business. Paul, in chains, stands before them. Festus gives Paul permission to speak for himself.

## Scene II

An Egyptian ship has been driven before a force 10 Mediterranean gale for 14 days. Paul and 275 passengers [RSV] have given up hope of surviving. They are dangerously close to land, which under the conditions is worse than staying at sea, even in the storm. The ship's cargo has been jettisoned. The angry waves are certain to break up the ship. Strong swimmers are ordered overboard to swim for land. Those who cannot swim are instructed to grab hold of anything that floats and hang on

until they reach shore. Paul, a prisoner on board, has announced a dream from his God in which he was told all would survive. It's every man for himself as, lemminglike, they plunge into the heavy breakers.

## Scene III

Survivors of a shipwreck are huddled on a strange shore, soaked and in various states of undress. They shiver in the cold wind. But all have survived. Every able-bodied man is needed to do what he can to help avoid hypothermia in the survivors. Paul, still chained, has joined several men who are gathering driftwood and dried branches for a fire to stop the chattering teeth, and to dry their soaked clothing. In plain sight of the survivors and curious islanders, a deadly viper sinks its hypodermic needlelike fangs into Paul's hand. The crowd waits breathlessly for this cursed man to collapse with violent seizures and die a painful death. The curse of the gods must be upon this man who survived the storm but would not survive the divine justice meted out before these many witnesses.

These exciting episodes have all the characteristics of intense drama. In the lesson this week you will see how God uses human crises to accomplish divine purposes.

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Acts 26:1; 27:2  
28:3

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# A Case of Insanity

by Ted Wick

## LOGOS

**Theme:** The world stands judged by the witness of God's faithful servants to the salvation that can be obtained through the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Read Acts 26:1—28:10

The narrative comprising this week's lesson takes Paul from his defense before Agrippa in Caesarea (Acts 26), through the beginning of his journey to Rome (27:1-26), the shipwreck on Malta (27:27—28:1), and the snakebite incident opened the way for a wonderful healing ministry for the island community (28:1-10). Let's focus on Paul's defense before Agrippa.

King Agrippa took the initiative in seeking to hear the apostle, which placed Paul in an advantageous position of being invited to speak. "I would like to hear this man myself" (25:22, NIV), Agrippa said to Festus. Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself" (26:1, NIV).

The readiness of a listener is very important for effective communication of the gospel. In the unfolding story two high-level officials of the Roman Empire are seated in the same room with the greatest teacher this world has seen except for Jesus Christ; they hear the same words, and yet they are not at the same level of readiness to accept what Paul has to say. Agrippa was eager to hear Paul, but his motives were not pure—he was merely curious. Yet I believe that the Holy Spirit had been at work preparing him for this important event. On the other hand, Festus was new to the governorship, and Jewish thought was new to him and he was not prepared for what Paul said. Paul did not hold his proverbial punches on Festus' account. He gave them the full treatment, making a very strong statement and a probing appeal to believe in Jesus Christ.

The *Interpreter's Bible* contrasts Paul and Agrippa in the following words. "Paul and Agrippa lived in two entirely different worlds. Look at the world of Agrippa. He was a Hellenized Jew. He was brought up in Rome with all the luxury and elegance of Roman culture. He was the last of the Herods. He was one of the unfortunate sons of a famous family, born too late to inherit the vitality of the family, reaping only the bitter fruit of its decline. He lived at the end of an era. He was the personification of an age that was dying. He lived in a world that looked like a fire after all the flame is gone and nothing is left except smoldering embers that will not be fanned into life.

"Paul, on the other hand, lived in a world which had just been born, a world not nearly so safe for him personally, full of risks and hazards, dangers and perils of every imaginable kind, but a world in which things were intensely alive. . . . Paul thought that the resurrection of Christ was a self-evident fact; he lived in a world that had been made new by that one fact, a world in which anything might happen; whereas Agrippa lived in a world that was dying a slow death, and the thought of resurrection was as foreign to that world as breathing is to a corpse. Some people are living today in a world

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that has gone. . . . Their future is behind them. Of course, in a world like that, to people like that, the resurrection of Jesus is incredible.”<sup>1</sup>

Another contrast we see in this situation is that of sanity and insanity. The KJV uses the term “mad.” Paul says, “And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:11).

Paul was describing his own fanaticism as a Jew and Pharisee when he led the persecution against Christians. Now as a Christian he describes that past behavior as a kind of madness.

Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad” (verse 24). To the believer, Paul’s persecution was madness, insanity, lunacy, fanaticism. To the unbeliever Paul’s arguments for the resurrection were madness, Paul was “beside himself.”

Paul was being persecuted with the same fury he had shown against Stephen and other Christians. Strangely, God was using those who held no sympathy for Paul’s teachings to protect him from the fury of the Hellenist Jews who were plotting to kill him and who had urged the uninitiated Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem for trial. Paul refused, and Festus did not force the issue. The Jewish intent was to kill Paul (see Acts 25:3).

“But again the hand of God was over him. Had he been set at liberty, his life would soon have been sacrificed. So Luther’s imprisonment at Wartburg was his protection from enemies.”<sup>2</sup>

When you think of Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea for two years, his arduous journey to Rome in chains, and another two years in a Roman prison, you wonder why? What possible good could come out of this harsh experience by one who had already suffered so much for the faith? One answer is that he was being protected from his Jewish enemies.

Another, more important, answer is that Paul’s prison epistles would not have been written, and how much poorer we would be without them. The wealth of spiritual insight in the letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the second letter to Timothy would not be part of our Christian heritage.

Someone has said, “When bad things happen to good people, they get better.”

*Did Paul waste his time and effort on Agrippa and Bernice? What about Festus? Compare the conversion accounts that Paul shared in different settings and note the variations of detail (Acts 9:1-19; 22:4-16; 26:10-18).*

1. George Arthur Buttrick, Ed. *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press 1954), vol. 9, pp. 322-323.

2. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, edito *The Pulpit Comments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdt Publishing Company) vol. 18, Acts, p. 277.

# Opportunities to Preach the Gospel

by Ted Wick

## ESTIMONY

### 1. Agrippa

Key text:  
Acts 28:7, 8

"Did the mind of Agrippa at these words revert to the past history of his family, and their fruitless efforts against Him whom Paul was preaching? Did he think of his great-grandfather Herod, and the massacre of the innocent children of Bethlehem? of his great-uncle Antipas, and the murder of John Baptist? of his own father, Agrippa I, and the martyrdom of the apostle James? Did he see in the disasters which speedily befell these kings an evidence of the displeasure of God in consequence of their crimes against His servants? Did the pomp and display of that day remind Agrippa of the time when his own father, a monarch more powerful than he, stood in the same city, attired in glittering robes, while the people shouted that he was a god? Had he forgotten how, even before the admiring shouts had died away, vengeance, swift and terrible, had befallen the vainglorious king? Something of all this flitted across Agrippa's memory; but his vanity was flattered by the brilliant scene before him, and pride and self-importance banished all nobler thoughts."<sup>1</sup>

### 2. The Importance of Personal Testimony

"Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked with our own individuality."

"Such a testimony will have an influence upon others. *No more effective means can be employed for winning souls to Christ.*"<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Results of Paul's Preaching During His Imprisonment and Journey to Rome

"Thousands believed on Him (Jesus) and rejoiced in His name.

"I saw that God's special purpose was fulfilled in the journey of Paul upon the sea; He designed that the ship's crew might thus witness the power of God through Paul, and that the heathen also might hear the name of Jesus, and that many might be converted through the teaching of Paul and by witnessing the miracles he wrought."<sup>3</sup>

### 4. The Stay on Melita

"During the three months that the ship's company remained at Melita, Paul and his fellow laborers improved many opportunities to preach the gospel. In a remarkable manner the Lord wrought through them. For Paul's sake the entire shipwrecked company were treated with great kindness; all their wants were supplied, and upon leaving Melita they were liberally provided with everything needful for their voyage."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>JA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, pp. 1066, 1067.  
<sup>2</sup>Christian Service, 213. (Italics supplied.)  
<sup>3</sup>The Story of Redemption, p. 314.  
<sup>4</sup>The Acts of the Apostles, p. 446.

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# The Way to Rome

by Ken Thomson

In this part of his narrative, Luke is developing the picture of a movement spreading beyond the narrow boundaries of the Jewish world. Paul is its ambassador, breaking through ethnic and cultic barriers. But the availability of salvation to the Gentiles without a requirement of first accepting the Jewish system was abhorrent to the Jews, and they reacted violently to his work (Acts 22:21, 22). For the last one quarter of the book of Acts, Paul is in the hands of the law.

Festus was puzzled by the vehement nature of the accusations that the Jews made against Paul. In his view, Paul had done nothing to merit conviction or punishment. But Festus was not a Jew, was new as procurator, and did not perceive that in promoting salvation outside of Judaism, Paul was removing the most vital element of Jewish nationalism. Although the peripheral accusations were unprovable, and failed to impress Festus, he was still uncertain what to do, in view of the strong stand maintained by the Jewish leaders. Paul's appeal to Caesar must have come as a way of escape from the dilemma confronting the new procurator.

Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II) was the current puppet king in the traditional role of the Herods under the procurators. This man had a good knowledge of Judaism, which fitted him to advise Festus on Paul's case, the position in which we find him in Acts 26. It was not a trial, but a combination event of honor for Agrippa, and a means of helping Festus prepare a statement about Paul for Caesar (25:23).

Paul's reference to a Christ who suffered, died, and rose from the dead as the source of the light that he was commissioned to carry was too much for Festus, who suggested that Paul was mad, fanatical, and irrational. Paul assured him in turn that what he was saying was fact and turned to Agrippa for confirmation of his position. Although the question was direct, Agrippa evaded it with typical Herodian shrewdness. What he actually said is uncertain, as many commentators admit, but "You're trying to make us all instant Christians, Paul" may be somewhere near the meaning, if perhaps sounding too friendly. Paul's wistful reply came from the heart and left no doubt about his genuineness.

Paul's faith in God's promise that he would carry the light to Rome gave him a boldness that could not be repressed, prisoner though he was. This hearing and the journey to Rome, both graphically described by the eyewitness Luke, are recorded to illustrate the conviction that the Christian movement was the culmination of the purpose of God and the work of the prophets in the salvation of Jew and Gentile. The breaking out of the narrow exclusiveness of Judaism was the first item on God's agenda for the new movement.

## REACT

What do you see as the result of the hearing in Acts 26—for Paul, for the dignitaries, for the young church?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 26:16-18

# Your Testimony for Christ

by Ted Wick

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Acts 26:1-23**

Paul's spoken testimony before King Agrippa is a good example of how to give your testimony for Christ.

It is important to note that Paul gave his testimony when he was invited to speak. The appropriateness of the situation must be considered before sharing your testimony. Pray for wisdom so that you will be sensitive to your listener's readiness to hear what you have to say.

This simple three-point outline contains the major elements of a personal testimony.

## 1. Life Before Christ

Paul described his Roman birth, his Jewish education, and his religious activities, especially his ruthless persecution of those who believed what he now believes. This provides a background to help understand his present situation. It shows the contrast of his former life and his present personal relationship with Christ.

## 2. Confronted by Christ

Next he details the events surrounding his conversion experience. He was traveling to Damascus to arrest, imprison, and prosecute believers there. On the road he was struck blind by a bright light at noonday. The power of the light and the divine Presence literally threw him to the ground. Paul shares details of the conversation he had with Jesus in his dramatic confrontation.

## 3. Life Since Receiving Christ

Then Paul describes the radical change in his life following his conversion. Starting at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and Judea and to non-Jewish people, he has been teaching that Jesus rose from the dead and that He is the promised Messiah.

Paul concluded with a personal appeal to his hearers to receive Jesus for themselves.

What an opportunity! It may have been Agrippa's only occasion to hear the personal testimony of an individual's faith in Jesus.

Jesus had promised the disciples that they need not worry about what to say when they were taken before kings, because the Holy Spirit would teach them in that same hour what to say.

Your experience will be somewhat different from Paul's. It may be less dramatic, but it is no less real. Think through the details of your experience. It is good to write it down and reflect on it. When you share with others, talk naturally, not as if you have memorized a speech. People you meet will be more interested in what Jesus means to you than in what He meant to Paul. It is not as difficult as you may think.

## REACT

1. Can you remember the events in your life that led you to accept Christ as your personal Saviour?
2. Have you ever had the opportunity to share your testimony?

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# Time Is Always Ripe to Do Right

by Ted Wick

## OPINION

Key text:  
Acts 26:28

It always seems easier to make tough decisions tomorrow. Most people try to find any way to unhook from the pressures of the moment.

Agrippa said to Paul after Festus had interrupted his defense, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:28, NIV).

Like other people who have changed the times in which they live, Paul lived by the philosophy of "redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16, KJV). After his conversion he sensed that he had wasted many years, and now he had less time to do what was really important. He told Timothy to be ready, "in season, [and] out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2) to speak in defense of his faith. He said, "It is high time to awake out of sleep" (Rom. 13:11).

Though his specific cause was somewhat different from Paul's, Martin Luther King Jr. also had this sense of the importance of time and of doing what you can do now. The following is a letter he wrote from prison in 1963.

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." . . . I had hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in the relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." *Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will eventually cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral: it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; but it comes from the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.\*

Do you find yourself postponing today's tasks?

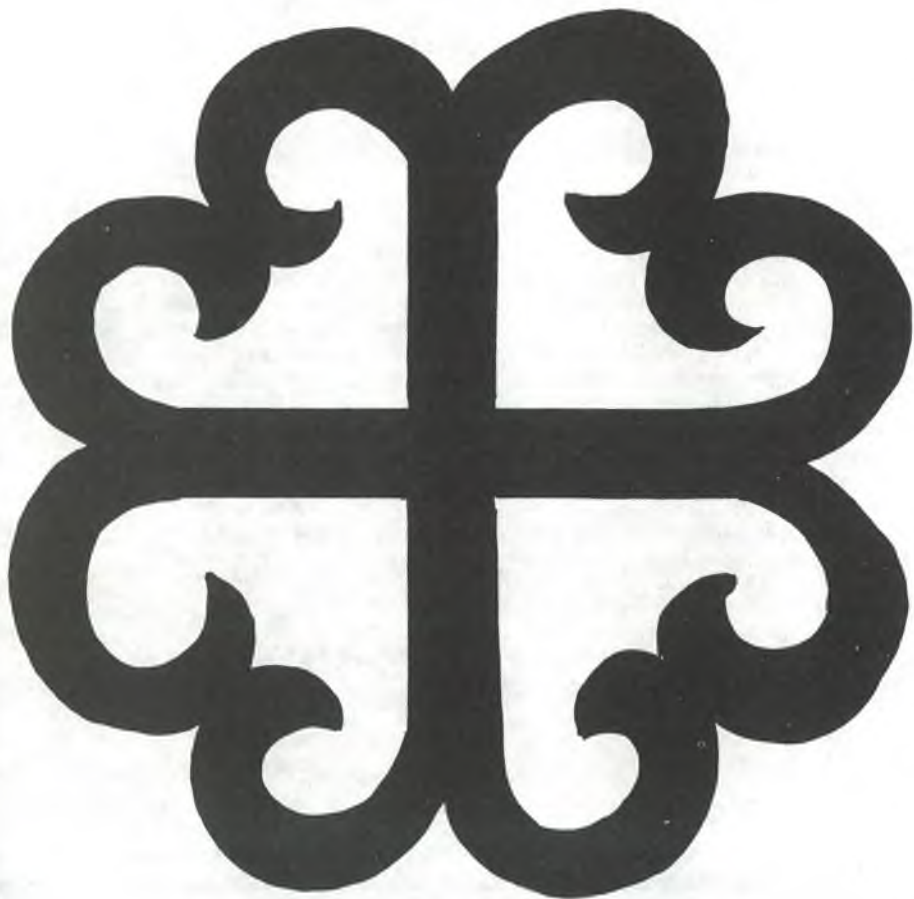
Is God waiting for a certain preset time for the second advent of Christ or is He waiting for a certain behavior pattern among His people?

\* "Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963. Quoted from *In a Dark Time*, pp. 128, 129. (I supplied.)

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# Chaplain at Caesar's Court

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, RSV).





# The Rest of the Story

by Ted Wick

Do you ever wish you could lift a curtain or open a door and see for yourself the 'rest of the story'?

Luke ends the book of Acts with a sentence or two that covers two years, with no specific events described—only that Paul "boldly and without hindrance . . . preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31, NIV).

Let's try a news clipping from a major newspaper in the Roman Empire.

## **ATHENS CHRONICLE** **Guest House for Philo-** **sophic Debate Opens in** **Rome**

by staff writer Teodorus

Rome—While waiting for audience with His Imperial Majesty, Nero, Paul of Tarsus, an itinerant teacher-philosopher, has opened a hospitality house. Guests may stop by to visit during the day, spend the night if from out of town, or even stay for a few days, the only price being that they are expected to participate in daily lectures and discussions.

Paul's visit to Mars Hill is still remembered by local sages as he proposed a radical philosophy including resurrection from the dead in which the deceased again takes on human flesh. This could be achieved by merely following a Jewish teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, who teaches that at the end of the age all who died while trusting him will return to life.

The writer interviewed Paul during his Athens visit and was impressed with his more-than-academic commitment toward his philosophy.

His teaching visit to Ephesus ended in a riot that involved thousands of people, especially the silver trade union that is very strong there. A spokesman for the silversmiths said—because of Paul's teaching concerning the "unknown God"—sales of silver images had seriously dropped. The riot accomplished their purpose by forcing the city fathers to invite Paul to leave town.

It is not known whether Paul will be received into Imperial audience soon, since such events have a waiting list of two years or more.

Most people in Nero's court expect that Paul will be given full freedom by His Imperial Majesty in view of the fact that he is allowed to live like a civilian in a rented house with only one guard and with complete freedom to receive visitors and even conduct meetings.

Romans not seriously interested in discussions of Greek wisdom will be interested in checking out Paul's ideas on religio-philosophical perspectives.

This writer believes that Paul is really sticking out his proverbial neck to get a hearing with the Emperor. If the Sovereign does not like the new teachings it could literally mean the ax. Meanwhile Paul is talking to anyone who will listen.

**INTRO-**  
**DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Acts 28:11-31

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# Victory in Chains

by John K. McVay

## LOGOS

**Theme:** Paul's house arrest in Rome led to the development of a strong work there. Both literary and evangelistic achievements brand these two years with success. God often uses adversity and apparent defeat to further the advance of His work on earth.

### 1. Paul Continues the Journey From Malta to Rome (read Acts 28:11-16)

*"The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged" (Acts 28:15, NIV).*

Reading of Paul's voyage from the island of Malta to Rome and of his trip inland, we're struck by numerous tangible details. Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, the Forum of Appius, and the Three Taverns were all very real places. Even the registration and dedication of the ship is disclosed. It bore the insignia of "The Twin Brothers," Castor and Pollux, who were regarded as "divine saviours" of mariners (Luke, from recent past experience, knows full well the identity of the real Saviour of seafarers). The excursion is so concretely described that we could be reading Paul's itinerary from the imperial travel agency!

Interwoven among these specifics are snapshots of Christian fellowship. The horizons of Rome might have looked bleak for Paul. But amid visions of trouble come serendipitous scenes of joy. "Some brothers" in Puteoli invite Paul and company to spend the week. The believers in Rome, hearing of Paul's arrival on their shores, travel as far as 33 miles (the Three Taverns) and 43 miles (the Forum of Appius) to meet him. And it is no ordinary welcome. Their greeting is described by the Greek word *apantesis*. It is used to describe "a civic custom of antiquity whereby a public welcome was accorded by a city to important visitors."<sup>1</sup> Responding to such a warm and unsolicited welcome, Paul "thanked God and was encouraged."

It's a comfort to weaker saints to know that an iron-willed individualist appreciated keenly the need for Christian camaraderie. The darkened days of the Pastoral Epistles lie ahead. But Paul is content, just now, to bask in the joys of Christian fellowship.

*What surprising scenes of spiritual encouragement have been part of your experience during the past week, month, year?*

### 2. Paul Preaches to the Jews in Rome (read Acts 28:17-29)

*"From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28:23, NIV).*

Verses 17-29 portray two meetings of Paul with the Roman Jews. At the first, "get-acquainted session," Paul declares his innocence to the leaders of the Jews. They claim that no one has prejudiced them

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against Paul, and a further meeting is arranged.

At the second meeting the apostle "tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (verse 23, NIV). The meeting is notable for its length—"from morning till evening." As Eutychus well knew, Paul wasn't given to brief Bible studies!

These verses are an appropriate conclusion to Acts for the following reasons:

1. They illustrate Paul's consistent evangelistic strategy. "To the Jew first' was Paul's constant programme everywhere."<sup>2</sup>

2. They illustrate Paul's consistent message. From the earliest postconversion days, the focus of Paul's message had been proclamation, even argumentation, of Jesus as Messiah. "Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22, NIV).

3. They illustrate the usual response to Paul's message—a mixed bag of acceptance and rejection. "Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe" (28:24, NIV).

Paul might have worried that ineffectiveness would result from his stay at Rome. He need not have! God, in His sovereignty, often takes the discouraging poisons of life and remanufactures them into the antibiotics of His grace. Some of the church's greatest treasures resulted from this Roman stay—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. To the literary accomplishments were added remarkable evangelistic ones. Paul could report, "It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (Phil. 1:13, NIV). Such noted exposure in the capital of the world was a remarkable evangelistic coup leading to many conversions.

The book of Acts ends triumphantly. Paul had expressed his burning desire, "I must visit Rome. . . ." Though the route had been circuitous, God answered Paul's prayer for Rome. Even though he is "officially" imprisoned, Paul "boldly and without hindrance . . . preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31, NIV). Desertion and lonely death may lie ahead, but God's overruling power in the present may just provide the needed source of courage to meet that dire end. The church that thirty years before had numbered its adherents by dozens can now be numbered in tens of thousands. The gospel, the story of Jesus of Nazareth, has penetrated to the center of the world and is experiencing uninhibited proclamation. Such is the resounding note of victory on which Luke chooses to end his book.

*Many students of Acts have noted an unfinished "feel" to its final chapter. If you were to write a conclusion, what would you include?*

1. Gerhard Kittel, ed. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 1. Trans. by Geo W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerck 1964), p. 380.  
2. D. Guthrie, et. al. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerck 1970), p. 989.

# Personal Experience With Christ

by Fred Veltman

## ESTIMONY

Key text:  
Acts 28:31

Paul evidently viewed the Christian religion as very personal. From his remarkable conversion and personal vision of Christ to his standing alone on trial before Caesar, his faith demanded personal accountability. On this point Ellen White wrote:

"The apostle showed that religion does not consist in rites and ceremonies, creeds and theories. If it did, the natural man could understand it by investigation, as he understands worldly things. Paul taught that religion is a practical, saving energy, a principle wholly from God, a personal experience of God's renewing power upon the soul.

"He showed how Moses had pointed Israel forward to Christ as that Prophet whom they were to hear; how all the prophets had testified of Him as God's great remedy for sin, the guiltless One who was to bear the sins of the guilty. He did not find fault with their observance of forms and ceremonies, but showed that while they maintained the ritual service with great exactness, they were rejecting Him who was the antitype of all that system.

"Paul declared that in his unconverted state he had known Christ, not by personal acquaintance, but merely by the conception which he, in common with others, cherished concerning the character and work of the Messiah to come. He had rejected Jesus of Nazareth as an impostor because He did not fulfill this conception. But now Paul's views of Christ and His mission were far more spiritual and exalted, for he had been converted. The apostle asserted that he did not present to them Christ after the flesh. Herod had seen Christ in the days of His humanity; Annas had seen Him; Pilate and the priests and rulers had seen Him; the Roman soldiers had seen Him. But they had not seen Him with the eye of faith; they had not seen Him as the glorified Redeemer. To apprehend Christ by faith, to have a spiritual knowledge of Him, was more to be desired than a personal acquaintance with Him as He appeared on the earth. The communion with Christ which Paul now enjoyed was more intimate, more enduring, than a merely earthly and human companionship."\*

## REACT

How may "Christians" today mistake personal knowledge and personal acquaintance with Christ for the saving relationship of a personal experience with Christ?

\* Acts of the Apostles,  
pp. 451, 452.

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# Physical Adversity v. Spiritual Prosperity

by Adugnaw Worku

One of the most difficult things to understand in Christian life is why God's people suffer adversity and apparent defeat even when they are fully committed to Him and doing His work. Very often, too, sufferings—human-devised or natural—seem to have no justification at all. Such was the case with Paul, for example, when he was arrested in Jerusalem and subsequently tried and imprisoned in Caesarea and Rome.

Paul was falsely accused by fellow Jews in Jerusalem who claimed that he had defiled the Temple by bringing Greeks with him. He was further accused of undermining Jewish law and custom by conceding that it was not universally binding and that non-Jews could follow their own laws and customs. Both of these charges were emotional rather than substantive and could not stand scrutiny in court.

When Paul appeared before the Roman authorities for trial his judges were convinced that he was not guilty of any wrongdoing. But they still chose to act according to political expediency rather than justice, so as not to offend Jewish public opinion with respect to Paul. So he had to endure false accusations, personal indignities, official ineptitude and corruption, and even imprisonment. He spent two years in Caesarea in chains and under guard until he finally appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen.

Unfortunately, the journey to Rome was by no means smooth sailing either. A severe early-winter storm wrecked the ship carrying Paul, and it was a miracle that he and others on board survived. Nature too produced its own extreme act of violence against Paul.

But at last, Paul arrived in Rome full of hope and expectancy that justice would finally prevail and that he would be set free. But in Rome he found Caesar's court slow to act. He remained in detention without trial, chained and under guard, for two long years.

Why does God allow such things to happen to innocent people like Paul, anyway? Paul explicitly pointed out that his arrest, trial, and imprisonment was not in vain. Far from feeling bitter and dejected, he considered his experiences as opportunities for personal growth and Christian witnessing. In Philippians 1:12-14, he says, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God courageously and fearlessly" (NIV).

In addition to being an inspiration to his fellow Christians and a witness to Caesar's palace guard, Paul was also able to preach to fellow Jews in Rome. Acts 28:24 indicates that "Some were convinced." It was also while a prisoner that Paul wrote the Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. No question, therefore, that Paul personally and the church too came out spiritually richer and stronger as a result of his trials and tribulations.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Acts 28:11-31

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# Keep the Focus

by Evaline West

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Philippians  
3:13, 14

She could have become embittered, but she didn't.

It came about this way. As an aspiring and hard-working future concert pianist, Teresa practiced diligently and dreamed enthusiastically.

And then it happened. Polio's vicelike grip clutched and almost snuffed out her young life. But she lived—barely.

After weeks—really months—in an iron lung she finally emerged to face a strange, hostile world. Her lungs were damaged. Her arms hung uselessly at her sides.

Although I didn't know her then, I'm sure there was real grief for lost hopes and dreams. No more happy anticipation of expressing her soul in music, of mastering great compositions and performing before vast, appreciative audiences.

Instead, she was dependant upon others, mostly her aging parents, for the very basics of life—bathing, dressing, grooming; even being fed like a small child.

When I met her a few years later Teresa was working valiantly to overcome obstacles. She could largely care for herself by this time, she wrote and painted with her toes, and her indomitable courage returned. Her focus was on living.

She met a man who appreciated her and her buoyant spirit. They married and together reared a son and daughter. Don worked while Teresa (still with no use of her hands or arms) diapered, fed, and cared for the babies.

Together they planned and struggled and improvised. It wasn't easy, but love and God made a way.

Their secret? Keeping a focus on their goal of a rewarding family life. Their method? Using all of their God-given gifts and abilities, gaining daily strength from Him.

Perhaps Teresa and Don learned their secret and method from Paul. They could have, for that is Paul's message to everyone, everywhere, for all time—*Keep the focus, the Divine focus!*

He wrote it, spoke it, and profoundly lived it.

Whether rebuked or acclaimed; in court or in dungeon; in person or by letter; to Jew or to Gentile—the message was the same: Accept and proclaim God's love. Be loving by appreciating your own uniqueness and using it in service to God and fellow persons. Accept the uniqueness of others. Encourage them to do the same. Be a vital part of the body of Christ. *Keep the focus!*

Philippians is one text that could be used to summarize Paul's philosophy. 1. Focus: "This one thing I do." 2. Present orientation: "Forgetting those things which are behind." 3. Clearly define and reach toward a worthy life goal. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

## REACT

Is there a focus to your life? What is it? Is it leading you where you really want to go?

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# Introducing Jesus

by Thomas Sinclair Geraty

**OPINION**  
Key text:  
Acts 28:23, 31

People-oriented as he was, Paul was willing to sustain any sacrifice or inconvenience to tell others of Jesus. "From morning till evening" he bore testimony. People are never weary of speaking of that of which their hearts are full.

Paul, like a magnet, in Italy drew hearers from far and near. He, the optimist, was grateful for a safe journey. Hardship, prejudice, or indifference did not dissuade him. His sense of destiny gave him incredible confidence. His life passed under cloud and sunshine, and the record of both has been left behind, a deep encouragement for us.

Instead of giving up to despair, steady people press on as though everything will come out all right, although some others may call that attitude "whistling in the dark."

Like Paul, other messengers, such as Ferdinand and Anna Stahl, went to Bolivia and Peru, Anna Knight to India, Abram La Rue to Hongkong, Stanley and Raylene Sturges to Nepal, and Wesley and Christine Amundson to Niger—all to bear witness to the Light in spite of primitive living conditions and hardship of travel.

In another letter (Rom. 1:16) Paul admitted that he was not ashamed of the gospel that had power to save both Jews and Gentiles—anyone who would exercise faith, belief, and trust.

From country to country, from city to city, this transformed Pharisee proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was not one who attempted to tabulate the number of people he led to Jesus; there was no noise or boasting of his exploits.

Have you ever traveled by boat or van carrying bulky suitcases and trunks? Not very easy usually. We have no record of Paul's being worried about luggage checks or excess baggage. People and persons were his interest—especially *the* Person.

His was not monologuing about the arts, sciences, and philosophies in which he had been educated, but the subject matter of his teaching was the cross and the crown. He could preach no longer with freedom in the Temple or church or on the street corner. He was now a prisoner, but he would preach Christ with the guard beside him in his own house. If he could not gather the many, he would talk to the few who came to see him. With all his bonds and sufferings upon him, Paul could still live, work, speak, and write for Christ.

With all the plus-and-minus checkerboard experiences that he had, the chaplain of Caesar's court knew that it was worth it all for the Master he served. He had appealed to Caesar, and finally now the good news had reached Rome; the Holy Spirit was active there. The capital of the empire had been stormed. No longer was the early church a hole-in-the-wall affair; it was now challenging the very center of the world's life and the citadel of power.

Who today with limitations of ability, time, means, and physical strength will join with a journeying church for Christ empowered by the same Holy Spirit to open doors in the courts and palaces of earth for the King of kings?

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# Seeking to Save the Lost

“ ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation’ ” (Mark 16:15, NIV).





# "To Supersede the Caesars"

by Russell Staples

*Ben-Hur* is the life story of an educated young Jewish nobleman who was taken captive by the Romans and made a galley slave. After gaining freedom, a wealthy estate in Rome, and fame as a charioteer he became a follower of Jesus Christ and an ardent supporter of the Christians in Rome. The story is an intricate web of divine intervention and human courage. It concludes with the hero back in Rome at the beginning of the Neronian persecution (c. A.D. 64). The young Christian church in the imperial city found itself without any place to hide from the fury of the emperor and with no place to give its dead a Christian burial. Ben-Hur conceived the idea of digging temples underground, where Christians could worship and give those who died in the faith a peaceful burial and a secure resting place. He dedicated a considerable fortune to the digging of the catacombs at Rome.

The story is imaginary, but it concludes with the historically accurate statement: "Out of that vast tomb [the catacombs] Christianity issued to supersede the Caesars."<sup>\*</sup>

The closing sections of *Ben-Hur* coincide chronologically with the establishment of the Christian church recorded in Acts. *Ben-Hur* is fiction, but in this case imagination paints a paler picture than does the Bible. Take a moment to

recall the stories of Peter and Barnabas and Paul and their associates—stories replete with miracles of many kinds—of earthquakes and angels that opened jails, of healings and resurrections, of exorcisms, prophecies, and divine guidance, and of deliverance from shipwreck and poisonous snakes. At times it has seemed to me as if I were reading events too strange to take place on this earth.

The life of Paul reads like the novel of some kind of superman. Nothing seemed to daunt him. He strode about the earth with a holy boldness and confronted those who opposed the gospel with a fearful power. And his single-minded obsession with the good news stands in sharp contrast to our fragmented lives. In comparison with the spirituality of his life, ours seem to be preoccupied with material things. How can we relate events of such a different time and kind to our own lives?

As you can tell from the above, I found myself so intrigued with the story of the lives of the apostles that I was inclined to lose sight of the fact that Acts is primarily an account of the founding of the Christian church—the Christianity that issued forth to supersede the Caesars. However, we will attempt to pay attention to both the significance of the church and of the lives of the apostles for our lives today.

**INTRODUCTION**  
**Scripture:**  
**Romans 15:**  
**18-20**

<sup>\*</sup> Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Ch* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922), p. 51

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# The Two Miracles

by Russell Staples

## LOGOS

Acts of the Apostles is the second volume of Luke's history of Christian origins. Originally, it is thought, Luke and Acts were circulated together as a "connected narrative" (Luke 1:3, NEB). Around the end of the first century the four Gospels were grouped together. Acts then became the connecting link between "the gospel" and "the apostle," for it explains the origin of the Christian church and provides the narrative background for an understanding of Paul's letters to the churches. It also validates Paul's claim to be an apostle.

Luke's two volumes are addressed to Theophilus, who is perhaps representative of intellectuals in Rome who are interested in Christianity. Luke's central concern in both is to make it clear that the amazing events he describes are not merely the haphazard results of human activity, but that they are the outworking of a divine purpose.

These two volumes record the two great miracles of Christianity—the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the rise of the Christian church. These miracles cannot be separated. The purpose of Jesus' life would have been frustrated had it not led to the establishment of the church, and the church could not have come into being without that life. In fact, the rise of the church is the most powerful objective evidence there is to the mighty acts of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

On the human level, the story of the church begins with the "amazement" of the worshipers in Jerusalem at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And the story of Acts is the answer to the question those worshipers asked: "What can this mean?" (Acts 2:12, NEB). It ends on a triumphant note. The gospel is being preached without hindrance in Rome. True, Paul is under house arrest, but even his bonds turn out to be a means of advancing the cause (Acts 28:30, 31). The pages between these two circumstances are a record of the outworking of the divine purpose (cf. Eph. 3:7-12). They describe events more marvelous than the human imagination could devise.

Thinking back over the lessons of the quarter, we can see important stages in the development of the church. The first few chapters tell the story of the community of faith in Jerusalem. The thumbnail sketch given in Acts 2:45-47 encapsulates almost the whole story. The closeness of that community fills us with amazement.

Next, the church had to learn to accept pluralism. Jewish Christians had difficulty accepting that Gentiles were as fully members of the church as were they. The unusual events in chapter 10 that led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his friends demonstrate the lengths to which the Holy Spirit had to go to break down the Jewish sense of particularism.

Scan chapter 10 and reconstruct the picture for yourself. Read particularly verses 28, 38, and 44-47. The accusation of the Jerusa-

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lem church, " 'You fellowshipped with Gentiles and even ate with them' " (11:3, TLB), dramatizes the Jewish exclusiveness. When Peter told them the whole story they devoutly accepted God's purpose. " 'Yes,' they said, 'God has given to the Gentiles, too, the privilege of turning to him and receiving eternal life!' " (11:18, TLB). But what we know about the church at Antioch (and the early church in general) demonstrates how effectively conversion to Christianity broke down the barriers of social status and racial prejudice. The conversion of Paul and his apostleship to the Gentiles enormously broadened the missionary vision of the church—and its theology also.

A major issue that confronted the church was the question as to whether Gentile Christians should fulfill the Jewish ceremonial law. The matter was complex. Apparently the continuity of the church with Israel was coming to be recognized. If so, then in what detail was this continuity to be recognized? Did it include the Jewish ceremonies? The Council of Jerusalem made a momentous decision. Read chapter 15. Judging by the experience of Paul, this was not a popular decision in Jerusalem. What if the council had made the opposite decision? Would there have been a split between Jewish and Gentile Christians? Or would the character of the whole Christian church have been different? But these are idle speculations, for we believe a divine hand controlled development of the church.

Then we took note of the further expansion of the church in the second and third missionary journeys. Always, however, the consciousness was maintained that the center of the church was at Jerusalem.

Finally, and this is where the story of Acts comes to an end. Paul was actively building up the church in Rome; and, of course, his being there was consequent upon the fact of his Roman citizenship. What if Paul had not been a Roman citizen? What if Christianity had not become established at the heart of the Roman Empire? Would Europe then have become Christian? And if not, how different would the history of the world have been, and your life and mine? Again, we cannot know the answer to these questions. What we do know is that in the providence of God, Christianity issued forth to supersede the Caesars, and Europe did become Christian.

Acts is a record of divine providence in human history. God called Paul because He needed a witness with the qualifications Paul possessed—Roman citizenship, education, and a brilliant mind. He was a "chosen instrument" (Acts 9:15, NEB) to fulfill God's purposes. And these purposes included the establishment of the church throughout the Roman Empire and the Christianization of Europe.

*What are some of the ways that the church struggled then as it does now to understand and do the will of its Lord?*

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# Handcuffed . . . but Truly Great

by Russell Staples

## ESTIMONY

Key text:  
cts 20:24, TLB

It is often said that Jesus left three things for His followers: an example of a godly life, a body of teachings unlike those of any other religious leader, and the nucleus of the Christian church.

In his Gospel, Luke dwells a little more on the events of Jesus' life—His example—than on His teachings. Perhaps this is what one would expect, for he was a historian. The same emphasis continues in Acts. True, he records several long sermons and speeches, but the glory of the book is its descriptions of the life and the deeds of the devout followers of Jesus.

Peter is the principal actor in the first half of the book, and his deeds and speeches are simply magnificent. Read his speech at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7-11), for instance; and you may like to try reading it in *The Living Bible, Paraphrased*.

Of course, Paul is the major figure in the second half of the book—in fact, he appears to be Luke's hero. Why does Luke concentrate so on Paul? There seem to be two reasons. You have noted, of course, that the story of Paul's conversion is repeated three times. First, Luke tells the story in his own words (9:1-22). Second, it is repeated in Paul's speech to the angry crowd at Jerusalem (22:1-16). And, again, in his speech before King Agrippa and Bernice (26:12-20). Why did not Luke edit the record a little more? He obviously does so with Paul's other sermons and speeches. I think the answer is that this is the charter of Paul's appointment as an extraordinary apostle to the Gentiles. It is God's doing. Paul is a "chosen instrument" (9:15) to fulfill God's purpose in the establishment of the church.

In addition to this, Luke must have known Paul very well. Judging by the "we" sections of Luke, he spent many years with him. He accompanied Paul during parts of the second and third missionary journeys, was with him in Jerusalem at the time of the disturbance, and traveled to Rome and spent time with him there. Luke obviously admires Paul, not only as one called by God but also as a magnificent practitioner of the gospel. And he gives us many word pictures of the man.

Some pictures reveal a very human Paul. For instance, during the fearful storm he could not resist saying, "You should have listened to me" (27:21, TLB).

Many pictures reveal his holy boldness. Witness his response at the jail at Philippi: "They want us to leave secretly? Never! Let them come themselves and release us!" (16:37, TLB).

Other scenes portray his constant joyfulness in the Lord, whether in jail or under impossibly trying circumstances.

Whatever picture of Paul appeals to you, one seems to see in every exposure not only the fearless and resolute apostle—in fact, the great architect of the Christian church—but one whose life is so permeated by the gospel that everything he did bore witness to it. "Life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus."

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# Miracles—Philosophy— God's Wisdom

by Russell Staples

"Jews call for miracles, Greeks look for wisdom; but we proclaim Christ— . . . he is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-24, NEB).

The lessons we have been studying this quarter do not require evidence in the normal sense, as might some doctrine that requires to be supported. There can be little doubt about the factual details recorded in Acts. Paul and the apostles were historical figures, and we know that the church was established. We also know from extrabiblical writings that the early Christians believed the gospel story implicitly.

But it is interesting to ask why Christianity was accepted, for we must admit that the story of the spread of the church is simply amazing. One has to agree with Luke's fundamental, underlying presupposition: It was the result of divine providence.

Writing from Ephesus during the third missionary journey, Paul reveals that different groups of people had different criteria for the establishment of truth. The Jews, scattered around the empire, constituted the broadest avenue of approach for the presentation of Christianity; and the apostle's first contact in every place was the local synagogue. But the Jews apparently were not generally the most numerous converts and did not always accept the magnificently reasoned approach of the apostle. Paul's sermon to the Jews at Antioch (Acts 13:16-41) is a good example of this. Very strangely, it seems, Jews accorded miracles a higher power of corroboration than the evidence of their own Scriptures.

Is this very different from the experience of Jesus? See Matthew 12:38, 39 and 16:1-4. What kind of miracle or sign were the Jews thinking of? It is not hard to see. The miracle they wanted was a powerful Messiah who could save them from the Romans. The Christ of the cross, who could save from sin, was not the savior they thought they needed.

"Greeks look for wisdom." For them, truth was established by means of Greek philosophical categories. Does this mean that Paul felt it was inappropriate to use reason? A quick perusal of his speeches and of his letters to the churches (several of which were written during the period of his life described in Acts) shows that Paul used reason extensively in his presentation of the gospel and its basic truths. Read the context of the key passage and also 1 Corinthians 15 as evidence of this. The difference is that Paul accepts the gospel as an *a priori* given by God. Reason is made servant to the wisdom of God.

What was the essential substance of the apostolic message? Paul affirms, "We proclaim Christ . . . nailed to the cross." Paul knew this was a stumblingblock to the Jews, who wanted miracles, and folly to the Greeks; but this was God's way of saving the world, and this was the word with which he confronted the world. Although, as we have seen, he argued the case magnificently, he recognized that Christ Himself was both the wisdom and the power of God.

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
1 Corinthians  
1:21-24

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What evidence did the apostles present to substantiate their message? They presented the witness of the Old Testament objectively, and they did so with persuasive argument and ringing conviction. Sometimes Paul began with intellectual arguments, to build a plausible base upon which to present the gospel. We have an example of this in his sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:19-31).

Are there parallels between the intellectual challenge the apostles faced and those confronting the Christian today? The similarity is clear, although the finer details differ. There are many in various parts of the world who would still find miracles the most convincing argument possible. And, although nineteen centuries have seen massive changes in the way human beings seek to find truth, there remains a gap between the gospel and what can be known by our scientifically informed pursuit of knowledge, just as there was in Paul's day.

The challenge Paul faced of how most effectively to speak about "the wisdom of God" remains a challenge to the Christian. The perennial theological task of the church is to proclaim the gospel in ways that engage the people of its time and generation. And this task is never done, because the patterns of human thought are in a continual state of flux. Paul felt the burden of this responsibility (2 Cor. 2:16). All of us are challenged to do our best; and having done this, we leave things in God's hands, for the gospel is the revelation of both the power and the wisdom of God.

### **REACT**

*What are some of the intellectual challenges the gospel confronts today as compared to Paul's time?*

# You're in the Right Boat—Now Grab an Oar

by Russell Staples

"Some laughed, but others said, 'We want to hear more about this later.' . . . But a few joined him and became believers" (Acts 17:32-34, TLB).

We took note in the Evidence section of the great skill and conviction with which Paul and the other apostles argued the case for the Christian faith. It is quite clear that Paul did not simply use the same sermon in every place. Briefly compare his approaches:

1. the sermon and appeal to the Jews at Antioch (13:16, 32, 33, 38)
2. the sermon and appeal at Athens (17:22-31)
3. the introduction to the mob at Jerusalem (22:1-5)
4. his brief word to the council (Sanhedrin) (23:6,7)
5. the introduction and appeal to Agrippa and Bernice (26:1-3, 19, 25-27)

The sensitivity with which Paul tailors his argument to the consciousness of his audience is readily apparent. And it is not only the presentation that is varied; there is always an appeal in a Pauline sermon. Sometimes this is soft and gentle, but it is more likely to be compelling. Note the warning of God's anger at Antioch (13:38-41) and of divine wrath at Athens (17:30, 31). The appeal to Agrippa is moving and powerful (28:26-29).

There is obviously much we can learn from this. I cannot read Paul without thinking of our tendency to slothfulness and lack of zeal. Paul is a model of both self-sacrificing commitment to preach the gospel to all who had not heard it and of care and diligence in the presentation of the message. And it would not seem possible to accuse him of timidity in pressing the claims of Christianity or calling for commitment.

Paul employed every opportunity to proclaim salvation in Christ. Perhaps the most impressive evidence of this is in his reaction at times of crisis, when his life seems to have been in danger. For instance, think of his concern for the jailer at Philippi, when he might have used the opportunity to escape; his desire to intervene during the uprising at Ephesus; and his speech to the mob at Jerusalem. At all of his trials he seems to have been more intent to tell of the great work God had done in Jesus Christ than to defend himself and gain release. I find myself quite overawed by this.

And Paul had a sense of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Think for a moment of the response he received at Athens. Read 17:32-34: "some laughed." Some not only rejected what Paul had to say about the resurrection of Christ—they found it quite out of keeping with Greek philosophy and therefore ludicrous. In this regard, things have not changed much, and the disciple of Christ must still be prepared to have his testimony ridiculed. Paul himself was quite prepared to be thought a fool for Christ's sake (1 Cor. 4:10), but this kind of thing is never easy for any of us to bear.

A few "became believers," and among these were people of importance. This must have been heartwarming indeed for Paul and his company.

## HOW TO

Key text:

Acts 17:

32-34, TLB

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But what do you make of the third group? They said, "We will hear you again about this." (Acts 17:32, RSV). Was this simply a polite evasion? Did they too inwardly laugh but, unlike the others, refrain from ridiculing Paul? I think they had actually been deeply moved by this forceful portrayal of a living and real religion. It must have made their own lives seem shallow and empty. And I get the impression that this was the largest group there. Those who ridicule the gospel may be loud and brash, but they are seldom in the majority. Ellen White described this group as follows: "Among those who listened to the words of Paul were some to whose minds the truths presented brought conviction, but they would not humble themselves to acknowledge God and to accept the plan of salvation."\*

This inner conviction—this active working of the Holy Spirit—is the great secret ally of the disciple of Christ. "We will hear you again" is just as much a secret wish as it is an evasion of the pressure of making a decision.

Perhaps a greater realization of this great ally—the secret longing—would encourage us to witness more frequently and openly. This is not always easy for us in Western society. Sociologists regard our "institutionalized individualism" as the most notable characteristic of American society. This is the same thing as the "lonely/sick-crowd" syndrome. We live private lives. We resent intrusion, and we are reticent to break in upon the privacy of others. Obviously, sensitivity is required in witnessing, but most of us could probably do much more to encourage our fellow "lonely" travelers and bring them the hope of the kingdom.

One of the New Testament images of the community of faith is a ship. This image implies a degree of separation and progress toward a goal. The art of harnessing the force of the wind by means of sails is old, and so also is the use of oars. I was reminded once again of the use of rowers in warships during Roman days in scanning *Ben-Hur*. This seems to be an appropriate image for the church militant. One gets the impression in reading Acts that most of the members of the early church were actively handling oars. You're in the right boat—now grab an oar.

## REACT

*Does the Spirit lead Christians today in ways that are different from the ways He led Paul and the early Christians to witness? What are some similarities? What might be some differences? What are the oars that the Spirit is calling us to handle to move the church toward its goal?*

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The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 239, 240.



# A Model of the Kingdom

by Russell Staples

**OPINION**  
**Key text:**  
 Acts 26:29, 31

"And so . . . I was not disobedient to that vision from heaven! I preached . . . that all must forsake their sins and turn to God" (Acts 26:19, 20, TLB).

The vision that inspired Paul and the message he proclaimed have guided the church through the centuries. And Paul left more than an abstract message—his life has been a model to many. Sometimes Paul has been regarded as a difficult-to-understand theologian, but he must also be seen as a pastor deeply involved in the life and work of the churches. Almost all his letters are written from within a congregation in one place to communities of believers in other places. Even his most personal letters—e.g., Philemon—are written to churches. Always he bears the burden of the churches and is concerned that they maintain the peace and harmony of the gospel, as well as its purity.

While he dreams and prays about preaching Christ where He is not known, he lives among the believers and encourages them in Christian growth and mission. We thus see two different sides to the life and work of the apostle—the burden to preach to the whole world and concern for the inner life of the churches.

The question I wish to raise here is how ordinary church members can best fulfill their discipleship. Let's leave aside the traveling-evangelist side of discipleship for the moment, even though many lay persons may have a calling to this task and the appropriate skills.

Ellen White writes, "Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity."\* Let's explore the meaning of this. Ellen White does not for a moment think that we should be simply silent witnesses, refraining from giving Bible studies or speaking a timely word to our friends and neighbors, and simply letting our lives do the talking. In fact, she frequently calls every member to active discipleship. What, then, does she mean?

Perhaps we can think of it this way: There are two complementary sides to the mission of the church and of the individual disciple. The centrifugal force of the gospel thrusts the church out to proclaim the Word. We have seen this epitomized in the life of the apostle Paul. On the other hand, there is the centripetal force of the gospel that calls Christians together and binds them into a community of faith. This we also see epitomized in Acts. Read again the descriptions of the communities at Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-47) and Antioch (Acts 11:20-24) in a contemporary version. You might try the New International Version. Why was Barnabas filled with excitement and joy at Antioch? What wonderful things was God doing there? I suspect there were many kinds of miracles—but especially the breaking down of ethnic and social barriers, producing the miracle of the Christian community. Is it surprising that many members were added to the church in each place? And is it surprising that the whole city was favorable to them?

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One gets the impression from extrabiblical writings that this strong sense of corporate oneness in Christ was characteristic of the early Christian churches. And when one thinks of this, then it seems not so surprising after all that Christianity spread so rapidly. Is this what Ellen White means when she writes of "the most powerful argument"? There is this difference, that Ellen White in this case writes of the individual Christian—in other places she places more stress on the witness of the community—whereas the most powerful argument in the early church was the corporate expression of Christian faith and love. If one Christlike life is a powerful argument, how much more powerful must that be of a whole community of Christians who celebrate their Christian joy in love and mutual support! We are called not only to proclaim the coming Christ but also to be a model of His kingdom in this present world.

Community is difficult for us in Western societies; and yet, according to sociologists, it is one of our greatest social needs. Mission is not only going out to proclaim; it is also attracting persons into a community that celebrates its faith in joyful worship and whose members support one another in Christian love. The burdens and blessings of life are alike too much for us to bear alone. In sorrow we need comfort; in hardship, encouragement; when joys overflow, we need others to celebrate with us; and when we are racked by doubt or torn by indecision, we need support.

Perhaps the most powerful form of witness our church needs today is that of the celebrating Christian community.

### REACT

1. *Explain how you think people can maintain their individualism and still contribute to community and oneness within the church family?*
2. *What do you think could be changed in the church, or in your life to bring about a stronger sense of corporate oneness in Christ as was characteristic of the early church?*
3. *Can you think of ethnic and social barriers present in our churches today that would hinder Christian community?*
4. *Can you think of ways in which you might make your life more Christlike in order to present a more powerful argument for Christianity?*

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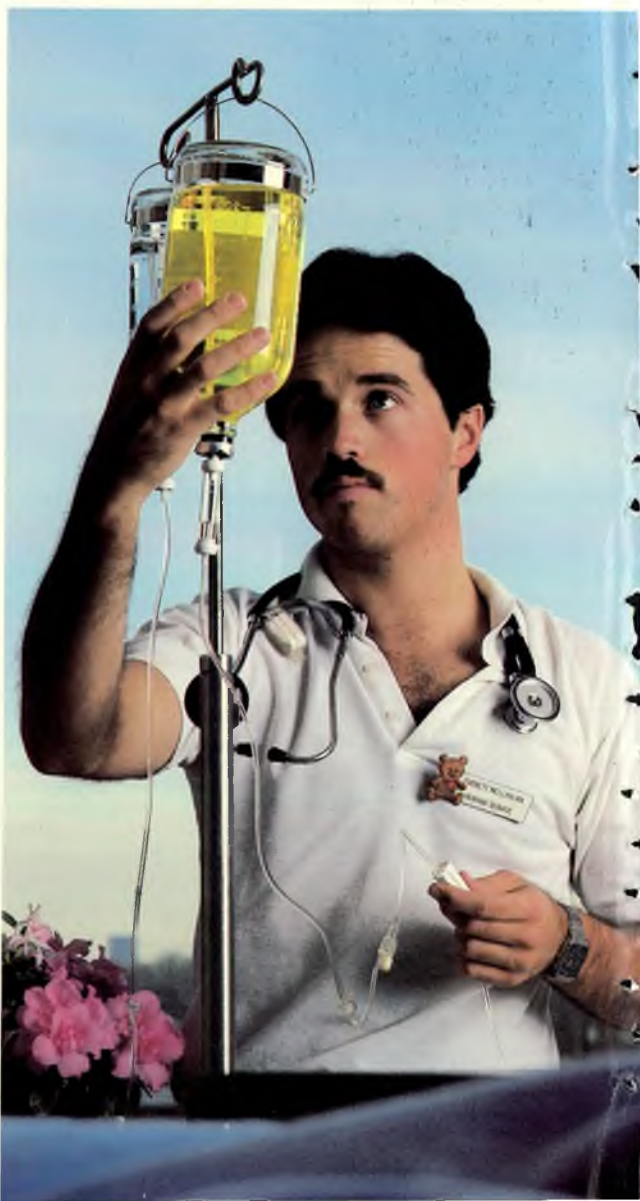
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