

### Where Are We Going?

In spite of the problems, I repeat that I am very optimistic about the Seventh-day Adventist church. Whereas other denominations may shrink in consequence of their schisms, we will experience expansion. The church will go forth "conquering and to conquer." While others divide, we *will* unite.

Although many of our youth and young adults do not seem to know what Adventists believe and appear uninterested in our evangelistic mission, I am still optimistic. I believe that most of them really do believe and care. They will return to the Lord and to His church. I believe that they will rally with us and with the many, many others whom God will call, and will unite for a finished work in all the world.

"Keepers of the springs, arise!"

Still let the Spirit cry,

Till Christ the Lord

Who reigns on high,

Shall take His conquerors home.

—Adapted from Charles Wesley's "Soldiers of Christ, Arise."

## HIS WORKMANSHIP

### Summary of a Sermon

By Joel Tompkins

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In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul describes the "course of this world." In the passage he shows that sin is not only self-destructive but also something reaches out to destroy everything within its influence.

In verse 3 Paul says we all walked according to the course of the world B.C. (that is, before Christ).

Verse 4, however, begins with the words, "*But God.*" God, it says, who is rich in mercy, has intervened in our behalf in a marvelous, miraculous way.

Then verses 6 to 10 describe the way things ought to be for God's people A.C. (after Christ). Verse 10 tells us that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." It reminds us that God's plan has always been that we should *do* good works.

But notice that the good works are A.C., not B.C. They are the fruitage, the results. Paul puts them in the right place. Just the same, they are there, and in abundance.

Good works come as the result of *His workmanship*. What we do does not contribute to His workmanship. We become what He makes us. But what He makes us is revealed in good works. We should never disparage good works.

Many of our laymen are asking, "Where are the standards of the church?" It seems to them that many of our standards have been abandoned. And they don't have much trouble documenting the evidence. Isn't it ironic that nowadays, when so many Evan-

gelicals are publishing books about holy living, some Seventh-day Adventists seem to be downgrading holy living?

I am one church leader who is not willing to sell out to Baal. Our people need to be called to good works today. Indeed, we need to focus on the tremendous potential of every Christian.

What strikes me most about Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 5:20 is that He expects our works of righteousness to *exceed* those of the Pharisees. He goes on in Matthew 5 to give several examples of what the Pharisees' righteousness was like. The Pharisees were trying to get away with the minimum that God requires. But Jesus points out in His Sermon on the Mount that, by His grace, we can go far beyond the minimum. There is tremendous potential for growth in human relationships beyond the minimum standards of not murdering and not committing adultery. When we are His workmanship, we can come to the place where we do not even *think* evil.

By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity; we live His life [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312].

What potential! Seventh-day Adventist Christians dare not settle for the bare minimum, when God makes so much possible.

#### A Challenge for the ATS

The Adventist Theological Society can do something tremendous for this church, if it will work to bring back standards. But this does not mean that we should attempt the impossible, as in the past, and try to police our standards. For example, we have learned from the age of television that you cannot police what people watch in the privacy of their homes. What we need to do is teach our people principles, then motivate them to apply these principles to their lives. The Pharisees proved that you cannot come up with enough rules to cover all possible circumstances. Neither can we be judges or consciences for one another. But the ATS must help our people find and apply the principles that *do* cover all the

circumstances. Not only must we teach these principles, we must teach them frequently.

As reformers, we need to learn to treat people with love and respect, rather than with censure and criticism. We need to leave room for the Holy Spirit to convert people in the specific details of Christian growth—while at the same time keeping before them their great potential for Christian growth.

#### A Tragic, Crucial, and Challenging Time

Our church today faces the most tragic and crucial era in its history. We live in a time when we need to pay close attention to the greatest righteousness by faith message ever entrusted to this church—the message found in *Steps to Christ*. One of the points brought out in that message is the warning that Satan is doing his best to get church members to fall into one of two errors:

There are two errors against which the children of God . . . especially need to guard. The first . . . is that of looking to their own works, trusting to anything they can do to bring themselves into harmony with God. He who is trying to become holy by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. . . .

The warning continues:

The opposite and no less dangerous error is that belief in Christ releases men from keeping the law of God; that since by faith alone we become partakers of the grace of Christ, our works have nothing to do with our redemption [ibid., pp. 59, 60].

We must sadly acknowledge that in spite of the warning these errors exist as two "sides" in our Seventh-day Adventist church today. One side concentrates on people's faults—responding tragically to "Satan's constant effort" to divert us into dwelling constantly on "the faults of others" (ibid., p. 71). Of course there *are* faults in the church, but by concentrating on them, we let Satan divert us from looking unto Jesus. It is a law of life that we become like that on which we concentrate.

The other side in our church is being used by Satan to tear down faith in our grand teachings and standards. You don't know how much it hurts me to find young people who have lost their faith because of what they have been taught in science and theology classes in Seventh-day Adventist schools. I can't take it! Not when

we work so hard to win people to our church. If some of our teachers do not believe what the church teaches, the honorable thing for them to do is to get out—not to stay in and undermine the faith of others.

Now it is not our business to decide who is on which side. What we need to do is to teach our people to study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy for themselves rather than, for example, depending so much on tapes for their understanding of what is right and wrong. We need to concentrate on the tremendous potential God has granted each one of us. Not only does He forgive our sins, He also cleanses us from sin *and* makes it possible for us to live pure and holy lives.

The ATS must challenge the members of the Seventh-day Adventist church to measure up to the potential God makes possible. We are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus for good works.

## Biblical Theology Without Apology

A Final Word from the Editor,  
Leo Van Dolson

With this first issue of the JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY we have accepted the challenge of bringing into focus a biblical theology without apology. "Biblical theology" I am sure you understand. But "without apology" may take a word or two of explanation.

First of all, we say "without apology," because some persons in recent years, convinced that our unique Adventist understandings of the Bible are not well accepted by theologians of other faiths, have become somewhat apologetic about our message. But rather than being apologetic, we believe we should thank God for the unique message he has given us, based as it is in the three angel's messages of Revelation 14:6-12 and directed to a truly global mission—a mission that includes the education of scholars rather than intimidation by them! As humbly, and yet as clearly as possible, we need to let others (including other scholars) know that we believe we are not merely another evangelical denomination. Our reason for existence is our belief that God has given us insights into Bible truths that set us apart as distinct, truths that other Christians have not yet acknowledged, but which they need to acknowledge.

Second, we say "without apology" because we recognize that the message which we believe God has entrusted to us is vital to the practical, everyday needs of people living in the last moments of earth's history. Unfortunately, all Adventists do not seem to appreciate this fact. The world about us has adopted a set of values corresponding to those "in the days of Noah." Many even in the church, influenced by these immoral values, are challenging those aspects of our theology that condemn the lifestyle they are adopting. Part of our challenge in the Adventist Theological Society, as some of the writers in this issue of our JOURNAL point out, is to take our unique,