

Living The Advent Hope

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

During the past several months it has been most gratifying to meet some of the subscribers to our ENDTIME ISSUES newsletters at my weekend seminars. It is hard to believe some of our subscribers have traveled several hours to attend the weekend seminars. In Orlando, Florida, a couple drove over 8 hours from South Carolina, to attend the Sabbath Enrichment Seminar that I presented at Apopka Highland SDA Church on March 9-10. Another family drove 4 hours from Miami to attend the same seminar.

The awareness that some fellow believers attending my seminars are travelling long distances, impresses upon me the importance of ensuring that my presentations meet their spiritual needs. It is encouraging to know that there are people who are willing to travel long distances to hear the proclamation of God's Word. When Biblical truths are proclaimed with clarity, conviction, and passion, people will come to the meetings. Every weekend it is a privilege for me to speak to capacity crowds in different parts of the country.

Some feel that new strategies are needed to draw people to the church, because the new generation does not respond to preaching alone. They propose to attract people through the use of entertainment gimmicks such as Gospel puppets, Gospel drama, Gospel magic, Gospel rock music, etc. Somebody emailed me a message last week, asking me what I thought about their new pastor who uses magic tricks in his preaching. In my view the use of worldly entertainment to communicate vital biblical truths, trivializes and cheapens the teachings of the Word of God. If professionals, like doctors, teachers, or politicians, do not resort to entertainment frivolity to communicate their important messages, it would be folly for preachers to announce God's final message of warning and judgement to a dying world by means of entertainment gimmicks.

NON-SDA MINISTERS ATTENDING SEMINARS

Among those who recently attended the weekend seminars, there has been some ministers of other faiths. They have shown a genuine interest for rediscovering the Sabbath for themselves and their congregation. For example, at the Winter Spring SDA Church in Orlando, Florida, Ron Cargil, senior pastor of the Harvest Time Tabernacle—a respected and active congregational church—attended all the three presentations together with his first elder.

Pastor Cargil explained to me that for many years he has preached against Sabbathkeeping as a form of legalism. In fact, he went as far as writing a book against the Sabbath. Recently, however, the study of the Bible impressed upon him the fact that love toward God is expressed especially through obedience to the moral principles He has revealed. Together with some key members of his congregation, they decided to reexamine the validity and value of the Sabbath for Christians today.

He learned about my Sabbath Seminar from an advertisement in the local paper. He attended all the three sessions, taking notes and listening attentively. On Sabbath afternoon I invited him to say few words to the congregation. He mentioned how in his recent Bible studies he discovered that Sabbath profanation led God's people in the past into apostasy and Sabbath reformation contributed to spiritual revival. This discovery convinced him of the validity and value of the Sabbath for Christians today.

Pastor Cargil expressed his wholehearted appreciation to our SDA Church for helping him and his congregation to understand and accept the Sabbath. He purchased on Saturday night the complete set of my books, cassettes, and videos. Furthermore, he invited me to share my ministry with his congregation. Let us pray for Pastor Cargil, that the Lord may give him the wisdom and courage to lead his congregation into the acceptance of the Sabbath message.

PREVIOUS ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS

Practically every day I receive messages from subscribers requesting some of the previous newsletters which they lost or did not receive. You will be pleased to learn that all the previous ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS can be accessed at my web site <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>. The newsletters are available both in HTML format and Adobe PDF version. The latter is useful for those who want to print out the newsletters. If your computer can surf the web, please retrieve previous newsletters at my web site. If your computer is not set up for web surfing, then feel free to request previous issues. I will be glad to Email them to you.

UPDATED VERSION OF ENDTIME ISSUES 62: LEFT BEHIND: FACT OR FICTION?

The enormous demand for the ENDTIME ISSUES 62: LEFT BEHIND: FACT OR FICTION? has encouraged me to develop this study more fully. I have added a very important section on the mistaken interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. The expanded edition will be posted at my website within the next few days.

The seventy weeks prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 is used to support the notion of the rapture of the church to be followed by the seven years tribulation. To defend this interpretation, the one prophecy contained in this passage is divided into two distinct prophecies. The first, consists of 69 weeks of years which reach to the death of the Messiah and is supposed to mark the termination of the Jewish dispensation on the day of Pentecost. The second consists of the seventieth week, which is separated by an intercalation of almost twenty centuries from the 69 weeks. This is supposed to be the dispensation of the Church which began at Pentecost and terminates at the Rapture. The Rapture ushers in the seventieth week, that is, the last seven years of the great Tribulation, during which major endtime events are to take place.

The expanded study shows how this interpretation ***breaks the unity of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy*** by introducing a time gap of almost twenty centuries between the sixty-nine weeks and seventieth week. Nowhere does Gabriel imply a gap among the three periods constituting the seventy weeks: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. These three time units are presented as a continuous, consecutive and unbreakable unity as indicated by the fact that they are first given in verse 24 as one basic period of "seventy weeks."

Another weakness is the failure to recognize the Hebrew ***stylistic pattern of repetition with elaboration in Daniel 9:26-27***. The pattern of Messiah versus Destroyer found in verse 26 is repeated as Messiah versus Desolator in verse 27. The latter verse, however, adds significant information. The Messiah who in verse 26 is simply "cut off," in verse 27 "shall make a strong covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease." Both of these acts were fulfilled by Christ when He confirmed God's covenant by instituting the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:28) and when He brought to an end the validity of the sacrificial system through the rending asunder of the curtain of the temple at the time of His death (Matt 27:51; cf. Heb 10:9).

The attempt to detach verse 27 from the immediate context and to apply the redemptive accomplishments of the Messiah to an Endtime Antichrist, ultimately turns Christ into an Antichrist. This goes to show what happens when a passage is forced out of its context to promote subjective views.

A THANK YOU NOTE:

Thank you for taking time in your busy schedule to read these lengthy newsletters. If these Bible studies enrich your understanding and experience of Biblical truths, be sure to invite your friends to subscribe. All what they need to do is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net>. As a result of your promotional endeavors over 13,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of April and May 2001. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area during the latter part of this year. I still have few open weekends.

APRIL 6-7: RED DEER SDA CHURCH, ALBERTA, CANADA

Location: Highway 2 South to McKenzie Road, Red Deer
For information call Pastor Ian Hartley (403) 347-9201 or (403) 886-4123

APRIL 13-15: BREMEN, GERMANY

Location: GANDERKESEE near Bremen, Freizeitheim HO EHENBOEKEN, Ammerweg 15
For information call 04223-9310222. People can book there for accomodation by tel. 038784-60428 or fax 038784-90067 with church elder Georg Bunkus, president of our institution.

APRIL 20-21: SANDPOINT SDA CHURCH

Location: 2255 Pine Street, Sandpoint, Idaho 83864
For information call Pastor Ron Reed at (208) 265-0519 or (208) 263-3648

APRIL 27-28: HERMISTON SDA CHURCH

Location: 855 W. Highland, Hermiston, OR 97838
For information call Pastor Kevin Wilfley at (541) 567-7989 or (541) 567-8241

MAY 4-5: PATTERSON AVENUE SDA CHURCH IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Location: 3901 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221
For information call Pastor robert Banks at (804) 270-1456

MAY 11-12: SPRING BRANCH SDA CHURCH IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

Location: 1614 Bingle Road, Houston, Texas 77055
For information call Dr. Cesar Puesan at (281) 405-8833

MAY 27 TO JUNE 2: CAROLINE CONFERENCE CAMPMEETING

Location: Lake Junaluska in North Carolina
For information call Carolina Conference office at (704)596-3200

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION TO THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is a practical meditation on what does it mean to live in the joyful expectancy of a soon-coming Savior. I preached this sermon last Sabbath, March 24, 2001, at the Spokane Central SDA Church as part of the Advent Seminar. The many expressions of gratitude received for this meditation, have inspired me to share this Bible study with you. The sermon is largely drawn from chapter 16 of my book **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**, where I discuss in greater details the practical implications of the Blessed Hope for our Christian life today.

This sermon as well as the three other presentations of the **ADVENT SEMINAR**, have been professionally recorded and are available in 4 audio cassettes. The information to order these cassettes as well as my two volumes dealing with the Second Advent, is found at the end of this newsletter.

LIVING THE ADVENT HOPE

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi

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What does it mean to live in the expectancy of a soon-Coming Saviour? How should the Advent Hope affect our daily life: the way we speak, the way we work, the way we relate to people, the places we go, the things we read or view on our TV, the goods we buy, the profession we choose, in short, our total outlook toward life? I believe that these are crucial questions that we need to take time to consider, because ultimately the way we answer these questions determines whether or not the hope of a soon Coming Savior has any meaning at all in our lives.

To guide our reflection this morning, I would like to invite you to consider how the Advent Hope should affect our life style here and now, by examining five distinguishing of a believer who lives in the joyful expectancy of the soon-coming Savior.

1. LIVING WITH A FORWARD LOOK

The first and foremost characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living with a forward look. Some people live in the past. They love to talk about their past scholastic achievements, their past successes in their college football team, in their past business ventures, their past promotions, their past family life. For them the life that counts is the one they have already lived in the past.

Other people live in and for the present. They look with satisfaction at their latest scholastic and/or professional attainments, at their latest acquisition of goods and gadgets. They love to talk about the money they make in their new business, the fun of the new car they have just purchased, the promotion they have just received, the comforts of the new home they have just built, the excitement of the exotic vacation in paradise island they have just enjoyed. For them the life that really counts is the one they live today. They live by the epicurean motto: "Eat, drink and be merry today because tomorrow you will die."

By contrast, the Advent believer lives not in the past, nor in the present, but looking forward to the world to come to be inaugurated by Christ at his the Second Coming. Paul eloquently expresses this forward look, saying: "Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14).

It is noteworthy that the Apostle finds the motivation for living and serving the Lord, not in his past life, which he chooses to forget, nor in his present attainments, which he finds still short of God's expectations, but in the future prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Imagine what would have happen to Paul, if he had kept looking and thinking back to his past life when with holy zeal he was seeking out for Christians to put

to death. Poor Paul, he would have become totally demoralized and paralyzed by an overwhelming sense of guilt. Thank God that we too, like Paul, do not have to live worrying about our past failures, because God's forgiving grace has taken care of it.

Note, however, that Paul chose to ignore not only his past failures but also his present attainments. This is surprising because very few people have attained Paul's dedication, moral maturity and success in the service of the Lord. Yet Paul says: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; . . . Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own" (vv. 12,13). Have you ever met Christians who believe that they have "made it," that they have reached perfection? Paul for sure did not feel that way. In spite of his moral and spiritual attainments, Paul admits that he had not "made it" yet; he was not yet perfect. Why? Because the Apostle recognized the danger of believing to have attained perfection, to have reached God's expectations for our life. To believe that we have finally reached the moral and spiritual maturity God expects of us, means to become proud, self-satisfied and judgmental toward those whom we believe have not made it yet.

Paul found his motivation for living and serving the Lord in what lies ahead. He tells us that he lived like an athlete straining forward to what lies ahead, stretching every muscle to reach the finish line. The reason is that he knew that the real prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus will be given at the Coming of the Lord. The Apostle understood the fundamental truth that to be an Advent believer, one must live with a forward look. He urges all mature Christians to have the same forward look: "Let those of us who are mature be thus minded" (Phil 3:15).

Pilgrims's Outlook. What does it mean to live with a forward look? It means to view our present life as a pilgrimage, a journey to a better land. It means to live like Abraham, looking "forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). It means to labor in this world, without making our labor the ultimate reality for which we live. It means to study hard to become the best possible doctor, teacher, preacher, engineer, nurse, lawyer, without making our academic or professional attainments the ultimate reality for which to live. It means to work hard to provide our family members with a nice home, food, education, conveniences, without making any of these things, the ultimate reality for which to live. Indeed, it means to view this world, *not as the living room* in which to live as though Christ may never come, *but as the waiting room* to the world that Christ will soon usher in at His Coming.

Let us ask ourselves, Do we view ourselves as pilgrims or as permanent residents of this earth? Someone has said that twentieth-century Christians are "the best-disguised set of pilgrims this world has ever seen." Many Christians hardly give the impression that they are just "passing through," when sometimes they are moonlighting at a second or third job, in order to have more and more and never be satisfied.

Function of the Sabbath. When I first heard about moonlighting, I thought that it was a romantic activity conducted under the silver ray of the moon. I was soon informed that "moonlighting" is not romanticism but a second or third job some will hold to earn more and more without often being satisfied. A vital function of the Sabbath is to teach our greedy hearts to become grateful, to remind us that we are pilgrims and not permanent residents of this world. When Friday night comes, it is *shabat*, that is, time to stop. We stop not only our work, but also our desire to have more. We start counting the blessings that the Lord has brought to our life during the week which has gone by.

The Sabbath teaches us to live with a forward look by encouraging us each week to look forward to the rest and peace of the Sabbath which is a foretaste, an anticipation of the greater blessings to be enjoyed in the world to come. To live with a forward look means then to maintain a Sabbatical outlook in which we view all our achievements and our possessions such as homes, cars, gadgets, as transitory; as things God gives us in this present life to help us prepare for and appreciate the greater realities that awaits us in the life to come.

2. LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

A second characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. It is only by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that we can “live sober, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:12) while awaiting the coming of our Lord. To emphasize the important role the Holy Spirit in the life of those who await His Return, Christ related the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-3).

Why were the five foolish virgins unprepared to meet Christ, the Bridegroom, at His Coming? Surely it was not because they lived immoral lives. The very fact that they are called virgins indicates that they were pure, genuine Christians. What was their problem, then? They failed to seek constantly the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. They were self-sufficient Christians. They did not sense the need to ask daily for a fresh provision of divine grace to meet the challenge of their daily lives. Here lies the essential difference between the life of a genuine Christian (wise virgins) and that of a nominal Christian (foolish virgins) or an unbeliever. A genuine Christian lives a life of constant dependency upon God. A nominal Christian lives a life of independence from God.

Dependent or Independent Christians. Are we dependant or independent Christians? Do we sometime feel self-sufficient like the foolish virgins? Do we feel that we have all the necessary financial, intellectual, professional resources to resolve our problems? Do we feel that we can manage our lives by ourselves without seeking God’s help? Do we find it humiliating to kneel before God each day and ask for the enabling power of His spirit?

I believe that if ever there was a time when we as Advent believers need the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, such time is today, as we are called to live in a selfish, impatient, unkind, immoral, intemperate, secularly minded society. Every day we are tempted and pressured to conform to the world in eating and drinking, dressing, entertainment, Sabbathkeeping, divorcing and remarrying, sexual permissiveness. Today more than ever before we need to ask daily for the enabling power of God’s Spirit. We need to ask the power of His Spirit as we begin each day, saying: God help me today to live sober, upright and holy life. Help me through Thy Spirit to be pleasant toward the people I shall meet, to be diligent in my work, and to be truthful in my speaking.

We need to ask the power of His Spirit also as we go through the day and we are confronted with unexpected situations that may cause us to loose our patience, to become hostile, to become discouraged. Let us pause for a moment and ask God for the special assistance of His Spirit. When you find that you are again in control of a situation that seemed difficult or out of control, pause again to thank God for strength received.

In researching biblical teachings on vital areas of our Christian faith, I have often been confronted with problematic texts, whose meaning puzzled me. I would consult all the available resources, but still I was unsure about the meaning of the text. In that moment I sensed the need to pose, and pray that God would open my mind so that I could understand the true meaning of His Word. Surprisingly, what was puzzling to me soon became clear. At that moment I sensed the need to thank God for help received.

As we live by the power of the Spirit we become more and more like One we are expecting, because as the Scripture tells us, “We all are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

3. LIVING A BALANCED LIFE

A third characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living a balance life, by avoiding the extremes of fanaticism on the one hand and liberalism or indifferentism on the other hand. To live a balance lifestyle, we need to heed Peter's admonition, as found in 1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sin."

In this text Peter uses two imperatives which in Greek are much stronger than in most English translations. The first imperative is *sophronesate*, which means: *Be mentally vigilant*. The translation "keep sane," does not convey forcefully the notion of mental vigilance. The second imperative is *nepsate*, which means *Be physically abstinent*. The common translation "be sober," ignores the primary meaning of the verb *nepho*, which literally means "Do not drink" or "be abstinent." This verb is used six times by Peter and Paul to urge believers to be physically abstinent. Unfortunately, most translators chose to translate the verb figuratively as "be sober" or "be temperate," in order to save the face of drinking by condemning drunkenness instead. This issue is discussed at length in *WINE IN THE BIBLE*, pp.195-210.

Mental vigilance and physical abstinence go hand in hand. The reason is simple. Mental vigilance requires physical abstinence, because alcohol impairs our mental judgement. This is the fundamental reason for the biblical prohibition of the use of alcoholic beverages, namely, because they impair the functioning of the mind. Any substance that impairs our mind is to be avoided, because the mind is the most precious organ God has given us. It is through the mind that we apprehend God and offer to Him a rational—*logike*—service (Rom 12:2). It is through the renewing of our mind that we "put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). Ultimately, anything that impairs our minds, defiles our body, which is the Temple of the Holy spirit (1 Cor 3:16).

As Advent believers we need in a special way to be mentally vigilant and physical abstinent because the expectation of Christ's imminent Return can give rise to two equally dangerous attitudes: fanaticism or indifference. In my itinerant ministry across North America and overseas I have found that these two trends can be found in a smaller or greater degree in every church.

Fanaticism. On the one hand there are those who, like the Thessalonians of Paul's day, became so "shaken in mind (and) excited" (2 Thess 2:2) at the thought of Christ's imminent Return, that they lose their balance by championing fanatical practices or teachings. For example, some become fanatic in their diet. Others become fanatic in their Sabbathkeeping. They observe the Sabbath as a day of absolute rest. They seem to believe that the best way to honor God is by being paralytic on the Sabbath.

Others become fanatic by majoring in minors. Let me share a personal experience. At a church where I presented a seminar, a brother offered to take me to the airport on Sunday morning, because he wanted to show me a document that he had written. I accepted the offer. When he picked me up he handed over to me a 12 pages document which contained his new year resolutions. His pastor had encouraged the congregation to write out their new year resolutions, and he took the advice to heart by preparing a 12 pages document which spelt out in considerable details the areas in which he wanted to improve his lifestyle. The first page dealt with exercise. He explained his goal to begin an exercise program, which included a three miles walk in the morning and in the evening. The second page had to do with salt. He resolved to cut down on the use of salt, both at home and when he ate out at restaurants. The third page focused on sugar. By the time I reached page 3, I decided to ask him some personal questions to learn more about him.

I asked him if he was married. He replied that he was married, but his wife lived 1500 miles away, because they were temporarily separated. "Do you have any children?" I further asked him. "Yes," he said, "but they are with my wife." "Do you discuss in in document your resolution to work toward a possible reconciliation with your wife?" I asked him. "No!," he said, "I forgot about it." I could not believe that he failed to address such an important issue. So decided to tease him, saying: "Brother, if you were to take some extra sugar that could sweeten your personality and contribute toward a possible reconciliation with your wife, it may not be that sinful after all." This story illustrates how some people major on minors.

Indifference. While some loose their balance by becoming fanatics, there are many others who loose their balance by becoming indifferent toward Christ's Coming. Like the unwise servant, they say in their hearts, "My master is delayed in coming" (Luke 12:45). Thinking that Christ's Return still lies somewhere in the distant future, they chose to make this present world a *living room* in which to live as though Christ may never come, rather than the *waiting room* to the world to come.

Usually these are the people who argue that the beliefs and standards of the church are too strict and out of touch with the present reality. They are the people who often ask: What is wrong? What is wrong with moderate drinking, dancing, going to movies, buying food and services on the Sabbath, divorcing and remarrying, being a homosexual or lesbian? They interpret the freedom of the Gospel as freedom to pursue their heart desires and inclinations. May I propose that if we want to be serious in preparing ourselves and others for Christ's coming, we need to stop asking, What is wrong? and affirm instead what is right.

To avoid the two dangers of fanaticism on the one hand and indifference on the other hand, we need to heed to Peter's admonition to be mentally vigilant and physical abstinent in view of Christ's Return. This entails living temperately, not only by abstaining from drugs and alcoholic beverages but also by learning to distinguish between necessities and luxuries, wants and wishes, restraining our desires for the latter. "It means to be willing to ask ourselves, when buying new clothes, a new car, a new house, or new furniture: Am I buying these to bolster my weak self-image? To keep up with the Joneses? Simply to keep up with fashion? Will this purchase encourage fellow Christians to live the kind of lifestyle Christ is calling us to live while awaiting His Return? Do I have a right to purchase anything my heart desires simply because I can afford it?"

If our motive for the acquisition of goods is primarily to gratify extravagant wishes rather than meeting genuine needs, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!' If we buy more food than we can consume so that we find ourselves constantly throwing away food which has spoiled, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!' If the size of our wardrobe is such that we have not worn many of the outfits for months or even years, then we need to heed God's admonition, "Be sober!" If we choose to live in a large house where half of the rooms are never used, then we need to heed God's admonition, 'Be sober!'" (*The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, p. 336). As you can see, fellow believers, temperance extends way beyond eating and drinking to include many facets of our life. How easy it is for us living in an affluent society to become victims of intemperance.

Preserve your Prayer Life. The reason given by Peter for being mentally vigilant and physical abstinent is, "for your prayers" (1 Pet 4:7), that is to say, in order to be able to pray as we ought. It is not difficult to see the connection between temperance and prayer life. A person who lives an intemperate lifestyle will either ignore his or her prayer life or will pray for the wrong things. The opposite is equally true. A person who maintains a healthy prayer life enables the Holy Spirit to operate more fully in his/her life.

The importance of prayer in the life of those who live in the expectancy of Christ's Coming was underscored by the Saviour Himself in His Olivet Discourse. After warning about the danger of intemperance, Christ said: "Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). It is noteworthy that Christ makes prayer the key to obtaining the strength to withstand external pressures and to be ready to stand before Him at His Coming. The reason why prayer is so essential is because it makes us more receptive and responsive to the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

4. LIVING LOVINGLY

A fourth characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living lovingly. Peter emphasizes this characteristic saying: "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8). Peter characterizes Christian love as "unfailing." The Greek term (*ektenes*) has also the meaning of being *zealous* and *outreaching*. In other words genuine Christian love is zealous, never-failing, reaching to all the lovable and unlovable.

There is much talk about love today, but most of it is love of self rather than love of others. People often speak of how much they love their job, their car, their clothes, their sexual partner, the place where they live. What they actually love is the self-gratification these things offer them. This is self-centered love that often leads to indifference toward the needs of others. The result of this self-love is most evident today in the appalling number of broken homes, violent crimes, abused children, neglected elderly people. Jesus predicted these pre-Advent conditions when He said that "most men's love will grow cold" (Matt 24:12).

In my study of the early church—the area where I earned my doctorate—I found that Christian love was a key factor in the success of the early Christian's outreach to the Roman world. Tertullian (about A. D. 200) tells us that the Romans could not understand how Christians could love their enemies more than they would love their blood relatives. I believe that genuine Christian love is also a vital factor today to the success of our Endtime mission to preach the Gospel to all the world (Matt 24:14).

Sometimes ago I was invited to speak at the General Conference Session of the Church of God Seventh-day. I recall having breakfast with a businessman who had recently joined that church. I asked him how long he had been a members of that church. He replied: "Six months." Then I asked him, "Have you ever attended an Adventist Church?" "Yes," he replied. "For how long?" I asked him. "About six months," he replied. That answer made me curious, so I probed a bit deeper. "Could you tell me why you chose to join the Church of God Seventh-day instead of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" His reply was most sobering. He said: "In that particular Adventist church I found *too-much law and too-little love.*" Undoubtedly, that church was an exception, because I meet loving people in every church that I visit. Yet, the story underscores the importance of being more loving and less critical, if we want to fulfil the gospel commission of reaching the world for Christ.

5. LIVING INDUSTRIOUSLY

A fifth characteristic of an Advent-oriented lifestyle is living industriously, by developing and using to the full every gift God has given us. In the parable of the pounds Christ commissions those who wait for His Return, saying: "Trade with these till I come" (Luke 19:13). In fact the only servant who was condemned at the return of the master was the servant who chose to hide his talent by not using it (Matt 25:24-30; Luke 19:20-23).

To fulfill the Gospel commission we need to make full use of every gift each God has given us. It may be a gift of speaking, singing, understanding, giving a word of encouragement, counseling, offering practical service, hospitality, money, or possessions inherited. Whatever gifts each one of us possesses, we much regard them as endowments to be used to hasten to establishment of Christ's Kingdom.

Sometimes I meet people who believe that the Lord has not equipped them with any special gift. I don't believe that. The fact is that each one of us has some special gifts. Obviously not all the gifts are equally noticeable, but they are all equally needed. Some of you may have the gift of cheering up people. That is a great gift that is so much needed today when so many seem to be so gloomy and doomy. My goodly mother has this gift. She has a smile and a word of encouragement for any person she meets. One cannot help but feeling good after speaking for few moments with my mother.

Some of you may have the gift of understanding people's problems. You are able to listen to people with an open mind, without prejudging them. That is a rare gift that is so much needed today. Have you ever looked for somebody that could understand your problem—someone willing to listen to you without prejudging you? If God has given you such a gift, use it. You can be a blessing to many people.

"Trade with these till I come" (Luke 19:13), is Christ's commission to us who wait for His Return. Christ expects us to plan and work for the future without making our future plans the only dominant future to live for. We must live as if Christ would return today, and yet plan and work as if His Coming were still in the future. Keeping this tension in balance is essential for our life today.

Conclusion. We have see this morning that a live Advent Hope greatly affects our motives, our values, our choices, in short, our total lifestyle. We have seen that living in the expectancy of Christ's imminent Return means, among other things, to live with a forward look, laboring in this world without losing sight of the world to come. It means living by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, experiencing in this present life a foretaste of the blessings of the life to come. It means living balanced lives, by preserving our sanity, sobriety, and prayer life. It means to live lovingly, by showing unfailing forgiving love toward all. It means to live industriously, by developing and using all the gifts God has given us. May God help each one of us to be true Adventist Christians by living "sober, upright and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:12-13).

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