

WHAT IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM?

THE PATH TO THE PROPHET

ProclamationMagazine.com

Proclamation!

FORMER ADVENTISTS
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS
SABBATARIANS
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

WINTER 2015
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SEEING WITHOUT THE
LENS OF ADVENTISM

DISTORTION OF
THE AFTERLIFE

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY
BREEDS OPEN THEISM

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY
REQUIRES SABBATH



ADVENTISM'S **WORLDVIEW**

ELLEN WHITE'S GREAT CONTROVERSY



COLLEEN TINKER

WE HAVE THIS REAL HOPE

One week ago today Richard and I struggled to work while watching the live news feeds covering the act of terrorism in San Bernardino that began with the shooting of 35 people, 14 of whom died, and ended with a police barricade and a search of the shooters' house in our own Redlands, California. Several of our family and friends were on lock-down as the events of the day transpired because they worked so close to the place where the crime occurred.

The horror of terrorism being active so close to home eclipsed both the joy of approaching Christmas and the focussed energy we were spending on preparing *Proclamation!* for the

trary, Jesus vindicated and fulfilled the law by becoming sin for us. Jesus, the Perfect Israel, kept every jot and tittle of the law in His sinless life. Jesus, the only human born spiritually alive, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was our perfect Substitute and Sacrifice. Jesus' shed blood has settled the score between humanity and God, and when we trust Jesus alone for our eternal future, we are reconciled to God and made alive by His Spirit.

This miracle of new birth—this fruit of the gospel of God that Scripture reveals—this new reality reveals the hope that we all need when our world no longer makes sense.

Adventism presents itself as an evangelical denomination, but I know from experience that Adventism cannot calm my anxiety or give me peace and an immovable foundation in a crisis. Only the certainty that Jesus' blood has opened a new, living way to the Father anchors me in hope (Heb. 10:20).

The blood of Jesus is not merely a portion of a necessary formula to guarantee my eternal safety in Christ Jesus; it is everything I need.

In this issue we examine the Adventist worldview, identifying its core assumptions and contrasting those with the gospel of the Lord Jesus as revealed in Scripture. You will read pieces contributed by Anthony Andreola, Stephen Pitcher, Dale Ratzlaff, Martin Carey, and me. You will hear also from our regular columnists Rick Barker, Chris Lee, and Carolyn Macomber.

As we celebrate Christmas in a world rocked by both global and personal torments, we can rejoice. God the Son has come to us. He has suffered in the flesh, has paid for our sin, has broken our curse of death. Because of Jesus we can stand firm in a terrified world.

Glory to God in the highest! †

AS AN ADVENTIST I HAD NO REAL HOPE TO OFFSET UNCONTROLLABLE EVIL.

printer. Our kitchen, torn apart because of a water leak that damaged the entire floor from the stove to the dining room, seemed almost a non-issue. The United States presidential campaign with Adventist Ben Carson gaining evangelical support faded to insignificance. Because of that single act of premeditated terror, reality shifted in the Inland Empire.

How are we to cope when reality seems permanently altered, when danger can lurk behind the eyes of coworkers we see every day?

As an Adventist I had no real hope to offset uncontrollable evil. I believed that because of the great controversy, God had to allow Satan to exercise his free will to carry out whatever nefarious plans he devised, just as He had to allow me and all humans to exercise our free will. Satan, I believed, was responsible for the pain, suffering, and evil that rocked the world. God had to limit Himself to allow evil to play out to its logical end in order to reveal to the watching universe that Satan really is devious, and God really is fair.

Now, however, I see that Scripture tells me God is utterly sovereign. On the one hand He asks us to believe and to make choices that have eternal consequences; on the other hand, however, neither we humans nor Satan and his minions can thwart God's plans. What He decides, He will do, and He is not surprised by anything that happens. He is already in the future.

The great controversy is the paradigm that defines the Adventist worldview, but that paradigm is invented; it is not found in Scripture. We do not vindicate the law and God's reputation by keeping the Ten Commandments. On the con-

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CAN A BELIEVER FALL AWAY?

Doesn't the parable of the Sower teach that a believer can fall away?

Most of the readers of *Proclamation!* are familiar with this parable—often called the parable of the soils—as it is recorded in all the synoptic gospels.¹ In short, the Sower's seed fell on four different soils: hard and impenetrable, rocky, weedy, and good. The seeds on the hard soil were eaten by birds; the seed on the rocky soil sprouted plants which withered quickly without water or firm roots. The seed in the weedy soil were choked by the encroaching thorns, and the seed on the good soil yielded a crop “a hundred times as great” (Lk. 8:8). How are we to understand this parable?

And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved (Lk. 8:12).

It is clear this group hears the gospel, but the message of Christ does not penetrate into the heart to bring repentance and true saving faith. It is the next type of soil (people) that raise the question asked at the beginning, “Can a believer fall away?”

And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away (Lk. 8:13).

Saving faith is more than intellectual belief: it is belief and trust. Notice that the people in this category “fall away” when

tested. In other words, they really did not trust the word of the gospel. One reason God allows us to be tested is to show us whether we have saving faith or just intellectual belief without willingness to trust our lives to God.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing (1 Pet. 4:12). And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope (Rom. 5:3-4).

And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful (Mk. 4:18-19).

Those in this group also do not exhibit saving faith. They hear the “good news” but the “deceitfulness of riches” and worldly pleasures pull them away from real saving faith. Like the rich young ruler, they are

unwilling to give up what they love the most for the sake of the gospel.

The last group exhibit true, saving faith.

And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance (Lk. 8:15-15).

And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold (Mk. 4:20).

In conclusion, the parable of the Sower does not teach that a true believer will fall away. It does, however, teach that saving faith is a real thing that changes the life. It is more than saying the words, “I believe”. Saving faith continues to trust God even in difficult times. †

¹ Mt. 13:2-9; Mk. 4:1-9; Lk. 8:4-15.

Dale Ratzlaff is the founder of Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine.

SAVING FAITH IS MORE THAN INTELLECTUAL BELIEF: IT IS BELIEF AND TRUST.

Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored six books: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the false Adventist doctrine of a pre-advent judgment that decides eternal destinies, *Truth*

About Adventist “Truth”—a little book that’s perfect to give to Christians that need to understand Adventism, *Truth Led Me Out*—in which Dale Ratzlaff tells his own story of following Jesus, no matter the cost, *My Cup Overflows*—Carolyn’s autobiography, and *Gospel Transformation*—which teaches what the Gospel is and accomplishes.

Each of these books is available at Ratzlaff.com or by phoning (928) 554-1001.



SEEING **WITHOUT** THE LENS OF ADVENTISM

ANTHONY ANDREOLA

I grew up Seventh-day Adventist. I don't blame my parents; they believed they were obeying God by teaching me Adventism. They had been tricked by Adventist prophecy into joining the organization back in the 70's when Adventism was growing in North America. In those days it wasn't possible to check facts on the internet, and a convincing talker could charm a person ungrounded in Scripture right into Adventist membership.

I was educated in the Adventist school system through eighth grade. Fortunately, after I graduated, my parents decided not to send me to an Adventist academy. Instead, I went to a public high school, although I remained passionately Adventist and would even debate my friends on Adventist particulars. Thankfully, I was spared the Daniel and Revelation eisegetical indoctrination some of my friends received in academy. What I had, though, was much worse than mere twisted teaching; I had the Ellen White "lens".

When I was about 11 or 12 I resolved to read the entire New Testament; after all, I reasoned, it made no sense to commit an eternity to someone I didn't even know. People in my life had told me about Jesus, but it seemed to me that the New Testament had to be the place one would really learn about Him.

Every so often, as I read, I would come across a passage or verse that challenged my Adventist beliefs. Each time I would take my question to an authority figure who then taught me the "proper" way to understand the passage. I didn't realize that the hermeneutic my Adventist authorities were using didn't derive from clear Scripture but from Ellen White—and I suspect that many of them didn't realize that fact, either. Nevertheless, in this way the Bible became a closed book to me. Although I would spend hours reading it, I was simply incapable of understanding its teachings. A "lens" developed in my mind through which I saw only Adventist teachings when I read Scripture. Significantly, when I would switch from the Bible to *The Clear Word*, the verses that troubled me seemed to vanish entirely. I didn't realize it then, but that "lens" that had been installed in my brain was even more dangerous than cancer, and there was nothing I nor anyone else could do about it.

Crossroad

When I graduated high school, I faced a crossroad: would I enroll at La Sierra University or join the Army? It was not an easy decision. On the one hand, I knew that if I didn't go to an Adventist university, I would have a hard time finding a good Adventist wife. On the other hand, the military was in my genes. Almost every man in my family had served in one branch or another throughout American history.

I joined the army, but I remained stubbornly Adventist; in fact, one girlfriend dumped me because I wouldn't convert.

I believed with all my heart that Adventists were right about the Sabbath. In fact, I would have argued that all the other Christian groups were deluded by the devil; after all, the fourth commandment is so obvious, I reasoned, only demonic deception could keep people from seeing it. Once again my Adventist "lens" kept me stuck in a twisted worldview.

After two years of military training I returned home to go to college and fulfill my reserve commitment. I don't remember why I chose not to go to an Adventist university—maybe I just didn't want to be in an Adventist environment. Although I believed the religion was right, I wasn't happy in the system anymore. Moreover, about that time my sister began attending a "Sunday keeping", non-denominational church. I was angry; if I could loyally stick it out, she should, too!

During that time I met my wife. I didn't tell her then, but I knew within a few weeks that she was "the one". I was concerned, however, that she was a "Sunday-keeper". I tried to convert her every chance I had, but she would check the things I claimed were in the Bible. She wasn't buying my arguments.

We were at an impasse. I was trained to ignore or obfuscate the verses she showed me, such as Colossians 2:16, so while the Bible helped her to resist my Adventist arguments, she wasn't skilled enough in understanding it to extract the cult from me—nor was cult extraction her job. We almost broke up over the Sabbath before she agreed to start studying the religion with my mom. When we finally became engaged, she agreed to attend an Adventist church as long as she could disregard its eschatology.



Detours

In 2008 we got married. I got a state job and a place for us to live in a small mountain town far away from where we grew up. We went to the small, local, very orthodox Adventist church once before we started commuting to church in a larger town about 45 minutes from our home.

The fact is, though, that I wasn't happy as an Adventist. In spite of my conviction that it was right, Adventism was a burden to carry in my soul, and I can't explain it much better than that. It wasn't long before I didn't want to go to church anymore and simply stopped attending. I refused to work on the Sabbath, even for overtime, and in my mind that refusal was sufficient Sabbath-keeping to avoid the mark of the beast.

Meanwhile, I met a charismatic "prophet" at work. Because we had quite a bit of down time in our duties, I would ask questions. As I began to practice the things she taught me, I came to believe that I had a direct line to God and could hear His voice. I kept a special journal of all the things I was "told"—a journal which came in handy later in an unexpected way. It is this part of my story that I don't like to tell; I have a semi-decent excuse for growing up Adventist but not for becoming a "prophet", so I feel shame.

Still, however, I was an Adventist in my mind. That "lens" installed in my understanding remained, and it burdened my conscience. I wanted to go to a normal church, but I simply couldn't. One day I invited my prophet friend to the house, and she prayed with us and gave us prophetic permission to go to any Christian church that we wanted. Although one could argue that the outcome of her prayer was good, still, as I look back, I realize that the "prophet" did not understand the new covenant from a biblical perspective. If she had, she could have explained to us why the seventh day was not mandatory for Christians instead of praying prophetic permission for us to leave the day. At that time, however, I didn't care about such things; I just knew I had what I wanted: a golden ticket to do what I wished to do. Even though I still believed that the Sabbath was God's law for me, I had just been given a special dispensation to break it.

My wife and I started looking at the local churches in town, and we were encouraged by her side of the family who were supportive of us in our new search. We found some really good churches, but we ended up at what today I would call a seeker-sensitive, non-denominational church. The pastor would preach the gospel from time to time, but he kept things rather light. I even asked him about this "gospel light" once, and he told me that this style was purposeful in order to reach the unchurched.

I, however, was not without church; I was without Christ. Even then I was still Adventist in my mind; I just didn't know it.

One unforgettable day I was painting my house with my dad, and we started talking about the state of the dead. We couldn't seem to agree—a situation which wasn't surprising since neither of us had truly studied the word of God on this topic. We were both functionally apostate Adventists with no understanding of Scripture, although I no longer used my *Clear Word* and had recently read a few Bible verses on the subject of death that had loosened my Adventist views on the state of the dead. I told my dad that I would get on the Internet and look for some answers and get back to him.

Answers

I wish I could remember that exact date so I could mark it on the calendar. Somehow I stumbled upon www.exadventist.com. I had just enough apostate Adventist in me not to feel guilty reading the material there with care and scrutiny. I downloaded a PDF from that site called *Dialogue with a Seventh-day Adventist* by Samuel Fisk. To this day I pray that the Lord blesses Samuel and his whole family now and in the future.

I spent all night reading that book; whoever wrote it really understood my "headspace". It was a simple narrative of an Adventist and a Christian talking about Adventist beliefs and comparing them with the Bible. It was a conversation I myself had many times as an Adventist, but I had never bumped into someone like Samuel Fisk who could actually rebut my beliefs. At that point in my life I would have been willing to pay someone to convince me honestly from Scripture that Adventism was wrong, but that night I had stumbled upon answers and obtained them for free. In fact, you can

I HAD BEEN A **PAGAN OF A VERY DANGEROUS SORT**; THE “LENS OF ADVENTISM” IMPOSED THE LAW ON ME BUT HID THE GOSPEL.

also go and read the book now if you want answers; the document is still on that website. There is nothing a Christian would find shocking; it's just Christian theology. At that time, however, it rocked my world—and I wanted more.

I haunted that website for days and read almost everything on it. My favorite part, however, was the page of interactive frequently asked questions. The most compelling thing I learned was the concept of a new covenant and how easily it could be proven in Scripture. I didn't have to add any words to the text with my imagination; I could just read it and believe it. When I found the material on the Waldenses, the twelfth century Christians who came into conflict with the Catholic church, I became angry. Not only were Adventists just wrong about the Waldenses being persecuted for keeping the Sabbath, but Adventism had intentionally twisted obvious facts and lied to me. This premeditated deception has only become more obvious as I have continued to study, and it sickens me.

I also found help understanding Ellen White. The website had a PDF cataloging her false prophecies—I had not known she said people lived on Jupiter! More importantly, however, I was able to test her prophecies objectively and biblically and lost all fear of her.

I cannot remember if it was my dad or I who finally found Former Adventist Fellowship. We told my mom about it—and as it turned out, my mom had been discovering similar things about Adventism on her own; she just hadn't been telling anyone yet. We decided as a group to drive to Redlands one Sunday, and we met the Tinkers and the group of former Adventists who met for lunch after church. That was a wonderful day—not just for my parents, who did most of the talking, but for me as well. What struck and shocked me was when Colleen spoke about Jesus—a Jesus Christ I'd never heard of before.

This Jesus is fully God and man; He commanded the dead to rise of His own authority, not solely as a conduit through whom the Father worked, but God of very God, incarnate in human flesh. Moreover, God is a Trinity in one being and substance. I hadn't realized how wrong the Adventist teaching about God is. I didn't know this God of whom Colleen spoke. I thought the difference between Adventism and Christianity was the Sabbath; I had no idea that the real difference was the actual identity of the Lord Jesus. Again, I cannot give you an exact date because I did not mark my

calendar, but it was during this period in my life that I truly heard the word of God and repented of my sins. I had been a pagan of a very dangerous sort; the “lens of Adventism” imposed the law on me but hid the gospel.

As an Adventist I was baptized into the teachings and interpretations of Ellen White, into an unbiblical religion with an unbiblical god. Even though I have said these things about Adventism, however, I care deeply for the people still stuck in it, and I am grateful to the ones God used to pull me out.

The sure word

In losing my Adventist lens and becoming a Christian, I learned how to read the Bible. It wasn't long, however, before I ran into Scripture's challenges to my prophetic practices. I still had my journal, though, and I tested Scripture against the messages I thought I had received from God just as I had tested Ellen White. The unfiltered word of God defeated the fortresses of my own creation just as easily as it had torn down Ellen White.

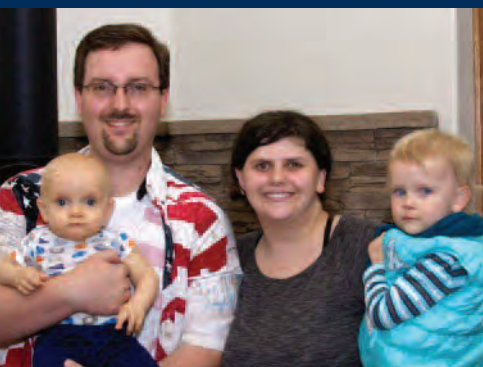
Now my source of truth is Scripture, the true word of God which He gave to us for a reason. All things are to be tested by it. We are not to twist it, malign it, or place ourselves or our reasoning over it. When we do those things we are not following the Bible anymore; we just have ourselves presiding over a twisted word. There is no efficacy in a twisted word.

What is it to be changed by the word of God? I died and was reborn as a different person. I didn't do this rebirth to myself; rather, hearing God's word rightly taught changed me. I didn't even participate in bringing about this change; when I believed the gospel of the Lord Jesus, this change happened to me. I was even baptized—and I won't say baptized again. What does it feel like converting to Christianity when I thought I already was one? Overwhelmingly, I know I didn't do it; it was done to me, and it was wonderful. Concurrently, though, it was—and still is—painful and a bit of a shock. There is loss and an almost disorienting adjustment to my worldview. There is a new identity grounded in my adoption as God's child instead of my identity as a son of a system perpetrating illusions.

Today I blog my biblical studies and share them with Adventists who are interested. Some have been very grateful, others not so much, but I do it anyway. I stumbled upon a group of formers on

Facebook who are administrators of a few groups designed to reach out to Adventists in Africa and other places. They have added me to their team, and I help with their organized efforts. I know that God doesn't need my help to save anyone; He is sovereign and does as He pleases. Nevertheless, I am honored to be given a role to play in His story and to be used by Him even in such a small way as sharing His word online.

I grew up Seventh-day Adventist, but now I live as a new creation born of God. To Him be all the glory. †



Anthony Andreola went to Adventist elementary schools and to public high school. He joined the army after graduation and served as a licensed vocational nurse. Today he works for the State of California as a Health Program Specialist. He and his family worship at a local Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. Anthony and wife Kira have two children, Liliana, who just turned four, and Anthony who is almost two.

Adventism's Fundamental Belief #17: Spiritual Gifts and Ministries

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love.

Comments about the belief statement

There is plenty of debate within Christianity running the gamut from cessationism to charismaticism. This Adventist belief statement falls within this familiar spectrum. In fact, the statements within this Fundamental Belief sound quite biblical with the exception of changing the gift of tongues to that of "proclamation". The big issue with this statement, however, is the discrepancy between what the Adventist organization proclaims as its official beliefs and how it actually operates within them.

With the glaring, singular exception of Ellen White, the Adventist organization is, in practice, cessationist. While Adventism allows the theoretical possibility that God may raise up another prophet among them—and while many Adventists have claimed to be prophets over the years—the organization does not officially acknowledge anyone besides Ellen White as having the gift of prophecy. Yet claiming a 19th-century prophet as the fulfillment of the biblical spiritual gift leads to questions. Shouldn't there be at least one acknowledged prophet in the history of the Christian church—if Adventism is part of the

ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #17: SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MINISTRIES

THE PATH TO THE PROPHET

Christian church—between the apostles and Ellen White? Why is there no active prophet now in the Adventist organization?

While the Adventist organization recognizes that God can heal, Adventism does not promote individuals with a "gift of healing". Adventists practice prayer and anointing the sick with oil, but although they believe in miracles, Adventism does not designate individuals as having the gift to convey these miracles. Within Adventism, talented medical professionals may be seen as those having the "gift of healing". To be sure, being an excellent diagnostician or therapeutic care-giver may be a God-given talent, but it may not be a spiritual gift.

Nevertheless, Loma Linda University's motto, mission, and vision reveal Adventism's focus on medical professionals as those carrying the mantle of Jesus' power to heal.

Motto: to make man whole; mission: to continue the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ; vision: transforming lives through education, healthcare and research. [www.llu.edu]

Education and personal skill thus replace the spiritual significance of the gift.

I have already noted that the Adventist organization changes the gift of tongues into the gift of proclamation,

eliminating yet another obvious spiritual gift and substituting a skill or work of the person. Furthermore, while this fundamental belief allows for individuals to exercise apostolic gifts, Adventism does not recognize people as apostles.

In short, this fundamental belief on spiritual gifts obscures the actual Adventist view of spiritual gifts today which is essentially cessationist among its members. Instead, Adventism uses the spiritual gifts as a foundation from which to introduce people to their one and only prophet, Ellen White. †

Rick Barker is a native of Southwestern Ohio and facilitates a weekly Bible study for former and transitioning Adventists in the Dayton, Ohio, area. Rick graduated from Andrews University in 1987 and received a Masters degree from the University of Dayton. Rick and his wife Sheryl formally left the Adventist church in 2004. Prior to this they had been active in the Miamisburg and Wilmington, Ohio, Adventist churches.



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WHAT IS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM?

COLLEEN TINKER

© ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SKODONNELL (BINOCULARS)

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The fall of 2015 has proven to be historic in unexpected ways. One of the most surprising unfolding events has been the campaign of retired Seventh-day Adventist neurosurgeon Ben Carson for the Republican nomination for the United States presidential election to be held in 2016. News outlets have been attempting to explain Adventism to the American public, and while they have revealed many facts about Adventist practices, they have largely been ignorant of the core beliefs that shape the Adventist worldview.

The Adventist worldview might normally be of little interest to the general public; however, with an Adventist campaigning for the presidency, his worldview inevitably affects the way he understands the world and reality. In spite of Carson's (and most reporters') statements that Adventism is an evangelical Protestant denomination, its fundamental understanding of Jesus, of man, and of salvation are not Christian. Although the words the organization uses to explain itself to "outsiders" are the familiar words of Christianity, Adventists' definitions are based on the visionary interpretations of their co-founder and prophet Ellen G. White rather than on a biblical hermeneutic.

The key to understanding Adventism is to understand its "great controversy" worldview. Because the great controversy paradigm is so important in understanding how Adventists think and believe, in these next pages we are re-running an article which we first printed in 2011 explaining this foundational Adventist doctrine. As former Adventists, we at Life Assurance Ministries believe that this truth needs to be known.

What is the "great controversy"?

Ellen G. White (EGW) Adventism's ongoing prophetic voice and their "continuing and authoritative source of truth",¹⁹ had her famous, two-hour "great controversy vision" in Lovett's Grove, Ohio, in mid-March, 1858. This vision is described in her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*. This vision included everything from heavenly pre-history when God exalted Jesus to be equal to Himself and triggered Lucifer's murderous jealousy (a story eerily reminiscent of Mormonism's story of Jesus and Lucifer originally being brothers) to Jesus' second coming when those who will be saved will be only those keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. For a list of the details creating the structure of Adventism's great controversy paradigm, see the chart on page 10.

When the early Adventists accepted the Lovett's Grove vision as truth, they cemented their position outside the Christian faith, interpreting Scripture through the lens of this new revelation. The investigative judgment—the notion that in 1844 Jesus began the work of investigating the records of professed believers to determine whether all their sins had been confessed and to ascertain whether or not they were perfectly keeping the law, especially the seventh-day Sabbath⁶—had already gutted Jesus' completed atonement. From 1858 on, however, Adventists finally had a complete story in which to frame their view of reality. They would use the same words and the same Bible all Christians use, but they would mean different things than Christians mean when discussing the Scriptures.



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Today, nothing has changed. Their Fundamental Belief #8 says,

“All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe...[Satan] introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated.”⁷

Adventists affirm centrality of the great controversy

In this postmodern age, Adventist leaders and authors are finding the great controversy to be an effective way to share Adventism with people who don’t believe in “absolute truth”.

In the November, 2008 issue of *Ministry* magazine, Erman Norman addressed evangelizing a postmodern culture with the great controversy story. In his article entitled “Reaching the Secular World”, Norman refers to an article entitled “Reaching Postmodern Society” which was published in the September, 2006 edition of the *Mid-America Outlook* and was written by Outlook editor Martin Weber. Norman wrote:

We do hold, however, a very important key—the great controversy. This God-given narrative...which entails the story of Eden lost to Eden restored in the earth made new, synchronizes well every Adventist belief, characterizing it as uniquely Adventist in

both content and scope....[and answers] many of the questions of the postmodern mind (Christ and His high priestly ministry, heaven and hell, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, etc.).⁸

Norm Gulley makes an even more far-reaching statement. In his article “The Cosmic Controversy” published in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Autumn, 1996, Gulley states, “Theology needs to break beyond the man-centered world view about human salvation to the cosmic world view about the great controversy. Seventh-day Adventists have an opportunity to lead out in this Einsteinian-like breakthrough into the broader world view.”⁹

Gulley develops the idea that not only humans but inhabitants on other planets must vote to vindicate either God’s fairness or Satan’s accusations. He says,

It is necessary that the truth about God, Christ and Satan be made manifest. The real story of all three is involved in the cosmic controversy. The revelation of who they really are must be made so that all created beings, angelic (fallen and unfallen), humans (redeemed and lost) and the unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar, may all vote unanimously on who is right and who is wrong. Only one side can win, yet all from both sides must vote, and vote the same. This is done with complete freedom, and is done purely on the evidence given by both sides.¹⁰

Importantly, the idea of “unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar” is found in EGW’s works, never in the Bible. Moreover, this assumption cannot stand the scrutiny of modern science.¹¹

In 2010 Adventist publishing house Pacific Press released a book compiled by Herbert E. Douglass entitled, *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the writings of Ellen G. White*. This book, organized into 21 sections plus an index, collects quotations from Ellen White's writings without Scriptural support and arranges them in themes.

The following endorsement on the back cover of the book confirms that the great controversy theme shapes the Adventist worldview. Written by Fernando Canale, professor of theology at Andrews University Theological Seminary, these words summarize the Adventist worldview:

Understanding...the great controversy theme will provide honest seekers with the indispensable big picture from which to frame their quest after truth. Many will find this work to be useful also as a tool to find the real God of Scripture hidden behind the maze of conflicting theological and ministerial traditions accumulated through the history of the Christian church.¹²

Three more endorsements on Douglass's book emphasize the great controversy's necessity for Adventist doctrine, proselytizing, and infiltration into Christian theology. Jack Blanco, professor emeritus of Southern Adventist University and the author of the Adventist "expanded paraphrase" of the Bible, *The Clear Word*, says:

An invaluable resource for...understanding of the great controversy theme that permeates our system of beliefs—from how we view God, sin, and salvation, to the cosmic issues that impact our future. It is a volume that ought to be in every school and personal library.¹³

Jim Pedersen, president of the Northern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, says this:

The great controversy theme is one of the special contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, particularly as it is

unfolded through the prophetic ministry and writings of Ellen G. White.¹⁴

The former director of education for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Humberto M. Rasi, writes this:

This metanarrative [the great controversy] provides a comprehensive framework that allows all the major themes of the Bible to fit into an integrated whole...The rapid growth of the Adventist Church around the world, the need to strengthen unity and mission focus among its members across different cultures...are all factors that in my view make this...book both compelling and timely.¹⁵

Why is this important?

In 2010 Life Assurance Ministries had a booth at a national leadership conference for a well-known evangelical denomination. We passed out *Proclamation!* magazines to the pastors and other leaders there, and while many were eager to learn the truth about Adventism, several let us know they were convinced Adventism was not a serious problem.

That lack of concern is not surprising because Adventists say the "right words" about the Christian faith. Inside Adventism, in fact, members vary widely in what they claim to believe personally. Some say they don't believe in Ellen White; others say they don't have to keep the Sabbath to be saved, and many claim that salvation is by grace through faith alone. These words, however, mean something different to Adventists than they mean to Christians who hear them. For example, "salvation is by grace through faith alone" for an Adventist means God saves them by grace which includes giving them the faith in Christ's power to help them overcome sin and keep the law so they can help prove that God's law is fair, that God is a good God, that Satan is a liar, and that they themselves are safe to save.

WHAT IS THE GREAT CONTROVERSY?

PRE-HISTORY

- Before time began, God the Father exalted Jesus to be equal to Himself.
- God's exaltation of Jesus over Lucifer made him jealous.
- Angry, Lucifer rebelled and turned one-third of heaven's angels against God.
- He accused God of unfairness in giving a law too difficult to keep, yet demanding obedience.
- God banished Lucifer/Satan and his angels to earth.

WARFARE MOVES TO EARTH

- Satan deceived Eve, thus causing humanity to sin.¹

- When Adam and Eve sinned, the Father took Jesus into His inner council and allowed Him to become the sacrifice for sin.
- Ever since, Satan and Jesus have been battling each other for the souls of men.

GOD GIVES THE LAW OF VINDICATION

- God gave the written transcript of His character on Mt. Sinai so we would know how to live.
- Jesus was born with inherited tendencies to evil to show us we can keep the law as He did.
- Jesus' death vindicates and exalts God's law.
- Ultimately God's people will become free of sin and prove God's law is fair and attainable.
- When God's people perfectly reproduce the character of Christ, they will vindicate God's

character, prove Satan to be a liar, and thus help Jesus win the conflict with Satan.²

LAW WINS, LOSER BURNED UP

- Jesus will place all confessed sins on Satan who will carry them into the lake of fire where he, Satan, "will bear the final penalty" for them.³
- Finally, God's people have the power to "hasten [their] Lord's return" by throwing themselves into carrying the Adventist message to the world and keeping the law perfectly.⁴
- The mark demarcating the saved from the lost is the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, while worshipping on Sunday is the mark of the beast.⁵

In order to simplify this web of assumptions that Adventists understand as “truth”, I will discuss how the great controversy paradigm changes the truth about God, Jesus, man, and the gospel, and then I will summarize the implications of these changed identities and definitions.

God and Satan: who is obligated to whom?

The cornerstone of the great controversy is its limitation of God—His sovereignty, responsibility, and identity. The Bible teaches that God is One (Deu. 6:4; Mk. 12:29-31; Js. 2:19). He is all-powerful, sovereign, and has authority over everything, including Satan, who cannot make a move apart from God’s sovereign permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), and who must flee when commanded by God’s authority (Matt. 8:28-34).

Furthermore, God cursed the serpent in Eden, and from that earliest record of human history, God decreed Satan’s defeat through Eve’s seed (Gen. 3:15). Scripture identifies Satan as the “accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10), but never of God. In fact, Satan and his demons know full well that they are subject to the One God and have no claim against Him. They know who God is—and they “shudder” because they are in rebellion against Him (Jas. 2:19).

Adventism, on the other hand, limits the power God can exercise over Satan and gives Satan illegitimate power. According to Adventism, God is obligated to protect Satan’s “free will” as well as the free will of the supposed inhabitants of other planets and is obligated to prove that Satan’s supposed accusations are unfair. In the great controversy, God limits His power so His creatures are free to accuse, question, and scrutinize His dealings and to pass judgment on His character. Furthermore, on the authority of EGW, Adventism teaches that God must allow Satan to inflict suffering, hardships, and death in order to convince humans and other worlds that he is evil:

[A certain] woman had not been possessed in spirit, but the Lord had suffered Satan to exercise his will in bringing disease upon her; for God was demonstrating the character of his kingdom before the whole universe of heaven. This opportunity must be given him to reveal the character of apostasy. The inhabitants of worlds unfallen could view in this case the attributes of Satan and the character of God.¹⁶

Scripture however, says this:

For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you [Cyrus] by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ...I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things... Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, “What are you making?”...I made the earth and created man on it...I have stirred him [Cyrus] up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,” says the LORD of hosts (Is. 45:4-13).

Paul says the same things about God’s position as sovereign over all creation in Romans 9:17-21. Quoting from the above Isaiah passage and also from Exodus 9:16, Paul says,

WHERE IS SATAN?

GOD CREATION

● SATAN

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For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”...

You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

Satan is not an independent agent of evil whose freewill God must protect. Evil is not an equal-but-opposite force opposing God’s goodness. Rather, Satan is a fallen, sinful creation who is in rebellion toward His sovereign Creator. He has already been disarmed and humiliated at the cross of the Lord Jesus (Col. 2:15).

Satan does oppose God’s people, and he does inflict suffering, but Scripture tells us that this suffering comes only with God’s permission and for His—not Satan’s—purposes (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor 12:7). God is not on trial, and Satan has already been judged (Jn. 12:31; 16:8-11).

At the heart of the great controversy worldview is a god who must allow Satan to torment humans so they will see that the non-defensive, permissive god who loves his enemies is preferable to the assertive, deceptive Satan. Mankind is expected to

see that God's kingdom is kinder and gentler than Satan's and thus choose to be on His side. EGW says this:

And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.¹⁷

In a nutshell, the great controversy offers salvation on the basis of the knowledge of good and evil—the echo of the original temptation that plunged us into spiritual death.

Scripture, however, says God sent His Son to save us (Jn. 3:16-17) so that He could rescue us from the domain of darkness and transfer us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). We are born dead in sin and objects of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), by nature citizens of the domain of darkness. We have no choice about our natural citizenship. Jesus even said those who do not believe in the name of God's only begotten Son are “condemned already” (Jn. 3:18).

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Israelites were not being given a choice between Satan's kingdom and God's. They were already bitten by deadly poison, and God gave them one provision: the bronze serpent. By simply believing God's command and looking they could be saved. Jesus revealed that He was the fulfillment of the bronze serpent's foreshadowing; all who believed in Him when He was lifted up would have eternal life in Him (Jn. 3:14-15) because He became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and paid the price God demanded for our sin (Rom. 3:25-26).

Satan has not accused God of unfairness, nor must God prove He is superior to Satan. There is no question in the universe about God's sovereignty. All creation—even Satan—is subject to Him and answers to Him.

The “transcript of God's character”

The great controversy not only limits God's sovereign authority and power over all suffering and evil, but it also diminishes His character into something that can be summarized in the law.

Ellen White said,

“The law of God is a transcript of his character. The rebel leader was in opposition to the law of God, and revealed the fact that his principles were those that actuated one who is lawless, disobedient, unholy, an accuser, a liar, and a murderer.”¹⁸

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines “transcript” thus: “A: a written, printed, or typed copy: a usually

typed copy of dictated or recorded material; B: an official or legal and often published copy: an official copy of a student's educational record.”

A transcript is an exact duplication or replica. It contains all the information found in the original document or experience. The law (and when Ellen White uses the term “law” she usually refers to the Ten Commandments) cannot contain all the information of God's character nor was it intended to do so. Even if we look at the full Torah with the detailed applications of the law included throughout the books of Moses, the fullness of God's mercy, grace, love, and provision is not and cannot be fully captured.

The only time God's character was fully revealed to humanity in material form was when the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate in a mortal body and lived among men. Only in Jesus do we find a “transcript” of God's character (Heb. 1:1-3).

Ellen White's choice of the word “transcript” is subtly deceptive. Christians may say that the law was a “revelation of God's character”—and that would be true. Every word God has spoken reveals Himself to mankind, but a revelation is not the same thing as a transcript. The revelation of God on Mt. Sinai in fire, thunder, and earthquakes was only a partial glimpse of God's holiness, a clear sign that men could not approach Him on their own terms without a mediator. The Sinai revelation of God's holiness, however, was completely different from His revelation of Himself to Elijah at the same mountain in a still, small voice. “Revelations” God gives of Himself are only partial glimpses into His eternal, unfathomable greatness.

Adventism, under the authority of EGW deceptively establishes the great controversy worldview by equating the law with the character of God rather than acknowledging it is a revelation of Him. This subtle assumption shifts the identity of God, the purpose of Christ's ministry, and man's duty.

Ellen White narrowed the focus of Satan's rebellion in heaven and of the great controversy itself to the law:

The law of God was the great subject of controversy in heaven. It is the great subject of controversy ever since the fall of Satan and will continue to be the great test question showing the loyal and the transgressors in two parties.²⁰

By equating the law with the character of God, the great controversy worldview makes law, not the Lord Jesus or the Triune God, the object of humans' and angels' loyalty or rebellion. Adventists believe that the law is the highest authority in the universe and is the necessary factor in avoiding sin and in perfecting their characters. EGW said,

WHEN THE EARLY ADVENTISTS ACCEPTED THE LOVETT'S GROVE VISION AS TRUTH, **THEY CEMENTED THEIR POSITION OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN FAITH,** INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE THROUGH THE LENS OF THIS NEW REVELATION.

WHILE ADVENTISTS FOCUS THEIR LOYALTY AND ATTENTION ON THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT, HOWEVER, THEY SEEM TO RATIONALIZE AWAY THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT, **MAINTAINING A PRO-CHOICE POSITION REGARDING ABORTION.**

In God's moral government, which is a government based upon a distinction between right and wrong, law is essential to secure right action. God's law is the expression of His character....to require less from His creatures than obedience to His law would be to abandon them to ruin. To fail to punish transgression of His law would be to place the universe in confusion. The moral law is God's barrier between the human agent and sin.²¹

Yet it is God Himself, not the law, that is the One we must serve. Adventists, because of EGW's claims, say that Adam and Eve's sin was the transgression of God's law. To be sure, they disobeyed God's clear command to them—but it was God against whom they transgressed, not the law.

When Nathan confronted David about his sin against Bathsheba and his arranged murder of her husband Uriah, David responded in Psalm 51 with these words, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Ps. 51:4).

Like David, Adam and Eve sinned by not trusting and obeying God; their sins were not against the inanimate law but against God whom they knew. Scripture is clear, in fact, that the law did not exist until Sinai (Gal. 3:17; Rom. 4:13-14).

Moreover, Scripture states that the righteousness that we need is not perfect law-keeping. What we need—and what God has provided in Jesus—is "the righteousness of God" which is "apart from the law" (Rom. 3:21). It is not "a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9).

In other words, EGW is wrong; the law is not "God's barrier between the human agent and sin," nor is law "essential to secure right action." Jesus is the barrier between us and sin; He is the One essential for righteousness.

By making the law the "transcript of God's character," the great controversy puts it on a par with God. For example, EGW attributes to the law the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in believers and claims it is the pledge of eternal life:

God's law is given to men as a hedge, a shield....To the obedient it is the pledge of eternal life, for it expresses the principles that endure forever. Christ came to demonstrate the value of the divine principles by revealing their power for the regeneration of humanity. He came to teach how these principles are to be developed and applied.²²

Moreover, Adventists believe that Jesus died to turn sinners back to honoring the law. Law-keeping is equated with being right with God:

The Majesty of heaven gave His life to make us individually His own by bringing back the transgressor to his loyalty to God's law, by turning away the sinner from his iniquity.²³

In the courtyard beside the Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University, the home of the Seventh-day Adventist theological seminary, a prayer garden depicts the great controversy view of reality. A plaque at the edge of the garden explains the garden's representation of how one experiences God. The excerpts below are taken from the legend on the plaque:

Walking the garden's edge, searching for a way in, we see the podium, an overlook where one can see across the water, through the arbor, and imagine God the Father represented in the ten commandments....Ever narrowing, the winding path leads to the narrow gate with three crosses. Standing at the gate you are at the moment of decision to approach the foot of the cross. Between the gate and the cross is the Stair of Creation, one step for each day of creation. [Importantly, there are only six days of creation, not seven as found in this garden; God ceased from His work on the seventh.] The steps widen and were made a perfect number that it might seem easy to approach the cross. For once the decision is made for Christ, it is not so difficult....Standing at the foot of the Cross you imagine Christ...and looking up...you read the promise, "I Will Come Again"....The Commandments beckon from across [the garden on the opposite wall]. It seems a long walk, like leaving earth, and entering the universe of the Creator. The path from the Cross leads directly to the Commandments...The Commandments stand at the center of the circle. Once within the circle, up close and intimate, we read what the hand of God wrote in millenniums past. Simple and embraced by the Father's arms, intimate in His presence.

The Bible, however, is clear: the cross does not lead us to the commandments; Jesus' death did not lift "the law of God to its own eternal dignity". Paul said, "...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets" (Rom. 3:20-21). And in Galatians 3:19 he explained, "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."

Finally, Jesus explained—contrary to Adventism’s doctrines—that being born again is what marks those who are fit for heaven. He told Nicodemus in John 3:3, 6, 14-15: “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God; unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”

It is both significant and ironic that Adventism’s focus on obedience to the Ten Commandments as the mark of being salvation-ready is interpreted primarily by whether or not a person keeps the seventh-day Sabbath. Ellen White said that the seventh-day Sabbath “is the seal of the living God.”²⁴ Moreover, she further stated that “the Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty,” and that “the observance of the false Sabbath” [Sunday] is the mark of the beast.²⁵

While Adventists focus their loyalty and attention on the fourth commandment, however, they seem to rationalize away the sixth commandment, maintaining a pro-choice position regarding abortion. In fact, since 1971 the Adventist organization has maintained two sets of abortion guidelines. One is publicized and allows abortion in cases of rape, incest, serious birth

The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor.²⁹

When Adam and Eve sinned, this exalted Jesus begged the Father to allow Him to come to earth to die for them. The Father finally acquiesced, and

The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.³⁰

In the great controversy paradigm, Jesus was not the eternal, almighty God. Instead, God exalted him to be His equal at some time in the distant past. When Jesus came to the earth, He “volunteered to take humanity” so that “in His power, humanity can obey God”.³¹ Thus, He came in the fallen condition of sinful man. EGW says,

By taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin.³²

Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.³³

Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race,

...EGW IS WRONG; THE LAW IS NOT “GOD’S BARRIER BETWEEN THE HUMAN AGENT AND SIN,” NOR IS LAW “ESSENTIAL TO SECURE RIGHT ACTION.” **JESUS IS THE BARRIER BETWEEN US AND SIN**; HE IS THE ONE ESSENTIAL FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

defects, and danger to the mother’s life. Internally, however, Adventist hospitals and medical providers have a set of guidelines that have permitted them to perform abortions on demand since two years before *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion.²⁶

What Adventism misses is the heart of the gospel: it is God the Son, not the law, who is the “transcript” of God’s character, and He, not the law, is the focus and Source and definition of God’s righteousness. He is our only means of salvation.

Who is Jesus?

The great controversy hangs on EGW’s statements that God the Father exalted Jesus to be His equal. This exaltation made Lucifer jealous and reveals that Lucifer had some reasons to believe God could have picked him for this exaltation, but didn’t. Here are some of EGW’s statements:

Satan’s position in heaven had been next to the Son of God. He was first among the angels.²⁷

Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic.²⁸

with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed.³⁴

In the great controversy worldview, Jesus’ primary purpose was not to be our Substitute but to be our Example and to vindicate God’s character. Importantly, the great controversy worldview assumes that Jesus kept the law as a man with a “fallen” human nature. His example, therefore, is to demonstrate that all people can achieve freedom from sin if they pray and self-sacrifice as He did.

The normal Christian understanding of Jesus as an example is that He shows those who are born again how they may depend upon God after being born of the Spirit. Adventism, however, sees Jesus as the example for all sinful mankind to follow in order to become right with God. Here are some of EGW’s statements:

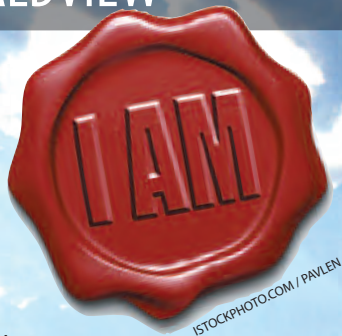
He came to this world to live the law in humanity, that Satan’s charge that man cannot keep the law might be demonstrated as false.³⁵

The Majesty of heaven undertook the cause of man, and with the same facilities that man may obtain, withstood the temptations of Satan as man must withstand them. This was the only

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

GOD

- revealed by Jesus
- sovereign over creation including evil
- all-powerful
- does not owe creatures explanations
- gave law to reveal sin
- gave Son to substitute for humans
- gave humans one way to be saved: Jesus



JESUS

- eternal Son, second person of the Trinity
- God incarnate in human flesh but with unfallen nature
- Born with living spirit—never needed to be born again
- once-for-all sacrifice—the propitiation for our sin
- our Substitute, took God's wrath for our sin
- could not sin nor could He have failed in His mission
- eternally our intercessor



MAN

- made spiritual beings in God's image
- possesses immaterial spirit separate from the mortal body
- born with spirits dead in sin; innately sinners
- unable to resist temptation even by prayer
- saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone
- born of the Spirit and transferred from domain of darkness
- spirit made alive with Jesus' resurrection life

GOSPEL

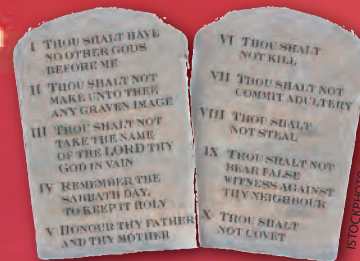
- Jesus died, was buried, and was raised on the third day; mission complete
- Jesus' blood was propitiation for our sin
- Jesus is the scapegoat
- Jesus' resurrection life is what brings our spirits to life
- we are saved by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice
- we are sealed with the indwelling Holy Spirit: born again
- God's Spirit in us guarantees our eternal future



ADVENTISM'S WORLDVIEW

GOD

- revealed by law
- accused by Satan of unfairness
- limits power over creatures to protect their free-will
- must answer Satan's accusations
- sent Jesus as example to vindicate the law
- saves those who honor the law and reproduce the character of Christ



JESUS

- exalted to be equal with God making Lucifer jealous
- incarnate in sinful flesh with fallen nature
- possessed inherited tendencies to evil yet resisted sin
- our example; showed us how to overcome sin
- paid the price for our past sins
- could have sinned, did not know He would rise
- mediation and intercession will end

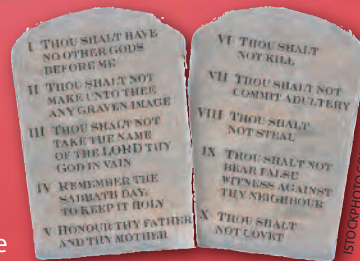


MAN

- made in God's physical image
- does not possess immaterial spirit (like an animal)
- born with inherited tendencies to sin
- must learn to pray like Jesus and resist temptation
- forgiven for past sins, must stay saved by obedience
- dies without knowing if saved
- knowledge of salvation revealed at Jesus' coming

GOSPEL

- Jesus died for sin; applies His blood in heaven since 1844
- Jesus' blood is "down payment" on our sin (breaking the law)
- Satan is scapegoat
- we are saved when we perfectly reflect Christ's character (the law)
- resurrection merely promises we will be re-created
- we are sealed or marked by keeping the Sabbath
- we will stand without a mediator during the tribulation



way in which fallen man could become a partaker of the divine nature.³⁶

The glory of Christ is his character, and his character is an expression of the law of God. He fulfilled the law in its every specification, and gave to the world in his life a perfect pattern of what it is possible for humanity to attain unto by cooperation with divinity.³⁷

We could quote many more EGW statements demonstrating that the great controversy model sees Jesus as the example for sinful people. This unbiblical description of Jesus, however, is only part of Adventism's belief about Him. EGW also states that Jesus was on probation while He was on the earth and that He could have sinned. For example:

“To hold the people in darkness and impenitence till the Savior's mediation is ended, and there is no longer a sacrifice for sin, is the object which he [Satan] seeks to accomplish.”⁴⁵

The Bible teaches, however, that Jesus came to be a sacrifice for sin once for all, and His priesthood is permanent. He lives forever to intercede for His people (Heb. 8:24-25). Furthermore, He cleanses our consciences “from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). He came to fulfill the law, not to establish it as God's measure of our righteousness. Rather, we “have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

IN THE GREAT CONTROVERSY PARADIGM, **JESUS WAS NOT THE ETERNAL, ALMIGHTY GOD. INSTEAD, GOD EXALTED HIM** TO BE HIS EQUAL AT SOME TIME IN THE DISTANT PAST.

The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. As a free agent He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan's temptations and work at cross-purposes with God.³⁸

Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.³⁹

For a period of time Christ was on probation. He took humanity on Himself, to stand the test and trial which the first Adam failed to endure. Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost.⁴⁰

The great controversy further teaches that Jesus died to exonerate God's law and make it possible for us to become perfect:

When Christ gave His life for you, it was that He might place you on vantage ground and impart to you moral power.⁴¹

Jesus was bearing the sin of the world; he was enduring the curse of the law; he was vindicating the justice of God. Separation from his Father, the punishment for transgression, was to fall upon him in order to magnify God's law and testify to its immutability. And this was forever to settle the controversy between Satan and the Prince of heaven in regard to the changeless character of that law.⁴²

In making His infinite sacrifice Christ would exalt and honor the law.⁴³

He died to make an atonement, and to become a pattern for everyone who would be His disciple.⁴⁴

Furthermore, the great controversy states that Jesus' mediation is only for a limited time and His sacrifice for sin will end when the great controversy is over. EGW says this:

Moreover, Jesus did not come with a fallen nature, nor was He divested of His full deity and power (Col. 1:19; 2:9). He was never exalted to be equal to God but was eternal, almighty God (Is. 9:6). “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Moreover, Jesus identified Himself with the personal name of God, “I Am” (Jn. 8:58).

Jesus was Satan's creator (Jn. 1:3); He was never in competition or in a battle with Satan. Jesus is God—not Michael the archangel or any lesser being exalted to be equal to God.

Finally, Jesus overturned death. While the resurrection is a central theme of the New Testament, it receives only passing mention in the great controversy. Yet Scripture tells us His resurrection life is what gives us our eternal life when we are born again (Rom. 5:10; 8:10-11). He has already been seated at the right hand of God and forever intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

Man in the great controversy

The great controversy model depends on the belief that humans are physical beings without immaterial spirits. Furthermore, Adventists believe that sin is transmitted genetically. Their Fundamental Belief #7 says in part,

Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit...When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and...the image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil.⁴⁶

Adventists believe that the “breath of life” is the literal breath, or air, that one breathes. They compare it to “streams of electricity that...transform a quiet, gray panel of glass in a box into a pulsating splash of color and action when we flip the switch on a color TV.”⁴⁷

Moreover, Adventists assume the image of God in man includes a physical resemblance. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* states:

Since the Bible teaches that man comprises an indivisible unity of body, mind, and soul, man's physical features must also, in some way, reflect God's image. But isn't God a spirit? How could a spirit being be associated with any form or shape?

A brief study of the angels reveals that they, like God, are spiritual beings...Yet they always appear in human form...Could it be that a spiritual being may have a "spiritual body" with a form and features...?

The Bible indicates that some people have seen parts of God's person....Christ is described as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and "the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). These passages seem to indicate that God is a personal being and has a personal form. This should come as no surprise, for man was created in the image of God.⁴⁸

The great controversy worldview assumes man is body plus breath, not a body with a spirit that can worship God (Jn. 4:24), that can be deeply moved and troubled (Jn. 11:33), or that goes to the Father at death (Lk. 23:46). Without a spirit, humans cannot be spiritually dead in a literal sense. Adventists do not believe that humans are born depraved, unable to obey or please God apart from a divine intervention. Scripture says we are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). "No one understand; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:11-12).

Rather, EGW teaches that sin is a choice we make:

It is not in the power of Satan to force anyone to sin. Sin is the sinner's individual act....Through prayer and the word of God we shall be enabled to overcome temptation.⁴⁹

By faith and prayer all may meet the requirements of the gospel. No man can be forced to transgress.⁵⁰

Because Adventism assumes a false understanding of man's nature, they also have a false belief about Christ's nature. Since man is a physical being with "higher powers" in his physical mind, they understand sin to be transmitted through the gene pool. Thus a fallen or sinful nature is defined as inherited weaknesses and tendencies to evil. Therefore, Jesus the man had a "fallen nature" but overcame temptation and showed us how we, too, can conquer sin by prayer and faith.

Without immaterial spirits, humans have no way to be "born of the Spirit", or "born again" (Jn. 3:3, 5). Instead, the new birth within Adventism is a mental change, the Holy Spirit enlightening the mind, a decision to be baptized. Because they do not believe in a literal human spirit, Adventists have no understanding that Jesus was conceived with spiritual life. He was the Son of God, not the son of Adam. His spirit was alive from the moment He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and He was the only human born who did not need to be born again.

Since the great controversy assumes that obedient people will demonstrate that God's law is fair and will thus vindicate God's character to a watching universe, it is not surprising that salvation and our highest loyalty are defined by Law. EGW said,

Satan had asserted that men could not keep the commandments of God. To prove that they could, Christ became a man, and lived a life of perfect obedience, an evidence to sinful human beings, to the worlds unfallen, and to the heavenly angels, that man could keep God's law through the divine power that is abundantly provided for all that believe.⁵¹

Summary statement

In order to see clearly how the great controversy paradigm warps Adventists' belief about reality, we'll summarize what we've said so far before concluding with a final look at Adventism's deceptive worldview. The great controversy:

- depends on the extra-biblical writings of Ellen White, their prophetic voice, their "continuing and authoritative source of truth".
- teaches a "different Jesus", one who is not Mighty God, the I AM, but a diminished one who took man's fallen nature, was on probation, and could have sinned, thus threatening the existence of the cosmos and God Himself.⁵²
- falsifies the identity and person of God by equating His essence with the law.
- gives Satan illegitimate power and freedom.
- claims God is obligated to answer to Satan.
- says Christ's atonement was not finished at the cross but continues through the controversy.
- teaches Christ's mediation will end sometime before the second coming, and there will no longer be a sacrifice for sin.
- replaces Jesus as our total Substitute with Jesus as our Example.
- replaces Jesus with Satan as the scapegoat who ultimately bears away the sins of the saved.
- falsifies the nature of man by denying the human spirit.
- claims the "the righteousness of God" is obedience to the Ten Commandments.
- substitutes the new birth by the Holy Spirit with conversion to Adventism and law-keeping.
- says salvation depends on our knowledge of good and evil to inform the right choice.
- replaces the Lord Jesus as the test of faith with loyalty to Adventist teachings.

Living in a deceptive worldview

The great controversy worldview is the Adventists' definition of reality. Just as they are taught that grass is green, so they learn that God identifies Himself with Law. Because the law is the transcript of God's character but Satan has said that law is unfair, humans' only hope lies in knowing what is good and what is evil so they can make right choices.

Although Adventists use all the words Christians use when referring to God and salvation, they internally mean the definitions established by the great controversy. They believe their replication of Jesus' obedient character will finally bring this controversy to an end. Thus, they finally have the power to vin-

dicating God's reputation and expose Satan as a fraud. Satan, therefore, is relentless in provoking and deceiving those who desire to serve God, while Jesus stands before them as a continuous example of sinless perfection which they must emulate. In this way each person becomes a player in the controversy as he grows in the knowledge of good and evil, the reputation of God and His law hanging on his shoulders.

Martin Carey, a contributing author to *Proclamation!*, has summarized the great controversy worldview like this: "When God's sovereignty is reduced, Satan or nature must fill the vacuum. The great controversy's god can be accused and put on the defensive with a 'meaningful' trial he can very possibly lose. We are also told, however, that natural and moral laws are sovereign. They cannot be questioned and can never fail. Therefore, the laws represent higher realities than God. The great controversy creates a dualistic cosmos that limits the power and control of God and expands the power of Satan and the laws. God must answer to Satan, and we must answer to the laws. God requires lesser beings, such as Jesus and a human 'remnant', to vindicate and rescue His sovereignty. Great controversy theory removes all the sound reasons why we should believe any of its god's prophecies or promises of success because they depend

upon human obedience and faithfulness. The doubts that great controversy theory raises help explain why so many Adventists become agnostic. Their god has already been discredited and dethroned."

The great controversy worldview is the unexamined assumption Adventists believe to be truth. It shapes every aspect of their lives, and there is no escape from the guilt, imperfection, doubt, anxiety, and pretending that runs rampant among them. They pursue education and good works to prove they love God, but behind their whitewashed exteriors lie despair, depression, corruption, abuses, addictions, and lies. No matter how they try to say gospel words, their worldview keeps them from understanding what is true.

But here is truth: Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-3). He saves "to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). All who believe will in Him have eternal life (Jn. 3:14), and those who believe pass from death to life (Jn. 5:24).

Jesus lives, and He sits at God's right hand. Satan is a defeated foe. The battle is won.

"It is finished!"†

Endnotes

¹ EGW, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 492-504.

² EGW, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

³ EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358. See also *The Great Controversy*, p. 673.

⁴ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 633, 634.

⁵ EGW, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

⁶ See Ratzlaff, Dale, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*, 2009 ed., available http://www.ratzlaff.com/Books_c2.htm

⁷ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005 edition, p. 113.

⁸ Norman, Erman, "Reaching the Secular World", *Outlook*, September, 2006, <http://www.ministry-magazine.org/archive/2008/November/reaching-the-secular-world.html>

⁹ Gulley, Norman, "The Cosmic Conflict", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Autumn, 2006, p. 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹ Carey, Martin, "Are Other Worlds Watching Us?", *Proclamation!*, Jan/Feb., 2008, pp. 6-12.

¹² Canale, Fernando, endorsement on Herbert Dou-

glass, *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen White*.

¹³ Blanco, Jack, professor emeritus, Southern Adventist University and author of *The Clear Word*, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Pedersen, Jim, president, Northern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Rasi, Humberto M., former director of education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *ibid.*

¹⁶ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, April 23, 1896.

¹⁷ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

¹⁸ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, April 23, 1896.

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²⁰ White, E.G., *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 269.

²¹ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, July 31, 1901.

²² EGW, *Education*, p. 76-77.

²³ EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 85.

²⁴ EGW, *The Great Controversy*, p. 640

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

²⁶ Tinker, Colleen, "Abortion In Adventism: Why Seventh-day Adventism Promotes Choice", *Proclamation!*, Summer, 2014, p. 20, <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamation/2014/2/abortioninadvent.html>

²⁷ EGW, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 341.

²⁸ EGW, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

²⁹ EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.

³⁰ EGW, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 07-09-1895, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," Par. 14.

³¹ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.

³² EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, pp. 116, 117.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³⁴ EGW, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 267, 268.

³⁵ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, April 7, 1898.

³⁶ EGW, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 252.

³⁷ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, Dec. 12, 1895.

³⁸ EGW, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 131.

³⁹ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

⁴⁰ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.

⁴¹ EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 74.

⁴² EGW, *ibid.*, July 12, 1899.

⁴³ EGW, *ibid.*, July 12, 1899.

⁴⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4., 1159.

⁴⁵ EGW, *The Great Controversy*, p. 581.

⁴⁶ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005 ed., p. 91.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴⁹ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, Dec. 18, 1893.

⁵⁰ EGW, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 177.

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THE GREAT CONTROVERSY BREEDS **OPEN THEISM**

MARTIN L. CAREY

Many of us were raised on Ellen White's book *The Great Controversy*, a sweeping view of history that controlled our worldview. We lived with a pervasive sense of cosmic spiritual warfare that invaded all the corners of our lives. Before Adam and Eve, the book teaches, Satan rebelled and accused God of being cruel and arbitrary, putting God on the defensive. To appear fair, God allowed Satan to be an independent agent of evil so his principles would be fully manifested. God's respect for free will was, therefore, a central piece of His government. The whole universe was watching to see who would finally be proven right, and all votes were to be counted. We understood that Satan was fully responsible for everything terrible that happened, and Satan's power was evident everywhere. Satan had the power to hurt people, neutralize God's plans, and trick us into going over to his side. Unfallen worlds were watching; we were in the cosmic limelight, and our choices were determining history!

OPEN THEISM **GAVE US A GOD WHO WAS MUCH MORE LIKE US.**

We had been taught that the great controversy was still raging because God was forced to allow all sentient beings to choose His ways or Satan's ways. God was on trial; His reputation was at stake, and He depended on us to vindicate Him by our obedience. God needed us to be His end time, showcase people. We had to help God defeat Satan or we could fail, thus delaying His plans and giving Satan even more power.

In 1980 Adventist professor Richard Rice's book *The Openness of God* had quite an impact on Adventist university campuses. Although Rice's views were not new,¹ we learned of radical freewill, God's limited foreknowledge, and an open future that God had not predetermined. Open theology was attractive to many of us longing for freedom from religious controls. If our free choices had no cause or pre-existing reality, then even God could not know them beforehand. If God couldn't reliably know the future, then I could determine my own future, and anything was possible.

Over time, some of us realized that the exciting new theology had added to our sense of risk and uncertainty. The "open" God seemed closer, but less dependable than we needed Him to be in fundamental ways. Traditionally, Adventists were taught that God's perfect foreknowledge of the future allowed end time

prophecies to be certain. Under openness, however, the future was much less certain with God's complete foreknowledge removed. Open theism gave us a God who was much more like us. He was locked inside time, didn't know the future, frequently changed his mind, and could be thwarted by evil. All those billions of free creature choices constantly shifted the bigger picture and kept God re-calculating the odds. No one is safe in that cosmos. Open theist Gregory Boyd explains,

The cosmos is, by divine choice, more of a democracy than it is a monarchy. The warfare worldview thus presupposes the reality of relatively autonomous free creatures, human and angelic, who can and do act on their own, and who can and do sometimes go against God's will. It thus presupposes the reality of radical contingency and of genuine risk. It further presupposes that this risk has sometimes gone bad, even on a cosmic scale, and that this has turned the earth into a veritable war zone.²

Greg Boyd is not an Adventist, but his warfare theology has much in common with that of Adventism's open theists. While the evangelical church keeps redefining itself, open theism is gaining a firm foothold across denominations. Rick Rice and Greg Boyd have many colleagues who support their ideas, and the Adventist great controversy worldview which shapes Rick Rice's theology has thus contributed to the growth of this notion. There is a battle in the church over God's sovereignty and glory, and we cannot shrink from it. †

Endnotes

¹ See for example, *Did God Know*, by Howard Elseth and Gayle Teague. In the 16th century, Fausto Sozzini taught a similar doctrine known as Socinianism.

² Boyd, Gregory, *God at War*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1997, p. 58.

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This article is excerpted from a forthcoming book by Stephen Pitcher on the Adventist “devotional paraphrase” of the Bible, *The Clear Word* (TCW). Written by Jack Blanco when he was chairman of the religion department at Southern Adventist University, TCW was first published as a whole work in 1994 with the title *The Clear Word Bible*. The Adventist organization denies that this work is “official,” yet the Adventist Review and Herald Publishing Association prints the book, and Adventist Book Centers sell several versions of this book as Bibles, both online and in their stores. In spite of statements denying its being an official Adventist Bible, inside the organization it is treated and marketed as a Bible.

STEPHEN PITCHER

DISTORTION

Within Adventism death and the afterlife are explained in one way: the dead, both the saved and the unsaved, remain in an unconscious state from the moment of death until the second coming of Christ. Then, when He returns, Christ will raise all believers to eternal life.

In fact, their Fundamental Belief #26 describes death and resurrection as follows:

26: Death and Resurrection:

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Rom. 6:23; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16; Eccl. 9:5, 6; Ps. 146:3, 4; John 11:11-14; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:1-10.)

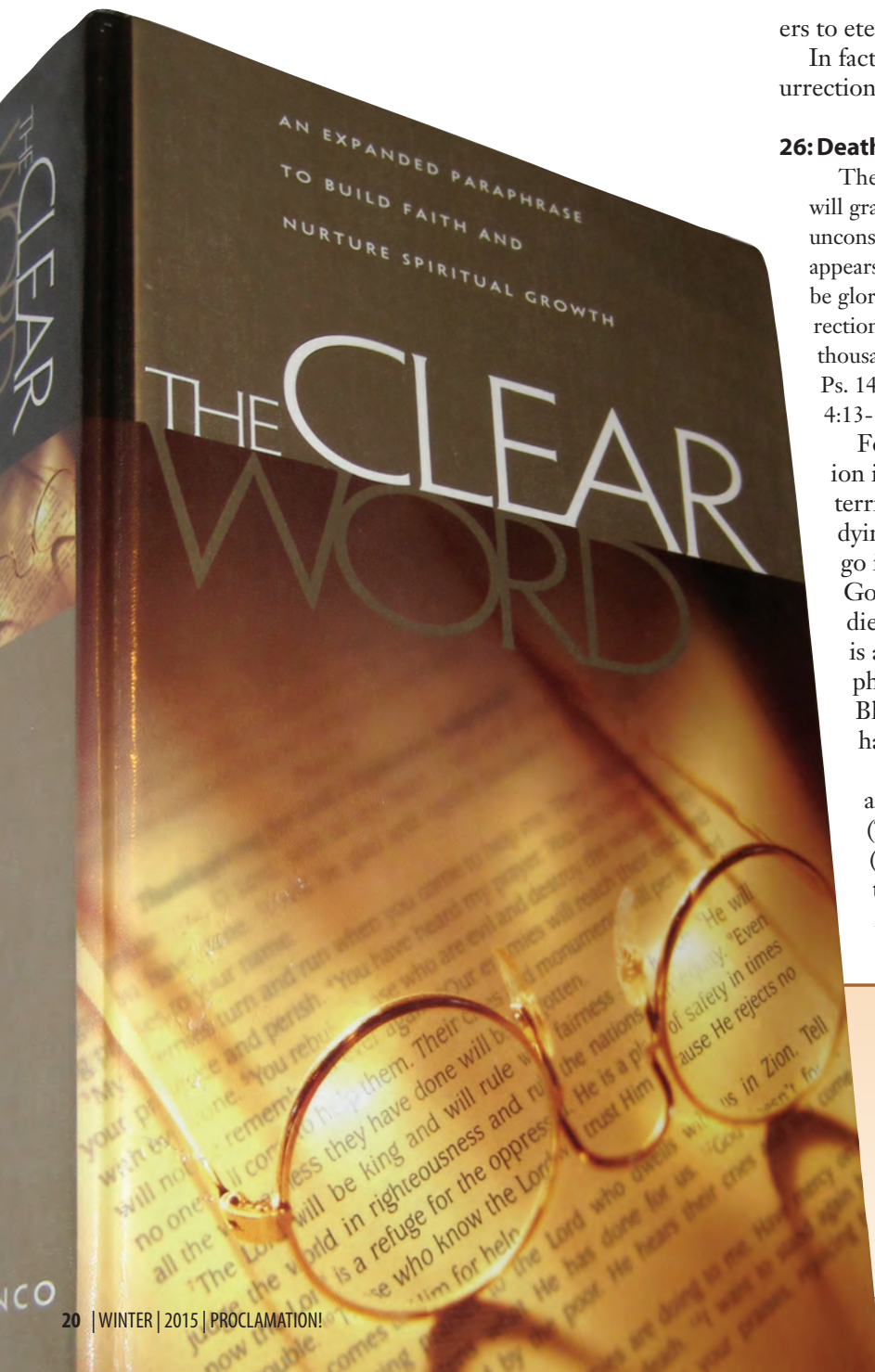
For Adventists, the belief in death as unconscious oblivion is terrifying. For most Christians, however, death is not terrifying. While we do not look forward to the process of dying, as believers we are sure that after death, we will not go into non-existence, even temporarily. Instead, based on God’s word and Jesus’ promises, we know that when we die, we will go home to be with the Lord. This certainty is a beautiful promise, but the Adventist devotional paraphrase of Scripture, *The Clear Word* (TCW) by Jack Blanco, rephrases the classic passages of Scripture that have comforted Christians for nearly 2,000 years.

In this article we will compare the ways *The Clear Word* and its companion paraphrases *The Clear Word for Kids* (TCWK) and *The Easy English Clear Word* (TEECW) (which contain identical text) render the biblical passages that describe death and the afterlife with the way the *English Standard Version* (ESV) articulates them.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5,

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Our body is like a tent that we live in. When we die, it’s taken down and folded up. But God has a new body for us, a house to live in. That body will be for heaven, where we will live forever. We’re tired of suffering and wish for that heavenly body. If we could move into it now without dying, we would. But since we have this earthly body, we do the best we can. Don’t get the idea



N OF THE AFTERLIFE

that I want to die. It's just that a heavenly body would give us so much more strength and energy, and we would live forever. God's plan for us is still the same. He gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that He will follow His original plan and give us bodies fit for heaven.

The Clear Word

We know that our earthly body is like a tent in which we now live, and when it is taken down and folded, a house waits for us in heaven, a new body, not one shaped in a womb, but an immortal body crafted by the hand of God. We're tired of this body and long for the heavenly one. If we could put it on, then we would be fully clothed. But, since we're still living in our earthly bodies, we suffer and groan through life. Don't get the idea from this that we long to die. We groan because we wish our frail mortality could be exchanged for the vibrancy of immortality. God's original intention for mankind is still the same. And he gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that His original plan to give us immortality has not changed.

English Standard Version

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

2 Corinthians 5:1 clearly states that “we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” *The Clear Word* passages indicate that believers are waiting for a glorified physical body that will take the place of the mortal bodies we now inhabit. TCW, however, ignores verse 4 which indicates that we will be “further clothed” after leaving this mortal tent which burdens us. While it is unclear what this further clothing will look like, it is clear that our current mortal tents will be swallowed up by life. (Incidentally, the metaphor of life swallowing death is the opposite of the usual literary image of the great maw of death swallowing life. This life into which we pass at death is stronger than death and overpowers it.)

As we will see when we examine verses 6-8, when we die we will no longer be away from the Lord but with Him. TCW, however, rephrases the passages in verses 4-5 to suggest that prior to death, people long for the resurrection—immortality, as Blanco puts it. TCW, therefore, is not stating the text's truth, that during death our mortal tents are swallowed up by life. In some unspeci-

fied but significant way, we are more alive after death than prior to death. TCW reduces this passage to a longing to avoid death and experience the resurrection. Paul, however, gave us assurance that the life we experience after death is more powerful than our mortal state. Moreover, the indwelling Holy Spirit is our guarantee that this overpowering life is a certainty.

Blanco reflects Ellen White

Also, notice again how TCW distorts verse 5, “And he gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that His original plan to give us immortality has not changed.” God's original plan, according to Ellen White (EGW), was to give Adam and Eve immortality after passing a period of time in which they would be tested to see if they were worthy of immortality. If they had kept God's Ten Commandment law and had honored His prohibition of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would have received immortality as a reward. Here are a couple of Ellen White's statements explaining this supposed arrangement:

When Adam and Eve were placed in the beautiful garden, they had everything for their happiness which they could desire. But he [God] chose, in his all-wise arrangements, to test their loyalty before they could be rendered eternally secure.¹

God will test all, even as he tested Adam and Eve, to see whether they will be obedient. Our loyalty or disloyalty will decide our destiny. Since the fall of Adam, men in every age have excused themselves for sinning, charging God with their sin, saying that they could not keep his commandments. This is the insinuation Satan cast at God in heaven. But the plea, “I cannot keep the commandments,” need never be presented to God; for before him stands the Savior, the marks of the crucifixion upon his body, a living witness that the law can be kept. It is not that men cannot keep the law, but that they will not.²

Notice that EGW's comments clearly say our eternal destinies depend upon our loyalty to God or our disloyalty. Loyalty, however, is not determined by belief in the Lord Jesus or in God's promises. Rather, according to EGW, it is our loyalty to the law that determines whether we are saved or lost. This claim eclipses the Lord Jesus with the law; in fact, she says that Jesus' resurrection is the proof that man can keep the law. In other words, Jesus' perfect law-keeping was what qualified Him to be raised from the dead. This same law-keeping is what qualifies us, therefore, to be resurrected.

Now we will compare Blanco's paraphrases of 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 with the plain words of Scripture:

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

That's why we can speak with such confidence, even though we are not yet in heaven. We live by what we believe and not just by what we see. This gives us courage to look ahead. We know that Jesus will come and that we will go home to live with Him forever.

The Clear Word

That's why we can speak with such confidence, even though we're still living in our mortal bodies and away from the Lord. Actually, we are not away from the Lord. He's here with us, not by sight, but by faith. That's what faith is all about. We long to lay aside our bodies, to leave this present world, and to be at home with the Lord.

English Standard Version

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

The ESV is very clear that to be in the body is to be away from the Lord, while to be away from the body is to be with the Lord. This fact is why we live with such assurance: we know that regardless of what happens to us here, we will be with the Lord. Death, therefore, is a portal to a continued conscious existence with God in heaven before the first resurrection. The versions of TCW go to great lengths to make sure that the

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reader believes Paul is teaching that they are longing for their glorified bodies, rather than going home to be with the Lord. As it says in TCWK, "We know that Jesus will come and that we will go home to live with Him forever." From an Adventist perspective, if we die before the second coming of Christ, we simply return to dust and the breath (spirit) returns to God, leaving us not only unconscious but essentially non-existent. Often referred to as "soul sleep", this label is not fully correct for describing the real Adventist doctrine of death.

Adventist teaching is that the breath in the lungs activates the body, thus causing a living soul. At death, therefore, the soul actually goes out of existence when the body ceases to breath. The Adventist doctrine of death, therefore, is utterly terrifying. It holds that the essence of a person's identity and being ceases to exist at death, and the mortal body simply rots in the grave.

Only a memory of the person exists in God's mind—something like data being stored on a hard drive. That data, or memory, will be infused into the new body at the resurrection.

Significantly, both versions of TCW remove the seamless reality of being "away from the body and at home with the Lord" that the ESV articulates. In TCW, Blanco deliberately adds the phrase "to leave this present world" to underscore that one does not simply leave the body and go to the Lord. The TCWK is even more explicit with the Adventist belief and eliminates the transition from leaving our bodies to being with the Lord. It blatantly states, "We know that Jesus will come and that we will go home to live with Him forever."

Altering another central passage

Along with the verses above from 2 Corinthians 5, Philippians 1:20-23 is one of the central passages explaining the certainty that believers go immediately to be with the Lord when they die. Blanco, of course, cannot allow TCW to proclaim this comforting reality because it opposes Adventist doctrine. Compare how TCW renders this passage with the way the ESV states it:

Philippians 1:20-23

The Clear Word

When I'm brought before Caesar for trial, I will not be ashamed of Jesus Christ, but I will exalt Him with courage and boldness as I've done in the past, whether Caesar releases me or not. If I'm released, it will be to the glory of Christ; if I receive the death sentence, it also will be to the glory of Christ and maybe even more so. If I could choose to live I would, and I would go right back to work for the Lord, but I don't have that choice. So I've been wrestling with mixed emotions. On one hand, I would prefer to be sentenced to death and in the next moment of consciousness see Christ, which would be much better than staying here in this old world.

English Standard Version

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

The Clear Word cannot allow Paul to "depart and be with Christ" as that would go against the doctrine of soul-sleep. To "clean up" the passage, Blanco changes it to state that "in the next moment of consciousness [Paul will] see Christ." Moreover, he eliminates Paul's statement that "to die is gain" and talks instead about his possible death being for God's glory.

Adventists cannot think of death as "gain" or as being "far better" than to go on living. No matter how they try to comfort themselves with seeing Christ in their next conscious moment at the resurrection, they know it would not be "far better" to be unconscious in the ground for unknown numbers of years than

to live out one's life in "fruitful labor". Blanco had to reverse the message of Scripture in order to accommodate the Adventist doctrine of death by eliminating the promise of being immediately with the Lord.

Watering down death in the gospels

In the next examples we will examine how Blanco reinterprets the meaning of "death" in several gospel passages. He eliminates the concept of spiritual death; he weakens God's right to judge, and he blurs the fact that people will be killed for their loyalty to the Lord Jesus.

Matthew 4:16

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

They will see a great light, and that light will give them hope.

The Clear Word

The people who live in darkness will see great light, and for those who have no hope, the light will shine.

English Standard Version

the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

From this verse in Matthew we can see that Blanco chooses to not use the word "death" in his paraphrases. Matthew quotes these words from Isaiah 60:1-3 along with Isaiah 9:2 after Jesus settled in Capernaum near the territory of Naphtali and Zebulun. The point was to emphasize that the people were living in the darkness of their natural spiritual death. Blanco eliminated this direct reference to depravity. Let's look at a few more verses to see how Blanco has chosen to use the word "death."

Matthew 21:41

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

The priests answered, "The owner will have the evil renters arrested and tried for murder. Then he'll get other renters to look after his vineyard."

The Clear Word

The priests answered, "He'll have them arrested and tried for murder, then lease out his vineyard to other grape growers who will recognize the landowner's right to a share of the harvest."

English Standard Version

They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Here we see Blanco changing "put to a miserable death" to being "tried for murder". This alteration is a serious problem. Here's why: the parable is about the owner of the vineyard (God) and how the tenants treated His own Son (Jesus Christ.) Only God has the authority to give and to take life, and in this passage Matthew declares this right. Blanco, however, sends the offenders to trial for murder instead of having them receive a death sentence for a capital crime. By altering this judgment against the offenders, Blanco subtly inserts the investigative judgment

into the verse. Rather than bringing swift justice to the situation, the landowner decides to let the case go to court (corresponding to the judgment in the most holy place of the sanctuary in heaven). According to the great controversy model, this judgment is done so the heavenly intelligences are allowed to view the righteousness of God's judgment against the offenders instead of watching God mete out justice at the time he declares it. Moreover, taking the case to court diminishes the biblical truth of God's own power to give or take life as he pleases, thus reinforcing the Adventist view that God does not kill people.

Now we will compare Blanco's renderings of Matthew 24:9 with that of the ESV:

Matthew 24:9

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

People will be mean to those who believe in Me. You will even be hated.

The Clear Word

Those who are loyal to me will be persecuted and killed.

They will be hated by all nations because they love me.

English Standard Version

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

The Clear Word is not a bad paraphrase of this passage on the surface, but remember the EGW quote above where she says that our loyalty or disloyalty to the law is what will determine our salvation.³ Blanco uses EGW's phrasing to emphasize the classic Adventist teaching that loyalty to God is marked by loyalty to the law and to Sabbath-keeping. TCWK, however, is blatantly "off". There is no mention of death or of being killed for the name of Jesus Christ. Again, Blanco has watered-down the reality that Christians will be persecuted and killed for the sake of Jesus because darkness hates the light.

Next, let us examine John 8:51:

John 8:51

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Whoever believes Me and holds on to what I say will never die.

The Clear Word

I want to tell you that whoever believes what I'm saying and obeys my teaching will not taste the final power of death.

English Standard Version

Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

TCWK is a reasonably good paraphrase of this particular verse; TCW, though, has the believer not tasting "the final power of death" instead of never seeing death. In other words, Blanco denies the reality of spiritual life, suggesting believers die but don't experience the final power of annihilation. Unless one knows Adventist theology, it is possible to miss what Blanco is actually saying. When an Adventist reads *The Clear Word*, however, it reinforces his Adventist worldview and seems to lend scriptural credibility to it.

Blanco erases “spirit”

Blanco’s paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 12:2-3 in which Paul recounts his having been taken into the third heaven demonstrates Adventism’s disbelief in the immaterial spirit of man.

2 Corinthians 12:2-3

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

About fourteen years ago Barnabas came to Tarsus looking for me and took me to Antioch. By then I had already been preaching for about seven years. One day I was taken to heaven in vision. There I saw Jesus. Whether I was there physically or just in vision I couldn’t tell. It was all so real. To this day only God knows. Let me say it again. How it happened I don’t know; only God knows.

The Clear Word

Fourteen years ago, Barnabas came to Tarsus to take me to Antioch. By then I had already been preaching the gospel for almost seven years. One day I was taken up to the third heaven to where Christ is. Whether I was taken there bodily or just saw it all in vision, I can’t tell you. To this day I still don’t know, only God knows. Let me say that again: whether I was taken to heaven bodily or just saw it all in vision, I don’t know, only God knows.

English Standard Version

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

First, Blanco inserts the story of Barnabas going to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch. This story is recorded in Acts 11:25-26; it simply does not appear in 2 Corinthians 12 at all.

Second, Blanco does not use Paul’s words which state he doesn’t know whether he was “in the body or out of the body” when he was taken to the third heaven. Instead, Blanco has Paul saying he didn’t know whether he was in the body or “in vision”. Visions are experiences that occur to people while they are in the body; in visions, people “see” things that are not in their environment. In other words, Blanco has completely eliminated the possibility that Paul’s spirit was in heaven without his

body. The Bible, however, teaches explicitly that Paul was either in the body or out of the body. In contrast, Blanco can’t admit that a disembodied spirit that had consciousness and memory could exist, much less go to heaven to be instructed by the Lord Jesus, because in Adventism, the spirit is only the breath in one’s lungs—the life force that animates the physical person. In Adventist theology, a person is only a body plus breath.

Finally, Blanco states in TEECW and TCWK that Paul saw Jesus. The text of Scripture does not make this claim. In TCW, he has Paul saying he was taken to the third heaven “where Christ is.” Again, this phrase is not in Scripture. What the Bible does say—and which Blanco does not even suggest—is that Paul claimed to be “a man in Christ”. Being “in Christ” is a biblical description of a person who is born of the Spirit and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This reality is usually missing from Adventism. Because Adventists do not believe people have immaterial spirits that are either alive in Christ or naturally dead in sin, the concept of being “in Christ” is misunderstood and contradicts Adventist doctrine. Blanco had to change that declaration.

Conclusion

Examining Blanco’s wording in these versions of *The Clear Word* reveals that the Adventist doctrine of “soul sleep” is not only hopeless, it is incorrectly named. According to Adventism, the soul actually goes out of existence at the time of death; the spirit (breath) returns to God, the body returns to dust, and the “living soul” ceases to exist. When reading a good translation of the Bible, however, we see that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. It is far better to be with the Lord than to be unconscious and merely a memory in God’s mind for unnumbered years.

Paul’s letters are an encouragement to believers facing death. We can know that we are saved, and death ushers us into the presence of the Lord.

Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).

The horror of “soul sleep” is swallowed up in the life of the gospel, and that is far better! †



Endnotes

¹ White, Ellen G., *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, 1870, p. 27.

² White, Ellen G., *The Watchman, God’s Test of Obedience*, Feb. 4th, 1908, para. 1.

³ It would be a decent paraphrase aside from the Adventist understanding of the time of persecution. Blanco’s TCW text

states that, “Those who are loyal to me will be persecuted and killed.” In Adventist theology, it is those who are keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath at the end of time who are the loyal ones that will be killed.

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THE GREAT CONTROVERSY REQUIRES **SABBATH** DALE RATZLAFF

The Adventist great controversy paradigm shaped by Ellen White's (EGW) vision of the same name is built—not on Jesus the cornerstone—but on its own cornerstone of the law. The motif of law-keeping found throughout the writings of EGW and throughout Adventism's teachings, especially in its evangelism, is necessary because it provides the undergirding to support their claim to be the remnant church of Bible prophecy—the only true church. By defining the “law” as the Ten Commandments and then elevating the importance of the fourth commandment above the other nine, calling Sabbath the “the seal of God”, the Sabbath completes the Adventist “gospel”. For Adventists, therefore, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath becomes the badge demonstrating that they are keeping the law of God. Within the great controversy paradigm, Sabbath-keeping “proves” the Adventist church is, indeed, the true church.

Unwittingly, however, this Adventist paradigm not only undermines the New Testament gospel of grace in Christ that was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), but it also serves to condemn them. Ultimately, Adventist Sabbath-keeping projects a shadow on the character and nature of God.

Within contemporary Adventism it matters not so much how one observes the Sabbath as that one observes it. In fact, Adventist Sabbath practices vary widely from culture to culture and even from family to family.¹ The one thing of unifying importance among them, therefore, is that they attend church (or otherwise worship) on the Sabbath. By exalting the Sabbath (which we believe to be a ritual law given only to Israel)² in relation to the other nine commandments (which contain moral principles), the Adventist organization has demonstrated less interest in the Bible's moral principles than in the Mosaic ceremonial observance of Sabbath.

For example, Adventism's support of abortion in their denominationally owned hospitals³ brings into question their obedience to keeping the law, “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). Likewise, their cover-up of the shut door visions and teachings of Ellen White⁴ and their deceptive scholarship in supporting their investigative judgment doctrine⁵ demonstrate willingness to compromise the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16).

Not only does the focus on law and Sabbath undermine the biblical gospel of faith in Christ, but in reality, this focus destroys all the underpinnings of the very message the great controversy motif seeks to establish. Adventists want to show to the “unfallen worlds” that by their law-keeping they are vindicating the character of God. However, their failure as a denomination to follow two of the nine moral principles of the law in addition to their failure to adhere to the laws of Sabbath-keeping found in Scripture—to say nothing of their corporate failure to observe the many additional pages of Sabbath laws laid down by Ellen White who speaks with “prophetic

authority”—will prove but one thing: their entire law paradigm is a failure. The law was designed to point out sin, not to provide righteousness.

Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested (Rom. 3:21).

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (Rom. 3:28).

For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation (Rom. 4:14-15).

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed (Gal. 3:23).

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56).

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20).

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

Endnotes

¹ Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ*, chapter, “The Sabbath and Seventh-day Adventists”.

² Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ*, chapters, “Sabbath Conflicts” and “Sabbath Fulfillment in Christ”.

³ See *Proclamation!*, Tinker, Colleen, “Abortion in Adventism: why Seventh-day Adventism promotes choice”, Summer, 2014; Fredericks, Richard, “A biblical response to abortion”, January/February, March/April, May/June 2003, <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamationback.html>

⁴ Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine of Adventists*, Chapters, “The Swinging Door” and “Lumps Under the Rug”.

⁵ Cottrell, Raymond F, “The Sanctuary Doctrine: Asset or Liability?” <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.com/pdf%20files/cottrell%201844.pdf>, Ratzlaff, “Biblical support or obscurantism?” *Proclamation!*, January/February, 2004.

Dale Ratzlaff is the founder of Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., and owns LAM Publications, LLC. He served as an Adventist pastor for 13 years, seven at Monterey Bay Academy where he taught Bible. He and his wife Carolyn left the Adventist church in 1981 when he realized he could no longer teach the investigative judgment in clear conscience. He has authored several books on Adventism that are available through his website, LifeAssuranceMinistries.com. The Ratzlaffs reside in Camp Verde, Arizona.

JEREMIAH CONFIRMS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS NOT THE **GREAT CONTROVERSY**

COLLEEN TINKER

The Sabbath School lessons for the fourth quarter of 2015 have focussed on the book of Jeremiah. The lesson for the fifth week, October 24-30, looks at many of Jeremiah's "woes" and links the prophet's suffering to the dynamics of the great controversy. The lesson also makes the point that while God knows all people's decisions in advance, His foreknowledge does not change our ability to make our own decisions, and the lesson emphasizes that, like Jeremiah suffered, the readers as Adventists can expect to suffer opposition for their faith.

In this article, excerpted from the online commentary found at this web address, <http://biblestudiesforadventists.com/2015/quarter4/sabbathschool5.html>, we will take a closer look at the assumptions underlying the great controversy and see that Jeremiah's experiences are not illustrating this Adventist paradigm.

The great controversy: scriptural or not?

Adventists like to argue that the term "great controversy" simply represents the evil influence of Satan in the world opposing the good influence of Jesus as the two beings fight for the souls of men. The way they describe this conflict publicly conceals Adventism's underlying beliefs, and many Christians, unaware of the Adventist assumptions underlying the doctrine, might agree with it.

Nevertheless, Adventism's view of a great controversy is not founded in Scripture. Jesus and Satan are not in a battle for the souls of men. They are not relatively equal opponents fighting for an ultimate "win". On the contrary, Jesus has already disarmed and humiliated Satan:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Col. 2:13-15).

Satan has never imagined that he could be considered a legitimate opponent of Jesus because Satan has always known that Jesus was his Creator. Yes, Satan opposed Jesus and rebelled against Him, but he has not been confused about his relationship to Jesus. He has always known he was a creature of the triune God.

Ellen White's (EGW) descriptions of Lucifer's jealousy when the Father supposedly exalted Jesus to the position of His Son and brought Him into the council of God, snubbing Lucifer by not inviting him in (see "What Is Seventh-Day Adventism?", p. 8-18 in this issue), are completely extra-biblical and opposed to Scripture.

Furthermore, EGW's explanation of the great controversy involves our faithfulness to obey Jesus and keep the law in order to demonstrate to Satan that God's law is just and fair, thus proving to a watching universe that Satan is a liar and a false accuser. By choosing to obey God, therefore, we help Jesus win the battle of the great controversy. We add evidence to God's cause and thus disprove Satan's accusations.

Again, this idea is completely unbiblical. We as God's born again, adopted children never answer to Satan, neither proving nor disproving anything to him. We answer only to God. Even when we sin, we deal with God, not Satan. David emphasized this fact in Psalm 51:4 when he wrote, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

Furthermore, there is no watching universe of creatures waiting to see what will happen. The Bible reveals that only the angels long to look into the matters of our salvation (1 Pet. 1:12). Our obedience is only something between us and God.

In fact, because we are born spiritually dead into the domain of darkness and under Satan's control from birth and condemned to eternal death (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:13; Jn. 5:24), we are not naturally able to make a choice between God or Satan. In fact, Paul quotes David when he writes,

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one (Rom. 3:10-12).

God has to draw us and call us to trust Him and His word. Jesus said,

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (Jn. 6:44-45 ESV).

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (Jn. 6:65).

We can only choose to trust Jesus after the Father has intervened in our spiritual death and has called us to repent and to place our faith in Jesus' shed blood and completed atonement on the cross.

Reliability of God's promises

The Sabbath School lesson points out that God honors people's choices to believe. If they repent of their sin after hearing a prophetic message, the lesson explains, they can reverse the prophesied punishment that was to come. To be sure, any individual is-

raelite could have trusted God and received His blessing for that trust. Indeed, Daniel and his friends, to name a few, did trust God and receive His blessing in the land of Babylon during the exile.

What the Sabbath School lesson fails to explain, however, is that the book of Jeremiah is showing us how God continued calling His people to repent while concurrently carrying out the terms of His covenant with Israel. The Mosaic covenant contained not only the promises of blessings for obedience but also the certainty of curses for disobedience. These conditions were not only for individuals; they were for the nation of Israel.

The exile to Babylon was not just for individual apostasy that permeated the nation. When God gave the law to Israel, He commanded that every seventh year, they were not to cultivate and harvest but were to give their land a rest. In fact, God foretold that they would fail to observe their sabbatical years of jubilee and that they would be in their enemies' land for as many years as they had failed to give their land rest (Lev. 26:34). Moreover, Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in Babylon for 70 years, and 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 states that Judah was taken into Babylon "to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths...to fulfill seventy years."

Jeremiah's suffering was not for the purpose of demonstrating the conflict of a supposed great controversy. His agony was rooted in the fact that not only the people of Judah but the entire nation had disregarded the terms of their covenant with God. Now, whether individuals repented or not, the national terms of the

is based on the reality of Jesus and His finished work, not on the shadows of rituals foreshadowing Jesus (Col. 1:16-17).

Adventism, however, looks back to the law and insists people must keep it in order to please God. They fail to see that if they place themselves back under the law, they also place themselves under God's curses for disobedience. They remove themselves from Jesus' full payment for sin.

Consequently, when Adventism attempts to teach books such as Jeremiah, it attempts to identify with Jeremiah's suffering as God's chosen agent and to focus on his calls to repentance. They fail to see that unless they accept the terms of the new covenant and believe that Jesus alone is their salvation, they are under a curse—because the law curses all who fail to keep it perfectly. Paul said,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-10).

Adventism cannot legitimately compare itself to Jeremiah or to Israel because it is not a biblical religion. Furthermore, it cannot consider itself to be part of the new covenant body of Christ because it distorts the gospel of Christ.

ADVENTISTS, LIKE EVERY OTHER HUMAN, NEED TO KNOW THE GOSPEL, AND **THEY NEED TO REPENT AND RECEIVE THE LORD JESUS** ALONE FOR THEIR SALVATION AND RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

covenant were trampled, and God was punishing them with exile in fulfillment of His own word to them. Israel's national disobedience resulted from persistent individual unbelief and apostasy, to be sure—but Jeremiah's appeals for God's people to repent would not undo the consequences of their national disobedience to the terms of their covenant with God.

The book of Jeremiah is the historical account of God's dealings with Israel as He fulfilled all His promises to them—including His promises to discipline them for unbelief.

Adventism assumes that, because it upholds the law and the Sabbath, it is now "spiritual Israel". They assume, therefore, that God's promises to the nation of Israel apply to them. They fail to see, however, that the Lord Jesus fulfilled God's covenant with Israel and ushered in the new covenant which has new terms.

In the new covenant, the Lord Jesus keeps all God's righteous requirements with the Father. Our only work is to believe in Him and to place our trust in Him (Jn. 6:29; Acts 16:31). When we believe, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14) and placed in Christ, hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). The new covenant

What is needed?

The need of Adventists is to see clearly who Jesus is and what He has done. Jesus is the Son of God who was the perfect Sacrifice for our sin and our Substitute. He became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus keeps all the requirements for God's demands upon mankind. Jesus and the Father are the participants in the New Covenant: Jesus, who has the perfect righteousness of God (because He is God) keeps all the righteous commands of God including becoming the complete Sacrifice God demands for sin. He breaks the curse of sin by shattering death from the inside-out. He took the curse that described the heart of the law and paid the price for human sin, but then He rose from death.

Adventists, like every other human, need to know the gospel, and they need to repent and receive the Lord Jesus ALONE for their salvation and reconciliation with God. They need to trust Scripture and know that the loyalty to which we are called is not to the law or to a day or to a prophet. Jesus alone saves us. †

I was dumfounded. My mind couldn't quite make the enormous leap it was being asked to make. I knew what I was reading at an academic level, but my heart was laboring to grasp the enormity of it all. I realized I was in good company with my undertaking: many before me had struggled to understand the throne room of Almighty God in heaven. In fact, many biblical writers struggled to find adequate words to describe their glimpses of God on His throne, resorting to similes to describe what they were seeing and hearing.

Those who were given a glimpse of God on His throne sometimes responded by falling face down as though dead (Rev. 1:17; Ez. 1:28; Is. 6:5; Dan. 10:7-8). Job responded with repentance and ashes, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

How does one respond when confronted with God's sovereignty and majesty? Has your mind grappled with descriptions of God sitting on His throne?

Listen to some of the attempts to describe God on His throne. "Under His feet was something **"like"** a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself" (Ex. 24:9). "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Is. 6:1). "Above the expanse over their heads was what looked **like** a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure **like** that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked **like** glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked **like** fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. **Like** the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the **likeness** of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell face-down, and I heard the voice of one speaking" (Ez. 1:26-28). John in Revelation writes, "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne....From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder...Also before the throne there was what looked **like** a sea of glass, clear as crystal" (Rev. 4:2-6).

CONTRASTING THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD WITH THE BIRTH OF A VULNERABLE BABY IN A FEED TROUGH HUMBLER ME AND BRINGS ME TO TEARS.

I AM UNDONE



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Everything around the throne worshiped the One Who sat on it. Scripture describes "creatures" attending the one who sat on the throne. Daniel describes what he saw this way, "His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him...all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him" (Dan. 7:9-14). "Creatures" around the throne never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

Contrast these pictures of God's throne with advent. "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:6-7). Shepherds came to a dirty manger to worship Him. The One who looks **like** jasper and carnelian, glowing metal, and fire, became paper thin flesh and flowing blood.

Contrasting the throne room of God with the birth of a vulnerable baby in a feed trough humbles me and brings me to tears. Truly this God Who hates sin, loves me. While I was a sinner He died for me; He entered His own creation for me; He suffered for me; He Who had everything gave it all up for me.

Will you join me in worshiping the One Who sits on His throne and whose kingdom will reign forever and ever? †

Carolyn Macomber was a doctoral student at Andrews University when she discovered inconsistencies between Adventism and the Bible. She withdrew her membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2009. She is a marriage and family counselor and is the contact person for former Adventists at The Chapel Evangelical Free Church in St. Joseph, Michigan.



Want the magazine

I have received my first copy of your magazine *Proclamation!*. It is very interesting, informative, and educational. Please keep my on your mailing list to receive it regularly. I would appreciate this very much. I'm looking forward to receiving the next copy of *Proclamation!* Keep up your good work telling it like it is!

BADEN, PA

Gospel will not be wasted

It was a pleasure speaking with you this afternoon, Mr. Ratzlaff. I do believe that being introduced to your magazine was divinely orchestrated and am looking forward to receiving the books that you recommended. Thank you in advance for sharing your knowledge of the gospel and Jesus Christ. It will not be wasted.

SONORA, CA

Dear Chris Lee,

I grew up in the Mennonite Church; my parents left the Mennonites in my early teens over baptism by immersion (Mennonites sprinkle). We joined the Church of Christ but left there when I was 15 over the Sabbath. As Mennonites we had kept a Sunday Sabbath, so the transition to Adventism was not hard except for having to deal with the

1200 head of hogs we had on our farm...

I have found that in every place there are people that know it all. These people will not stand for someone who does not think their way because "it's all so clear". But inside these groups there are also those who know that there is a lot we don't know, and what we do know will probably need some adjustment eventually...

Our former pastor used to tell us, "God is bigger than bad theology."

A while back I heard a person say in church that we "have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". Really?! Duh.

Why, I would bet that there are people at *Proclamation!* that think they have it all figured out, too. We are humans; that pretty much says it all.

My point: just because humans act like humans, say dumb things and take dumb positions, does not change the message.

You had a good article (Back Page, Fall, 2015), but *Proclamation!* has wandered into the opposite ditch from the legalists. The Adventist church has a good message, but some of its people are in a ditch—and unfortunately I can point to several times that I, too, had to climb out of one or other of the ditches.

The challenge is to find the middle ground, and above all to believe that God is bigger than all my bad theology.

VIA EMAIL

Chris's response: Thanks for the nice note. In the article I cite the quote, sometimes attributed to Augustine, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity". In my article I was trying to say that for all those things that fall into that secondary, non-essential category, we should be tentative and understand that it's okay to have varying opinions. However, we must have unity in the essentials of the faith. In fact, there is no true unity without the essentials.

Orthodox Christian doctrines such as the nature of God, the person of Jesus, the work of Jesus, the

way of salvation, the authentic gospel, the authority of Scripture alone, the universal Church, and so forth cannot be compromised. Since these are essential to the Christian faith, when these are compromised, then that compromised belief system is something other than orthodox Christianity. The New Testament is pretty strong on this point, and it is also pretty concerned with our obligation to oppose those teachers and teachings that stray from the authentic Gospel.

I would go a step further and say that if God has put any one of us in a position to be able to help people who have been sucked into another gospel, that is no gospel at all, then failure to help, failure to use the life

Proclamation! magazine, but I do read them from stem to stern. I am amazed how one can know Truth and then depart from it! I have some random comments about the Fall, 2015, issue.

In the Editor's Comment by Sister Tinker, she recalls how in 1998 she and others began to call the Sabbath Day, Saturday. That seems so secular instead of spiritual. Why do you even worship on Sunday? To your "Ask the Pastor" column about legalism, I respond, it is not legalism to obey God's commands. Rather, it seems to me to be rebellion to disobey His commands intentionally, and worse yet, to teach and broadcast such a false and counterfeit belief and response to His sacred instruction.

I DO BELIEVE THAT BEING INTRODUCED TO YOUR MAGAZINE WAS DIVINELY ORCHESTRATED AND AM LOOKING FORWARD TO RECEIVING THE BOOKS THAT YOU RECOMMENDED

experiences and knowledge God has given us is nothing short of sin. If I fail to use my experience to help people know the gospel, I fail to be on mission. I pray that I will always be on mission.

Ten years in Christ

On my day off I revisited your web site. It's been a while since I visited it. Once again, the testimonies you have are inspiring. I'm a former fourth generation Seventh-day Adventist. My journey to being saved took many years, but it's been ten years now since I accepted Jesus.

Thanks for all you do.

VIA EMAIL

Come to your senses

I am an Adventist who has been in the "Way" for a long time. I do not know why or from whom I receive these quarterly issues of

You denigrate Ellen White. No other church or communion on the face of this earth has such a prophetic gift as does the Seventh-day Adventist church in our Gift of Prophecy who wrote in *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 475, "The only safe and sure rule is to do what God says." It is not works to obey God and His commands; rather it is His desired obedience for His chosen people for their own good.... I believe that Jesus summed up the entire Bible in Matthew 4:4.

It seems to me that the message of *Proclamation!* is so limited, directed to so few . . . and wrong. I am pleased that God's message through His chosen remnant church is a worldwide message. I hope that before you and your followers expire or the Lord returns, that you will come to your senses and return to the Word and the Way....

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES

MISSION

To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

MESSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

We all will continue to learn in heaven where you (along with me) will again “from one Sabbath [not Saturday] to another will come and bow down and worship Him.” (Is. 66:22-24—read it all).

LIVONIA, MI

Editor's response: First, Isaiah 66:23 not only designates bowing before the Lord “from sabbath to sabbath” but also “from new moon to new moon”. These two sabbaths, the weekly and the monthly, were always connected in the Old Testament. Keeping the Sabbath holy also required observance of the holy new moon days. Colossians 2:16-17, however, says, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

Second, Jesus did deliver an eternal statement of truth when He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to Satan, an event recorded in Matthew 4:4: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

The “word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” includes all the writings of the New Testament as well as of the Old Testament. In fact, Jesus identified the obedience that is required of each person in order to please God. When the Jews asked Him what they should do in order to do the works of God, Jesus replied, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

Abraham is the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:11-12). Genesis 15:6 states the way he and all the faithful are saved: “Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

The work God requires of everyone who is saved is the work

you. I repented and asked for the help of the Holy Spirit, and I did it—no, not me—He did it. I am justified! Now I know the feeling of being a born again person. All these years I have been a nominal Christian, but now I am really liberated from bondage. This is my

translated as “mankind”. These two constituent parts of Mark 2:27 form the strongest argument for sabbatarians.

Some took issue that I said the Greek word “made” could mean, “be established”. As mentioned in my article, this possibility was based upon the Greek helps in Bible Works 8 which suggested that ἐγένετο, as used in Mark 2:27, should be “be established”.

The second main argument against this article was that I did not develop more fully the idea that the Sabbath was made for mankind and Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath. In my interpretation of these concepts I followed D.A. Carson who, in my opinion, is one of the best New Testament scholars today.

I encourage you to re-read the article and note that my main point was this: while Mark 2:27 could be interpreted as the Sabbath was made for mankind in Genesis 2, the preponderance of evidence does not support this conclusion. The Sabbath was given only to the Jews. There is no biblical evidence that the Sabbath was ever given to the gentiles, either before Moses, during the time of the law (unless a gentile lived with a Jew), or after the cross. It is a sign between God and the “sons of Israel.”

Corrections

These corrections apply to the endnotes in the article “Ellen White consults with her dead husband” by James Valentine in the Fall, 2015, issue of *Proclamation!*

¹ EGW, “Ancient and Modern Spirituality”, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, condensed version [Beginning of the End], c. 2007, p. 34-346.

² p. 684-685.

⁸ *Review and Herald*, vol. 46, no. 18, Nov. 4, 1875 (See also *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 11, 1875, quoted in *Counsels on Health*, p.465.) Quoted from Sydney Cleveland, *Whitewashed*, p. 129, 2nd rev. 2011.

ALL THESE [83] YEARS I HAVE BEEN A NOMINAL CHRISTIAN, BUT NOW I AM REALLY LIBERATED FROM BONDAGE.

of believing in the Lord Jesus and His finished work on the cross and in the resurrection. Working backwards from belief and requiring a holy day which God's own word declares a shadow is to teach “a different gospel; which is really not another,” and “even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!” (Gal. 1:6-8).

Repentance and liberation

I would like to share something with you. I read John 8:11 many times, and in the NIV it says, “Go and leave your life of sin.” I saw there must be an act of repentance first before anyone can go and sin no more. I mean, without repentance, the Holy Spirit cannot possibly enter our hearts to make us to will and to do, and who will be able to remain sinless?

To tell you the truth, I experienced repentance myself only one month ago, after 83 years, mind

testimony; you may share it with others.

JAKARTA, INDONESIA

Dale Ratzlaff's response to criticism of Sabbath article

I have received several letters taking issue with my article on Mark 2:27 which reads in the NASB, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath”. My introductory paragraph stated:

There are two things drawn from this verse used to support the conclusion that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. The first is the Greek word “made” (ἐγένετο). It is said that within the context it refers to the “making” of the Sabbath which should lead one back to Genesis 2 where God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. The second support comes from the fact that in Greek “man” has the definite article and really says the Sabbath was made for “the man” (τὸν ἄνθρωπον). This usage may be

YOU CAN HELP US

We are receiving more and more contacts from pastors inquiring about Seventh-day Adventist teachings. With Adventist Dr. Ben Carson campaigning for president, there is increasing interest in understanding Adventism.

Here is where you can help. Beginning with your own pastor and using the internet to locate other Protestant pastors in your area, make a list of pastors and their church names and mailing addresses and email them to us. Please contact the

churches, however, and ask them for the names of their pastors and their correct mailing addresses; sometimes online listings give physical locations but not the mailing address.

After you make a list, you may email it to Carolyn@ratzlaf.com (note only one “f”) and she will enter it into LAM's mailing database. If you cannot email the list, send your list to Carolyn Ratzlaff, 1042 N. Powderhorn Road, Camp Verde, AZ 86322.

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:

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SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2016

- 9:00 Peter #1, Dale Ratzlaff
- 10:30 Daniel #1, Gary Inrig
- 11:45 Breakout Sessions (Dale, Martin, Jim, Ron)
- 1:45 Daniel #2, Gary Inrig
- 3:30 Letters to the Editor, Colleen Tinker
- 6:30 Public Session, Ron Rhodes, Paul Carden
"Cultic Solutions to the Problem of Evil"

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2016

- 9:00 "Story of Faith," Ron Rhodes
- 10:30 Daniel #3, Gary Inrig
- 11:45 Breakout Sessions (Dale, Martin, Jim, Ron)
- 1:45 Peter #2, Dale Ratzlaff
- 3:15 "Breakout Sessions (Dale, Martin, Jim, Ron)
- 4:30 "Why I Trust the New Testament," Ron Rhodes
- 6:30 Daniel #4, Gary Inrig (Communion)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2016

- 10:30 Worship Service: Cornerstone Fellowship BC
- 12:30 Fellowship Lunch



RON RHODES
REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES
FRISCO, TEXAS



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THE LIFE A F T E R WITH CHRIS LEE

Words mean things. Language is only meaningful to the degree that humans are able to communicate using words in a conventional way, and conflicting definitions create an almost insurmountable language barrier to meaningful dialogue.

I think this issue of definitions is one of the primary reasons why Evangelical Christians have trouble determining if Seventh-day Adventism is an evangelical denomination or something else. Evangelicals and Adventists use the same words and phrases but mean very different things. Evangelicals clearly don't know this fact, and Adventists are not fully cognizant of the problem, either.

Take, for example, the core issue of *sola gratia*. Before Leaving Adventism (BLA), if you had asked me if I believed in salvation by grace alone, I would have readily given you a resounding, "Yes!" However, each word is important. My understanding of those words in The Life After (TLA) Adventism is far different. The following is how I would characterize my understandings, both BLA and in TLA.

"Salvation" BLA: The uncertain hope that I might one day be determined to be "safe to save" through an investigative judgement of my works. If and when I passed that judgment, the benefits of the atonement would then be applied, and my sins would be marked as "pardoned".

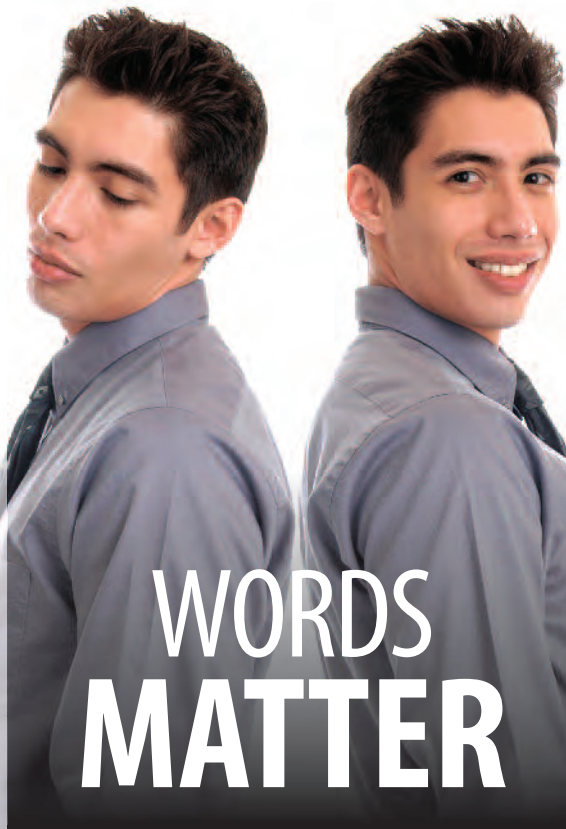
"Salvation" TLA: Three aspects of God's work, all of which are guaranteed at the moment of belief. I am forever justified before God; I am in the process of being sanctified by God, and I am assured God will finish His work in my future glorification. I have been adopted into the family of God and have eternal security, now.

"Grace" BLA: God empowering me to keep the Law so that I might pass the investigative judgment.

"Grace" TLA: God's unmerited favor gifting me salvation, giving me my faith bestowed on me by God's



Chris Lee lives in Lincoln, Nebraska with his wife, Carmen, and daughters, Ashlyn and Alyssa. They attend the Lincoln Berean Church. Chris is a self-described "theology junkie" whose mission is to proclaim the unfathomable grace of Christ in a clear, understandable, and Biblical way. Chris is the editor of the *Proclamation!* Blog at ProclamationMagazine.com. You may contact Chris by email at ambulator@gmail.com.



sovereign choice, and not dependent on anything I have ever done or ever will do.

"Alone" BLA: I can't be "saved" without "grace" because I can't do it alone. I need help in my efforts. I am dependent upon God's power to help me keep the law so that I can prove I am safe to save and prove that God is justified in letting me into Heaven. So, ultimately, it is grace alone that saves me, but working in conjunction with my best efforts.

"Alone" TLA: Alone. Plus nothing. Period.

The BLA me and the TLA me would both agree that salvation is by grace alone, but we would have completely different understandings of "salvation", "grace", and even the concept of "alone". So our agreement on *sola gratia* would mean nothing in reality.

I use *sola gratia* as an example of the language barrier that evangelicals face in dialoguing with Seventh-day Adventists, but this same barrier exists in discussing nearly any topic of theological import with Adventists. If one truly desires to reach Adventists with the authentic gospel of Jesus, one must be willing to invest time and effort into understanding the language barrier and defining words. Only then can conversations go beyond surface level pleasantries.

I pray that the articles in this issue of *Proclamation!* will equip evangelicals with a better understanding of Adventists' beliefs and the words associated with them. I pray that a deeper understanding will lead to deeper conversations and opportunities to share the gospel with Adventists. Adventists need to hear the real gospel because even that word has a different meaning in Adventism. I pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the right words to speak and enable Adventists to hear the true meanings. †