

ProclamationMagazine.com

Proclamation!

FORMER ADVENTISTS
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS
SABBATARIANS
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

SUMMER 2016
VOLUME 17, ISSUE 2

**“THUNDER” LAURISTON:
LEAVING ADVENTISM,
EMBRACING THE GOSPEL**

DEAR ADVENTIST,
DO YOU KEEP THE SABBATH?

MY TRUE FATHER



**AN UNCERTAIN GOSPEL
THE PROBLEM OF OPEN THEISM**



COLLEEN TINKER

IS GOD SOVEREIGN?

It was sometime around the year 2000. Richard and I were attending a Sunday morning class at Trinity Church, “Walk Through the Old Testament” taught by Elizabeth Inrig. We had thought this class would be simple review. After all, if anyone knew the Old Testament, it was a former Adventist!

We were wrong. We had never realized that the stories of the patriarchs, prophets, and kings were not primarily illustrations of weak people whom God blessed because they persisted in trying to please him. Rather, the Old Testament

stories revealed an all-knowing, sovereign God who chose people for His own purposes. Moreover, He chose people for no reason we can see. Abraham was a moon-worshiper; Moses was a murderous adopted prince; David was an adulterer with blood on his hands—but God used them to accomplish His eternal plans.

As we listened to Elizabeth talk through the familiar stories, we realized we had always seen them upside-down. They were not primarily about men who were examples to us; they were glimpses of God transforming sinners into men and women who believed and trusted Him.

One day Elizabeth said, “God’s glory is the ultimate value in the universe. It is greater than the saving of nations and greater than the life of a child.” I had always thought God valued humanity more than He valued His own power and authority. I had learned that He limited Himself in order to give me absolute freedom. In my Adventist worldview, our free will was God’s highest “value”.

A sovereign God whose glory was the highest value in the universe, on the other hand, meant that we served Him, and He protected us. Instead of God putting Himself at the mercy of man, a sovereign God took responsibility for us. Cared for by a sovereign God, we could love Him—but we could not manipulate Him.

That moment marked the beginning of my trusting God with what I could not see. Knowing He was sovereign even over darkness and evil—even though I cannot explain how it works—has given me great peace. I can trust Him because He is not surprised by what surprises me.

The great controversy view of God that makes our free will God’s most valued resource is not unique within Adventism. There is a growing movement called “open theism” that is gaining momentum in the evangelical community as it is carried by professors in universities and books sold in Christian bookstores. This theology is different from arguments that say man’s will is free. Openness says that God Himself is free from sovereign foreknowledge, possessing only the understanding of infinite possibilities which humans will determine by their choices.

IN THIS ISSUE of *Proclamation!* Martin Carey critiques open theism—a movement which includes among its advocates Adventist professor Rick Rice from Loma Linda University. Martin’s concerns with a theology that promotes a limited God who does not fully know the future are shared by all of us who desire to help people know and trust the real, triune God of the Bible. After believing we held the power to facilitate Jesus’ return, we who have left Adventism need a God who is bigger than we are, a God we can trust who is stronger than all our fears and foes.

In this issue we also introduce a new columnist, Lisa Winn, who will share her convictions about what it means to be Truly Adventist. Steve Pitcher shares another article about the Clear Word and its twisting of the doctrine of hell, and Elce “Thunder” Lauriston shares his story of coming to faith and leaving a rosy future as an Adventist pastor/evangelist in the Caribbean. As always, you will also enjoy the contributions of columnists Dale Ratzlaff, Rick Barker, Chris Lee, and Carolyn Macomber.

We pray that as you read, you will see the glory of God and the reliability of His word and that you will trust Him, because He is faithful. †

I CAN TRUST HIM BECAUSE HE IS NOT SURPRISED BY WHAT SURPRISES ME.

Proclamation!

Vol. 17, Issue 2 • Summer 2016

Founding Editor **Dale Ratzlaff**

Editor **Colleen Tinker**

Design Editor **Richard Tinker**

Copy Editor **Cristine Cole**

Contributing Editors **Rick Barker, Martin L. Carey, Chris Lee, Carolyn Macomber, Lisa Winn**

Proofreaders **Carolyn Ratzlaff, Jordan Quinley**

Life Assurance Ministries, Inc. Board of Directors

Richard Tinker, President
Cheryl Granger, Secretary
Martin Carey, Dale Ratzlaff, Carel Stevenson

Proclamation! is published quarterly by Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., 1042 North Powderhorn Road, Camp Verde, AZ 86322. Copyright ©2015 Life Assurance Ministries, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Editorial Office, phone: (909) 794-9804.

Web: LifeAssuranceMinistries.org
E-mail: Proclamation@gmail.com
YouTube: FormerAdventist

LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Back issues of *Proclamation!* and the blog site ProclamationMagazine.com
- Books and other materials by Dale Ratzlaff LifeAssuranceMinistries.com
- Day by day commentary on the Sabbath School lessons BibleStudiesForAdventists.com
- Testimonies, Bibles studies, and the forum FormerAdventist.com
- Large body of resources for studying Adventism TruthorFables.com



IS BREAKING THE SABBATH **BREAKING THE WHOLE LAW?**

Doesn't James 2:10 teach that if you break the Sabbath, then you are guilty of violating the whole law?

In biblical interpretation we must always start with the context. The context is one of showing partiality to a well-dressed person wearing a gold ring and thereby giving this person a better seat in the church meeting place (see v. 1-7). Then, in verse 8, James refers to the “Royal Law”:

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well (Jam. 2:8).

In verse 9, James clarifies that showing partiality violates this royal law:

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (Jam. 2:9).

James’ use of “law” in verse 9 does not refer to the Ten Commandments which say nothing of partiality. Instead, James quotes Leviticus 19:18 and calls it the royal law of love which labels partiality a sin. To illustrate his point, James brings in the idea that one is a transgressor of the law if he breaks one commandment but keeps another. Then, in verses 12 and 13, we see that the law that will judge us is not the Ten Commandments, but a higher law, the law of liberty. As Paul states in Galatians,

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (Gal. 5:14).

JAMES’ USE OF “LAW” IN VERSE 9 DOES NOT REFER TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WHICH SAY NOTHING OF PARTIALITY.

Now we come back to verse 10.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (Jam 2:10).

If we insist James is encouraging keeping Old Testament law, we must realize how encompassing the “whole law” really is. I am indebted to former Adventist Margie Littell for the following list of what is included in the “whole law”, from which Jesus said not one jot or tittle can be excluded until all is fulfilled (Mt. 5:17-20). In this context, James 2:10 takes on a whole new meaning.

There are 10 commandments defining who God is. Six define the law, and five identify the signs and symbols of the law. Four tell how to pray, 14 tell how to treat other people, and 13 tell how to care for the poor and unfortunate. Six tell how to interact with the Gentiles (non-Jews).

Twenty-three laws tell how to divorce, marry, and cherish family, and 30 detail sexual practices to avoid. Twenty-seven tell how to keep the weekly and yearly Sabbaths, and 27 give dietary rules. Fourteen tell how to conduct business matters, and 19 tell how to treat employees, servants, and slaves.

Seven laws govern oaths and promises, and 17 tell how to observe each seventh year.

Twenty-nine outline court and judicial procedures, four explain how to negotiate injuries and damages, and 11 mandate property and property rights.

Seven detail criminal laws, 24

outline punishment and restitution, and there are three standards of prophets and prophecy.

Forty-eight commands govern idolatry, idolaters, and idolatrous practices. Seven detail agriculture and animal husbandry practices, while three regard clothing.

Four regard firstborn children and animals. Thirty-nine detail the responsibilities and criteria of the Levites, and 23 mandate tithes and taxes. Thirty-two dictate caring for the temple, the sanctuary and sacred objects, while 101 detail sacrifices and offerings.

Fifteen mandate ritual purity and impurity, and four govern lepers and leprosy.

Seven define leaders of the people, and 10 outline rules for Nazarites. Sixteen commands govern conducting wars.

In conclusion, we cannot read James without taking his context seriously. Paul summarized this situation well in Galatians 3:10:

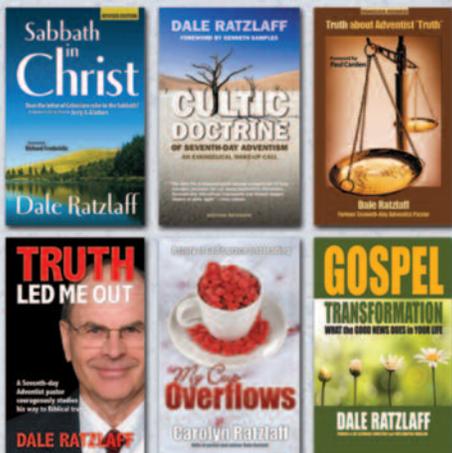
For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” (Deut. 27:26).

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

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.



© ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MARTE VAN CASPEL

LEAVING ADVENTISM, EMBR

ELCE - JUNIOR "THUNDER" LAURISTON

I was born almost accidentally in Haiti on a small island known in French as Ile de La Tortue, and in Spanish as Tortuga Island. My mom and dad, Elce and Ermana Lauriston, were originally from Haiti, but they had moved to the Bahamas. In mid-September, 1986, they returned to Haiti for a vacation, unaware that Ermana was pregnant. When they realized her condition, they decided to stay in Haiti until she delivered. Months later, I arrived.

After I was born, my parents returned to the Bahamas, leaving me in Haiti to be raised by my grandmother and other relatives. Not surprisingly, given the details of my unplanned arrival, my childhood days were not a bed of roses. Poverty, malnourishment, nakedness (literally), neglect, and other hardships were my com-

At the same time, I battled with depression and anger and was very suicidal. No matter what I did, I could not feel contented or find happiness in the life I was living. I was expelled from several of the public schools where I lived, nearly shutting the door permanently on my ever being able to graduate. One of my big sisters, however, worked hard and long and managed to get one school to agree to accept me—on the condition that I would behave myself because education was “important”, and I was nearly 18 years old and running out of time. With the help of some good friends, though, I did manage to stay out of trouble for two long years and graduated from high school.

Graduation was my ticket to freedom, or so I thought. I had no obligations standing between me and an uninhibited life of self-in-

I WAS A PROUD, STAUNCH, FANATICAL, AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ADVENTIST EVANGELIST AND BUDDING MINISTER. MY FUTURE WAS SECURE, AND I WAS UTTERLY CONFIDENT IN MY ABILITY TO SUCCEED PROFESSIONALLY WITHIN THE ADVENTIST ORGANIZATION.

mon lot. My father died when I was about four years old. I never knew him, though, because he lived in the Bahamas, and I lived in Haiti. About five years later, however, my mother came for me, and I migrated to the Bahamas with her.

Life in the Bahamas was awesome as far as material needs were concerned, but socially, morally, and spiritually, it was chaos. My mom worked from morning until evening to make ends meet, but her busyness left my four siblings and me unattended. As a result of my chronic lack of parental oversight, I learned about life from the bad influences on television and in our neighborhood. I was drawn to the “thug life”, to gangsterism and the “bad boy” mentality and lifestyle that pervaded my world.

I ran into trouble often in school. I skipped classes—even whole days of school—at will to hang out with “the big boys”. The older I grew, the more rebellious I became, and the more I got involved in destructive activities. By the time I was 13 years old, I would sneak out late at night to attend parties, and I ran away a few times. I was bent on living my own life and adamant about being a “big man” before my time. In my mid-teens I started smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol, and partying like never before. School did not interest me; I decided it was the obstacle to my living a life of indulgence and endless pleasure.

dulgence and immorality until I died. Since life appeared to have no meaning or purpose, I was intent on “going out in style” and did not care how that would happen.

ADVENTISM TO THE RESCUE

It was amidst this orgy of self-destruction that I came into the Seventh-day Adventist Church through a good friend. He was a role model and an upright young man, and I admired his Christian mores and character very much. Amazingly, he really convinced me that the Christian life was the best way to live. I had believed that I could never become a Christian, but at the age of 19, I “accepted the Advent message” and became a changed young man. I stopped using profanities—something I had never been able to do before. I quit smoking, partying, and stopped all the immoral behaviors that I loved so much. I no longer felt any urge to visit the clubs, bars, and other amusement places in which I had reveled so recently. In fact, sometimes I would sit on the back porch and read my Bible while songs that I had loved were booming through the neighborhood, but I was no longer moved by them.

My mind was made up; I was a changed man, and nothing could change my mind. Moreover, the change felt good. My family, espe-

ACING THE GOSPEL

cially my mother, was thrilled with my transformation. I was discovering there was purpose and meaning to life—not just life in general but to my life in particular—and that God had a plan for me.

I began reading the Bible as if there were no tomorrow. This new life was very exciting! Meanwhile, as I learned that the Adventist Church was “God’s remnant church of Bible prophecy” and that we alone have the right doctrines, teachings, prophetess, and diet, in addition to keeping the Sabbath, I was overwhelmed with the privilege of being a part of such a wonderful church. Because of my privilege, I immersed myself into Adventism. I was more than willing to do whatever was asked of me. I sang in the youth choir. I joined a passionate youth ministry that visited hospitals, children’s homes, and infirmaries where we performed plays and concerts. It was such a wonderful experience as I threw myself, heart and soul, into my new religion. I was living the life. We were “taking the gospel to all the world in our generation”.

In August, 2007, our choir was invited to come to Jamaica to sing at Northern Caribbean University (NCU), Adventism’s flagship tertiary educational institution in the West Indies. We came, spent one week, and had a wonderful experience. Then, two days before we returned home to the Bahamas, I had a surprise: the choir director and his wife had made arrangements for me to be accepted into NCU. I was to remain there and study to become an Adventist minister.

I was overwhelmed and flabbergasted; I could have never afforded tertiary education on my own. I believed their kindness and generosity were heaven-born, as they initially covered the expenses of my studies.

In February, 2009, however, my dream of becoming an outstanding Adventist minister abruptly ended: I was expelled for having a theological disagreement and confrontation with the church pastor. Immediately I lost the financial assistance I had been receiving, and my future ministry in the Adventist Church in the Bahamas seemed bleak.

Instead of returning to school the following September, I returned to Jamaica and married my fiancé Kahmal Williams, whom I had met during my first year at NCU, and made Jamaica my home. Despite the huge setback, however, I still had high hopes of becoming an Adventist minister, so I reapplied to NCU in 2010 but was denied. I reapplied again in 2011, and that time I was reaccepted. I thought I would be able to work and study, but that dual load was too heavy for me to carry. Reluctantly I dropped out and gave up hope of becoming a trained Adventist minister.

RECHANNELED ENERGY

I determined, however, not to give in to discouragement nor let my talents die out, so I rechanneled my energy into helping and building my local church. I became very active



in various ways, availing myself of every opportunity to do anything that the Church would want me to do. Among other things, I sang, preached, taught lesson reviews, and was a Bible counsellor, and before long, my abilities and passion for Adventism got the attention of many Adventists, some of whom were in powerful positions.

A retired teacher in the church soon encouraged me to go back to school and finish my degree, but after I shared my financial woes with her, she understood and suggested a Plan “B”. She knew the Personal Ministries and Sabbath School Director of the conference and arranged a meeting with him so that I might share my hopes with him. Since the door was closed to my becoming a trained Adventist pastor, I settled with being an evangelist—a position which did not require a degree in the West Jamaica Conference.

After my meeting with the conference director, I was hired immediately, and the director began giving me appointments. Everywhere I went, I was loved and admired by old and young alike. I was a sought-after evangelist in the West Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In less than two years I became one of the leading evangelists in the Conference. I conducted numerous evangelistic campaigns and seminars, revivals, weeks of prayer, funerals, special day programs, and served as chaplain for Easter camps. I even acquired the nickname “Thunder” because of my preaching style, my zeal and passion for the Adventist Church, and my fearlessness in preaching the “Advent Message”. The Church saw me as the next “big name” coming up in Adventism in Jamaica.

In July, 2013, I was invited to do a three-day weekend program in the Cayman Islands. When they heard me preach, the leaders and members of the church loved my knowledge, passion, and abilities. In fact, the three days extended to two months during which I went from church to church doing revivals and seminars. The Cay-

man Island Conference wanted to employ my wife and me right away to minister in the church there, but since I did not have my degree, they could not hire me as a pastor.

Members from many of the churches where I had preached, however, were convinced that I was called to the Adventist ministry and that my labors were already bearing fruit. These people decided to pool their resources to send me back to school to finish my ministerial training. This provision, I believed, was a miracle from God; nevertheless, I was reluctant to go at first because I did not want to become “corrupted by academia and scholarship and lose my zeal”. The Cayman Island members insisted, however, and I took the offer.

In January, 2014, I resumed my studies at NCU. I am a voracious reader and committed to excelling, so I maintained a high grade point average. I wanted to be the best Adventist minister that I could possibly be, and I was “the” Ellen G. White defender and Adventist apologist in my classes. Everyone knew where I stood and that I knew and could defend the doctrines and teachings of

the organization. I believed and preached, on various occasions, that the Adventist Church is the only true church and that it is the only church in the universe that can defend its doctrines, teachings, and beliefs on any public platform. I was a proud, staunch, fanatical, and knowledgeable Adventist evangelist and budding minister. My future was secure, and I was utterly confident in my ability to succeed professionally within the Adventist organization.

I was completely unprepared for the shock I would receive in September, 2015—just two semesters later—a shock that would dismantle the life I expected to live.

GREEK REVEALED ERRORS

In the fall semester of 2014, I began studying New Testament Greek. Before long, I was the top Greek student in the School of Religion and Theology. As I became increasingly fluent in the language, however, I began to see more and more inconsistencies between the Greek Scriptures and the teachings of Adventism. I did not pay much attention to this problem at first; I rationalized that I was getting smarter in Greek than I was in other theological areas, and as my knowledge of the bigger picture increased, the apparent inconsistencies would certainly resolve. On the contrary, however, the more I studied, the wider the chasm between the Bible and Adventism seemed to get.

In the fall of 2015, I was in my second year of Greek and had also started hermeneutics (the science of Bible interpretation). As I read and learned more about how Scripture should be correctly interpreted, I encountered more and more problems. I realized with growing horror that I could no longer use certain texts I had been taught to use to uphold certain Adventist teachings and doctrines.

IT HAS COST ME EVERYTHING... BUT I WOULD DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN FOR THE JOY, PEACE, AND ASSURANCE OF SALVATION THAT I NOW EXPERIENCE IN JESUS MY LORD.

In fact, the more I learned, the worse the problem became! Before long I realized that the core doctrines of Adventism were concocted by means of wild proof-texting and preconceived, unscriptural assumptions. My foundation began to undergo a great shaking.

This disorienting process of discovery intensified when a former Adventist pastor friend of mine, Damian Skeen, with whom I had worked with in the past, sent me a document entitled, *Lying for God: What Adventists Knew and When They Knew It*,¹ for my honest critique and perusal. As I went through the document, my Adventist world and future collided with biblical facts. I was utterly devastated. I wanted to know what else was being deliberately hidden from me and from the vast majority of seminary students and church members.

I searched and found the 1919 Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference Minutes,² laboriously read them, and was left in shock with the content which showed that four years after Ellen White's death, the Adventist leaders doubted her veracity but decided to hide this fact from the members at large in order not to destroy

In fact, the more I learned, the worse the problem became! Before long I realized that the core doctrines of Adventism were concocted by means of wild proof-texting and preconceived, unscriptural assumptions. My foundation began to undergo a great shaking.

This disorienting process of discovery intensified when a former Adventist pastor friend of mine, Damian Skeen, with whom I had worked with in the past, sent me a document entitled, *Lying for God: What Adventists Knew and When They Knew It*,¹ for my honest critique and perusal. As I went through the document, my Adventist world and future collided with biblical facts. I was utterly devastated. I wanted to know what else was being deliberately hidden from me and from the vast majority of seminary students and church members.

I searched and found the 1919 Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conference Minutes,² laboriously read them, and was left in shock with the content which showed that four years after Ellen White's death, the Adventist leaders doubted her veracity but decided to hide this fact from the members at large in order not to destroy

their faith. I then found out about Desmond Ford and his 1980 Glacier View presentation which showed without doubt that the investigative judgment cannot be proven from Scripture. I went on to discover the work of Dale Ratzlaff,³ of Robert Brinsmead,⁴ Greg Taylor,⁵ and of J. Mark Martin.⁶ I devoured the online videos of the Former Adventist Fellowship conferences,⁷ *Proclamation!* magazine, other resources of Life Assurance Ministries,⁸ and more. I was reading and watching presentations until I was turning blue!

At the same time I was devastated and frustrated. I felt betrayed, lied to, and used. I had been deliberately made a pawn for the Adventist organization! Sometimes I wished this discovery I was experiencing was only a nightmare from which I would soon wake up so I could continue in my “perfect Adventist world”. Sadly, I never woke up; the reality I was uncovering only became worse.

When I would pose questions to the Dean of the School of Religion and Theology and to my lecturers, their answers to me were, “Preach what the church teaches; that’s what you’ll be paid to do.” “If I wanted a good career in the church”, they said, I should “ignore these things and preach what the church teaches”. On a few occasions I was even told not to share the things I was learning with my wife!

The cognitive dissonance, the betrayal, the cover ups, the corruptions, the perfidy, the “prophetess”, the reality—what should I do? To whom should I talk? Should I “ignore everything” and continue with my successful career in Adventism? What else were they hiding?

So many questions plagued my mind! Oh, how I prayed that it was all a bad dream! But my studies kept proving to me that the massive deception was a reality—a reality that brought pain, heartache, headaches, disillusionment, nervous breakdowns, lack of interest in my studies, a decline in class and grade performance, and difficult decisions that came with dire, irreversible consequences.

Since I was half way through my studies, I thought I would try to suppress everything the best I could until I graduated, and then leave the church, but that privilege was denied me. As I uttered certain things in classes, as I asked certain questions, feathers started to be ruffled. Some classmates secretly complained about me to the lecturers; some made calls to their various pastors and church elders, and my conference soon started an investigation about my “new theology”.

THUNDER IN A STORM

News began spreading through the local churches like wild fire. Accusations were laid against me; rumors were spreading; character defamation ensued, and suspicions began to breed: “Thunder” is in a storm!

Some classmates were demanding my immediate dismissal lest I “contaminate the department”. Calls from across Jamaica and the Cayman Islands began to bombard my phone mercilessly on a daily basis. My world was crumbling quicker than I could regain my composure or pick up any of the pieces.

In the midst of this deconstruction of my life as I knew it, reality became crystal clear: the best decisions would be the most costly ones. I would have to drop out of school or fail the semester. I would have to leave Adventism and forfeit my only means of education, giving up all hopes of becoming an Adventist minister. I

would have to appear on Religious Hardtalk (a local TV program) and explain to Adventists why I was leaving, and in doing so, I would open myself to an endless barrage of defamation, accusations, attacks, malicious words, and bitter criticism.

Openly leaving Adventism would be the hardest thing to do, but it would be the most honorable. I would have to leave and explain my decision if I were to be true to God, to my conscience, to my theological training, and to the people.

I had no other choice. I mustered up my courage and left the Adventist church and did what I knew was right. It has cost me everything—education, job, social status, family and friends, a promising future, and my identity—but I would do it all over again for the joy, peace, and assurance of salvation that I now experience in Jesus my Lord.

It has not been easy in these months since I’ve left Adventism, but God has been my strength. He has placed some wonderful new friends in my life. My decision has strengthened many others to take a similar stance for the Gospel, sooner or later, and I am now free to preach and teach the Word of God as it is, when God brings the opportunity.

Even as I have lost everything familiar including people I loved, I realize how God is providing for me. I am thankful for my wife Kahmal Williams-Lauriston for standing by my side after she came to understand and embrace these truths. I am grateful for the ministry of Dale Ratzlaff and his team and for the Former Adventist Fellowship conferences. They have been significant in re-educating me to a biblical worldview and have strengthened my Christian convictions. I am ineffably thankful for my good friends Damian and Kemisha Skeen, for their commitment to the gospel and for their desire to have sincere but deceived individuals like me come to its realization. I thank God for my new-found friends in Christ, Joan Hutcheson, Samuel Brown, Delroy Reid, and a host of others, for their prayers, support, kind words, Christian benevolence, and sheer goodwill. I am thankful for the opportunity to share my story in *Proclamation!* magazine.

As I see how God is providing support, teachers, and opportunities as my wife and I walk through the dissolution of everything we knew, I know that we can trust Him for the future. I am learning that His word is sure, and His promises cannot fail. Knowing Jesus is worth whatever it costs to follow Him.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.truthorfables.com/LYING%20FOR%20GOD.pdf>

² http://www.truthorfables.com/1919_Bible_Conference.htm

³ <http://lifeassuranceministries.com>

⁴ <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamation/2011/2/brinsmead.html>

⁵ <http://www.formeradventist.com/stories/gregandpaulatayl.html>

⁶ <http://exadventist.com/Home/Mark/CalvarysStory/tabid/476/Default.aspx>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/user/FormerAdventist#g/u>

⁸ <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org>

Elce-Junior “Thunder” Lauriston currently resides in Jamaica with his wife Kahmal, a Spanish and English teacher. They have a five-year-old-boy and a three-year-old daughter. He desires to finish his theological training and to become a Christian minister. His greatest desire is to be a conduit by which others can experience the love of God and the wonderful salvation that is in Jesus.

DEAR ADVENTIST, DO YOU K

Editor's note: We introduce a new column in this issue, "Truly Adventist" by Lisa Winn. Lisa says she has discovered that many Adventists today are unfamiliar with the writings of Ellen White, and she wishes to re-acquaint them with the roots of their faith. This column is intended either to encourage Adventist readers to hold fast to their faith as directed by Mrs. White, or, if her directives seem oppressive and legalistic, to re-examine their beliefs and prayerfully peruse the rest of this publication.

The Sabbath is one of the pillars of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ellen White says, "It means eternal salvation to keep the Sabbath holy unto the Lord."¹ One can easily conclude that to her the Sabbath is perhaps the most important commandment, "the center of the ten precepts"²; it is the "seal of God."³ Furthermore, according to Mrs. White, keeping the Sabbath is the final test of God for his people:

Some will urge that the Lord is not so particular in his requirements... But here is just where the test is coming, whether we will honor the law of God above the requirements of men. This is what will distinguish between those who honor God and those who dishonor him. Here is where we are to prove our loyalty...he demands exact obedience.⁴

In fact, the Sabbath is such a defining doctrine for Adventists that it is included in the name of the organization. If people are convinced in their own minds that they should keep the Sabbath, but do not do so, they are in sin. Paul says, "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Ellen White adds, "Every deviation from right brings us into bondage and condemnation."⁵

Nevertheless, it is clear from her writings that Mrs. White truly desires the seventh day to be "a delight"⁶ for its keepers. "The Sabbath should be made so interesting to our families that its weekly return will be hailed with joy."⁷ Imagine families, having freed themselves from everyday concerns, frolicking through fields whilst singing hymns, talking about God, and admiring His creation. Hopefully the remainder of this article will help lay out some guidelines for achieving this perfect Sabbath rest every week.

First, Sabbath must always be in the forefront of one's mind: "None should permit themselves...to become so absorbed in their temporal interests, and so exhausted by their efforts for worldly gain, that on the Sabbath they have no strength or energy to give to the service of God. We are robbing the Lord when we unfit ourselves to worship Him upon His holy day."⁸ Concurrently, honoring the Sabbath as God intended requires completion of every possible chore during the other six days of the week.⁹ The Sabbath-keeper must "jealously guard the edges of the Sabbath. Remember that every moment is consecrated, holy time."¹⁰

Moreover, Sabbath, while a time for rest from worldly pursuits, should be a day given in *full* service to the Lord, not in napping or idling listlessly.¹¹

It is displeasing to God for Sabbathkeepers to sleep during much of the Sabbath. They dishonor their Creator in so doing, and, by their example, say that the six days are too precious for them to spend in resting. They must make money, although it be by robbing themselves of needed sleep, which they make up by sleeping away holy time. They then excuse themselves by saying: "The Sabbath was given for a day of rest. I will not deprive myself of rest to attend meeting, for I need rest." Such make a wrong use of the sanctified day.¹²

Therefore, part of one's Sabbath preparation should be ensuring that one's weekly schedule is not so hectic that there is no energy left for God on His holy day. On Sabbath, one should not nap in the pews¹³ but should actively participate and serve at church.¹⁴

PREPARING FOR THE SABBATH

Friday is traditionally known as "preparation day" for the Sabbath. Before the sun sets, all tasks should be meticulously completed. The children's Sabbath clothes should be laid out in advance, "so that they can dress quietly, without any confusion or rushing about and hasty speeches."¹⁵

See that all the clothing is in readiness and that all the cooking is done. Let the boots be blacked and the baths be taken. It is possible to do this. If you make it a rule you can do it. The Sabbath is not to be given to the repairing of garments, to the cooking of food, to pleasure seeking, or to any other worldly employment. Before the setting of the sun let all secular work be laid aside and all secular papers be put out of sight.¹⁶

In addition, one must be spiritually prepared as well: "All differences between brethren, whether in the family or in the church, should be put away. Let all bitterness and wrath and malice be expelled from the soul."¹⁷ On Friday evening, open the Sabbath with a time of devotion: "Before the setting of the sun, let the members of the family assemble to read God's Word, to sing and pray. There is need of reform here, for many have been remiss."¹⁸

OBSERVING THE DAY

On Sabbath morning, the family is wise to rise early:

"If they rise late, there is confusion and bustle in preparing for breakfast and Sabbath school. There is hurrying, jostling, and impatience. Thus unholy feelings come into the home. The Sabbath, thus desecrated, becomes a weariness, and its coming is dreaded rather than loved."¹⁹

Later, at lunch, one must not over-indulge:

"We should not provide for the Sabbath a more liberal supply or a greater variety of food than for other days. Instead of this the food should be more simple, and less should be eaten, in order that the mind may be clear and vigorous to comprehend spiritual things. Overeating be fogs the brain...By overeating on the Sabbath, many have done more than they think to dishonor God."²⁰

KEEP THE SABBATH?

Also, mind your manners at the lunch table: “Come to the table without levity. Boisterous noise and contention should not be allowed any day of the week; but on the Sabbath all should observe quietness. No loud-toned commands should be heard at any time; but on the Sabbath it is entirely out of place.”²¹ Moreover, “The fourth commandment is virtually transgressed by conversing upon worldly things or by engaging in light and trifling conversation.”²² After the meal, “We would charge all not to wash their dishes on the Sabbath if this can possibly be avoided. God is dishonored by any unnecessary work done on His holy day.”²³

Mrs. White encourages spending Sabbath time praying, reading Scripture or devotionals, or enjoying nature—God’s marvelous creation. She recommends that Sabbath outings be close to home, however: “If we desire the blessing promised to the obedient, we must observe the Sabbath more strictly. I fear that we often travel on this day when it might be avoided...we should be more careful about traveling on the boats or cars on this day.”²⁴ While specific distance is not mentioned, she says elsewhere, “You should not rob God of one hour of holy time.”²⁵

Also, do not let your children break the Sabbath: “Pleasure seeking, ball playing, swimming, was not a necessity, but a sinful neglect of the sacred day sanctified by Jehovah.”²⁶ Play of any sort is forbidden. “When you suffer your children to play upon the Sabbath, God looks upon you as a commandment breaker. You transgress His Sabbath.”²⁷ Sabbath family time should focus on telling children about Jesus and “the reason for the institution of the Sabbath.”²⁸

Sabbath should close with another time of devotion. As the sun sets, “let the voice of prayer and the hymn of praise mark the close of the sacred hours, and invite God’s presence through the cares of the week of labor.”²⁹

Clearly, it is impossible to keep the Sabbath if one does so only partially:

“It is the grossest presumption for mortal man to venture upon a compromise with the Almighty in

order to secure his own petty, temporal interests. It is as ruthless a violation of the law to occasionally use the Sabbath for secular business as to entirely reject it; for it is making the Lord’s commandments a matter of convenience.”³⁰

There are exceptions, of course. It is okay for doctors to work on the Sabbath in cases of emergency; however, if they routinely work on the Sabbath, they “do not honor God.”³¹ Mrs. White was also aware of the pressure on medical students. However, she exhorted them (and all students) not to study on the Sabbath: “Some have gone through the medical course and have remained true to principle. They would not continue their studies on the Sabbath, and they have proved that men may become qualified for the duties of a physician...”³²

DEAR ADVENTIST

Remember, the world is watching you and judging you by how you live out your faith! “A partial observance of the Sabbath law is not accepted by the Lord and has a worse effect upon the minds of sinners than if you made no profession of being a Sabbathkeeper. They perceive that your life contradicts your belief, and lose faith in Christianity.”³³ Remember also: “Every time you put your hands to labor on the Sabbath day, you virtually deny your faith.”³⁴ As Adventists, you believe that you alone received the “Sabbath truth” after Christianity mysteriously lost it almost 2000 years ago. Remember, therefore, “No one who disregards the fourth commandment, after becoming enlightened concerning the claims of the Sabbath, can be held guiltless in the sight of God.”³⁵

Sabbath-keeping is non-negotiable for professing Adventists. These quotes from Mrs. White should clarify how one may live with integrity while being *truly Adventist*. †

ENDNOTES

¹ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 356.4.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 75.4.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 117.3.

⁴ *Counsels for the Church*, p. 268.5 See also *Ibid.*, p. 268.2.

⁵ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 702.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 584.2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 585.1.

⁸ *Child Guidance*, p. 530.1.

⁹ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 701.3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 356.1.

¹¹ *Child Guidance*, p. 530.1, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 362.1.

¹² *Counsels for the Church*, p. 270.4.

¹³ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6., p. 361.4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 362.2.

¹⁵ *Child Guidance*, p. 528.4.

¹⁶ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6., p. 355.3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 356.2.

¹⁸ *Child Guidance*, p. 529.1.

¹⁹ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6., p. 357.1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 357.2.

²¹ *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 257.4.

²² *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 702.1.

²³ *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 258.4.

²⁴ *Counsels for the Church*, p. 267.6.

²⁵ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 701.3.

²⁶ *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 258.3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 257.3.

²⁸ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 358.2.

²⁹ *Child Guidance*, p. 536.3.

³⁰ *Counsels for the Church*, p. 269.2.

³¹ *Counsels on Health*, p. 368.2.

³² *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 447.3.

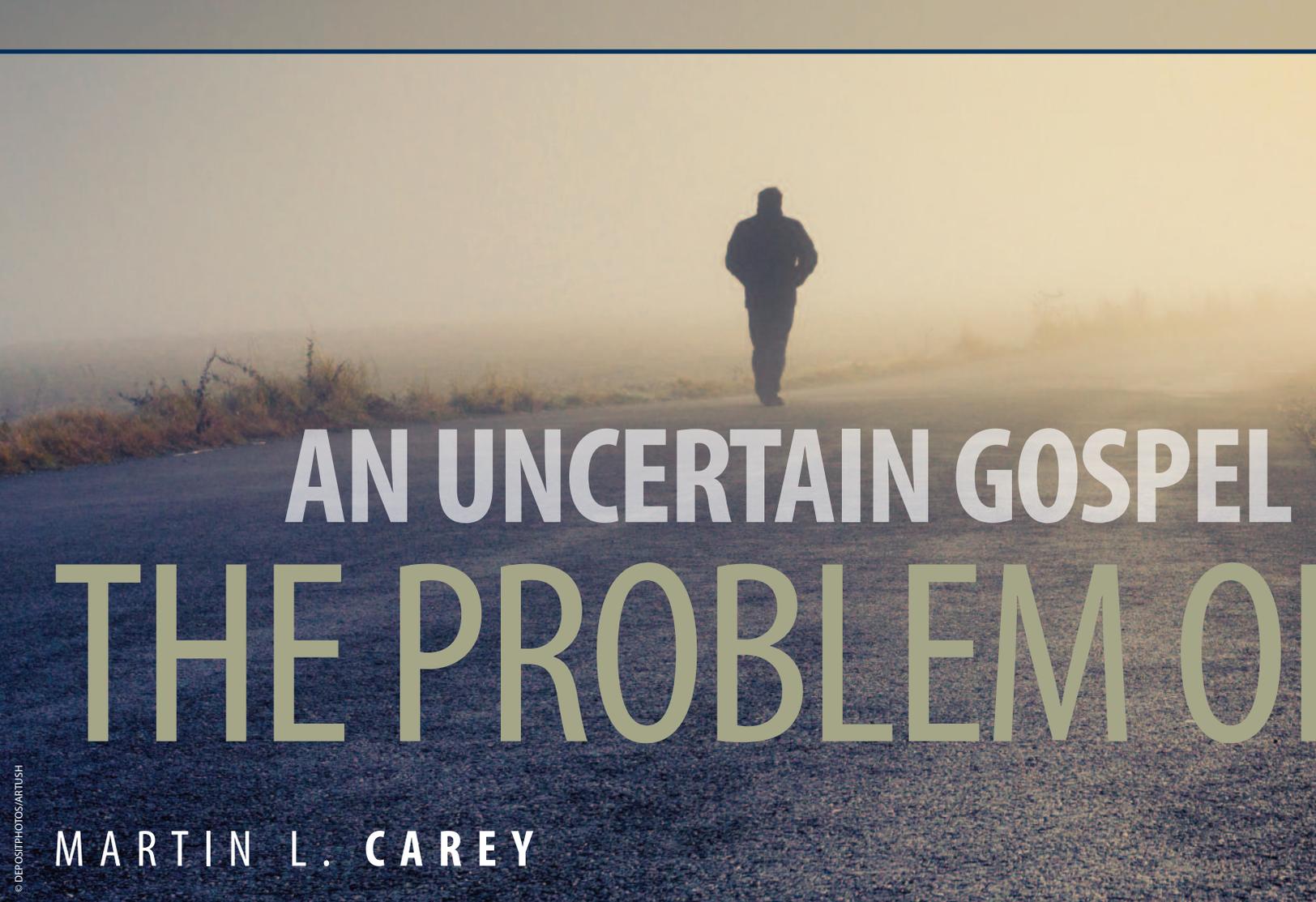
³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 248.1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 250.2.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 247.3.

Lisa Winn was raised in the Adventist school system and is a graduate of Pacific Union College. She became a born again Christian in 2007 upon thoroughly examining Adventist teachings and carefully studying the Bible. She lives in Yucaipa with her husband Jonathan and their two children, Daniel and Héloïse. They are members of Fellowship in the Pass Church in Beaumont, California.





AN UNCERTAIN GOSPEL THE PROBLEM OF

MARTIN L. CAREY

Editor’s note: One of the preconceived ideas we as Adventists held—an idea shared with many Christians as well—is that of ultimate human self-determination. Even God, we were taught, values our free will above His own authority. We at Life Assurance Ministries (LAM), however, believe there is mystery we cannot explain in the biblical statements of God’s absolute foreknowledge and of its commands to us to believe. Both are true. Nevertheless, God is the ultimate authority in the universe, not our free will. Martin Carey’s article examines the clear dangers of the “openness of God” theology that permeates Adventism and is creeping into evangelicalism. We pray this article will draw readers to worship the God revealed in Scripture who sees, knows, and saves us.

How do we know for sure that God will triumph over Satan in the end? We are horrified by the evil in the world, and sometimes we wonder guiltily if God is losing His control. As Christians, we look forward to the world ending as described in Revelation 20, with God flinging the dark forces into the Lake of Fire and gathering a multitude of people who have remained safely and willingly loyal to Him.

On the other hand, His enemy is also gathering followers, and in much greater numbers. When God’s enemies appear to oppose Him successfully, how can we be sure that He will triumph?

Seeing this spiritual battle over human loyalties raises some hard questions. As Seventh-day Adventists, in fact, we often

asked those questions in Sabbath School discussions that went something like this:

“How can we have free will if God is sovereign?” someone would ask. “Why is there so much suffering? Why won’t God do more to stop Satan?” Someone else would give our automatic answer, “Because we have free will, and God doesn’t want robots programmed to love Him.” We liked that answer—even though something seemed to be missing.

As Adventists, free will was one of our core values, and yet we all knew that sooner or later, life would deliver an ugly surprise that would make us plead with God, “Why have you forgotten me?” (Ps. 42:9). We loved our freedom, but when tragedy hit, we wanted God to take strong action—we wanted Him to take control.

We may think free will is at the heart of our identity, yet when tragedy strikes, we need a truly sovereign God who has the power to work all things for our good. The therapy books tell us to look inside ourselves for strength, but self-affirmations are hollow and temporary. Deep inside, we know that “When other helpers fail and comforts flee,” as the songwriter said, we need assurance that is firmly anchored to rock-bottom reality.

ONE FOUNDATION

Our great controversy worldview made us uncomfortable with a strong sovereign God. Because we believed that God’s



F OPEN THEISM

purposes are often frustrated by Satan, we could not fully embrace God's central revelation: "I am God!" We were blinded to the implications in Isaiah chapters 40 to 48 where God declares Himself to be the only divine power and puts all the other gods on trial, exposing them as frauds.

"Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. Behold, you are nothing!" (Is. 41:23, 24).

In His word the one true God directs us to Himself—the Rock—and proclaims why He is worthy of our confidence:

"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Is. 46:9,10).

As Adventists we were disconnected from 2000 years of Christian heritage, of confidence in God's never-failing control of history, and of His declaration of everything that will happen in the future. We believed we had superior understanding, and we disdained the simple trust of Christians who submitted to God's will. Instead, we demanded that God must respect our choices.

Christians, however, have always known they can trust God's rule, not only because He is loving, but also because He knows exactly how He will fulfill His purposes. In fact, while both Arminians and Calvinists have differed on how God's sovereignty and our

free wills interact, they have always agreed on God's perfect, exhaustive foreknowledge. For example, Jacobus Arminius wrote, "[God] has known from eternity which persons should believe . . . and which should persevere through subsequent grace."¹ John Calvin expressed it this way: "[God] foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place."²

A NEW IDEA TAKES SHAPE

In recent years, however, a fascination with free will and a God who limits His power to protect our autonomy has developed within the Christian church. This movement denies God's perfect foreknowledge and portrays Him as a limited being like us. In fact, one of the leading spokespeople for this belief is a Christian pastor and author, Gregory Boyd, who says that God does not know all that the future will bring. Another Christian promoter of this idea, Clark Pinnock, says, "The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God."³ This view, called open theism, says God leaves the future open to our free choices, and our decisions don't exist until we create them from nothing. Thus, they are unknowable beforehand, even by God. Boyd says:

In the Christian view God knows all of reality—everything there is to know. But to assume He knows ahead of time how every person is going to freely act assumes that each person's free activity is already there to know—even before he freely does it! But it's not. If



GREG BOYD

... TODAY'S OPEN THEISTS FREQUENTLY DENY THAT JESUS' DEATH WAS THE PAYMENT FOR INDIVIDUAL SINS. FOR EXAMPLE, GREG BOYD ASKS, "DOES GOD REALLY NEED TO APPEASE HIS WRATH WITH A BLOOD SACRIFICE IN ORDER TO FORGIVE US?"

we have been given freedom, we create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don't exist.⁴

For open theists, the future is an ongoing cooperative project between God and His creatures—a construct that probably sounds much like the Adventist worldview. Within this framework, all our hopes for the future are tentative, depending on unforeseen decisions we and other humans will make. If history is largely shaped by human choices within this paradigm, then God's foreknowledge is limited to gathering facts and making the best predictions He can. These "facts", say the open theists, don't include our future free choices; therefore, God's predictions can be wrong. However, says Clark Pinnock, God is very wise and knows all the "contingencies," all the events that might happen:

Nothing can happen that God is not prepared for and in his wisdom cannot handle. His anticipation of future contingencies is perfect.⁵

Within open theism, therefore, God is never surprised by any event, even if it is one chance out of trillions, because He, like a supercomputer, has anticipated all possibilities before they happen. Presumably, open theism's God can effectively prepare for a vast number of different outcomes without specifically having foreknowledge of what will actually occur.

If we believe that God is ignorant about much of the future, however, His "perfect anticipation" is of small comfort. He limits Himself to living inside of time as we do, so moment by moment, He awaits all our unforeseeable decisions that force Him to keep changing His plans. When He miscalculates, He regrets His decisions and learns from those experiences. In fact, Boyd compares this version of divine "foreknowledge" to the risk calculations used by insurance agents, although God's database of risks is much greater than theirs.⁶ If God were to write insurance policies under this scheme, He could only mitigate disasters by paying out settlements after the disasters happen. This "open God" is unable to prevent most evils, arriving late to clean up after Satan and to fix the damages as best He can.

If this "openness" scenario is God's "providence," though, we must trust not only in God's power but also in His good luck. If our theology reduces God, so that He is not the Sovereign who turns the king's heart wherever He wills (Prov. 21:1) and determines the times and boundaries of every nation on earth (Acts 17:26), our faith in Him is also reduced. As Bruce Ware has said,

While claiming to offer meaningfulness to Christian living, open theism strips the believer of the one thing needed most for a meaningful and vibrant life of faith: absolute confidence in God's character, wisdom, word, promise, and the sure fulfillment of his will.⁷

This view of an "open" God who limits Himself to protect our free will is not new to Adventism. In fact, for 172 years, Ellen White's great controversy paradigm has kept Adventists struggling to finish "the work" because Adventism's Jesus depends on their work to make His return possible.

Now, over the last 20 years, the openness movement has entered into mainstream Christianity and keeps gaining respectability. Seventh-day Adventist theologian Richard Rice from Loma Linda University found common ground with open theology, becoming a major figure early in the movement. Rice and evangelical theologians such as Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory Boyd—professors at established colleges who were not influenced by Adventist theology—have succeeded in promoting open theism into the mainstream in both the Adventist church and much of evangelicalism. Today openness theology has a growing presence on campuses, in churches, and in Christian bookstores.

OPEN THEISM IN HISTORY

There have been several movements throughout church history that have embraced variations of "openness". Faustus Socinus (Fausto Sozzini), 1539 to 1604, came from a prominent Italian family, and although he befriended the reformers Melancthon and Calvin, he had major differences with them. Socinus believed that faith must be agreeable to reason, leading him to see the incarnation—God becoming man—as an irrational doctrine. He denied that Jesus was God and insisted that His atonement on the cross was not a payment for sin to satisfy God's justice. Thus, to Socinus, the cross was only a dramatic display of God's forgiving love. Socinus' God does not have wrath to be appeased; He forgives because His will is free; His just nature does not determine what He "must" do. Therefore, in addressing sin, this God does whatever suits Him at the moment. He doesn't need a blood sacrifice for our sins in order to forgive them. Moreover, because of our free will, we don't need a substitute; we only need Jesus as our example of making moral choices, showing us the way to salvation.⁸

Socinus denied that God can have perfect foreknowledge of the free choices of his creatures. God foreknows “necessary” future events, but has only partial knowledge of free choices.⁹ In Socinus’ view, if God knows infallibly that something will happen, then that event must come to pass, and no one is free to change it. For Socinus, any theology that tries to combine God’s perfect foreknowledge with our free will is an illusion.¹⁰

Modern open theism shares some of the main ideas of 16th century Socinianism. Although today’s open theists do not deny Christ’s divinity, they frequently deny that Jesus’ death was the payment for individual sins. For example, Greg Boyd asks, “Does God really need to appease his wrath with a blood sacrifice in order to forgive us?” He then gives ten reasons why he opposes the penal substitution view of the atonement.¹¹

For open theists, sin is not about guilt before the holiness and justice of God. Sin is “alienation,” says open theologian John Sanders; it is a broken relationship with God.¹² From this perspective, Christ came to demonstrate God’s love and to show the way to salvation. Openness theology says we restore our relationships with Him by making good choices and living out Christ’s example.

According to open theologians, God’s loving nature greatly limits His power to govern. Although Scripture makes it clear that God’s ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself (Is. 43:25; Ez. 36:22; Jn. 12:27-28; Eph. 1:5; Phil. 2:9-11), open theists claim that God’s ultimate purpose is to experience free, authentic relationships with His creatures. Therefore, they say, God created men and angels who could share power with Him and, if they chose, freely oppose and frustrate His plans. In fact, Gregory Boyd insists that perfect human freedom is necessary for us genuinely to love God. This perfect freedom we supposedly have, therefore, means that our relationships with God include mutual risk, pain, and joy, just as we experience in relationship with each other.¹³ Clark Pinnock agrees:

God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God’s will for their lives, and he enters into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with us. The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between God and human beings.¹⁴

RADICAL FREE WILL

Open theism’s central assumption that controls all its beliefs is not a confidence in God; rather, it is a belief in human libertarian free will. This libertarian, or radical, free will is supposedly marked by free choices which are purely self-created, uncaused by anything in creation or by God. According to open theists, a strictly free choice is not even caused by our desires, since desires are shaped by our experiences, genetic makeup, and environment.¹⁵ Even though our personalities and experiences influence our choices, they will explain, libertarian free choices are not determined by any of those influences. Until the moment we choose, therefore, our wills are indifferent, equally able to choose among opposite alternatives. Open theists call this radical freedom of the will the “liberty of indifference.”

This confusing premise leads to some questions. If our free choices are not caused by any part of “us”, can our choices really be considered ours? Do we really choose at all, or is our freedom of choice more like rolling the dice? If our free choices are only

mental accidents, how can we be held morally responsible for them?¹⁶

Lacking biblical support for this idea, Boyd appeals to quantum mechanics to bolster his theory:

Quantum mechanics has demonstrated that this uncertainty is not due to our limited measuring devices; it is actually rooted in the nature of things. This means that even on a quantum level the future is partly open and partly settled.¹⁷

Quantum physics, in fact, is well known for strange goings-on. Physicists cannot predict with precision what any one particle will do. In fact, “Nothing physical determines quantum events,” declares the current scientific consensus on quantum mechanics.¹⁸ In open theism’s universe, however, the freedom of uncertainty has been given not only to subatomic particles but also to men and angels as well. If the tiniest particles are unpredictable, they reason, then human choices are equally accidental.

Boyd takes a wild metaphysical leap by claiming that God, like us, is unable to determine or predict the behavior of quantum events. If physicists are unable to predict or control all the movements of particles, the open theist believes that God is likewise limited, confounded by the very things He created.

Openness theology imagines that free will needs a free universe in order to flourish. In other words, free choices are made possible by God’s limited power and the wild randomness of nature. This belief, however, leads to another question: if nature is fundamentally chaotic, if even God must submit to its randomness, why should we trust Him with the future? If He is a being much like us, constrained by His own creation, then He, like we do, waits and hopes for an uncertain future. How do we trust a God who is as surprised as we are by future events?

Disturbingly, the wild, radical freedom of open theism also demands that our choices be completely detached from everything we feel or experience as “real.” This belief, however, leads to an unsolvable dilemma: if our choices have nothing to do with our desires, how do we respond to God with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind? After all, Jesus said that this mandate is the first and greatest commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk. 10:27).

Luke’s passage echoes the psalmist, and both define loving God as desiring God, consciously giving Him control of all our desires and attachments:

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:25).

THE FREEDOM WORTH HAVING

The previous texts show us that loving God means willfully giving our entire selves—our hearts, souls, strength, and minds—over to His control. This submission even of our wills, however, is antithetical to openness theology and its claims of radical freedom. So, if Scripture describes loving God as submitting to him, how does Scripture describe our freedom?

Jesus said this, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:31, 32).

The Jews who heard Him didn’t believe Him; they thought they had freedom as sons of Abraham (vs. 33) and had no need of Jesus. He answered,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (vs. 34, 35).

Here Jesus alludes to Hagar and Ishmael who were slaves in the house of Abraham. Any natural child of Abraham who sins is a type of slave like Ishmael, and not a son. Slaves like Hagar and Ishmael have no permanent place in the home and ultimately are cast out. Only the Son—in this case the descendant of Isaac, the child of promise, could be the sole and permanent heir. Jesus’ hearers knew that Isaac, not Ishmael, was the true heir of Abraham. What they didn’t want to acknowledge was that the true Son of promise, Jesus, redeems the slaves of sin, both Jew and Gentile, and sets them free. Outside of Him, they—and we—could only be slaves.

Jesus defined freedom to his stubborn listeners as the condition of being set free from sin by Him and then of abiding in His word and thus knowing truth. In other words, knowing Jesus, and knowing the truth in His word, sets people free. In contrast with the open theists, Jesus and His word define freedom not as a universal, natural endowment independent of one’s will and of God, but as the condition of being forgiven and released from sin, then being able to know the truth in His word.

Man’s original freedom was degraded by sin, so none are naturally free; all are under sin (Rom. 3:9-18). The natural man wants his independence; he is hostile against God (Rom. 8:7, 8), a slave of sin (Jn. 8:34), and incapable of acting outside of his nature. We are morally accountable for our sin, even though we are slaves to it and cannot make holy choices. In other words, we are only free to act on our corrupted desires—while paradoxically we are held responsible for our sin which we are helpless to avoid.

The Bible, however, defines true freedom as liberty from sin, for all of us are slaves to sin unless we die to the old self by sharing in His death (Rom. 6:6-8). Liberty is obtained by adoption into the household of Christ (Gal. 4:5-7). He makes us alive in Him (Eph. 2:5-7) and gives us new hearts that make us “slaves to righteousness” (Rom. 6:15-23).

THE GODS AT WAR

Open theism presents a different picture of God than Scripture gives us. Openness says He took grave risks in creating angels and man with radical freedom—a freedom which carried a heavy price for God. In spite of His splendid creation, Adam and Eve sinned. Their fall came as a surprise to God, for in the perfections of Eden, sin was “implausible.”¹⁹ Their sin ushered in evil and suffering, but His loving nature and moral purity prevented Him from interfering with the free choices of men and angels.

Concurrently, open theology’s Satan is a ruthless, independent agent of evil whose free choices God does not foreknow. In fact, he can surprise God with his powers which resemble those

of the gods of mythology.²⁰ Gregory Boyd illustrates this view of Satan by describing the warfare worldview of the Shuar tribe in Ecuador, a primitive people who attribute all disaster and death to unseen evil spirits. The Bible, he says, supports the Shuar’s fears of constant supernatural warfare and explains all of life’s good and bad events as the effects of war between powerful spirits.²¹ The good powers are not in control of the universe, Boyd says, for “God chose to create a quasi-democratic cosmos in which dualism could result.”²²

In a universe shaped by warfare between a limited God and an unrestrained Satan, God’s promise to cause “all things to work together for good to those who love God” (Rom 8:28) has no meaning. Open theist John Sanders discusses the meaning of incurable cancer striking a two-year old child:

It is a pointless evil. The holocaust is pointless evil. The rape and dismemberment of a young girl is pointless evil. The accident that caused the death of my brother was a tragedy. God does not have a specific purpose in mind for these occurrences.²³

Open theists claim that evil angels continually force God to deviate from His original intentions for His creation. How, then, is God’s will accomplished? Pinnock answers that God is “endlessly resourceful and competent in working toward his ultimate goals,” even though He “does not control everything that happens.”²⁴

Ironically, open theism’s elevation of evil’s freedom and power ultimately contradicts its central doctrine of free will. For example, if evil spirits can interfere with God’s hearing or answering one’s prayers²⁵ or can freely plan and execute disaster for one’s children,²⁶ or if evil can enter a person’s mind to victimize another,²⁷ all without God’s foreknowledge or plan, one cannot claim to have real freedom. Ultimately, what begins as a theology of freedom becomes a paradigm of fear and bondage.

When we take power away from God, we transfer it to the forces of nature or to other beings. Do we feel freer believing Satan is in control of evil than we do having our Creator and Savior in charge?²⁸

The New Testament describes the God-given role of Satan and puts him in his rightful place. He is certainly a murderer and a liar (Jn. 8:44) and a deceiver who rules those who do not belong to God (Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Jn. 5:19). He also is allowed, under God’s strict supervision, to bring trouble to God’s people. Paul tells of a “messenger of Satan” that was given to him, a thorn in the flesh to harass him and keep him from pride. When he asked God three times to remove it, God answered, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Satan’s harassment was God’s tool for Paul’s good.

The overwhelming message of God’s word is that the infinite, sovereign God controls Satan and by Himself rules history. In fact, while the Israelites were being invaded by Babylon’s armies, God told them,

“Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary” (Is. 8:12-14).

Open theists, on the contrary, say that God cannot plan for evil or suffering in any form, for such foreknowledge would make Him guilty of causing the event.²⁹ They claim it is pointless to look for

some divine plan in tragedy, as Christians have always done because of God's promise in Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Greg Boyd interprets the text to mean, "Whatever happens God will work with us to bring a redemptive purpose out of the event."³⁰

The text does not say, however, that God is working with us to bring good purposes out of events, after they happen. Verse 29 contains His purpose, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." The words are precise; "predestination" states a pre-existing purpose of God to make us like His Son. In all things, even terrible things, God is working His purposes for us, because He planned for us to be changed through those events.

In open theism, radical free will is the wild card that threatens the destiny of the universe. In Scripture, God's will is carried out in the heavens and on earth (Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11), but in openism, God's will is often frustrated by His godlike adversary. Bruce Ware sums up the consequence of openness well:

"Cosmic warfare theology gives us a perilous, demon-haunted future—the price we must pay for the radical freedom of open theism. God has been locked in fierce combat against Satan and his angels, with God doing all he can, often unsuccessfully, to oppose evil."³¹

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

In 1980, Adventist theologian Richard Rice of Loma Linda University published his book *The Openness of God*,³² and as a college student at La Sierra, I found his world view very enticing. Many Adventist church members have embraced his open theism, especially around Loma Linda, California, where professors Jack Provonsha and A. Graham Maxwell also taught for decades.³³ They denied Christ's penal substitutionary atonement and portrayed a universe engulfed in cosmic warfare, much like the views of Boyd, Sanders, and Rice.

Open theism's cosmic warfare scenario, in fact, has a familiar ring to Seventh-day Adventists acquainted with Ellen White's great controversy theology. The great controversy theme (GCT) claims to be a "theory of everything", as Herbert Douglass put it, and "introduces us to the mind of God."³⁴ Satan has been allowed to tempt and destroy because, according to White, God has to defend His character against Satan's accusations. Satan was successful in putting God on the defensive before the court of the universe. Being on the defensive, God's actions to save man are primarily motivated to save His reputation against Satan's accusations. That controversy spread from heaven and enveloped our earth after man's fall, as Herbert Douglass explained:

"Satan has charged (and influenced men and women to believe) that God is unfair, unforgiving, and arbitrary. God's defense has been both passive and active passive; in that He has allowed time to proceed so that Satan's principles could be seen for all their suicidal destructiveness."³⁵

In the great controversy God is forced to allow Satan and his evil hordes to operate with minimal restraint. God's plans and actions are controlled by circumstances, driven along by threats and demands that He didn't plan or want. According to Ellen White,

UNTIL THE MOMENT WE CHOOSE, THEREFORE, OUR WILLS ARE INDIFFERENT, EQUALLY ABLE TO CHOOSE AMONG OPPOSITE ALTERNATIVES. OPEN THEISTS CALL THIS RADICAL FREEDOM OF THE WILL THE "LIBERTY OF INDIFFERENCE."

God is defending himself in a cosmic lawsuit and needs to win his case before untold billions of innocent, inquiring aliens. Satan was allowed access to "tempt and annoy" the unfallen beings of countless worlds, putting doubt in their minds.³⁶ Why does Satan have the freedom to continue his destructive rampage?—for the security of the whole universe! Says White,

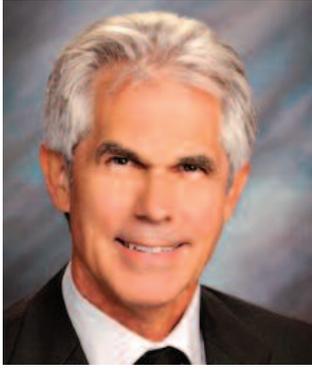
"It was God's purpose to place things on an eternal basis of security, and in the councils of heaven it was decided that time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his system of government... Time was given for the working of Satan's principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe."³⁷

In fact, White depicts a heavenly scene where God gathered a "council" to discuss the disasters of sin and death initiated by Satan. The committee decided to use caution, realizing Satan's rampage needs to continue until the entire universe is agreed on Satan's utter badness. God's salvation timeline, therefore, depends on many factors, including His political standing in the cosmic popularity polls, and on human obedience to His laws. In the great controversy, God is portrayed more like the harried prime minister of a troubled democracy, than the supreme monarch "who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11).

Boyd's cosmic warfare has a different emphasis than White's, claiming that, because God gave sovereign power over to His creatures, the universe is now under the rule of more than one "god."³⁸ Boyd acknowledges that God is infinite in wisdom and goodness, but contends that his radical free will experiment permitted his arch enemy to grow extremely powerful. Unlike Boyd, White generally accepts God's perfect foreknowledge,³⁹ but she weakens God's sovereign control with a cosmic lawsuit where God must defend His character against a powerful accuser.

In spite of some differences, however, we can see that open theism and great controversy theology have elements in common:

1. Radical free will is the core value that governs God's relationships with angels and men, so that, like God, their choices have ultimate power to shape the future.



RICK RICE

IN 1980, ADVENTIST THEOLOGIAN RICHARD RICE OF LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY PUBLISHED HIS BOOK *THE OPENNESS OF GOD*... MANY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS HAVE EMBRACED HIS OPEN THEISM...

2. Satan's freedom and power are godlike. Satan has the power to frustrate God's plans, bringing vast destruction, death, and pointless evil to God's creatures. Evil must be allowed to rule, not because God uses evil to glorify Himself, but as White said, "time must be given for the working of Satan's principles."

3. The gospel of Christ was "Plan B." Satan's rebellion disrupted God's original plan for His creation, so that Jesus' dying and rising for sinners was not God's original purpose, but a countermeasure to Satan's work.

Ultimately, if openism and the great controversy reveal the "mind of God," we see a limited being who can fail, one who is embattled and outmaneuvered by the growing power of Satan.

INTEGRITY OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a great test to measure the integrity of our theologies, so let us apply that test to open theism. Although open theists generally accept that Jesus somehow died for our sins so that we are saved by God's grace, that faith is damaged by openism's central assumptions. If God cannot know the future of our free choices, the New Testament gospel of salvation is changed. Let's look at two ways that open theism profoundly distorts the gospel.

First, under openism none of God's promises are certain. Rather, they are conditional, depending upon the uncertain, future choices of men and angels. Contrary to this belief, however, God's covenant with Abraham has detailed promises that must happen as promised by God; otherwise, they are null and void. Consider, for example, this prophecy where God pledged His covenant to Abraham's offspring:

"Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:13, 14).

There was no legal fine print or escape clause in that covenant. Many free human choices were involved in making the prophecies come true, such as the sins of Joseph's brothers recorded in Genesis 50:15-20. Nevertheless, these sins ultimately led to Israel suffering the horrors of slavery for 400 years under Pharaoh, just as God had said—and then they were delivered. All these details occurred just

as God declared they would—and yet, God was not the cause of those sins.

The mysterious interplay of human choice and God's sovereign promises and foreknowledge appear to be contradictory. Humans struggle to explain how these interactions "work". In truth, however, both human choices and God's sovereign foreknowledge are true. The Bible is clear that both are true, and we are expected to accept both as true without forcing a resolution that will satisfy our logic.

Another argument against God's foreknowledge uses the "I regret" statements of God. These texts are supposed to show that God changes His mind about a past decision, after He sees it was a mistake. Consider 1 Samuel 15:11:

"I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments."

Later in the same chapter, however, we learn what He meant by "regret":

"The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret."

God's regrets are not feelings of remorse for mistakes. Certainly God has complex feelings about His interactions with the world,⁴⁰ but He is not like fallible men who lie or change their minds. If He spoke, He will fulfill His word (Num. 23:11-15). God can, however, feel sorrow about something He knew was painful but necessary to do, such as appointing Saul as king as part of the divine plan that would ultimately usher in Saul's neighbor David, a better man, as king. In fact, David's family line was already foreordained to bring Messiah into the world. Saul's tribe was Benjamin, but the Messiah must come from Judah, according to the prophecies. As Jesus said, the word of God "cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35).

Second, within open theism the gospel becomes impersonal. If God cannot know future human choices, He cannot know the identities of any of us prior to our births. Furthermore, an "open" God has not known who would come to Him and believe, or who would be saved or lost. It also means that none of Jesus' work was done for us personally. Yet Isaiah 53 tells what the suffering Servant came to do for us, people that didn't know Him:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed (vs. 4, 5).

He came to bear our griefs and our sins in Himself, so that we might be healed and have peace with God. However, under openism, Jesus did not know that any of us would exist, so when He suffered, He did not bear any of our personal sorrows or sins. Those griefs and sorrows were not real pains that any of us actually have felt, but generic sorrows for anonymous people of the future. Under openism, Jesus could not have borne our personal sins 2000 years ago. Instead, His death was an impersonal death for unknown people who might or might not believe.⁴¹

But His death was personal. Peter tells us, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). This is a personal exchange between Jesus and us. While we were His enemies our sins were laid on Him, so He could give His life and righteousness to those He foreknew. “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). Those who love God were foreknown by Him and predestined to become like His Son (Rom. 8:28, 29). He loved us first, chose us and adopted us, that we should be blameless before Him (Eph. 1:4,5). In God’s mind, He has already justified and glorified us (Rom. 8:30), as an accomplished fact of history. We are comforted knowing His foreknowledge is so deeply personal.

Concurrently, we are commanded to believe. God knows how to lead us to the Son and how to impact us with the truth of the gospel. He has no need to force our wills to bend to Him; His ways are gentle, but His purposes for His children never fail. Jesus said to the Jews that the work of God is to believe in the One whom He sent (Jn. 6:29). He also said that He who believes will not come into judgment, but he who does not believe is condemned already (Jn. 3:18).

There is a mystery here which we cannot explain. Instead of attempting to create a formula to explain these apparently opposing facts, our proper response is to believe that both are true. God’s sovereign knowledge of our choices does not remove our responsibility to choose rightly. When we hear God’s command to believe, our proper response is to obey, knowing that God had full knowledge of our moment of decision before we ever were born.

BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

As the final chapter of history closes, it will appear that evil is winning. There is a terrible beast, an overwhelming political power with great signs and wonders to deceive. The dragon gives the beast authority to rule over every tribe and people on the earth so that they worship the beast. By all appearances, the forces of darkness will have finally prevailed, dominating the world and stopping God’s kingdom. Almost everyone on earth will worship the evil power—with one small exception:

“...everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” (Rev. 13:8).

At the world’s end time there are two groups of people; a very large group who worship the beast, and a little group who are not

deceived, whose names are written down in “The Book of Life of the Lamb”. Later, in Revelation 17:8, the world—all those whose names are not in the Lamb’s book of life from the foundation of the world—marvels at the beast. The decisive difference between the two groups is whether or not their names are recorded in the book. What is it about that book that prevents people from following the most evil power in history?

Before Adam and Eve sinned, before the creation of the world, before Satan rebelled, the book of the slain Lamb was written. In the eternal counsels of God, the Trinity knew that sin would come and the plan for sin was already set in place. Sin didn’t require an emergency “heavenly counsel” to decide, after the fact, what to do with Satan and sinners. No, as God said through Isaiah, He declared His counsel from the beginning, and it still stands (Is. 46:9). God first decreed that the Lamb was to be slain for sinners, long before there was sin. It was as good as done, for He had already recorded the names of those to be saved by His blood.

But why so much suffering? We long for the bliss of the new earth where we will be free from the consequences of our fallen state, but now we find answers whenever the gospel is preached. Peter presents the eternal viewpoint on the Day of Pentecost, when he preached that the very Jesus who was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Before Jesus came to earth as a man, in God’s mind He was already crucified for sinners. Jesus’ execution by evil men was, by God’s plan, “predestined to take place” (Acts 4:28), for He was always the slain Lamb, “foreknown before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19).

Jesus, the Lamb to be slain, created the universe and everything in it for His own glory and purposes (Is. 42:8; 43:7; 48:9-11; Col. 1:16). The earth was made to be the theater of His perfections, where the Son would exhibit the greatest wonder of all, showing grace to sinners.⁴² Sin and suffering were no surprise to God, for they serve His eternal purposes. Jesus came to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, redeeming them and giving us eternal glory with Him.

“I LAY IT DOWN”

We know that God’s “very good” creation was put in place for us to see His glory. It may seem strange that He would create a beautiful cosmos for the purpose of entering into it to suffer and die, yet these things all happened according to His eternal counsel: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk. 24:26). Our Creator does not gamble with His own glory, betting on reckless creatures with uncertain futures. Neither does He need luck, for He upholds all things by His word. In fact, He sat down with his disciples and told them what He was about to do, of His own free will:

“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (Jn. 10:18).

Jesus made a free, sovereign choice in perfect submission to His Father—a choice predetermined from all eternity. Two thou-

sand years of prophecy foretold His death, and the night before His trial, Jesus gave His disciples the sure sign of true sovereignty. When Judas was about to betray Him, He told the twelve, “I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am” (Jn. 13:19). The pronoun “He” is not in the Greek; Jesus identified Himself as the “I AM”, the One in Isaiah 46 who declares the end from the beginning, whose counsel will stand. He said He would be betrayed and slain (Mt. 17:22) to give His life as a ransom for many. As God He decreed, and as the Son of Man, He fulfilled. There was no “chance” that Jesus could have failed, for failure to fulfill His promise would make God a liar. What He speaks, He accomplishes.

Today, many Christians are afraid that if God is fully sovereign, He is also untouched by our pain. They fear He will crush their freedom, so they flee to weak, unthreatening versions of Him. A weak God, however, cannot keep His promises or protect us from ourselves or from the kingdom of Satan.

If we would know the true Father—the One who is powerful enough to keep us safe from all evil, we must know the Lord Jesus of Scripture. If we reject this sovereign, powerful God and His Son who shed His blood to pay for our sins, we will prefer our darkness (Jn. 5:36-40).

In Christ, all the power and glory of God dwells, and He is the one who faithfully carries all of our sorrows. Today, He commands us to surrender our wills and choose Him above all imitators.

We do not serve an “open God” who gambles our futures in a battle with Satan. Rather, we serve a victorious King, and in the endless years of eternity, we will never cease praising the mighty, terrible Lion who is the Lamb who was wounded for us.

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). †

ENDNOTES

¹ Carl Bangs, *Arminius*, Quoted in *Taste and See: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life*, John Piper, Crown Publishing Group, 2009, p. 212.

² *Ibid.*

³ Clark Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue*, Wipf and Stock, Publishers, 1998, p. 130.

⁴ Gregory Boyd, *Letters From a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles With His Father's Questions About Christianity*, David C. Cook, 2010, p. 38.

⁵ Clark Pinnock, *Ibid.*

⁶ Martyn McGeown, *Closing the Door On Open Theism*, Covenant Reformed Protestant Church, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/opentheism.htm#VtUk-M72ZCE>

⁷ Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000, p. 21.

⁸ Sam Storms, *Socinianism*, <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/socinianism/>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Gregory Boyd, *Ten Problems With the Penal Substitution View of the Atonement*, <http://reknew.org/2015/12/10-problems-with-the-penal-substitution-view-of-the-atonement/>

¹² John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, p. 105.

¹³ Gregory Boyd, *The Risk of Love and the Source of Evil*, <http://reknew.org/2014/08/the-risk-of-love-the-source-of-evil/>

¹⁴ Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, John Hasker, David Basinger, *The Openness of God, A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, Intervarsity Press, 2010, p. 7.

¹⁵ John Frame, “Open Theism and Divine Foreknowledge”, 2001, <http://framepoythress.org/open-theism-and-divine-foreknowledge/>

¹⁶ John Frame, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible*, Baker Books, 2000, p. 109-110.

¹⁸ John Beckman, *Modern Physics and the Open View of God*, 2001. <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/papers/ets/2001/Beckman/Beckman.pdf>

¹⁹ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1998, p. 46.

²⁰ Boyd, *God at War*, Intervarsity Press, 1997, p. 12.

²¹ Gregory Boyd, *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²³ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1998), p. 262.

²⁴ Clark Pinnock, et al, *The Openness of God*, p. 7.

²⁵ Gregory Boyd, *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

²⁸ Chad Brand, *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁹ Gregory Boyd, *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁰ Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p. 155.

³¹ Bruce Ware, *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³² Richard Rice, *The Openness of God*, Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 1980.

³³ A. Graham Maxwell, *Atonement: Quotes by Graham Maxwell*, Pineknoll online.

³⁴ Herbert Douglass, “The Great Controversy Theme: What it Means to Adventists”, *Ministry Magazine*, December, 2000, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2000/12/the-great-controversy-theme>

³⁵ Herbert Douglass, *Ibid.*

³⁶ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911, p. 659.

³⁷ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898, p. 759.

³⁸ Gregory Boyd, *God at War*, p. 119.

³⁹ See for example, Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22, God foresaw the fall of Satan and man.

⁴⁰ John Piper, *Glory of God at Stake in God's Foreknowledge of Human Choices*

⁴¹ Bruce Ware, *The Gospel of Christ*, Ch. 9, Out of Bounds, Edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjos Helseth, Crossway Books, 2003, p. 333.

⁴² Alfred Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*, Colossians 1:16, “For Him,” Biblehub.com, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/1-16.htm>



Martin Carey grew up as a “nomadic” Adventist in many places. He works as a school psychologist in San Bernardino, California. Married to Sharon, he has two sons, Matthew, 14, and Nick, 27. Astronomy, research, and too many pets keep him in joyful disarray. You may contact him at martincarey@sbcglobal.net.

This morning I woke up, and all I wanted to do was worship. All I wanted was to be close to the One who loved me enough to give His life as a ransom for me. My heart yearns for Him as a running deer yearns for water. All I need is Him.

My heart has felt ripped and stripped of all protection. I've watched in the last few weeks as a woman live-streamed the death of her boyfriend; I saw a live news camera pan around a running crowd and rest on a fallen police officer lying motionless, face-down on the cement, before they cut the live feed. I learned of a mass shooting in a club and watched people holding each other up as they tried to escape the carnage.

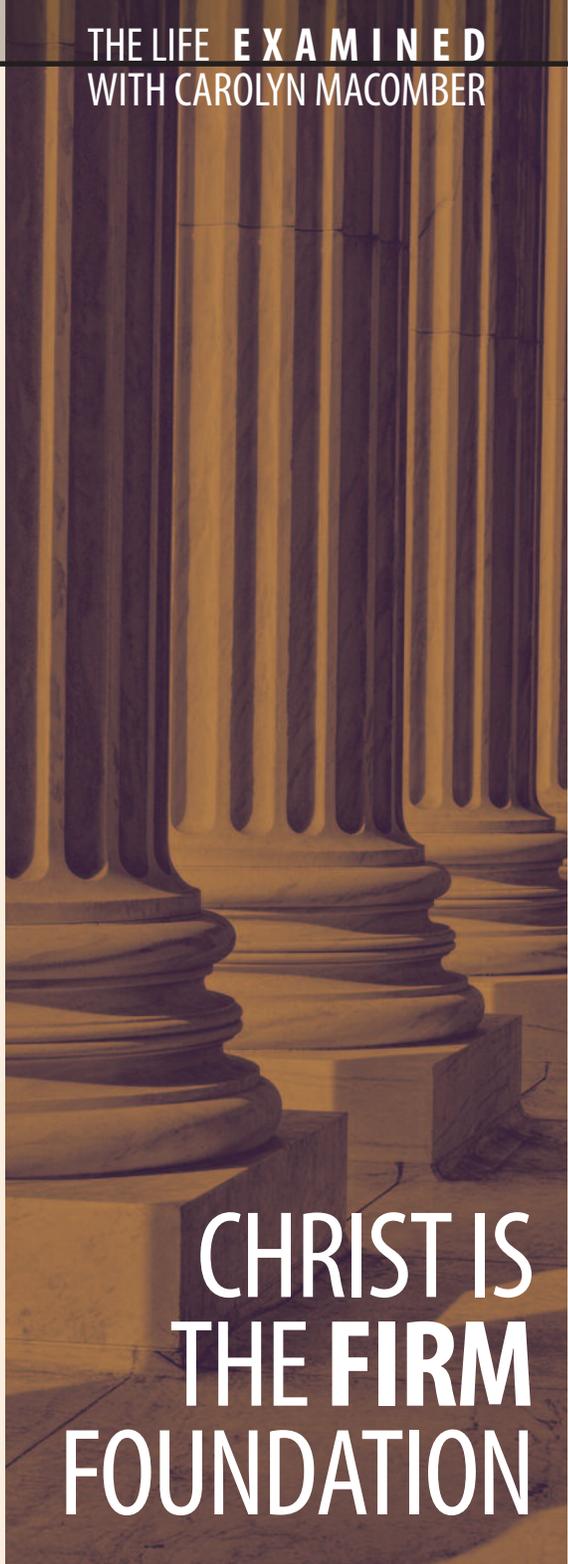
Meanwhile, closer to home, I heard of a felon who wrested a gun out of the hands of a bailiff and two died in a court of law. I watched people running for their lives to escape being mowed down by a two-ton truck whose driver's sole purpose was to kill as many as possible. I've heard and seen that some on our planet rejoice over the death of innocents. People are doing what is right in their own eyes.

HEART ACHES

My heart aches for a world that seems to be spinning out of control, where chaos is the norm, and I need to worship. My spirit needs to be close to the One who calls Himself the Prince of Peace, Almighty God, The Good Shepherd, Wonderful, Counselor, and King. My heart grieves over the lawlessness of this planet, for a world that rejects the One who came to rescue it. My eyes are wet with conviction of the sin that pervades my planet—the destructive self-centeredness and selfishness that is the natural inheritance of us all.

As I read this week from the words that give me hope, I was struck with the reality that God's prophets foretold that peace would be taken from this world. In fact, that removal of peace is a pre-cursor to the events that will bring the One who will eventually rule the nations with an iron scepter (Rev. 12:5; 19:15). My heart yearns for the Judge who will judge in righteousness and truth.

I was struck by the words I read just yesterday in Scripture: "Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other" (Rev. 6:4, NIV). I paused and wrote



CHRIST IS THE FIRM FOUNDATION

© DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM/SILICKSPICS

in the margin the date and all the death scenes I had watched parading across the screen of my television during the preceding days.

In the midst of my grief, confusion, and heart ache, I can only turn to the One who is my hope and my salvation. I can turn only to Him for the comfort and peace my soul yearns for. It is in Christ that I have what I need. It is in Jesus that I find the solace for my aching soul. It is the Son of God who won the victory over sin and death to whom I turn.

CHRIST IS THE FIRM FOUNDATION

All I want to do is worship and be in His presence, soaking in His goodness, justice, and love. Christ is the firm foundation to whom I can run when chaos breaks out and my world is turned upside down.

Where do you turn? What do you yearn for? What will you do?

There is only one answer for us all. Jesus said this in Matthew 11:25-30:

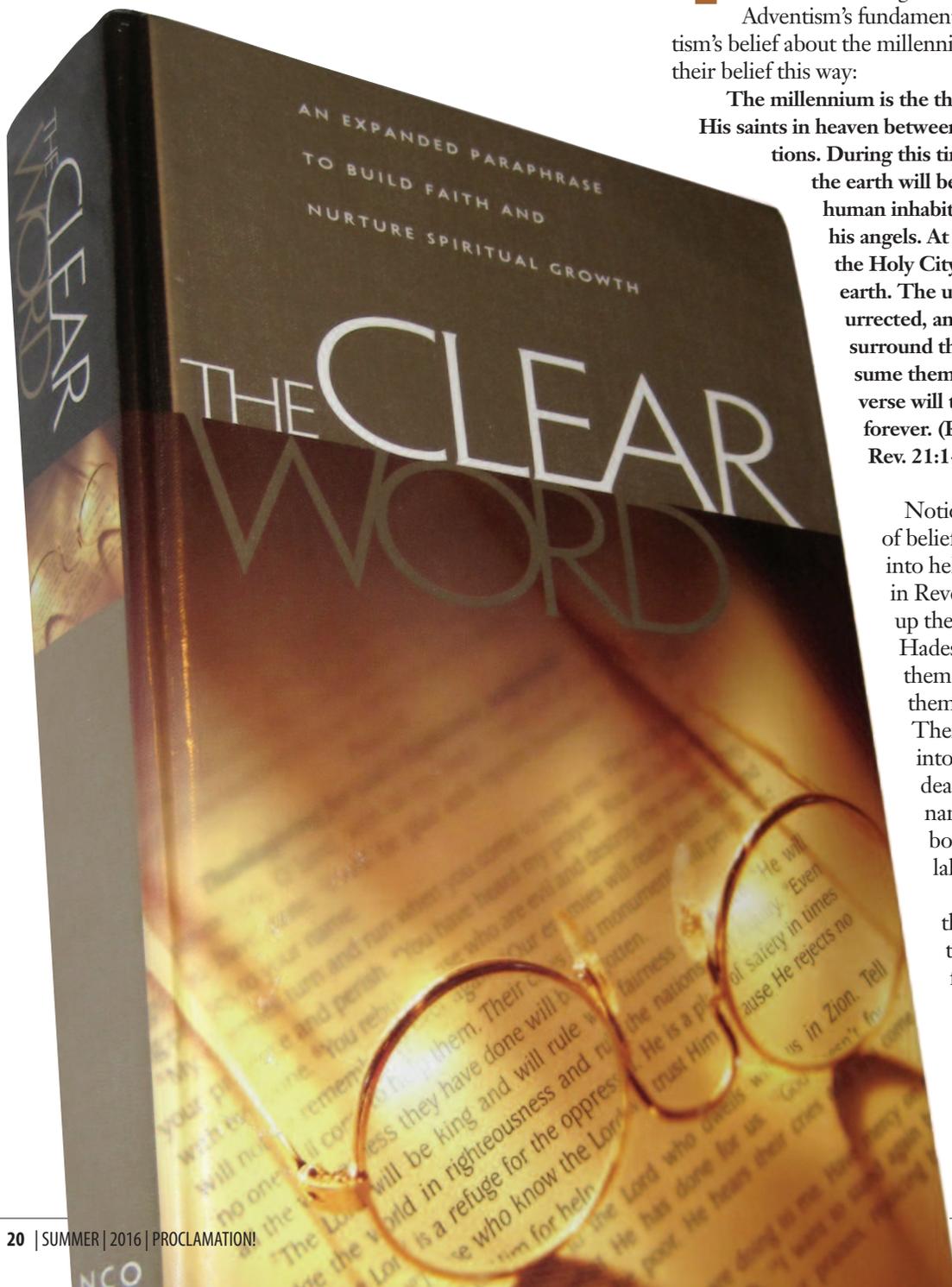
"I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight." All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30). †

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.



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



HELL AND

The Seventh-day Adventist belief about hell is one of its distinctive differences from evangelical Christianity. Adventism says that hell is a temporary punishment resulting in the wicked’s being annihilated, never to exist again. In fact, Adventism’s fundamental belief #27, which explains Adventism’s belief about the millennium and the end of sin, articulates their belief this way:

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Rev. 20; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Jer. 4:23-26; Rev. 21:1-5; Mal. 4:1; Eze. 28:18, 19)

Notice that, according to this statement of belief, the unrighteous dead are not cast into hell or into the lake of fire as explained in Revelation 20:13-15: “And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Instead, Adventist doctrine states that Satan and his angels, along with the wicked, are consumed by a “fire from God” which also cleanses the earth, annihilating sin and sinners. Importantly, although Scripture promises that God will wipe away all tears and will glorify us eternally, the Bible never states that the “universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever.” In other

THE CLEAR WORD

words, while Scripture is clear that the righteous can look forward to an eternity of freedom from sin, the Bible never says that the wicked dead will be annihilated and cease to exist.

The doctrine of hell can be an emotional one even for Christians, particularly if family members have passed away who have not known the Lord. Nevertheless, the biblical teaching of hell—God’s eternal punishment of unrepentant, unbelieving sinners—reveals both the seriousness of sin and God’s mercy expressed in His Son’s sacrifice of Himself as our Substitute, offering us a rescue from hell if we believe. Conversely, Adventism diminishes the seriousness of sin and the spiritual nature of man by teaching a “hell” that is temporary, consuming everything it touches.

In this article we will contrast the teaching of *The Clear Word*—the Adventist paraphrase of the Bible written by former chairman of the theology department at Southern Adventist University, Jack Blanco—with what the Bible says about hell.

WHAT IS HELL?

Throughout the Old Testament the word indicating the abode of the dead, death, and the grave, is sheol. Blanco fairly consistently and properly interprets sheol as “the grave” in his Old Testament passages. Our primary concern, however, is with the word “hell” and its use in the New Testament, so this article will focus on the New Testament occurrences of hell.

Adventism says that death is a time of sleep or unconsciousness, but when we examine its doctrine closely, we find that it really teaches that the dead do not exist. The spirit (interpreted by Adventism as “breath”) returns to God, and the body returns to dust. Within the Adventist paradigm, when the body ceases to breathe, the person, or soul, dies. Thus, there is no immaterial part of the person that exists after death. This doctrine that denies the existence of a person’s soul after death negates any belief in a place of torment for the souls or spirits of the wicked dead.

Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus, however, demonstrates that the dead do not cease to exist, and there is a place of torment for the wicked dead. Here is a passage from this parable recorded in Luke 16:24-26:

And he [the rich man] called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”

Adventists dismiss this story as revealing anything about the state of death by saying, “It’s just a parable.” They limit this story to an illustration about the fickleness of wealth and social classism.

To be sure, this story is a parable, but Jesus would never use an untruth about the nature of God, man, or reality to teach a truth. While this story is clearly a parable, the reality of conscious existence after death is the framework on which Jesus built His illustration.

Interestingly, Blanco has actually used the word “hell” in verse 26 of *The Clear Word* (TCW) even though it does not occur in standard translations. This insertion is unusual, as we will see, because Blanco often changes the word “hell” where it does occur in the New Testament. In TCW, therefore, Luke 16:26 states:

Besides there’s a great distance between heaven and hell, so no one from here can go down there nor can anyone from there come up here.

COMPARISONS

Since Jesus taught more about hell than any other person, it is important for us to understand what He and also His apostles said about it. The New Testament teaching of this doctrine, therefore, is crucial for us to understand and to take seriously. Understanding that Adventism teaches an unbiblical view of death prepares us to expect that *The Clear Word* will distort the teaching of the biblical doctrine of hell. Following, therefore, are comparisons of 14 New Testament uses of the word “hell” with the same passages in *The Clear Word* (TCW), *The Easy English Clear Word* (TEECW), and *The Clear Word for Kids* (TCWK) renderings of the same passages.

Matthew 5:22

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Don’t be angry and hate people. Don’t even look down on others and call them names. If you do, how can God give you eternal life?

The Clear Word

But I’m telling you that even if you don’t kill, but you hate someone so much that if you had the opportunity you would kill him, you’ll be held responsible by the heavenly court the same as if you had committed murder. To go a step further, if you treat someone with contempt because you think you’re better than he is, you’re in danger of losing eternal life.

English Standard Version

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire.

In his paraphrasing of Mathew 5:22, Blanco is inconsistent in identifying the sin that he says threatens eternal life. In the TEECW and TCWK he states that being angry, hating, and calling someone names may prevent one from receiving eternal life, but in TCW the eternally fatal behavior is hating someone so much that one would kill if given the opportunity, or treating someone with “contempt” and thinking one is “better than he is”. The ESV, however, links being angry with someone with insulting him and defaming his character. Jesus says these reactions are as indicting as murder and make one liable to “the hell of fire”.

Even more significantly, Blanco has completely avoided using the words “hell of fire”—or even simply “hell”—replacing “hell” with the “danger of losing eternal life”. This change in wording eliminates the idea of eternal punishment and even of the wicked suffering in the fires of hell. In short, Blanco’s edits support the Adventist idea of annihilation.

Matthew 5:29-30

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Be willing to lose an eye rather than to sin. God can restore your eye, but if you really don’t want to stop sinning, God can’t take you to heaven. It is better to lose a hand than to continue sinning and lose heaven.

The Clear Word

If there’s anything that keeps leading you into sin, you need to get rid of it, even if it’s as valuable to you as one of your eyes. It’s better to go without an eye than to go on sinning and lose eternal life. Even if you had to lose your right hand, it would be better to lose it here than to lose out on heaven later.

English Standard Version

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Again Blanco eliminates the word “hell” in this passage and substitutes it with “lose heaven”. Even though Adventism does teach a temporary “hell”, it is better for Adventist readers to avoid the word entirely because the word implies people being tormented for their sins. Blanco knows that his paraphrase needs to support the Adventist doctrine of annihilation at the end of all things, so he avoids “hell” altogether.

In the next comparison we are including a third version by Blanco, a stand-alone paraphrase of the New Testament, *The New Testament, A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth*. We will see that Blanco has found three different ways to avoid the Matthew 10:28 assertion that God can destroy people in hell.

Matthew 10:28

The New Testament, A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth

Don’t be afraid you might be killed. They can kill your body but not your spirit or your loyalty to me. Now, if there is something to be concerned about, it’s that you don’t lose your confidence in God.

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Even if some people threaten to kill you, don’t be afraid. They can’t take away your eternal life. Only God has the power to give eternal life or to take it away.

The Clear Word

Don’t fear that you might be killed. They may kill your body, but they cannot take away your eternal life. God is the only One who has power over eternal life and death.

English Standard Version

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Blanco must have had a difficult time with these paraphrases. First, notice that in *The New Testament Devotional Paraphrase*, Blanco includes the word “spirit” instead of “soul” and states that it can’t be killed. In Adventism, one’s spirit is literally the breath in one’s lungs. Breath, of course, cannot be killed. Moreover, in Adventism, a “soul” is a body that has breath, not an immaterial part of man. This distinction between “spirit” and “soul”, however, is not explained but is assumed. Blanco’s Adventist readers will understand what he means. Also note his use of one’s “loyalty to me” which cannot be taken away, while one must be concerned about his “confidence in God” which he can lose. There is no hint of these concerns in the ESV.

In this verse, the ESV distinguishes between body and soul, but in Adventism a body and soul cannot be separated because a breathing body constitutes a soul. Consequently, Blanco eliminates the word “soul” in all of his versions and removes the clear statement that the soul lives on after the body is killed. Instead, he vaguely states that no human can take away another’s “eternal life”. This idea makes life, both temporal and eternal, related to the body and not to an immaterial soul or spirit.

Further, Blanco removes any hint that God destroys people, “soul and body”, in hell. Adventism teaches that if people are lost and annihilated in the fire of God at the end of time, they themselves have chosen that fate. Satan destroys, Adventists say, not God. Blanco, therefore, removes the word “destroys” and simply gives God “authority” over eternal life and death and once again removes the loaded word “hell”. Moreover, the fear of God is not placed in any of the versions of *The Clear Word*. Clearly, however, the Bible teaches that we are to fear Him who can cast both body and soul into hell.

Matthew 16:18

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

But don’t feel proud. You are only a little rolling stone. It’s on His Son, the Rock, that God will build His church. The forces of evil will go against it, but they will not win.

The Clear Word

But don't become overconfident. You're just a small rock, as your name indicates. However, the Rock on which I will build my church is the truth that was just revealed to you. The gates of wickedness and death will not be able to stand against it.

English Standard Version

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Blanco attempts to avoid the Catholic argument that Peter was the first Pope because Jesus identified him as the rock on which He would build His church. In fact, the name Peter is *petros*, or a loose stone. The word underlying the "rock" on which Jesus would build His church is *petra*, or "bedrock". Commentators have suggested several different interpretations of this difficult passage, but the idea of Peter being the "bedrock" upon which Christ built His church and becoming its first "pope" is clearly not suggested in this verse.

To avoid the Catholic conclusion, Blanco completely changes the meaning of the verse and makes Jesus' words a reproof and a warning to Peter against pride. Furthermore, Blanco again eliminates the word "hell". The Greek word *Hades* underlies the word "hell", and its multiple definitions include the place of the departed spirits. The connotation of this word in context suggests that the powers of death—of all the forces that oppose God—cannot prevail against the church. Using the word "hell" here accurately portrays the meaning: the gates of the place where all the wicked will be punished will not prevail against the church. The term "hell" when used Biblically can give a powerful message, but Blanco carefully avoided the implications of the text of this verse.

Matthew 18:9

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

If your eyes keep looking at things you shouldn't, do whatever is necessary to overcome evil. Think about loving God and being with Him. You don't want to die forever, as the wicked will.

The Clear Word

If, for example, your eye causes you to sin, be willing to lose your eye if necessary rather than to lose out on heaven. If you must make a choice, it's better to forego greatness in this life than to be consumed by the fire of God's judgment.

English Standard Version

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

First, Blanco eviscerates the hyperbole Jesus used of tearing out an offending eye and throwing it away rather than being thrown into hell. If we were reading this passage in a book of secular literature, we would immediately recognize it as a figure of speech intended to emphasize the importance of refusing to accommodate persistent sin in our lives. Blanco removed the hyperbolic power of

BLANCO'S CHANGE OF THIS PASSAGE FROM ONE THAT TEACHES ETERNAL TORMENT TO A STATEMENT OF DESTRUCTION IS ONE OF HIS MOST BLATANT CHANGES OF SCRIPTURE. BY ALTERING THESE WORDS, BLANCO CHANGES THE NATURE OF ETERNAL HELL INTO SOMETHING THAT IS MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE FOR AN ADVENTIST AUDIENCE AND FOR OTHERS WHO HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME BELIEVING IN ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

Jesus' words. In the TEECW/TCWK version, he made a moral lesson and challenged children to motivate themselves to overcome their sin. In TCW Blanco morphs the motivation and makes a case for choosing to debase oneself rather than insisting on greatness.

Next Blanco again eliminates the word "hell". Furthermore, he makes a point to refer to dying "forever" and to being "consumed" by the fire of judgment. Very deliberately Blanco washes the reference to eternal punishment out of this passage and reinforces the Adventist doctrine of annihilation.

Matthew 23:15

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

You tell people to sell their houses and give all they have to the Temple so you can use it. You're willing to do anything to have someone accept your beliefs. But you teach him to be more like you than like God.

The Clear Word

You will go to any length to convert one person, both here and abroad, but after that person is converted, he's twice as unfit for heaven than before, because of what you taught him.

English Standard Version

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

In this example the verse from TEECW/TCWK is different in meaning from *The Clear Word*, let alone from the ESV. Rather than making the proselyte “a child of hell”, Blanco has the Pharisees teaching them to be “more like you than like God.” Although this accusation may be true, it is not what the Scripture states. In TCW Blanco merely refers to “what you taught him,” but he changes “twice as much a child of hell” to “twice as unfit for heaven.” Once again Blanco negates the seriousness of Jesus’ words and removes His judgment against the unbelieving Jews for their deception and false teaching. Blanco not only eliminates the reference to hell, but he also downplays the Jews’ offense and eliminates the truth about God’s judgment of sin.

Matthew 23:33

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

You’re very shrewd. How can you expect God to approve what you’re doing?

The Clear Word

You’re as slippery as snakes. How do you expect to receive anything except total annihilation?

English Standard Version

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Here TEECW/TCWK is timid, calling the Pharisees “shrewd,” and ending with God’s simply not approving what they’re doing. In *The Clear Word* Blanco introduces a simile—“slippery as snakes”—and becomes explicit with the Adventist doctrine of annihilation. Not receiving God’s approval and being sentenced to hell, however, are not equivalent in any way. Children and those learning English as a second language are not receiving the full impact of Jesus’ words, while the readers of TCW are being reinforced in their belief in annihilation. In reality, Jesus uses an image of deception and calls the Pharisees vipers. He clearly says they will not escape being condemned to hell, but Blanco utterly eliminates this serious judgment and the message to all who pervert God’s word and deceive the unsuspecting.

Mark 9:43, 45, 47

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

If your hand, foot, or eye causes you to lose your faith or leads you into sin, it would be better to be without a hand, foot, or eye than to lose heaven and die forever.

The Clear Word

You must be willing to sacrifice anything that would take you away from me, even something as valuable as your right arm. It is better to be physically handicapped and be in the kingdom of God than to go through life physically whole only to lose eternal life and be consumed in the lake of fire. Anything that holds you back spiritually needs to be removed. If you have to sever your foot to keep from straying away from God, do so. Why go through life striving to be a great success if it means sacrificing eternal life for the fires of hell? Whatever perverts your spiritual vision, get rid of it. It’s better

to lose an eye, if you have to, and be in God’s kingdom than to be praised by men and be thrown into the lake of fire.

English Standard Version

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.

TEECW/TCWK has condensed five verses, 43-47, into the brief statement shown above. Significantly, “unquenchable fire” in verse 43 is changed to “die forever”—a change which loses the impact of Jesus’ reference to eternal punishment. In TCW, however, Blanco has the wicked being consumed in the lake of fire in verse 43. He cannot use the term “unquenchable”, however, because it would contradict the Adventist belief in annihilation of the wicked.

Interestingly, however, we finally find Blanco using the term “the fires of hell” in verse 45 of TCW. In the context of his paraphrase, though, there is no sense of these fires being eternal. Moreover, Blanco once again destroys the hyperbole Jesus used when He says to cut off offending body parts if they cause one to sin. Blanco “spiritualizes” the text and makes a moral lesson about eliminating whatever “perverts your spiritual vision.” He also uses the idea of perverted spiritual vision and being praised by men as the antithesis of being in “God’s kingdom”.

In context, however, Jesus is warning against sinning against other believers. This warning about cutting off hands and feet if they cause one to sin immediately follows His statement that whoever causes a little one to stumble would be better off thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck. Jesus is warning against hurting and deceiving others and against persistent sin, and He recommends radical measures to remove sin from one’s life. Blanco weakens the pointed warnings, morphs the concern into one of being praised by men, and eliminates the references to eternal punishment.

Luke 12:5

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Only God has the power to destroy forever. He’s the one you should respect.

The Clear Word

The only One to stand in awe of is God, who can not only destroy your body but also has the power to destroy you in the lake of fire. He is the One to fear.

English Standard Version

But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

Blanco does two things in this verse. First, he softens the word “fear”, although in the kids’ version he eliminates “fear” altogether. Most Adventists learn that the texts that ask us to fear God really

mean we are to hold Him in awe. God, however, should be feared by those who do not know Jesus. He is the sovereign Power in the universe and holds life and death in His hands.

Second, Blanco again avoids using the term “hell”. He is comfortable, however, using the term “lake of fire” because in Adventist thought, this phrase carries with it the idea of annihilation. The belief in annihilation shapes Blanco’s phrase “the power to destroy” in both versions.

James 3:6

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

A tongue is a flame of fire. It can ruin a person’s life as if his body had been set on fire by Satan himself.

The Clear Word

The tongue is just like that. It can inflame emotions and create a world of evil. It can poison the whole body and set a person’s whole life on fire, as if it had been done by the devil himself.

English Standard Version

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

In this verse, Blanco again modifies the power of the biblical metaphor. The Bible actually says the tongue is “a world of unrighteousness”. Blanco says it can create a world of evil. This shift from identity to creation removes the unrighteousness from the tongue of the person and puts it outside the person as something his tongue happened to do. James puts the fire and the unrighteousness in the body—the tongue—of the person as a natural part of the human inheritance. This wording supports the biblical teaching that we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Moreover, Blanco removes the reference to the “fire of hell” and says the destruction one’s tongue can cause is like a fire caused by Satan himself.

This wording changes the meaning of the metaphor. “Hell” is God’s judgment and punishment of the wicked. It is not caused or powered by Satan; it is God’s own wrath against sin that creates hell. By saying that an unrighteous tongue destroys one’s life as if with fire caused by Satan, Blanco gives Satan illegitimate power. Satan is not the cause of nor responsible for the destructive power of hell. God is. The actual passage from James makes it clear that an unrighteous tongue creates destruction in one’s life that is related to the destruction of hell—a destruction that is God’s judgment on sin.

Finally, “hell” and “the devil himself” are not equivalent. One is a place and a condition of judgment, while the other is an evil being. Again, removing hell eliminates the echoes of “eternal burning” and the connection between one’s natural sin and the fires of hell.

2 Peter 2:4

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

If angels who sinned were put out of heaven, it’s only a matter of time before false teachers will also be punished.

The Clear Word

If God didn’t spare the angels who had sinned but had to put them out of heaven to remain in darkness until they are judged, it’s only a matter of time before these false teachers will have to face the consequences of what they have done.

English Standard Version

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ...

In this passage Blanco adds content to the verse. The Bible says nothing in verse 4 about the false teachers being punished. Moreover, Blanco removes the certainty that the sinful angels are already being judged as they wait for “the judgment”. The ESV states that God “cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness”, and there they are kept until Judgment Day.

Blanco also removes the reference to hell and chains. In TEECW/TCWK he only states that the sinful angels were “put out of heaven”; in TCW he says they are remaining in darkness “until they are judged”. Blanco is being true to Adventism in this alteration, however; in the great controversy paradigm, no creation is cast into the lake of fire until the end of the investigative judgment. Blanco cleverly omits this biblical proof that God is already keeping some angels bound in hell until the day of judgment.

Revelation 19:20

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

But the sea beast and land animal that had turned false prophet were both captured. They were thrown into a lake of fire and destroyed.

The Clear Word

But the sea beast and the animal turned false prophet were taken prisoner. This is the false prophet who had worked miracles to deceive people and had forced them to worship the sea beast and to receive its mark. Both of them were engulfed by a lake of fire and destroyed.

English Standard Version

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

In this verse Blanco states that the beast and the false prophet were thrown into “a lake of fire” and destroyed. There is nothing in Scripture, however, that indicates that they are destroyed by this lake of fire. They are thrown in alive. Moreover, Revelation 20:9-10 make it clear that the lake of fire did not consume the beast and the false prophet:

“And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had de-

ceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

The passage in Revelation 20 is set after the millennium, 1000 years after the passage in Revelation 19 where the beast and the false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire. A millennium later, they are still there and will be tormented with Satan forever and ever.

Revelation 19:20

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

All of them will be destroyed, including Satan and his angels. This is called the second death. That death will last forever.

The Clear Word

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and consumed together with the sea beast, the land animal, and all the wicked. Their destruction will be forever and ever.

English Standard Version

and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

In this passage Blanco has eliminated the concept of “torment” and inserted the clear statement of the eternal destruction of the wicked. This change accommodates the Adventist doctrine of annihilation. Scripture, however, tells us that the wicked will be tormented “day and night forever and ever.” Blanco’s change of this passage from one that teaches eternal torment to a statement of destruction is one of his most blatant changes of Scripture. By altering these words, Blanco changes the nature of eternal hell into something that is much more comfortable for an Adventist audience and for others who have a difficult time believing in eternal punishment.

Revelation 20:14-15

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

That’s when I saw Satan, together with all those whose names were not written in the Book of Life, thrown into the lake of fire and totally destroyed. This is called the second death.



Stephen Pitcher became a Christian at age 17 through the ministry of Young Life and was baptized in a Baptist church. He later converted to Adventism which he left after 18 years. He currently attends Redeemer Fellowship in Loma Linda, California. He continues a 40-year study of cults, world religions, and the occult from his home in Yucaipa, California.

The Clear Word

Then I saw death and the grave thrown into a lake of fire. This is called the second and final death. Anyone whose name was not recorded in the Book of Life was consumed by this same fire.

English Standard Version

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

TEECW/TCWK fails to say that death and the grave, or *Hades*, were thrown into the lake of fire. *The Clear Word* in this instance is closer to Scripture than are the simplified versions. However, both of Blanco’s paraphrases state that the lost are consumed or destroyed by this fire. He adds to the passage the concept of destruction instead of using the Scriptural words: the wicked, death, and *Hades* are thrown into the lake of fire.

CONCLUSION

Seventh-day Adventism does not teach the biblical doctrine of hell. It teaches that the wicked dead are “asleep” (actually non-existent) as are the righteous dead. Further, Adventism teaches that the wicked dead will be resurrected to face the lake of fire where they will be totally annihilated, never to exist again. Jack Blanco has altered the New Testament passages about hell to make them consistent with Adventist theology. In other words, he has made the passages more comfortable for an Adventist audience.

When Adventists read *The Clear Word*, they will not find its words to be challenging or puzzling as the Bible would be. Revelation 20:10, for example, is difficult but clear: “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Blanco has “fixed” this passage in his paraphrases so it will be familiar for Adventists rather than jolting them into searching the Scriptures to see if their beliefs are true or not.

Blanco will stand one day facing the judgment of the words of Scripture. The large audience that uses *The Clear Word* in one or more of its editions as a study aid are learning Adventist doctrine from its pages. Moreover, they are being confirmed in their belief that Adventism is the only belief system that is true to the Bible. The words of James 3:1 reveal that those who teach, as Blanco does through his *Clear Word* paraphrase, are judged with greater strictness:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Finally, Revelation 22:18-19 clearly states the outcome for those who tamper with God’s word:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The Clear Word is not a Bible. Adventists need to know that reading this book will not teach them God’s word. Instead, it will confirm the unbiblical doctrines of Adventism. †



others, the word “embodied”, however, overstates how these great principles are illustrated through the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, the Ten Commandments do describe behaviors that are consistent with loving God and others, and love is exemplified in Christ. Therefore, I see little reason to make an issue of the opening statement.

They [the Ten Commandments] express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age.

This sentence both introduces speculation and contradicts Scripture. Deuteronomy 5:1-3, for example, tells us that the Ten Commandments were given specifically to Israel at the time of the Exodus, and specifically not to the generations before: “Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: ‘Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.’”

ADVENTISM’S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #19:

THE LAW OF GOD DISTORTED

ADVENTISM’S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #19

The great principles of God’s law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the standard in God’s judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Savior. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness.

COMMENTS ABOUT THE BELIEF STATEMENT

I will examine this fundamental belief point by point to determine which statements can be supported biblically and which are built on speculation, assumptions, and Ellen White’s interpretations.

The great principles of God’s law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ.

While some people may disagree with the underlying Adventist implications of this sentence, on the surface the words sound good. While the great principles of God’s law are loving God and loving

Paul also makes clear that the law was given specifically to the nation of Israel. First, Romans 5:12-13 says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.”

Next, Paul clarifies that there was a time before the law—the time from Adam until the time Moses received the law: “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

Paul repeats this statement of timing in Galatians 3:17: “What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later [after God’s covenant with Abraham], does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”

Furthermore, the law was not binding on all people for all ages. We have seen there was a time before the law and people before the law. Moreover, Paul shows us in Romans 2:12 that, even after the giving of the law, not all people have been “under the law”: “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.”

Thus, without even approaching the question of whether the law continues as a binding requirement on believers, we have already seen that the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #19 makes claims that are at odds with Scripture. CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

These precepts (the Ten Commandments) are the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the standard in God’s judgment.

This claim was true of Israel’s covenant with God, but it is not true of His covenant with Abraham, into which believers are ushered. Again I turn to Paul’s explanation in Galatians 3:15-18:

“Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.”

Adventist fundamental belief #19 directly contradicts this text. According to the Adventist church, the Law is “the basis for God’s covenant” while Scripture plainly states that the Abrahamic covenant, which is fulfilled in the new covenant, is based on a promise and not on the law. This is the second direct contradiction to Scripture in this belief statement.

Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they [the principles of the law] point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour.

This claim is consistent with Paul’s description in Galatians 3:23-24, that before faith came, the law was a tutor to lead us to Christ.

Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments.

In this belief statement, Adventism talks out of both sides of its mouth. This sentence says salvation is all of grace, but an earlier sentence described the law as the basis for God’s judgment. Even here they contradict that salvation is “all of grace” by adding obedience to the law as necessary “fruit”.

The earlier claim that the principles embodied in the Ten Commandments is the basis for God’s judgment is misleading. In fact, God’s law, both written Scripture and nature’s revelation, condemns all mankind (Rom. 1:18–3:9). The law judges that “None is righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10), and “All have sinned and fall short” (Rom 3:23). It reveals our natural state of condemnation, but it is not the standard determining our salvation.

Adventism most seriously misunderstands the Law in its relationship to salvation. Salvation is accomplished “apart from the Law” (Rom 3:21, 28). Believers are not judged by the law. Believers have already passed from death to life (1 Jn. 3:14; see also Jn. 3:14-18 and Jn. 5:24) based on faith alone in Christ’s completed atonement for sin.

This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being.

This statement is typical of the Adventist focus on the person and his works. In contrast, Scripture teaches that Christian “character” is the result of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer and producing fruit, not the result of obedience to the law (see Gal. 3:1-5 again). Furthermore, our sense of well-being isn’t based on behavior because our obedience is never adequate. Rather, our

sense of well-being comes from knowing that we have been adopted as children of God just as we are (Eph 1:5, 13-14; Rom 8:14-17).

It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human being.

Here Adventists have turned the commands to believers to love God and others—the truly eternal principles—on their heads. Now the Ten Commandments become the litmus tests of that love, when in fact these commandments do not begin to encompass the demands for true love. Furthermore, this statement ignores the obvious questions: who is examining this evidence of obedience, and why is this evidence needed? Adventism’s investigative judgment doctrine teaches that obedience to the law is evidence God needs to determine our salvation, and unfallen beings need it to judge between God’s and Satan’s truthfulness. The Bible teaches, however, that our obedience to the Lord’s commands to love one another selflessly is evidence to those around us that we are His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). The difference between obedience to the 10 Commandments and obedience to Jesus’ new commandment that we love one another cannot be overstated.

The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness.

Adventism has misused the phrase “obedience of faith”. Nowhere does Scripture describe obedience to the law as an “obedience of faith”. Instead, Scripture refers to believing in Christ. For example, in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 Paul uses “obedience of faith” to denote people’s conversion to believing in Christ when they learn the gospel of Jesus’ finished work for the forgiveness of sins. (See also Acts 6:7.) This phrase does not refer to keeping the law.

In summary, the Law is good, but only when it is used properly (1 Tim 1:8-10). Belief statement #19 reveals some of the ways in which the Adventist church is misusing God’s Law, particularly as it relates to our salvation and our covenant relationship with God. Adventists will often claim to believe in salvation by faith but strategically omit their simultaneous belief that sincerity of faith is determined and revealed by obedience to the law. This “hidden” belief means obedience to the law becomes a prerequisite of the faith that saves; in other words, Adventist doctrine insists that there is no salvation apart from the law. This belief is the polar opposite of biblical salvation that is based on a promise—that through faith we are counted as having a righteousness that is not our own and is apart from the law. †

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.



Enjoying Hebrew Roots article

I consider myself to be a former Adventist after 25 years of being one. I discovered for myself (towards the end of my Adventist experience) that living a grace-filled, Christ-filled life doesn't work too well under a system of law and works.

I wanted also to let you know how much I enjoyed reading the recent issue of *Proclamation!* with Dale Ratzlaff's article on the Hebrew Roots Movement. I found it to be very insightful. I have found out for myself that any religious group that has even one teaching that leans towards some form of Judaism (such as keeping the Sabbath, tithing, state of the dead, requiring the use of "Jehovah" when referring to God, denying the concept of the Trinity, the food laws, and so forth) has one foot already into the Hebrew Roots Movement. I wasn't too surprised in seeing the Jehovah's Witnesses being included among those who are vulnerable to the Hebrew Roots Movement. I've been taking my time in reading that article because there is so much information there that needs to be processed slowly in order to completely understand it. I think a lot of people may even be quite surprised to see that the Jehovah's Witnesses have

strong inclinations towards the HRM.

Thanks for everything.
SOUTH DAYTONA, FL

Praying for Adventists

I appreciate your magazine very much and your mission to help Adventists see that they are in bondage to a teaching that Jesus never would have taught. Keep up the good work.

I recently attended a small country fair on a Saturday where I

and freedom for which Jesus died. Also, they try to enslave others [while trying to present themselves as] just "regular Christians". I will keep praying for these people to be set free. Amen.

Thank you for all you do!
WHITMORE, CA

Jonah: also a false prophet

I feel compelled to respond to Colleen Tinker's logic regarding Ellen White and the disappointment.

I APPRECIATE YOUR MAGAZINE VERY MUCH AND YOUR MISSION TO HELP ADVENTISTS SEE THAT THEY ARE IN BONDAGE TO A TEACHING THAT JESUS NEVER WOULD HAVE TAUGHT.

observed a booth with the huge banner "Sabbath Keepers" blazoned across the front. Apparently they were a Seventh-day Adventist motorcycle group. I thought, how ironic to want to enslave people to the bondage of "Sabbath keeping" while they themselves couldn't even begin to "keep" the Sabbath. First of all, they paid someone to rent the booth space. Second, they labored and toiled to set up the booth. And to top it off, this all was done on the supposed "Sabbath Day", Saturday! I don't mean to sound like I am mocking them, but I did pray for them to see the futility of this teaching—not even one of us can "keep the Sabbath". Honoring God to the best of our ability, on any specific day (or every day) is awesome, but to think that we are "keeping the true Sabbath" even minutely is delusional. Jesus set us free from this kind of striving. He Himself was mocked by the Pharisees for "not keeping the Sabbath". He came to show us a new and better way—He being the fulfillment of the law! Praise the Lord!

The sad thing is that people enmeshed in Adventist teaching have completely missed out on the joy

"purposely" misled the people of Ninevah by the preaching of Jonah to believe that the city would be overthrown. Jonah himself was angry and miserable because God did not do what He said He would do to the Ninevites. However, a great reformation occurred, and Ninevah survived for years afterwards.

Therefore, it is a shame that Colleen must now realize that Jonah was a false prophet as well.
NORTH FORK, CA

Editor's response: Because Adventists have begun to use Jonah as an argument that God does "trick" people into repenting, thus normalizing Ellen White's claims that God concealed William Miller's wrong date so that people would get ready for Jesus to come, we will print our response to this letter.

God sent Jonah to warn Ninevah that He was about to judge them for their persistent unbelief. When they did believe, there was no longer a need to judge them by death. The message was clear; they had displeased God, and they were to be destroyed. Had Ninevah not repented, they would have been destroyed. This message was not a trick; it was clearly a warning of the inevitable consequences of Ninevah's habitual unbelief. When they heard the warning, they believed God and repented. God always honors belief in Him, just as Abraham in Genesis 15:6 believed

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

She states (paraphrasing) that she can't believe in Ellen White because she said it was God's will [that William Miller set a date for Jesus' return], and God purposely misled the Millerites so they would get ready for the next date: 1844. She goes on to say it was at this point that she had to call Ellen White a false prophet, because God does not do such things. (See editorial, Spring, 2016.)

I would like to refer Colleen Tinker to the book of Jonah. In that book it is rather clear that God

DISCOVERING GRACE

ONE WEEK OF TEACHING AND TESTIMONIES CELEBRATING THE DISCOVERY OF GRACE



OCTOBER 18, 7:00 PM

"THE TRUTH LED ME OUT OF ADVENTISM"

DALE RATZLAFF, FORMER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PASTOR, FOUNDER OF LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES

OTHER SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

DR. DAVE ANDERSON, DR. CHARLIE BING, MICHAEL AND LYNN WILDER, AND ADAM'S ROAD IN CONCERT

DAILY MEETINGS ON OCTOBER 16–23, 2016

NEW BRAUNFELS BIBLE CHURCH • 652 LOOP 337, NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS

God, and that belief was counted to him as righteousness.

As for Jonah, he was not tricked, either. He knew God was gracious and merciful and would not punish true belief. He was, however, self-centered and complaining, not wanting God to be gracious to these historically oppressive gentiles. He was feeling imposed-upon because God had sent him to Ninevah to proclaim the truth to his nation's enemies, and God dealt with Jonah's hard heart in the process. Moreover, Jonah did not deliver a false message. His message was true and was from God; God consistently used prophets throughout the Old Testament to call His people (and in this case gentiles) from their wicked ways to avoid His judgment. This message of judgment was quite unlike Ellen's explanation that God hid Miller's mistake.

There was no misleading that went on in the story of Jonah. Jonah delivered God's message that was 100% true for the Ninivites at that time. Their repentance was an honor to God, and His saving them was a testimony to His compassion. There was absolutely no trickery or face-saving that went on there.

As for William Miller, his date-setting did not come from God. He used Old Testament dates and figured out a confusing 15-step "proof" for his belief that Jesus would return in 1843. He did not credit God with this insight. It was EGW who said the date was from God. Moreover, when Miller realized his calculations had been "off" and re-set the date for 1844, he clearly accepted the responsibility and did not blame God for the error. It was EGW who made the

mistake God's. She declared that God hid Miller's wrong date so people would get ready for the right date...and the "right" date also turned out to be wrong.

Ellen's declarations about God's intentions and trickery and actions were hers alone, not William Miller's. She defended a charlatan by claiming authority from God. There is absolutely no comparison between her and Jonah.

Finally, Ellen defended a man's calculations, claiming authority from God to do so. Jonah did not

deliver a man's message; he (reluctantly) delivered God's own word to a perishing people.

Pidgin Clear Word in Papua

I am a Baptist Missionary (independent) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). I also have an uncle who became a Seventh-day Adventist pastor after marrying an Adventist woman in college.

Since moving to a remote area of PNG, I have found a large group of families here that have been influenced by Ellen G. White (EGW). There is also an Adventist congregation and church building. I started learning some of their doctrines and was quite shocked. I thought, "Surely these are only the beliefs of these poor, uneducated people," and I appealed to my Adventist uncle to help me set them straight.

After contacting him, I was dumbfounded. These Adventists in the bush of New Guinea were in one accord with Adventist doctrines world wide. They even have a Pidgin (Tok Pisin language) *Clear Word Bible*. As I emailed my uncle, using the Bible to reply to his arguments, he refused to answer or outright ignored some of my questions. After a while, he stopped replying.

This year I started to research more about the doctrines of Adventism, and in May, 2016, I found

in the Holy Place after Jesus is no longer there. I cannot believe how supposedly intelligent people can be so deceived and follow the teachings of the religious world. All the world shall be deceived except a small remnant group who follow all of God's teachings all the way. You will do anything to avoid persecution like our Lord had. Everybody that I have written to that is a former Adventist is usually cocky, negative, self-righteous, fault finding, and criticizing without a glimmer of genuine love. What terrible deception. Wake up and know God's word.

VIA EMAIL

Pitched into the lake of fire

Too bad that you people are going to be pitched into the lake of fire one day soon!! Angels of God are making up the crown to be placed on the heads of the true, the frank, and the honest. Angels of God will pick you up and throw you into the fire because Jesus is going to tell you to depart from Him, because He never knew you.

Repent and do your first works!

You people spend so much time hating the truth that you actually remind people like me of the real truth that I learned as a child. So, thanks! I am going to repent and do the first works and I wish to be among the real Seventh-day Adventists who will be in heaven with the true Son of God along with Ted Wilson, my long-ago friend from Blue Ridge Youth Camp.

Ms. Colleen—you are the one who will suffer the burning the most because you are the one who seems to be the leader of this sad "movement" against real true Adventists. I want to be so real to Jesus that when He sees me He will hold me to His chest and cuddle me. I ask Him if I may have the honor to give Him the grapes one day when He can finally enjoy them once again with everyone.

I believe He will. He likes to give good gifts to His children. What an honor! And how did I think of that? The wooing of the

TOO BAD THAT YOU PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE PITCHED INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE ONE DAY SOON!!

Proclamation! online. It was amazing to find I had been using many of the same arguments with my uncle that you have been using to win your family and friends to Christ! I enjoy the stories of how the Holy Spirit has led so many out of bondage into His glorious light. May God continue to bless your ministry.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Complete garbage

I have read some of your material. Complete garbage. Love of Jesus is not ever mentioned. Everyone I read about is self righteous, claiming Jesus and His love, but rejecting His commandments and biblical truths. How does one love Jesus genuinely and at the same time reject His truths, His commandments, and His Sabbath (which will be in heaven for eternity)? Freedom outside the law of God yields the same results as Lucifer and His angels. If you reject His words here, your rejection will continue in heaven with the same spirit of rebellion that Satan had for God's truths.

Such deceived people! Those who will not enter into the final phase of God's plan to save, the Most Holy Place where Jesus has moved, are deceived by remaining

FORMER ADVENTIST CONFERENCE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 17–19, 2017
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

MORE DETAILS COMING!

save
the
date!

Spirit. You, too, can ask Him to break those chains that bind you.

Love Jesus. Don't be jealous of anyone. Believe on the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, and let them woo you. It will work. You will no longer hate or be on the wrong side.

Let the wooing begin now,
Sincere love to you,
ROUND HILL, VA

A life saver

Here is an appreciation gift for you to use wherever you deem necessary. I have benefited greatly from your ministry including books such as *Sabbath in Christ* and *White Washed* and the plethora of videos available on the Former Adventist YouTube channel. This is my way of saying thank you.

I was engaged to an Adventist girl until late July of 2015. I was already having doubts about their denomination several months prior to discovering the Youtube videos that disclosed their true purpose and identity. Watching Dale Ratzlaff's videos and others became a greater catalyst for our ending our relationship. What a life saver.

I still listen to much of Gary Inrig's teaching as well. Colossians, Galatians, and Judges have been truly insightful and helpful.

Please pray for me. After being thoroughly exposed to a religious cult, I now see the value in a book-by-book, verse-by-verse approach to God's word that I didn't see before.

Your brother and pupil,
CHATTANOOGA, TN

How do you sleep at night?

I was raised a Catholic with the doctrine of immortal souls burning in hell forever, which gave me nightmares of people suffering unimaginable pain with no hope of it's ever ending. With a God this cruel, I could not imagine bringing kids into this world so that they could have even the remotest chance of winding up there. Yet this is the doctrine loved by Sunday-keepers, especially Baptists and Pentecostals.

Learning the Bible truth about the state of the dead and God's justice in dealing with the wicked now allows me to sleep better. I'm so thankful for the Adventist faith. Perhaps you are really doing work for God in a sense, because a person who would choose the God of the Sunday churches [for that is where you send them] would be a poor example to the world of an Adventist Christian who is supposed to be a lover of the truth.

For example, a friend invited me to his Baptist church where the sermon was that the Ten Commandments were all done away with. Like Herod who killed all the children in Bethlehem to get rid of a certain holy one, our Sunday friends kill all of God's law to get rid of a certain holy day, and we all know which one that is.

While I may sleep well now, I don't know how you can.
SANDPOINT, ID

Legacy of Adventist trauma

I was raised a third-generation Adventist. I bought it all because I was raised in the subculture and spent 2 1/2 hours a day being bussed to Adventist school.

As a child I was in fear constantly but for some reason did not express myself and my needs to my folks. My busy parents did not explain how "the world was evil" or how I could ever feel safe knowing that Jesus was available by prayer.

The thought of the time of Jacob's trouble without our having a mediator terrified me! The doctrines did little to help me understand love, friendship, or life.

I was shy and compliant. I tried hard to memorize and do the Sabbath rules and was proud not

to associate with non-Adventists. Now I see that behavior was so unbiblical. The twists of thinking really harmed the gospel.

I left Adventism at 30 and have been in good Bible churches, but I found my childhood trauma led to clinical depression, and I lack a sense of being able to understand what happened to me as a child. Have others written about this and how they could find freedom?

I learned that Ellen White's claiming to be the Spirit of Prophecy is to claim the Holy Spirit's title!!

Trying to really sense God loves me is still hard; can you give me help from others who overcame and recovered to a joyful life?

I have been grateful to read *Proclamation!* many times. You have been courageous to oppose the church and have been gracious in words.

VIA EMAIL

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:

Editor, *Proclamation!* Magazine
P.O. Box 7776
Redlands, CA 92375
OR EMAIL EDITOR:
proclamation@gmail.com

To my fellow readers

I trust you're enjoying *Proclamation!* It always contains clear biblical truth and spiritual nourishment which sometimes surprises me and sometimes shows up in unexpected places, like even in the Letters to the Editor! I know for certain *Proclamation!* opened my eyes when I first began reading it about five years ago, and it continues to challenge me.

This publication takes much time, hard work, and research by our faithful team to produce this amazing magazine that points people to the Lord Jesus. Have you noticed it doesn't avoid the hard questions? As a part of the local Former Adventist Fellowship where many of the Life Assurance board members study Scripture together, I am blessed to be part of discussions where we wrestle with the Bible to find God's answers to the questions we all face.

They need your support and count on your financial participation! Please consider giving regular donations using the return envelope enclosed. Alternatively, my favorite way to donate is online using this link: LifeAssuranceMinistries.org, and then clicking the small "Online Donations" box on the top right corner of the page.

By donating to Life Assurance Ministries, we participate as His ambassadors to bring the truth of Jesus and the new covenant to our Adventist loved ones. Paul said it like this:

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

Charles Cochran



CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

PROCLAMATIONMAGAZINE.COM

THE LIFE A F T E R WITH CHRIS LEE

I hope you'll bear with me a moment as I get real. This column is dedicated to encouraging people in living the life after Adventism, but I acknowledge that life in this world is not always as it should be. There is pain, there is disappointment, and sometimes there is emptiness. If you can relate, read on.

It's Father's Day as I write this, and I have no one to call. I only met my biological father briefly before he passed away. My adoptive father revoked his parental privileges long ago—or, rather, I revoked them for the safety of my daughters. That's reality, and on days like this I'm aware of a hole in my heart.

Why do I bring up the subject here?

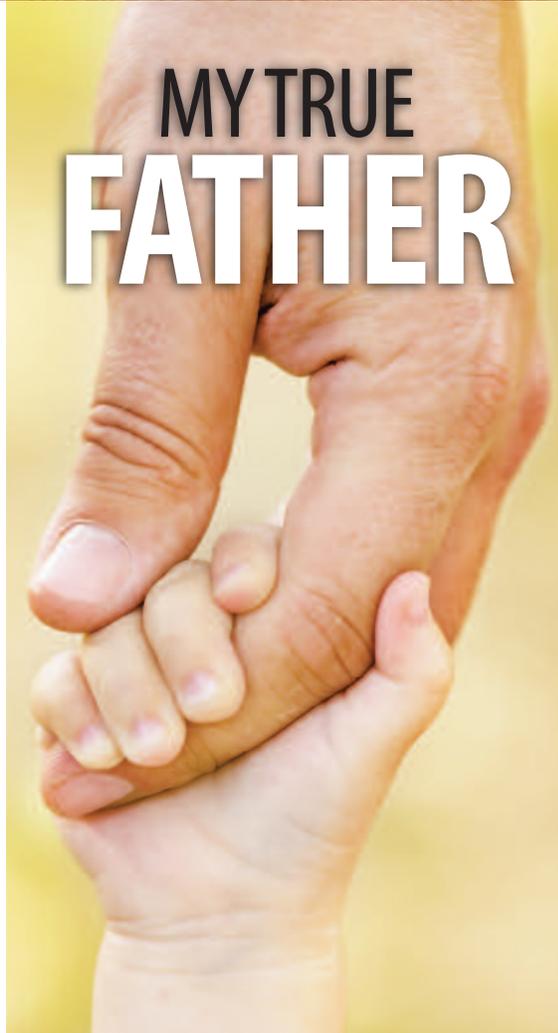
I get e-mail from readers suggesting that many people might identify with my painful childhood and family relations. In Adventism, however, I always felt pressure to present a perfect picture—and perhaps many readers also felt that pressure. But the Life After, life in the church, should be characterized by doing life together—by supporting, encouraging, and being honest with and praying for one another. So on this day, I've decided to share my struggles. Maybe you share some of them.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, God reveals Himself as our Father. This identity tells us something about how He relates to us and how we're to relate to Him. What if our histories with our earthly fathers, though, were marked by absenteeism or abuse? What then is our model for relating to God?

I've had to set aside my past experiences and focus on what God has taught me over the years about parenting. In fact, I've learned a lot through my distressingly many failures as a father. I've realized that God never fails, and that He is the



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.



perfection I wish to attain. He is the ultimate Father.

At the same time, God has given me some successes. When I see the two wonderful young adults my daughters have become, I see glimpses of God working in my life. Basically, when I contemplate the love I have for my daughters and think about the father I want to be to them, I have a small vision of who God truly is as my Father. Even though I don't have an earthly father, I thank God that He has allowed me to be one—and that He has fathered me.

So about that hole in my heart. I still have it—not just on Father's Day, but on most days, if I'm being totally honest. I choose to believe that God is sufficient to meet all my needs, but some days reality seems separated from my belief. On those days I remind myself that the pain we experience confronts us with our need for God and humbles us to depend fully on Him. It is in those moments of emptiness that we realize our brokenness, surrender to Him,

and allow Him to fill us up with His fullness. As with all else, I am imperfect in surrender, but how blessed it is when I surrender to His presence.

It's Father's Day, and I don't have anyone to call—not here, anyway—but I am calling on my true Father. I'm asking Him to reveal Himself to me, to show me what a real Father is, and to fill up that space in me that yearns for Him. I'm also calling on you to be real, to support those around you, to admit life is hard, and to engage with the collective Church—his born again, adopted children. It's time to start living the Life After. †

© DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM/PHOTO-DETI