

IN DEATH ARE WE **PRESENT WITH THE LORD?**

THE CLEAR WORD ON **FOOD**

# Proclamation!

ProclamationMagazine.com

FORMER ADVENTISTS

INQUIRING ADVENTISTS

SABBATARIANS

CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

SPRING 2017

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 1

## WHO CHANGED THE SABBATH?

# 2017





**RICHARD TINKER**

## WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE

**W**e are thankful to be able to mail this printed version of *Proclamation!* to you. As you may have already heard, Life Assurance Ministries (LAM) experienced a significant drop in donations during 2016—enough of a drop that we were only able to publish and mail three of our usual four issues of the magazine. As a consequence of the drop in income, the LAM board met at the end of January to pray and to make decisions for the future.

Interestingly, this drop in income does not reflect the demand for the magazine; we continue to receive new requests for *Proclamation!* Moreover, more and more people are finding our on-line resources.

HE HAS BEEN **COMPLETELY FAITHFUL** THROUGH EVERY CHANGE, EVERY CHALLENGE, AND EVERY NEED.

## Proclamation!

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MINISTRIES

Because the income has not been sufficient to plan for another year of our usual four magazines, the board voted some changes—many of which we believe you will enjoy. First, we are already implementing one of the new projects the board approved: a weekly *Proclamation!* email magazine. This weekly email magazine will be sent every Friday at noon, Pacific time. This timing will perhaps facilitate readers being able to peruse the articles during the Friday evening hours at the end of the work week.

The weekly magazine will include various articles by a variety of authors including the magazine's regular writers. It will also include a study written by Dale Ratzlaff which examines a book of the Bible, and there will usually be at least one article analyzing current Seventh-day Adventist news.

The articles contained in the email will be linked to the *Proclamation!* Blog site. We encourage you to subscribe to the blog so you will receive email notices whenever new material is uploaded there, and we also encourage you to sign in and respond to the articles in the "Comments" section below each piece.

### New projects voted by the board

1. Begin to produce a weekly *Proclamation!* to be emailed to those who have requested it. **DONE!** You can sign up here: [LifeAssuranceMinistries.org](http://LifeAssuranceMinistries.org) and click on the top left box that says "New! Weekly email update."

2. Update websites owned by Life Assurance Ministries. **IN PROCESS.**

3. Continue printing and mailing *Proclamation!* as funds allow. **NEXT ISSUE COMING SOON.**

4. Continue the annual Former Adventist Fellowship conference in Southern California. **DONE.**

5. Produce a live call-in internet radio show with various guests. **IN PROCESS.**

6. Produce an app that makes finding *Proclamation!* and video content easy. **IN PROCESS.**

### Conclusion

The LAM board as well as the staff and writers for *Proclamation!* praise God for His provision through all the years since the magazine was launched at the end of the year 2000. He has been completely faithful through every change, every challenge, and every need. Now, as the internet becomes an increasingly accessed venue for research and information, we are trusting God again as He directs us into new ways to share the gospel to those caught in the slavery of a false gospel and deceptive religion.

We ask that you join us in praying for God's direction and protection upon Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine. We ask that you share the weekly emails with those you think could benefit from them, and ask your friends to subscribe to them. We ask that you join us in praying for God's provision and for His opening doors for the gospel.

We thank God for each of you and pray that He will provide all that you need in Christ Jesus. He is faithful.

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as through seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Colossians 2:4–6). †

## RESPOND NOW

**You must respond to keep receiving your mailing of the printed version of *Proclamation!***

**SEE PAGE 30 FOR MORE INFORMATION.**



# WHY DON'T PEOPLE ACCEPT CLEAR TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE?

## Why do some people not accept the clear teaching of Scripture?

For example, when shown that the Holy Spirit is the seal believers receive at the moment of new birth, why do many continue to promote the Sabbath as either the seal of God or “the sign of the seal”?

## Their paradigm of theology

I believe the reason is that when confronted with clear, contextual, biblical teaching, they see it as not fitting their paradigm of theology. There is nothing wrong with forming a paradigm or system of theology as long as it is done from honest, Spirit-led Bible study. Further, one's paradigm of theology should be developed accepting the Protestant principles of the four “alones”: by Christ alone, through grace alone, by faith alone based on Scripture alone. Neither is there anything wrong with using one's paradigm of truth (when rightly formed) as a test of the interpretation of some part of Scripture.

For example, we at LAM would be very suspicious of an interpretation of Scripture that undermined the simple gospel of God's grace through Christ by faith.

The problem with most sects or cults is three-fold. First, the development of their paradigm of theology—the study of Scripture in its context—was defective. Often the context was ignored, and the people doing the study were not qualified with adequate linguistic and hermeneutical skills. One might also question their

THIS ADVENTIST PARADIGM IS SO TIGHTLY BOUND TOGETHER THAT IT FORCES A PERSON TO ACCEPT THE SYSTEM OR BREAK EVERY CORD THAT BINDS IT TOGETHER.

standing with God. Many in early Adventism did not believe in the eternal existence of Christ. Their writings demonstrate that their understanding of righteousness by faith was close to non-existent before 1888. Their efforts to cover up and deny past, erroneous teachings, such as the “shut door”, makes one wonder how the Holy Spirit could be guiding their conclusions.

Second, usually only a little bit of the Bible was studied and then used as a basis for their conclusions. They quickly built a system of theology and then—often in error—interpreted the rest of the Bible to fit the system, even if it did not. Early Adventists shortly after 1844 laid down the pillars of the Advent faith by following this pattern. For example, the three key doctrines that form the pillars of Adventist theology are the seventh-day Sabbath, the investigative judgment and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, and the prophetic authority of Ellen G. White.

A third problem that keeps their defective theology from being altered by continuing study is the acceptance of a modern-day

prophet who speaks with authority. If the prophet declares what a passage of Scripture means, then that interpretation stands. Ellen White has not only written with prophetic authority on many sections of Scripture, she has also set

Adventist's whole paradigm in stone linking the Sabbath, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment to the over-arching “great controversy” scheme.

This prophetic authority giving credence to poor biblical scholarship and unbiblical doctrines, I believe, is what makes it so hard for Adventists to accept what the Bible clearly teaches. It goes against their system of truth which was incorrectly formed but was validated by one who “speaks with prophetic authority”. This Adventist paradigm is so tightly bound together that it forces a person to accept the system or break every cord that binds it together.

It is not easy to change one's paradigm of truth. To do so we have to make a commitment to the authority of Scripture alone, lay aside the writings of Ellen White, and accept the simple gospel of God's grace in Christ. We accept Christ as God's final word.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb.1:1-3). †

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](http://Ratzlaff.com) or by phoning (928) 554-1001.







# IN AND OUT OF ADVENTISM

STEPHEN BAXTER

**W**hen I think about my faith story, I realize that in many ways, I have been blessed. I enjoyed growing up in the Adventist church. I had plenty of friends with whom I went to school and summer camp, and I even enjoyed church and Sabbath school.

My family, however, wasn't the "ideal" Adventist family. My mom became an Adventist by default as a young girl when her parents joined the Adventist organization in a small town in Maine. Going to the local high school kept her grounded, though, and she eventually married a local boy—my dad.

Dad was never an Adventist. In fact, if you asked him about God, he would reply, "Well...I believe in a higher power. If you want to call it God, that's OK with me, I suppose." As a result of my parents' dissimilar convictions, I was raised Adventist but with less rigidity (and less indoctrination in Adventism) than many who came from generational Adventist homes. I attended Adventist grade school and day academy, but I was home every night

and also spent time with plenty of non-Adventist friends in town. Because of my dad, my sister and I grew up eating meat and indulging in many of the other taboos established by Ellen White—except the taboo of breaking the Sabbath. By all means, we kept the Sabbath.

Mom and Dad loved and respected each other, so their difference of religion was never a problem. On Sabbath mornings, we went to church, and my dad mowed the lawn; it was as simple as that.

During my middle school years, church had become boring, and God was some abstract concept. I never doubted His existence, but I also had learned that only perfect people go to heaven, and believe me, I knew I was not perfect.

I often wondered what the time of trouble would be like. Once, during week of prayer at the Adventist school I attended, I got a brief glimpse. The speaker read us the book *Now* by Merikay McCloud. It was the fictional story of a young person who lived through the end times, suffering persecution at the hands of the

government and the “Sunday-keepers”. In the end, this young person barely escaped death by the electric chair because Jesus came back in just the nick of time. That book scared the “living day-lights” out of everyone, including me.

I asked myself, “Could I be as strong as that young person and live the perfect life required for salvation?” I honestly tried to live without sin, out of fear if nothing else, but I always failed. I used to ask myself, “How many times will God forgive me for sinning?” I especially worried about His forgiving those sins I kept repeating! It is sad to say, but, like many Adventist young people, I just gave up. It was too discouraging to even try anymore. I figured that I was probably going to hell in the end, and that was that. Besides, I was taught that when I died, I would sleep until I was raised up among the sinners, and then I’d be destroyed. At least I wouldn’t have to suffer for long. I thought, “If that’s my fate... oh well. It’s impossible to be perfect anyway.” It was much easier not to think about God or my eternal destiny, so I didn’t.

By the time I hit my teen years, though, life suddenly started to get my attention. The Vietnam War was raging; college kids were sitting in, protesting, smoking dope and rioting in the streets. Man walked on the moon, a president resigned, and I had my very own draft card—reality looked out-of-control and scary.

However, right in the middle of the upheaval and noise around me, a newly married young couple became the youth directors in our church. Their names were David and Carolyn, and they were fresh from Southern Missionary College where people were listening to the controversial and scandalous Wedgwood Trio. These two quickly won the love of the youth, including me. Who’d have thought we’d have guitars in church? It was the late 60s and early

ventism with the teaching of “righteousness by faith”. Many Adventists latched onto this new understanding like poison victims who had found an antidote to the deadly potion of obsessive law-keeping and incessant confession. What we didn’t understand, however, was that one cannot transplant the true gospel onto a heretical root. Adventism did not change; instead, those who taught “righteousness by faith” had to harmonize it with Adventist doctrine—or ultimately jettison the doctrine. The result was a more-nearly Christian-appearing message, but under the surface the core of Adventism was alive and well.

David and Carolyn were riding that wave of hope that proclaimed God was Love. We freely discussed His love, righteousness by faith, current events, school, the future, and witnessing to others. This new openness and honesty hit a nerve, and I actually started to think about God and salvation again. Maybe there was real hope even for me!

At the same time, as a result of David’s musical influence, several of us formed a band that was really quite good. We had a couple of guitars, a banjo, a stand-up bass, and a mandolin as the core group, but anyone could join the praise and worship band in Sabbath School. People could bring their guitars or stand up and help Carolyn lead the songs.

The next few years were exciting, and our youth Sabbath School was very popular. It was so popular, in fact, that we outgrew our room and moved downstairs to the large multipurpose room. Before long even that room became impractical, and we had to find a new home.

Our youth class became so large that we moved across the street to the Lutheran church. It was a small church that accom-

## I ENJOYED GROWING UP IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH. I HAD PLENTY OF FRIENDS WITH WHOM I WENT TO SCHOOL AND SUMMER CAMP, AND I EVEN ENJOYED CHURCH AND SABBATH SCHOOL.

70s, though, so guitars are what we had—much to the consternation of some in the church whose economic and educational status gave them the authority to make the decisions. To them, we teens singing with guitars were “those hippie kids!”

One of those prominent, upper crust leaders held the position of musical director for the church and looked upon us kids as scandalous, misguided, and hell-bound. She openly opposed the changes in the youth department under David and Carolyn’s leadership. Her opposition was cemented when David decided that he was tired of playing the only guitar and offered to teach anyone who wanted to learn. There was overwhelming response, and I was at the head of the line. Sabbath School had become “cool”!

It wasn’t just music, though, that held our attention. This young couple was on fire for God—a God much different from the one taught in historic Adventism, and their enthusiasm was infectious. This was the time period when Morris Vendon, Robert Brinsmead, and others were breathing change and hope into Ad-

modated about 125 people, but it suited us just fine and gave us room to grow—and grow it did. Youth were coming from other surrounding Adventist churches as well as non-Adventist “town” kids whom we invited. During this growth spurt, David & Carolyn started a coffee house/reading room—popular establishments in the day—downtown next to the local college. They named it The Way, and people could come in, have a beverage and a snack, hear about Jesus, study and discuss the Bible—and read Adventist literature and ask questions.

The Way became our home away from home. We could always find a friend or two among the strangers who wandered in, and often we were playing music which drew folks in from the street. As a result of this youth-sponsored music/coffee house ministry, about 25 people were baptized into the Adventist church, and hundreds heard about Jesus and His love. Interestingly, this booming youth ministry was funded entirely by private funds. The local Adventist church never gave the youth program a single dollar—not



because money wasn't budgeted for the youth. The local church leaders, however, didn't approve of our long haired, hippie ways, so funds were not available for "that Youth project".

Eventually I graduated high school and moved on. The dynamic young youth leaders persevered with the next generation of young people, but internal church politics coupled with the drying up of the private funds finally ended that dynamic period of local Adventist youth ministry. David and Carolyn resigned, and Youth Sabbath School gradually went back to the standard, Adventist-approved format. Needless to say, attendance dwindled. Traditional Adventism had squelched the longings of those who had been drawn toward a God of love.

Subsequently, I left the Seventh-day Adventist Church. David and Carolyn, meanwhile, had become like my older brother and sister, and we've maintained a loving friendship for almost 50 years. They, too, eventually left the Adventist church.

## YEARS OF UPHEAVAL

The next couple of decades were a blur. I settled in the Chattanooga area, worked, married, had two sons, and was divorced. Life kept me busy, and I didn't have time for the Adventist church or its meddlesome prophet. During the summer of '91, however, my mom contracted cancer, so I transferred to Virginia to be closer to my family. This move meant I could be back in Maine within 12 hours by car instead of 20 hours from Tennessee.

It was during that time of transition and loss that I turned back to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I told folks that I slinked back in through the rear door out of which I had slipped so many years before. My job transfer occurred suddenly, so I contacted the local Adventist church for help in finding a place to live until I could establish myself properly. Adventism was familiar, and the folks I contacted were so friendly that I was really surprised. I asked myself, "Is this the same church I left so many years ago? Maybe things have changed a bit since my youth." Regardless, I thought that I should at least make an appearance and thank the folks who were so kind in helping me. "Who knows?" I thought. "Maybe I'll keep going; we'll see."

Indeed, when I first attended church, everyone welcomed me, and they quickly involved me in many activities. I even started to feel at home. Then they asked if I would teach the youth Sabbath School class, and I agreed. I really should have known better.

With the example of David and Carolyn inspiring me, I threw out the youth Quarterly. (What was I thinking!) I asked the kids what they wanted to talk about, just as I had been taught in my youth. We read the Bible, discussed righteousness by faith, Ellen White, what they thought about current events, and how Biblical teaching influenced them. It wasn't long, however, before I heard complaints from the parents via the pastor who was, in all fairness, a wonderful man whom I liked very much. Nevertheless, it was his job to mediate the concerns. Parents worried about what I was reputed to have said about the Ten Commandments, about Ellen White, about the investigative judgment, and about endless other topics. In fact, the complaints sounded familiar, except now they were directed at me instead of David and Carolyn. Needless to say, when my term was up, I declined to renew my office.

## NEW DISCOVERIES

During this time of my re-immersion into the Adventist church, I started dating my wife, the lovely and gracious Mary. I also started looking critically at church doctrine and Ellen White (EGW).

So many things EGW counseled just made no sense at all. I had grown up hearing my grandmother say, "Mrs. White says this" or "Sister White says that," but as a kid, I didn't really give her admonishments much thought. (Besides, my non-Adventist father paid no attention to EGW.) As a youth, I didn't think about the prophet much, either. The only things I knew about her were those things I learned in my school Bible classes and in Sabbath School.

We had been required to read several of her books in school, and I had learned about Adventism's health message, EGW's visions, and Sabbath-keeping. Now, however, I was an adult who had gone back to Adventism, and I felt I needed to find answers to my questions. Reading EGW's writings again, as an adult, was eye-opening, and I seriously started doubting her veracity.

One day during the time I was beginning to question Adventism, I had a very odd experience. I was on the golf course with my then-pastor (the pastor I had admired so much had retired several years before), and I asked him a pointed question regarding Ellen White. I also expressed doubt about whether or not I would remain an Adventist because of her. I was looking for a good answer, a justification to remain in the church.

His response startled me. He said, "Well, you don't have to believe in Ellen White to be a good Adventist." I was, frankly, stunned! Wasn't EGW the Adventist church? Weren't Adventism's unique doctrines and Three Angel's Messages based on her visions and teachings? His logic just wasn't sound. What better example of cognitive dissonance could one find? The pastor's answer fueled my study and skepticism even more.

## TURNING POINT

One weekend, after a hectic week of work and caring for aging parents, Mary and I decided not to attend church. Our plan was for a completely quiet, restful Sabbath with no church and no social interaction—just rest.

Little did I know, that quiet weekend would change my life forever. As I stated earlier, I had been questioning Adventist doctrine and EGW for some time by then, and I took that occasion to do a bit of reading and research into the Adventist doctrine of "soul sleep". For various reasons it just didn't make sense to me.

In the course of my research and study, I decided to research Ellen G. White. I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of information that was figuratively dumped in my lap as I searched the internet! There were literally dozens of websites devoted to her, some pro, some con...mostly con! With a skeptical mind, I waded into the deep end of the "con" pool. The most vocal critic was a chap by the name of "Brother A". (I later learned his name was Dirk Anderson.) Brother A seemed to be highly knowledgeable and connected concerning Ellen White.

While I found all the sites interesting, my skeptical mind had predetermined that anyone could be critical, and for all I knew this

“former Adventism” might be just another fanatical offshoot sect of Adventism like The Shepherd’s Rod or the Branch Davidians. However, the topics on Dirk Anderson’s sites were well researched and built upon Biblical study and quotes from EGW which were sourced directly from the General Conference, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, and the White Estate. Additionally, there were historical accounts of early Adventist church history that I had never heard in my formal Adventist “training”. Before I knew it, the whole afternoon had raced by, and Mary was asking, “Are you STILL on the computer?” My reply was, “You won’t believe what I have stumbled onto; this is amazing!”

I was hopelessly hooked. I spent most of Sunday doing the same thing, uncovering more and more documented information regarding EGW and the Adventist church. I couldn’t believe it; there were actually others out there with the same questions and concerns I had—others who had done the research and taken the time to publish their findings. This was exciting! While following what seemed endless links, I stumbled across Former Adventist Fellowship, Dale Ratzlaff, and *Proclamation!* magazine to which I quickly subscribed. I obtained *Sabbath In Christ*, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, *The White Lie*, and Canright’s *Adventism Renounced*, all of which I eagerly consumed. It was official: I was on my way out of Adventism.

But there was something else. Granted, I had found credible sources and evidence to renounce Adventism; I was “on my way out”, but there was one inescapable fact: nature and the soul abhors a vacuum. Now that I had pretty much rejected Adventism, what would become of me? Something would take Adventism’s place, but what? Atheism? I quickly put that option out of my mind. I could not conceive of a life without God. Unfortunately, I have since learned many Adventists do just that: they give up on God and faith. Because EGW’s teachings breed failure after failure, these Adventists just give up and become Anti-theists. This reality is a tragic byproduct of cult programming and works-based theology.

Fortunately, by the goodness of God, I found an explanation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in clear, basic terms. It is what I needed and what I believe every Adventist needs: baby steps and basic knowledge of the gospel. As an Adventist I had NEVER heard the gospel, at least not the real one—the one Jesus and the Apostles taught. All through my years of Adventism, I had never heard anything like the gospel in my Bible classes, in Sabbath School, or from the pulpit. In fact, because of my Adventist indoctrination, I didn’t understand it—not at first.

Nevertheless, I knew something was there that I needed; this was different, simple, and exciting! So, I read through that gospel explanation five times! Each time I understood a little more, and finally a light went on in my head: all I needed was Jesus Plus Nothing!

As the realization of what Jesus had done struck home, I sat in my library in stunned silence. I finally understood what a lifetime of cultic doctrine had hidden from me. I finally realized and understood how simple and elegant the gospel is. It is amazing!

Someone asked me once, “Have you been born again, and do you remember when it was?” My answer was a not-so-simple, “YES!—and No.”

Don’t ask me what day it was, and don’t ask me for a definitive time. What I do remember is a gradual realization culminating in that moment that I sat in my library feeling relief, feeling rest, and finally having an understanding of what Jesus really meant when He said, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt. 11:28, 29). There IS genuine rest and freedom in Christ!

Even reading my Bible was different after that moment. The words jumped off of the page with new clarity and meaning. It seemed as if I had been reading the Bible in a dimly lit room all of my life, straining to see and understand the words, and suddenly someone reached over and turned on the reading lamp—a lamp that had always been there—so I could see clearly. Nothing has ever been the same since.

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this testimony I stated that, compared to some, I have been blessed. I have not experienced family disputes or persecution for leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church. No one was overtly mean to me, and I was not persecuted out of the church. In fact, despite my letter of resignation, I have managed to maintain a cordial relationship with church members, and even the current Adventist pastor near me is a friend of mine. What few family members that remain in Adventism aren’t really concerned with what I do, even though I have become one of those misguided “Sunday-keepers”.

Since resigning my membership, my daughter and her husband, my best friend Tim, and a few other close friends have all left the local Adventist church. We started a weekly Bible study which became our weekly fellowship until we found a church to attend. We rejoice daily in the new-found freedom we have in Christ. I am still studying and have made it a personal ministry to expose Ellen G. White as the false prophet she was. I have also founded a private Facebook group called “Ellen G. White—False Prophet” that provides information, a safe place for current Adventists to ask questions and share common experiences, and discussion for those who have a loved one who is involved with the Adventist church. Currently, there are just under 1000 members studying and sharing the truth about Adventism, and new members are joining every day.

My longsuffering wife still asks me, from time to time, “Are you still on that computer?” To which I reply, “Yup; a seeking Adventist asked a question. Praise God, another Adventist has had the veil removed and is seeking truth and real freedom in Christ!”

“But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ” (2 Cor. 3:14). Amazing!

Finally, this is the end of my testimony, but praise God, it is not the end of my faith story. †

Originally from Maine, **Stephen Baxter** lives in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia with “the lovely and gracious Mary”, his wife of 18 years. Together they have four children and 13 grandchildren. They currently attend The Village Church in (where else) Churchville, Virginia.

# WHO CHANGED THE SABBATH?

RUSSELL EARL KELLY

**A**dventism claims—indeed, Ellen White declared in her book *The Great Controversy*—that the pope of Rome changed the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. This claim, however, is a straw-man argument. God reveals in the Bible itself that throughout the history of humanity, God has treated the seventh day differently during different ages.

First, in Genesis 2:1-3, God referred to the seventh day as “blessed”. Moreover, that blessed day was an indefinite time, without the “evening” and “morning” formula defining its boundaries. No further reference to the seventh day occurs in the Bible until Exodus 16:23-30. Consider Genesis 2:1-4:

**Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which he had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. This is the account of the heavens and earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.**

The Bible specifically states that the first six (6) days all had boundaries of “evening and morning” (Gen. 1:5-31). However, the inspired word does not state this formula for the seventh day—an omission which demands the question, “Why?”

There is an obvious break between Genesis 1:31 and 2:1. The word “day” in Genesis 2:2 refers to the seventh day, but in 2:4 the word “day” does not refer to a 24-hour period. Adventists claim that “days preceded by numbers are always 24-hour days.” Nowhere, however, is this principle confirmed as fact in Scripture. Moreover, Adventists do not apply this “rule” to numbered prophetic days (such as 1260)!

God’s creation rest was a period of time when both God and man rested in sinless harmony. We are not told how long that first sinless Sabbath rest lasted. In fact, that original “Sabbath rest” may have lasted numberless years before sin entered.

Seventh-day Adventists, however, insist that the seventh day at the end of creation week was one calendar day and even state that it is the seventh day of creation when God created Sabbath. Scrip-

ture, however, does not describe the seventh day as part of creation. Rather the Bible describes it as the day God ceased creating and rested from His work.

## FROM ADAM TO ISRAEL

In Exodus 16:23-30, God again mentions the seventh day and changes its length from a sinless creation of indefinite length to a single day. Moreover, He assigned this Sabbath to Israel and commanded them to observe weekly rest, refraining from work as they rested inside their tents with their families:

...then he said to them, “This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.” So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.”

Significantly, in Exodus 16:29, God changed the focus of Sabbath rest from Adam and His sinless creation to national Israel:

“See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.”

Moreover, just four chapters later (signifying about one month’s time in the narrative), God further defined and amended the Sabbath. In Exodus 20:10 He changed His instructions from merely stipulating that Israelites were to stay at



home to mandating that no person or animal within their gates should work :

**...but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.**

God's law to Israel prohibited the Hebrews from sharing their covenant with the uncircumcised. Moreover, they were to show them no mercy in war. This prohibition, which included the covenant sign of Sabbath, was not removed until Jesus inaugurated the new covenant.

**Exodus 23:32: "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods."**

**Deuteronomy 7:2: And when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.**

Furthermore, Exodus 31:15 establishes the death penalty for Sabbath-breaking. This penalty is part of Sabbath law:

**"For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death."**

Then, in verse 17, God adds the explanation that the weekly Sabbath is more than a memorial of creation; it is a unique covenant sign only for Israel. Contrary to what Adventism teaches, it is never called a "seal":

**"It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."**

Ignoring Exodus 31:13-17, Seventh-day Adventists (not God) have changed the Sabbath from a unique cultic covenant sign only for national Israel into an eternal, moral principle required for all mankind. This change is serious; the Sabbath cannot be both a sign unique to Israel and also a requirement for all mankind.

The Sabbath for Israel is very clear in Exodus 16:23; 20:2, 8-11; 31:13-17, and in Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 12-15. It cannot be an eternal moral principle unless it is discernible by all mankind through nature and conscience as demonstrated in Romans 2:14. In fact, the weekly seventh-day Sabbath was not observed by gentiles and only came via special revelation to national Israel (see Rom. 1:18-20; 2:14-16; Jn. 1:9).

## OFTEN OVERLOOKED

Significantly, God changed the wording of the Sabbath commandment when Moses reiterated the covenant before the wilderness generation entered Canaan under Joshua. First, compare Exodus 20:8-11 with Deuteronomy 5:12-15:

**Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day;**

**therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:8-11).**

**Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day (Deut. 5:12-15).**

Notice now that God changed the wording of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy from the Sabbath's being a memorial of creation rest to its being a memorial of His deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It is strange that Christians

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## This change is serious; the Sabbath cannot be both a sign unique to Israel and also a requirement for all mankind.

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quote the earlier version from Exodus and not the later from Deuteronomy 5, even though God's rest and freedom from bondage are closely related.

Now we turn to one of Adventism's favorite secondary proof texts for the eternity of Sabbath: Isaiah 66:23. First, here is the verse:

**"And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD.**

By teaching that Isaiah 66:23 proves that the weekly Sabbath will be kept throughout eternity, Seventh-day Adventists err by not teaching the same about the new moon Sabbaths. Furthermore, they ignore the context of Isaiah 66 which is specifically addressing God's promises to Israel, because these passages make no sense in Adventist eschatology.

Furthermore, the prepositions "from" and "to" in 66:23 define a range of time. For example, if we say we will be out of town from Sunday to Saturday, we mean we will be gone for a full week. "From new moon to new moon" and "from sabbath to sabbath" means "every day of the lunar month" and "every day of the week". If (as Adventists insist) 66:23 proves that the weekly Sabbath will be observed throughout eternity, it logically must also prove that the monthly new moon Sabbaths will also be kept—but Adventists do not teach the continuation of the new moon feasts.

Moreover, Revelation 21:25 suggests that there will be no days and nights in the new Jerusalem, and therefore no numerable days:

**In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed.**

## NEW TESTAMENT CHANGES

Adventists cite Matthew 5:17-19 to teach that the law is still in force; therefore, they argue, so is the Sabbath day:

**“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”**

Using Matthew 5:17-19 to support weekly Sabbath observance, however, changes the meaning of God’s word and is self-defeating. The texts literally teach that we are either under all of the Law or none of it. In fact, verses 20-48 include examples from the whole law of commandments, judgments and statutes, not simply the Decalogue. In other words, the entire law stands or is fulfilled as a whole, and God determines when “all is accomplished”. Therefore, verses 17-19 cannot be used to argue the continuation of Sabbath. Adventism admits that “the ceremonial law” was ended at the cross, but they insist that this passage in Matthew refers to the Ten Commandments, thus twisting the meaning of the words Jesus spoke.

Another passage Adventists misuse is Matthew 19:16-21. They insist it mandates Sabbath-keeping as part of the requirements for salvation:

**And He said to him, you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”**

This encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler occurred before Calvary when Jews were under the full jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law. Obedience to the entire Mosaic Law, not merely to the Ten Commandments, is in view here. Proof that one was a true Hebrew was exhibited by obedience to all of the law and not merely the Sabbath. The passage continues:

**When the rich young ruler said he kept all the laws, Jesus replied, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mt. 19:21).**

Jesus was saying to this young man that even careful law-keeping could not qualify him to be saved. What he had to do was to be willing to give up what he loved the most and follow Jesus. This passage is adamantly not teaching that keeping the Sabbath is an implicit salvation requirement.

It is also important to note that Jesus commanded his Jewish disciples, before Calvary, to obey the Mosaic law in Matthew 5:23-24 and 8:4. He never, however, commanded gentiles whom He healed to observe the Mosaic law.

Furthermore, Adventists change the application of Jesus’ prophecy about Sabbath found in Matthew 24:20 by removing it from its biblical context of Judea, Jerusalem, and the temple on earth:

**“But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.”**

This passage is a prophecy about the future destruction of Jerusalem. It is not saying people would be unable to flee because they had to keep the Sabbath. Neither is Jesus making a statement about a Sabbath requirement that is universal. Rather, He was specifically referring to the earthly city of Jerusalem and saying that, if “the abomination of desolation” (v. 15) came on Sabbath, the gates would likely be locked, and people would be UNABLE to flee.

Another text Adventists misinterpret is Mark 2:27-28 (and also Matthew 12:8) when they insist that Mark 2:27 can only be interpreted to include all mankind:

**Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”**

Adventists insist the Greek words which underly “mankind”, *ho anthrospos*, can only mean “man in general”, or “all mankind.” However, this argument is far from conclusive. God gave the Sabbath to national Israel as their special old covenant sign and commanded them not to share their covenant. This mandate is clear in Exodus 23:32; 31:13-17; Deuteronomy 7:2, and Ezekiel 20:12, 20.

The “men” (*anthrospos*) in the context of this passage in Mark are Hebrew men under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law. Thus, Jesus might have been saying, “The seventh-day Sabbath was made for the Hebrew man [who is under the law], and the Hebrew man was not made for the seventh-day Sabbath.” Importantly, as discussed earlier, it is impossible for the Sabbath day to be at the same time “for all mankind” and also to be a unique sign of the God’s old covenant with national Israel as stated in Exodus 31:13-17.

## COMMANDMENTS AND THE CHURCH

While Seventh-day Adventists themselves pick and choose when determining which of the old covenant commandments they think still apply to the church, they accuse others of being commandment-breakers. Furthermore, no Jewish follower of Jesus would have subdivided the Mosaic Law into three divisions—civil, ceremonial, and moral—in an attempt to observe only the Ten Commandments and to ignore the remainder of the law. Second, when Jesus told his Jewish disciples who were still under the full jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law to “keep his commandments”, he was certainly not instructing the post-Calvary, still-not-revealed body called the *ekklesia* (church) about sanctification after Calvary. Third, if the Adventist viewpoint that the Ten Commandments are extracted from the law and still apply to the church were true, there would be little need for the epistles.

Ironically, the Adventists have made Saturday one of their busiest days of the week, mandating church attendance, often preparing and serving Sabbath dinners for family and friends, taking nature walks, and doing various evangelism projects. In addition, their Sabbath rest which forbids “secular work” (medical work is allowed) requires the work of non-Adventists on the police and fire crews, the power plants, and even in pharmacies and stores in case of emergencies requiring Sabbath-purchases for the health of a family member.

The only consistent hermeneutic is the one which says, “Only that which is either repeated after Calvary in terms of grace or that



which is universally knowable through natural law, can be brought forward out of the Mosaic Law into the New Covenant.” To illustrate: when the fledgling United States discarded all of British law and wrote its own U.S. Constitution, their new laws included many regulations—such as prohibitions against murder and betrayal of one’s country—which were also included in British law. Nevertheless, these common rules did not mean the new United States was still subject to the laws of Britain. Instead, these common factors reflected a shared respect for moral behavior honored by both countries. The United States was no longer subject in any respect to the laws of Britain. They had a completely new law that applied only to them, even though this new law contained elements common to Britain’s law.

Another passage Adventists twist is the Acts 15 account of the Council of Jerusalem. When Peter says, in Acts 15:1, “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear,” he is referring to the entire law including all 10 of the Commandments. Adventists, however, insist the Sabbath is not part of the unbearable yoke even though the context clearly rejects the Sabbath along with the whole law for gentile Christians.

Paul was opposed by Christian Pharisees who wanted gentile converts to observe all the Mosaic Law, including circumcision and Sabbath-keeping. Furthermore, Peter had witnessed how God saved gentiles by faith who had not observed the Mosaic Law (Acts 10), and he realized that salvation by faith alone—not the law—also saved the Jews. He knew that the Pharisees’ insistence on circumcision and Sabbath-keeping had lost its value.

In addition, James confirmed that the church in Jerusalem had no intention of expecting the gentile converts to observe the Mosaic Law, including Sabbath-keeping (Acts 15:13–29). In fact, he said such a requirement would be “unsettling [or subverting] your souls” (v. 24). Finally, The Holy Spirit even confirmed that gentile Christians were not obligated to observe the Mosaic law (v. 28).

Seventh-day Adventists ignore these texts as they progress through the book of Acts to teach Sabbath-keeping out of context.

## PAUL’S SABBATH PREACHING

Adventists change the Bible’s explanation for Paul’s Sabbath preaching to try to prove he kept the Sabbath. For example, they cite Acts 13:14 which recounts Paul and Barnabas going into the synagogue on the Sabbath at Perga after arriving at Pisidian Antioch. They do not point out, however, that Paul’s pattern was always to go first to the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath because he had an open, free pulpit as a Jewish rabbi, and he had a commitment to preach first to the Jews. Neither do they teach that Paul usually preached to the gentiles daily, not once a week, after he had been rejected from the synagogues.

In this same account in Acts 13, Adventists conveniently omit 13:39:

**“And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”**

They quote verses 42 and 44 which emphasize Paul and Barnabas’s commitment to preach in the synagogue, but they ignore verse 43 which points out the gentiles who urged them to continue

in the grace of God were God-fearing proselytes to Judaism who had already been persuaded to observe the Sabbath. In other words, Paul’s preaching was not bringing gentile converts into Sabbath-keeping; Judaism had already done that. The apostles did not turn to the non-proselyte gentiles who did not worship on the Sabbath until verse 46!

Paul followed his pattern of going first to the Jews in each new city he entered. He did not go to the synagogues because he was keeping the Sabbath; rather, he went there to bring the gospel of Jesus to his kinsmen. Consistently, after the Jews would throw him out of the synagogues, he went to the gentiles, and he did not

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## ...the Adventists’ claim that Paul always observed the Sabbath is unbiblical.

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preach to them on Sabbaths exclusively. He preached every day of the week. In fact, this pattern is described in Acts 16, 17, and 18. It is amazing how conveniently Adventists forget to point out that all of their Sabbath-day illustrations involving Paul intended to validate Sabbath sacredness actually end with Paul’s going to the gentiles and preaching to them daily. Clearly no sacred day is in view in any of these accounts.

## REWRITING HISTORY

Seventh-day Adventists misinterpret and change the word of God to make it appear that the entire early church worshiped on Saturday Sabbath. Yet history affirms that only the Eastern Roman Empire worshiped on Saturday for several centuries. They did so, moreover, because they misunderstood the law and its lack of application to the church (Acts 21:20–21). However, God’s word affirms that gentiles in the East were not required to worship on Saturday because the law was not required of gentile believers (Acts 15:28 and 21:25).

Adventists do not want others to know that Christians in the Western Roman Empire (before the Catholic Church existed) very early worshiped on Sunday. Essentially all church historians except Adventists state this fact correctly. Although Catholics claim to have changed the Sabbath, they distort the truth that Constantine made the decision apart from pressure from the Western papacy. Still unbaptized, Constantine did not institute Sunday as a day off to obey the papacy; rather, he declared Sunday a legal holiday to bring unity to his empire.

Finally, Adventists change God’s Word by twisting the very obvious Sabbath-day reference in Romans 14:5 into something different:

**One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.**

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CHRIS LEE

# IN DEATH ARE WE PRESENT WITH TH

**T**here is no doctrine, apart from the Sabbath, that shapes Adventists' identity as completely as "the state of the dead". In fact, some of the most energetic discussions I have with Adventists arise when their belief in annihilation and "soul sleep" is challenged by the biblical teaching about death. I have been told that I hate Adventism and desperately want to trash anything it teaches when I have explained Paul's teaching that "to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Quite the contrary; I love Adventists. They are my people. Because I love my people, I try to be obedient to the New Testament commands to oppose false teachers and dangerous doctrines that twist Scripture.

I believe the notion of non-existence at death (with the underlying idea that there is no immaterial human spirit in any real sense) is seriously bad doctrine. It affects how we think about the nature of man, our fallen condition, and salvation. I believe it is important for Adventists to know what the Bible says in context about human death and why the church has believed what it has believed down through the ages.

The historic, orthodox Christian view of what happens to the spirits of post-cross believers at death can be summarized as follows: at death the spirit departs the body. The spirit returns to God where it is consciously with the Lord. At the second coming, God will bring those departed saints with Him when He





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comes. He will then raise up for them imperishable bodies in the resurrection.

We can systematically look at texts throughout the Bible in order to get a big-picture view of the historic doctrine summarized above. Importantly, however, the individual texts are not conclusive on their own; each one merely supports a larger picture presented in Scripture.

To formulate sound doctrine, we need to do extensive inductive Bible study in didactic passages meant to teach the church about this very topic. Therefore, I will focus in this article on two such passages: 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 and Philippians 1: 21-26. Does the Bible actually teach “absent from the body, at

home with the Lord”? Does it really teach that to depart the body to be with the Lord is very much better than staying alive here on earth?

## Adventist proof text

First, however, I will examine one of Adventism’s central passages used to defend its doctrine of “soul sleep”—a misnomer which hides the fact that Adventism actually believes people cease to exist at death. The passage is below:

### Ecclesiastes 9:1-9 (NASB)

For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him. It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead. For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

We will examine this passage from four perspectives. First we will look at the context of the book of Ecclesiastes and examine how the whole book informs this Adventist proof-text. Then we will examine Ecclesiastes’ literary context, its context as part of the Old Testament, and finally its biblical context. We will look at the perspective Ecclesiastes’ author is presenting and at the inspired purpose of the book.

In fact, it is obvious from even a cursory reading of this passage that the author sees no difference between the fates of the righteous and of the wicked. Death is seen as an evil fate that separates mankind from the things of this world—a perspective which the author assumes is all we can anticipate. In short, this passage states that when any human dies, he or she has no more part in anything “under the sun” (anything that is done in this world). The author presents this view because he is showing how futile life and death appear apart from a relationship with God.

At the same time, however, there is a sense in which believers would agree that the dead have no part in anything done in this world: Christians do not believe that the dead are roaming the

earth as spirits or poltergeists. In other words, Christians do not believe in communicating with the dead or that the dead are communicating with us. Furthermore, Christians oppose séances or any other form of spiritualism. They believe, as the Bible teaches, that the dead are either with the Lord or in Sheol awaiting final judgment. They are not here on earth “under the sun”, and they are no longer directly involved with the activities of life “under the sun”.

As we work through the context of Ecclesiastes in the next section, it will become even clearer why we need to consider the inspired purpose of the book before using this passage as a primary place to formulate doctrine on the conscious awareness of believers who have died in Christ.

## The book context

In order to understand the purpose and perspective of this book of wisdom literature, let us consider a few passages. I will use the Holman Christian Standard Bible instead of my usual New American Standard Bible for these quotes because it clearly conveys the futility contained in the texts.

### Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. “Absolute futility,” says the Teacher. “Absolute futility. Everything is futile.” What does a man gain for all his efforts he labors at under the sun?

### Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 (HCSB)

Again, I observed all the acts of oppression being done under the sun. Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. Power is with those who oppress them; they have no one to comfort them. So I admired the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive. But better than either of them is the one who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

### Ecclesiastes 6:1-5 (HCSB)

Here is a tragedy I have observed under the sun, and it weighs heavily on humanity: God gives a man riches, wealth, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all he desires for himself, but God does not allow him to enjoy them. Instead, a stranger will enjoy them. This is futile and a sickening tragedy. A man may father a hundred children and live many years. No matter how long he lives, if he is not satisfied by good things and does not even have a proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. For he comes in futility and he goes in darkness, and his name is shrouded in darkness. Though a stillborn child does not see the sun and is not conscious, it has more rest than he.

### Ecclesiastes 12:8 (HCSB)

“Absolute futility,” says the Teacher. “Everything is futile.”

Whenever I hear someone quote Ecclesiastes 9:5 in a discussion of the state of the dead, I always think, “Have they ever read Ecclesiastes?”

Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon (or in the voice of Solomon) during his apostasy. The context of the entire book is the futility of life apart from God. Depending on the translation one uses, the Hebrew word *hebel* might be translated as “futile”, “meaningless”, or “vanity”. Whichever English word is used, each conveys the truth that whatever is done apart from God is worthless and fleeting. This futility is a predominant theme of the book as demonstrated by the fact that *hebel* is used 33 times in Ecclesiastes.

Underscoring this theme of futility, several passages recommend that the reader live it up. Eat, drink, and be merry, because indulgence is all there is. Moreover, several passages suggest that there is no difference between the outcomes of the righteous and the unrighteous dead.

This viewpoint certainly does not reflect the worldview of one who is in relationship with God. In fact, Christians don’t believe that life is meaningless, and they certainly don’t believe that there is no difference between the eternal destinies of the righteous and the unrighteous.

In light of the underlying theme of futility, we have to ask: is Ecclesiastes teaching falsehood?

Absolutely not! Instead, it is graphically demonstrating an absolute truth. Life without God is futile, meaningless, and without any positive hope for the future. Ecclesiastes is truly and accurately portraying the bleak outlook of someone apart from God. It’s a depressing but true picture of what such a life looks like. Without God we might as well live it up, because this is all there is; life is meaningless. Fortunately, however, Christians have a hope that goes far beyond this life.

Understanding the context of Ecclesiastes raises the question, “Is this really the primary book from which we should formulate our doctrine on the state of the dead?” Of course not! This book is written to show how depressing and meaningless life apart from God is. In fact, the view of death the author presents is just as morbid, depressing, and meaningless as the view of life that he presents. It is a truthful and accurate view if one is separated from God, but it does not describe the view of those who are in Christ.

It’s hard to imagine that anyone who has ever read this book even once would want to use a phrase from it as the foundation of a doctrine on the state of the dead. This book was simply not written to establish doctrine. Ecclesiastes does have some valuable things to say about death, especially in the last chapter as it turns the reader’s heart and mind back towards God, but this book is not a primary passage for formulating a Christian doctrine on the state of the dead.

I strongly affirm that all Scripture is inspired, inerrant, infallible, and useful for teaching and training. We need to be careful, however, to rightly use God’s word for its intended purpose. Ecclesiastes is intended to teach us about the futility of life apart from God, not about the state of those who have died in Christ.

## Literary context

The book of Ecclesiastes is part of what is known as “wisdom literature”. Wisdom literature is not usually intended to be didactic doctrinal literature. Wisdom literature teaches us certain truths, but it often uses highly poetic language and other literary devices to do



so. Because wisdom literature is designed to portray certain truths about life in very memorable ways, we need to be very careful in drawing our doctrine primarily from wisdom literature. Rather, we should use didactic passages to interpret the wisdom literature.

Let me give you a graphic example of literary devices from the wisdom literature of Psalms.

### **Psalms 137:7-9**

Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom  
The day of Jerusalem, Who said, “Raze it,  
raze it To its very foundation.”  
O daughter of Babylon, you  
devastated one, How blessed  
will be the one who repays  
you with the recompense with  
which you have repaid us.  
How blessed will be the one  
who seizes and dashes your lit-  
tle ones against the rock.

If we weren’t careful in our hermeneutical methods, we might formulate a doctrine that says that those who kill the children of their enemies will be blessed by God! We know, however, that this conclusion can’t be our “marching order” because we have didactic passages that teach something very different. For example:

### **Matthew 5:43-44**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

What are we to make of Psalm 137?

The Psalms show the full range of human emotion. They often show people crying out to God in their anguish and pain in the rawness of human experience. They encourage us to open our hearts to God, to pour out our thoughts to Him, to allow Him to comfort us, and ultimately to allow Him to conform us to His way of thinking. The Psalms are not primarily intended for the formulation of doctrine. They tell us much about worship, the relationship between God and man, and the woes and joys of life. We can learn much from the Psalms, but they must be interpreted based upon didactic teaching literature or we could easily formulate wrong doctrine.

There is also one more point we must make about wisdom literature. It frequently advances truisms that are usually true in most cases, but not always true in every individual case. We could give many examples of these types of truisms in Proverbs, but one should suffice:

### **Proverbs 22:6**

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.

While this principle is usually true, we could probably all cite cases in which things did not turn out this way. We should not then formulate a doctrine claiming that any parent with a rebellious

child must have failed to train them in the way they should go. In fact, some parents have worked very hard to train their children only to have them go astray. The proverbs are not meant to teach absolute rules that apply in all cases. Rather, wisdom literature articulates general truisms about life.

Much more could be said on this subject, but these two examples illustrate why we do not want to use wisdom literature as our primary source for doctrine. To formulate strong doctrine, we must start with didactic passages and then rightly interpret and

## **ECCLESIASTES IS INTENDED TO TEACH US ABOUT THE FUTILITY OF LIFE APART FROM GOD, NOT ABOUT THE STATE OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN CHRIST.**

apply the truths contained in wisdom literature in light of the teaching passages.

### **Testament context**

The entire Bible is inspired and the entire Bible is true, but Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. The teachings of Jesus and His apostles revealed truths that were only partially known or were unexplained mysteries in the Old Testament. This fact does not mean that the New Testament corrects the Old Testament; rather, the New Testament provides more information that expands and clarifies many things that were not fully known in the Old Testament. Some examples of things that were either mysteries or partial mysteries in the Old Testament but were more fully revealed in the New Testament include: the nature of God’s Messiah, the Trinity, the church, resurrection, and death.

In the Old Testament death is a rather vague, shadowy concept not fully understood by the Jews nor fully revealed by the Old Testament writers. The New Testament, in contrast, gives us much more information about what we can expect at death and why we have such hope. Because the ministry and the gospel of the Lord Jesus uncovered many of the Old Testament mysteries, we need to allow the New Testament to shed light on the Old Testament. If our doctrine is primarily formulated on Old Testament passages, it is not nearly as strong as if we start with the New Testament and then interpret the Old Testament in the full light of Scripture. Because of Jesus, therefore, we have a much clearer picture of death revealed in the New Testament.

### **Biblical context**

The analogy of faith dictates that we may never interpret any passage in such a way that it contradicts something that is taught elsewhere in Scripture. The Bible is internally consistent. We know that if we ever interpret anything in such a way that it contradicts something else in the Bible, it is not the Bible that is in error; we are. This principle of hermeneutics, therefore, means we cannot in-

interpret Ecclesiastes 9:5 in such a way as to contradict other parts of the Bible. We cannot use Ecclesiastes 9:5 to contradict Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 5 and Philippians 1. If we do so, it is we who are in error, not the Bible. The Adventist interpretation of Ecclesiastes 9:5 puts it in conflict with other parts of the Bible. That fact means the Adventist interpretation must necessarily be wrong.

By now it should be apparent that the understanding of Ecclesiastes 9:5 we had when we grew up Adventist is not supported within the context of the passage, the book, the literature form, the testament, or the Bible as a whole. Overall, it is a very weak "proof text" indeed, and it rather surprises me that some still use it.

Now that we have examined Adventism's central Old Testament passage supporting their view of soul sleep, let us turn to the New Testament and discover what its central didactic passages

## IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THE IDEA THAT WE CAN BE "UNCLOTHED" OR "NAKED" STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT THERE IS SOMETHING REAL THERE TO UNCLOTHE—OUR SPIRITS.

teach us. We will begin with 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 and examine it passage by passage.

### 2 Corinthians 5:1

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Paul here uses the symbolism of a tent to represent our current perishable bodies. Significantly, a tent is not a permanent dwelling but is easily torn down, just like these physical bodies. The good news, however, is that we can look forward to the resurrection when we will receive an imperishable body from Heaven that is permanent and will never be torn down.

### 2 Corinthians 5:2-4

For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

Paul has already compared our current bodies to temporary tents. We groan in these bodies that grow older every day. We experience aches, pains, sickness and frailty, and yet few of us really look forward to the unnatural intermediate state of death when these bodies will be torn down like a tent. To be unclothed spirit without body is not a natural state, nor is it the final state. The Christian worldview is not a platonic view that seeks to be set free from the body. The Christian worldview is very physical. What we truly anticipate is the final state when our spirits will be clothed with imperishable eternal bodies. It is worth noting that the idea

that we can be "unclothed" or "naked" strongly suggests that there is something real there to unclothe—our spirits.

### 2 Corinthians 5:5-9

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

This passage is the source of the oft-repeated Christian refrain, "Absent from the body, present with Lord". These words are clear.

In fact, I don't know how Paul could be any more clear. When we are in these bodies, we are absent from the Lord. When we are absent from these bodies we are at home with the Lord.

Ask yourself this question: if we don't have spirits, only breath as Adventist doctrine

teaches, how could we possibly be absent from our bodies and at home with the Lord? The only way Paul's teaching makes any sense at all is if we have a real spirit that can be absent from the body and be with Christ awaiting the resurrection.

Also please note two other very important things:

1. Paul says he would actually "prefer...to be absent from the body"! This startling assertion can only make sense if he is consciously with Christ. Think about it: who in their right mind would prefer to be non-existent over being alive on earth with loved ones, doing the work the Lord has given us to do? Paul can't possibly be saying he would prefer to be non-existent or unconscious. It also doesn't work to say that Paul is merely looking forward to the second coming and the resurrection because he specifically says that he is talking about a time when he is "absent from the body" and "at home with the Lord". This state cannot be the resurrection because he is "absent from the body". Paul is describing a conscious existence in which he is absent from the body and present with the Lord—a state which he sees as preferable to being alive on earth.

2. Paul indicates that it is possible to be actively pleasing to the Lord when in the body or when absent from the body! The Greek verb used here is in the present tense and active voice. The only way we could possibly be actively pleasing to the Lord when absent from the body is if we are conscious and active in some way. To say that Paul is talking about a non-existent or unconscious state makes his teaching nonsense. And again, it simply does not work to claim that Paul is only looking forward to the resurrection; on the contrary, he specifically refers to being "absent from the body". There's just no viable way to get around Paul's words.

There is no legitimate way we can get an unconscious or non-existent state out of this didactic passage without doing incredible mental and verbal gymnastics. The words are as clear as they could possibly be. If you were Paul and wanted to state that to be "absent



from the body is to be at home with the Lord”, how could you state it any more clearly? Paul has made his point abundantly clear to anyone willing and able to hear it.

There’s one more thing we need to remember as we study the words of Scripture. The most basic rule of hermeneutics (the science and art of proper biblical interpretation) is that the strongest, most dogmatic Christian doctrine should be based on New Testament didactic (teaching) passages. Starting from the solid foundation of very clear teaching that is given to the New Testament Church, we are then able to rightly interpret the Old Testament including the wisdom literature. Be very suspicious of dogmatic doctrine that seems to flip-flop this most basic hermeneutical principle. When a doctrine has been based largely on Old Testament wisdom literature, it deserves careful scrutiny.

### **To die is very much better**

We have seen that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. We have also seen that we can continue to be actively pleasing to the Lord when absent from the body. While this passage is abundantly clear, Paul has also given us a companion passage that, while equally didactic, is very personal. He was in prison and possibly facing death as he wrote the book of Philippians, and he reflected on the possibility that his life might be nearly over. I will end this article with a detailed look at Philippians 1:21-26 as Paul confidently declares that dying would be very much better for him, even though staying alive would be more necessary for the church.

#### **Philippians 1:21**

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Paul sees death, not as a non-existent state, but as a state that can actually be described as “gain”.

#### **Philippians 1:22**

But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.

In fact, Paul is so eager to be with the Lord that he can barely choose which possibility he prefers, living or dying. Also note that there is no indication at all that the options are living on in the flesh or being non-existent. Rather the most natural way to understand Paul’s dilemma is to understand the choices as living on in the flesh or living on in the spirit.

#### **Philippians 1:23**

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

Both possibilities, living on in the flesh or living on in the spirit, are desirable to Paul. Paul knows that if he remains in the flesh he will be able to continue his work and serve the fledgling church. However, he also knows that being with Christ is a far better thing.

The only way that being with Christ can be considered better than continuing on in this life is if it is a conscious existence with Christ. If the choice were between staying and continuing his work

or becoming non-existent, then it would be a pretty easy choice. Who would be torn between living and being non-existent? That choice would make nonsense of the dilemma that is tearing Paul in two different directions.

It also doesn’t work to say Paul is only looking forward to the future resurrection at the second coming. It’s obvious by the way he is struggling with the options that he is debating two immediate possibilities: living on in the flesh now or departing and being with Christ now.

#### **Philippians 1:24**

yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Again, ask yourself what contrast Paul is making here. What is the direct contrast to “remain on in the flesh”? The most direct contrast is to “depart in the spirit”.

#### **Philippians 1:25-26**

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

As Paul struggles with where his desire should be placed, he ultimately displays a selfless character. As badly as he wants to depart and be with Christ, he instead accepts that he will remain and continue the work. Of course, this decision to remain would be no struggle at all if the only other possibility was to be non-existent. This entire passage, and the dilemma Paul faces, are both predicated upon the biblical teaching that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. This reality is the only reason that Paul would have such a hard time choosing where to place his desire.

As Christians, it is very comforting to know that to die is gain. To die is to be in the very presence of our Lord. In fact, being with Christ at death is desirable and can even be considered very much better than our present condition. As Christians, it is also comforting to know that when the Bible says we will be “absent from the body and at home with the Lord”, we can simply accept it for what it says and claim this promise as reality.

Finally, Paul explains in 2 Timothy 1:9-10 why the facts of death and life were veiled in the Old Testament. He says that God’s purpose and grace were granted to us “from all eternity, but now have been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

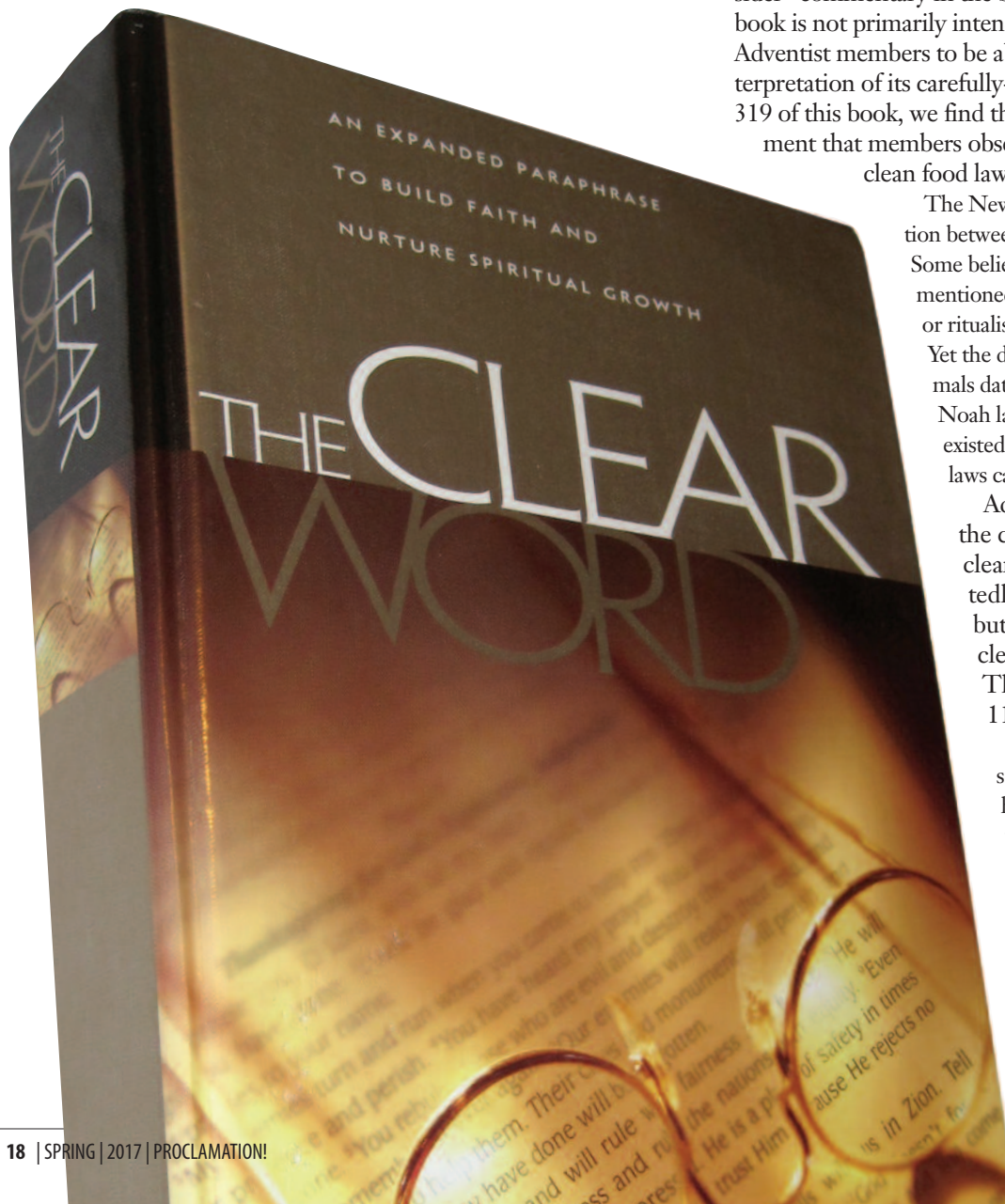
Before Jesus fulfilled the law including taking its curse which condemned the whole human race, and before He abolished death by rising from the tomb, the truth about life and immortality could not be known to us. The truth about our death and life has been revealed in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Only after He completed His ministry could we know the truth about our condition in death and our security in Him.

We can know that, if we have trusted in the Lord Jesus as our Savior because of His finished atonement, when we die we will not enter an unconscious non-existence. Instead, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. †

# THE CLEAR WORD

This article is a chapter from a forthcoming book by Stephen Pitcher comparing the Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Clear Word*, “an expanded paraphrase” of the Bible written by the former chairman of the theology department at Southern Adventist University, Jack Blanco, with standard translations of Scripture. Comparisons are between *The Clear Word* (TCW) and the *English Standard Version* (ESV). Also included in some comparisons are *The Easy English Clear Word* (TEECW) and *The Clear Word for Kids* (TCWK).

STEPHEN PITCHER



In this article, we will show how *The Clear Word* reflects the Adventist teaching about clean and unclean foods and vegetarianism and compare *The Clear Word*'s rendering of God's word with Scripture. To set the stage, we will begin by quoting from the Adventist's Fundamental Belief #22 on Christian Behavior:

Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

Adventism's 28 Fundamental Beliefs are published with “insider” commentary in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. This book is not primarily intended for public use but is distributed for Adventist members to be able to understand Adventism's true interpretation of its carefully-worded statements of belief. On page 319 of this book, we find this explanation of Adventism's requirement that members observe the Old Testament clean and unclean food laws as explained in Leviticus 11:

The New Testament did not abolish the distinction between the clean and unclean flesh foods. Some believe that because these dietary laws are mentioned in Leviticus, they are merely ceremonial or ritualistic, so are no longer valid for Christians. Yet the distinction between clean and unclean animals dates back to Noah's day [we will deal with Noah later in this chapter]—long before Israel existed. As principles of health, these dietary laws carry with them an ongoing obligation.<sup>2</sup>

Adventists teach that God gave Moses the commands concerning clean and unclean foods for purposes of health. Admittedly, eating healthfully is a good practice, but God did not mandate the clean/unclean distinction to keep Israel healthy. The Lord specifically states in Leviticus 11:44–45:

For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of identifying the clean from the unclean animals was to “consecrate” Israel, distinguishing them from the nations that sur-



# ON FOOD

rounded them. The purpose was holiness, not health; God intentionally separated Israel from the surrounding cultures. Adventists, on the other hand, have confused eating healthfully with holy living, but biblical holiness involves being separated from the world and set apart for God. If Israel could not eat gentile foods, they would be forced to remain socially distant from the pagans. Intimate relationships would be impossible if they could not share table fellowship.

## The Bible says

Because Adventists anchor their “health message” in the Garden of Eden, we begin our comparison of their teachings with Scripture by looking at Genesis. We will then conclude with a comparison of New Testament texts.

The original diet is recorded in Genesis 1:29, 2:9, 16–17. As the late Walter Martin stated in his lectures, “There weren’t any trees in the Garden of Eden that sprouted steaks.”<sup>4</sup> Scripture, therefore, reveals the vegetarian diet Adam and Eve were given in their unfallen state:

Genesis 1:29: And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.”

Genesis 2:9: And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:16: And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Again, quoting from *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* we read:

The diet God ordained in the Garden of Eden—the vegetarian diet—is the ideal, but sometimes we cannot have the ideal. In those circumstances, in any given situation or locale, those who wish to stay in optimum health will eat the best food that they can obtain.<sup>5</sup>

The original diet given to mankind was vegetarian. One might even make a case they had a vegan diet, although we do not know whether or not Adam and Eve ate animal products such as milk and eggs.

As we know, however, Adam and Eve transgressed the command of the Lord (Gen. 2:17) by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They discovered that they were naked and ashamed, and they fashioned coverings for themselves. Their next encounter with God resulted in God’s providing clothes for the two made from the skin of an animal, and then He banished them from the Garden.



Following their expulsion, we see that Abel was a shepherd, tending flocks of sheep. Genesis 4:2 simply states:

And again, she [Eve] bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.

Although Scripture does not state whether or not Adam’s family ate meat, the context of the third and fourth chapters of Genesis suggests that they did use animals for sacrifices and for clothes. It is not impossible that they also ate the meat of the sheep that shepherds such as Abel tended; nevertheless, it is speculative to suggest that they did.

Adventism teaches what Ellen White said: “Only after the Flood did God introduce flesh as food. With all vegetation destroyed, God gave Noah and his family permission to eat flesh foods, stipulating that they were not to eat the blood in the meat (Gen. 9:3–5).”<sup>6</sup> However, Ellen White’s reasoning is equally speculative. Nowhere does Scripture state that God allowed man to eat meat because vegetation had been destroyed, and nowhere does Scripture state that the antediluvian world did not eat meat.

Interestingly, Jack Blanco inserts many words into *The Clear Word* that are derived from Ellen White’s commentary—words that

are not even suggested in Scripture—as he explains the supposed difference between Cain’s and Abel’s sacrifices.

## Genesis 4:3-5

### *The Clear Word*

As they worshiped week by week, Cain brought the fruits of the field as an offering to the Lord—symbolic of his own labor and given as a favor to God. He refused to ask his brother for a lamb in order to sacrifice an offering as the Lord had instructed his parents to do. But Abel brought a lamb to the Lord, and God accepted Abel’s offering because it pointed forward to the One who would give His life for man. Abel understood the principle of redemption and, by his obedience, showed faith in what God had promised to do.

But Cain’s offering was not acceptable to God. He saw no need for the sacrifice of blood. He believed that offering the fruit of his labor was all that mattered. When Cain realized that God was not pleased with his offering, he not only became upset with God, but blamed his brother as well. As time went on, he became increasingly angry.

### *English Standard Version*

In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Blanco’s addition does not make the word of God more “clear.” Instead, it adds information from Ellen White that makes the understanding of offerings more complicated. In fact, we find that Blanco took his ideas directly from Ellen White:

Cain brought his offering unto the Lord with murmuring and infidelity in his heart in regard to the promised Sacrifice. He was unwilling to strictly follow the plan of obedience, and procure a lamb and offer it with the fruit of the ground. He merely took of the fruit of the ground, and disregarded the requirement of God. God had made known to Adam that without shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin. Cain was not particular to bring even the best of the fruits. Abel advised his brother not to come before the Lord without the blood of a sacrifice. Cain being the eldest, would not listen to his brother. He despised his counsel, and with doubt and murmuring in regard to the necessity of the ceremonial offerings, he presented his offering. But God did not accept it.<sup>7</sup>

When Cain saw that his offering was rejected, he was angry with the Lord and with Abel; he was angry that God did not accept man’s substitute in place of the sacrifice divinely ordained, and angry with his brother for choosing to obey God instead of joining in rebellion against Him.<sup>8</sup>

## When God added meat

In the story of Noah we find the text of *The Clear Word* modified to suit the purposes of the Adventist organization. Noah’s story is told in Genesis 6 through 9, including the account of the worldwide flood that wiped out all humanity except for the eight

in the ark. Following the flood, God gave Noah new diet instructions which included “everything”. Notice the contrast between the way TCW tells of this new instruction and the way Scripture recounts it:

## Genesis 9:3

### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

Some animals will provide food for you and your families. So from now on you may eat meat as well as vegetables.

### *The Clear Word*

Many of these animals will provide food for you, and from now on you may eat meat as well as vegetables.

### *English Standard Version*

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

Rather than allowing Noah and his family to eat any “moving thing”, TCW has limited the animals to “many,” not all, while TEECW only states that “some animals will provide food for you.” This wording is intentional in order not to contradict the diet given in Leviticus 11. Adventism cannot allow Noah to eat “every moving thing” because Adventism teaches that the dietary restrictions are not only for Israel, but for all God’s people. Their reasoning goes something like this: prior to the flood, the whole world was vegetarian. After the flood, God allowed people to eat meat—but only clean meat. Because God designated that Noah take seven of every clean animal into the ark but only two of every unclean animal, Adventists say this detail shows that Noah had clean meat restrictions on his diet.

In fact, Noah was not an Israelite—nor was there yet a nation of Israel. Nowhere does Scripture hint that the distinction between clean and unclean animals on the ark means Noah was only allowed to eat clean ones. Moreover, Scripture is explicit: God gave Noah “every moving thing that lives” for food. Adventist teaching opposes this clear biblical provision, as we see in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*:

Another stipulation Scripture implies that God gave Noah was that he and his family were to eat only what God identified as clean animals.<sup>9</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist organization not only teaches that it was in Noah’s day when the clean and unclean animal “health laws” were given, but Adventists teach that those laws remain an obligation to believers today:

The New Testament did not abolish the distinction between the clean and unclean flesh foods. Some believe that because these dietary laws are mentioned in Leviticus, they are merely ceremonial or ritualistic, so are no longer valid for Christians. Yet the distinction between clean and unclean animals dates back to Noah’s day—long before Israel existed. As principles of health, these dietary laws carry with them an ongoing obligation.<sup>10</sup>

The above statement is simply untrue. First, as we have already discussed, the clean/unclean food laws were not principles of health. Second, the Bible is extremely clear that those laws do not “carry with them an ongoing obligation”. Those food laws were given as part of God’s covenant with Israel which is known as the



Mosaic covenant. This covenant contained laws about which foods the Israelites could eat and which they could not for purposes of holiness and separation.

Moreover, the Mosaic covenant was only for Israel. It does not apply to Christians who are born again in Christ. In fact, when we look at the New Testament, we learn about food in ways that shocked both the Jews and Jesus' disciples. Let's look, for example, at Mark 7:19—the first instance in the New Testament where all foods are declared clean. This is a problematic passage for Adventism, so finding a problem with the rendering in *The Clear Word* is no surprise. We will compare this passage not only with the rendering in the ESV but also with that of the popular paraphrase, *The Message*:

#### **Mark 7:18b,19**

##### *The Clear Word*

“Can’t you see that whatever goes into a man from the outside, like dirt from his unwashed hands, cannot make him morally unclean? It doesn’t affect his relationship with God, because it goes into his stomach, passes through his intestines, then out of his body.”

##### *The Message*

“Don’t you see that what you swallow can’t contaminate you? It doesn’t enter your heart but your stomach, works its way through the intestines, and is finally flushed.” (That took care of dietary quibbling; Jesus was saying that all foods are fit to eat.)

##### *English Standard Version*

“Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

The context of this passage is that the Pharisees criticized the disciples for eating with unwashed hands. Jesus took the situation to a deeper level than anyone expected. He clarified that nothing that goes into a person from the outside—such as uncleanness from ritually unwashed hands or food itself—can make a person unclean. This shocking declaration is unacceptable to Adventists who insist people are contaminated by unclean food. Unable to explain away the passage, Jack Blanco has simply removed the parenthetical statement found in the oldest, most reliable manuscripts. (The King James Version lacks this sentence.) Ignoring this statement in the Gospels, however, does not make the problem go away, for there are a number of passages in the New Testament that present the same teaching that all foods are clean.

Jesus' words recorded in Mark introduce the revolutionary truth that in the new covenant ushered in by His own blood, the Jewish laws and practices no longer applied to believers. All the shadows of the law were fulfilled in Him.

### **Believers' requirements in Acts**

The issue of what requirements of the law should be expected of Gentile Christians comes to a head in the book of Acts. The party of the circumcision (Christians converted from Judaism and, perhaps, some Jews) were insisting that the new Gentile believers must

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be circumcised. Along with circumcision came the requirements of the law, including the dietary restrictions expected of Israel. In Acts 15 the apostles and elders in the early church made a decision about circumcision and the law: they do not apply to Gentile believers. Acts 15:1, 2 tell us:

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

The result of this meeting, often referred to as the first church council, was a list of things that the new Gentile believers were encouraged to avoid. Given the nature of the meeting it is significant to find that the Sabbath, clean and unclean foods, and other specifically important Jewish—and Adventist—teachings are not even mentioned in the letter that the leaders sent to the churches in the care of Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Judas. We read the account of this delivery in Acts 15:22-31:

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

Not surprisingly, Blanco has tampered with the meaning of this passage. Verse 21 concludes the apostolic verdict that was then written into the declaration quoted above. In verse 21, James concludes his judgment on the matter by reminding those present that “from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” Adventists insist this verse endorses the law and means that Gentiles are to keep the law. In reality, James is saying that believing Gentiles have had enough knowledge of the law that they could have become Jews (being circumcised and legally qualified to keep the law) if they had wanted to do so. Adventism’s treatment of this single verse sets the stage for their completely missing the point of the apostolic decree quoted above. Blanco reflects the Adventist interpretation:

#### Acts 15:21

##### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

On the positive side, they should become better acquainted with the Bible, especially the writings of Moses that we read every Sabbath in church.

##### *The Clear Word*

On the positive side, we should also ask them to familiarize themselves with the writings of Moses, of which we read a portion every Sabbath in the synagogue.

##### *English Standard Version*

For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.

Jack Blanco has completely changed the meaning of this verse from a statement of fact indicating existing understanding of the law to a mandate requiring Gentiles to come under the law’s demands. The fact is that Moses “has had in every city those who proclaim him,” whereas Blanco says, “ask them to familiarize

themselves with the writings of Moses.” In fact, it is the following of the Mosaic law that the Gentiles are warned to avoid, as passages in Galatians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 7 clearly state.

Also, In TEECW and TCWK the word “synagogue” has been changed to “church,” providing deceptive comfort to new speakers of English who hear the law being preached in Adventist churches.

If new Gentile believers were to observe the Mosaic laws regarding diet, Sabbath, or other concerns, they would have been instructed in this letter to do so. The restrictions against strangled meat and blood draw on the laws God gave to Noah, pre-dating the law. These prohibitions would make it possible for Jewish Christians, with their long-standing aversion to non-kosher food, to share table fellowship with Gentile Christians. Believers were asked to eat whatever was put before them, but bloody food was excepted. Well-cooked pork would be far less upsetting to see than a plate of rare meat or blood pudding.

The fact is the Mosaic law has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and is no longer a barrier between Jewish and Gentile believers. Ephesians 2:14–17 states:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both [Jews and Gentiles] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off [Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [Jews].

## More Evidence

As we continue through the New Testament we again find Paul correcting the Judaizing influence that required Gentiles’ observance of Jewish laws and customs. For example, Colossians 2:11–17 tell us:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

The Colossians were Gentiles, and in his letter to the Colossians Paul emphasizes that they were to let no one pass judgment on what they were eating and drinking.

In a surprisingly strong passage in 1 Timothy, we again find Paul dealing with the issue of following dietary laws and their requirements. Notice that the Bible regards these restrictive food laws as “teachings of demons,” and those who teach these ascetic



requirements have seared consciences. *The Clear Word*, however, completely reinterprets the passage:

#### 1 Tim. 4:1–5

##### *The Clear Word*

The Holy Spirit has explicitly told us that in the last days, people will give up their faith and turn away from Christ. They will listen to deceiving spirits and end up following doctrines of demons. Some will pretend to be loyal to the truth while teaching lies. Their consciences will be as insensitive as if they had been seared with a hot iron. Others will say that it's wrong to marry and to eat the good things God created which we should receive with gratitude. God created everything. Nothing should be rejected which He has said we can eat, and we should do so by offering thanksgiving and praise. These foods not only have the approval of the word of God, but will also be blessed by Him through our prayers.

##### *English Standard Version*

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

*The Clear Word* demonstrates again that Adventism cannot allow “everything” to be used for food; a plain reading of the text would violate the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On the contrary, the TCW version of 1 Timothy 4:1–5 states that “Nothing should be rejected which He has said we can eat.” Blanco used these words because Adventism insists that the words “He has said we can eat” used in Leviticus 11 apply universally to mankind. They ignore both the passage in Genesis 9 discussed earlier and the Lord’s reversal of the Mosaic food laws in the New Testament.

Notice that Blanco says that “These foods ... have the approval of the word of God”—an approval which is found in the Old Testament law of Moses. Moreover, the New Testament clearly removes the Mosaic restriction; the ESV states that “nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.” This inclusive acceptance includes not only the foods that Jews eat, but also foods that Gentiles from many different cultures eat as well.

The book of Galatians contains one of the clearest validations of the fact that the food laws became obsolete in the new covenant. Paul tells of the time Peter (Cephas) came to Antioch, the city that became the headquarters of the Gentile church and the place where believers were first called Christians. At first Peter ate with the Gentiles, enjoying both their company and their food. In fact, Peter clearly understood that God had removed the food restrictions, because Peter had been the one to receive the vision of the sheet full of unclean animals with the instruction, “Kill and eat!” (Acts 10:9–6) before being sent to the home of Cornelius the Roman (Acts 10:17–48). Nevertheless, Paul eventually had to rebuke Peter because he became intimidated by the Judaizers, the “party of the circumci-

**Jack Blanco has completely changed the meaning of this verse from a statement of fact indicating existing understanding of the law to a mandate requiring Gentiles to come under the law’s demands.**

sion”, who arrived in Antioch and began pressuring Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the whole law. Afraid of the Judaizers who insisted that Gentiles could not be truly Christians without becoming Jewish first, Peter withdrew from the Gentile believers and their food. We find the account in Galatians 2:11–16:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

We see in this passage that Peter was sharing food with Gentiles—something that offended the Judaizers to the point that they pressured Peter to stop. We also see that Paul validated the table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers when he rebuked Peter for withdrawing from it.

#### **What About Romans 14?**

Romans 14 makes a clear statement about food and the believer. In a nutshell, this chapter exhorts us not to stand in judgment against fellow Christians who do not share our eating practices or preferences for days of worship. At the same time, we are to be sensitive to the believer whose conscience is weak, and we are not to

**Adventism...has developed its own syncretistic theology blending Old Testament and New Testament instruction. In fact, it takes food rules far beyond the Levitical laws of clean and unclean meat.**

exercise our freedom in a way that leads another to stumble because he indulges in something that causes him to go against his conscience before the Lord.

Before we compare TCW's rendering of passages from Romans 14 with that of the ESV, however, we need to understand the circumstances behind Paul's emphasis on this issue. Many Christians read this chapter and assume that the argument about food is no longer relevant in the church. Significantly, however, Paul's repeated warnings in the books of Galatians, Colossians, Titus, and 1 Timothy about not being enslaved to food restrictions emphasizes that these concerns remain real stumbling blocks within the church.

False teachers have repeatedly infiltrated the body of Christ, trying to make Christians subject to the law of the Old Testament with its practices of observing days and abstaining from certain foods. Sometimes they overtly preach that the Old Testament law is binding on Christians; other times restrictions on foods and other practices are taught as spiritual disciplines which enhance one's relationship with God. Paul, however, was unequivocal: the law was fulfilled in Christ; righteousness and sanctification are the work of God and not of ourselves, and we now live by the Spirit and in submission to the word of God implanted in our hearts (Jas. 1:21).

In the case of the book of Romans, Paul was writing to a metropolitan group of Gentile Christians and Jews who had become Christians. Quite possibly there were some unconverted Jews and Gentiles in the Roman congregations as well. Chapter 14 and its admonishment not to judge others in matters of food and drink is specifically addressing the food issues that resulted from new Jewish Christians sharing fellowship with new Gentile Christians. Each had completely different eating practices and traditions. In

the new covenant, however, they had to learn to embrace the freedom bought by Jesus' blood while considering each other's vulnerabilities established by their previous beliefs.

Paul's other epistles were written to congregations of Gentile Christians. Significantly, however, the message in Romans is the same as that in the rest of his letters: as Christians, we must not subject ourselves—nor subject others—to the dietary rules of the law. We as Gentiles must take Paul's warnings seriously. We must not become subject to the law, even in matters of diet. For example, Paul writes in Galatians 5:1–4 (ESV):

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

If we substitute diet, Sabbath-keeping, or any other requirement of the law for the word "circumcision", we do not change the meaning of the passage. From the Jews' perspective, being circumcised was the requirement for a Gentile's being ushered into the law, becoming subject to the law, and being effectively Jewish. From our perspective today, as Gentile Christians, we are not to subject ourselves to any of the ritual requirements of the law. By putting ourselves under any of the law's requirements, we become subject to the whole law.

Righteousness before God is entirely an act of God's grace to us by faith through Jesus' death and resurrection. It has nothing at all to do with diet, with Sabbath-keeping, or with circumcision. The whole law, not merely specific rituals, is in view in this warning from Paul.

Adventism, however, has developed its own syncretistic theology blending Old Testament and New Testament instruction. In fact, it takes food rules far beyond the Levitical laws of clean and unclean meat. The Ministerial Association of the General Conference actually explains acceptable practices for food preparation and meal planning and warns against the dangers of spices. Meat—even clean meat—is not the only food to be marginalized:

Furthermore, we should prepare the foods we eat in as simple and natural a way as possible, and for optimum benefit, should eat at regular intervals. Complex, stimulating diets are not the most healthful. Many condiments and spices irritate the digestive tract, and their habitual use is associated with a number of health problems.<sup>11</sup>

Ellen White actually classified condiments with stimulants and narcotics. Here is one of her many statements on the problem of spices:

Spices at first irritate the tender coating of the stomach, but finally destroy the natural sensitiveness of this delicate membrane. The blood becomes fevered, the animal propensities are aroused, while the moral and intellectual powers are weakened, and become servants to the baser passions. The mother should study to set a simple yet nutritious diet before her family.<sup>12</sup>

What a far cry these teachings are from the gospel in Scripture! Now that we have examined the underlying beliefs of Adventism related to foods, it is even more obvious that *The Clear Word* twists the words of Romans 14:7:



## Romans 14:7

### *The Clear Word*

On the other hand, we should not think that as long as we're not hurting anyone, it doesn't matter what we do. Everything we do in life affects others; even the way we accept death.

### *English Standard Version*

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

It is obvious that TCW completely changes the meaning of this verse. The "kingdom", "eating and drinking", "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" have all been omitted, and a new meaning is inserted that makes little sense as a stand-alone verse. This rendering is not even a commentary on Scripture, as some supporters of *The Clear Word* would argue; it is simply a change of wording.

## One more comparison

We will compare one last verse which demonstrates Adventism's commitment to avoid the Bible's clear warnings against being deceived by false teachings including food restrictions. As was the case with Romans 14:7 above, TCW has twisted Hebrews 13:9 so much that the meaning of the text has been changed:

## Hebrews 13:9,10

### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

Don't be deceived by wrong teachings. Our Christian life needs to grow by God's grace. Don't think that eating a piece of meat from a sacrifice offered at the Temple will make you holy. We already have a sacrifice. It's Jesus.

### *The Clear Word*

Don't let your faith become unbalanced by every kind of strange doctrine that comes along. May your hearts be strengthened by God's grace, not by eating ceremonial foods from the altar, which are of no help to anyone.

### *English Standard Version*

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

Here Blanco changes "foods" to "ceremonial foods from the altar"—a addition which eliminates a simple warning to avoid strange teachings and creates instead a strange teaching.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church spends a great deal of time and money on health, diet, and medical care. While commendable pursuits, it is a sad deception for an organization claiming to be a church to lure converts with promises of improved lifestyle through dietary restrictions without teaching the simple gospel of eternal life through Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection. Adventism eclipses our eternal future by focusing on the issues of our brief earthly existence.

Peter tells us, "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls" (1 Pet. 1:24).

Our earthly life is a brief, vapor-like existence. Our bodies will fade away, yet our spirits will go to be in the presence of the Lord if we are found to be in Him.

## Conclusion

Scripture is clear about what foods we are permitted to eat. It tells us what Adam and Eve were given; it records God's provision after the flood. Further, the Bible details Israel's food restrictions designed to keep Israel separate from their pagan neighbors, and it explains the removal of those restrictions in the new covenant for the purpose of uniting the body of Christ. We may have food preferences, but as Christians we must never require them of others.

In fact, to ignore that the God-given diets found in Scripture mean what they say is to seriously tamper with the word of God. In changing Noah's dietary restrictions and eliminating Jesus' statement that all foods are clean, *The Clear Word* brings people under the dietary restrictions that were given for a period of time for Israel, thus subjecting the unsuspecting to the whole law.

As Christians, we must not become burdened with a yoke of slavery; instead, we live in the freedom of conscience that is ours in the gospel. †

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd Ed., p. 311, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotations from the *English Standard Version*, 2001, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, Walter from a lecture I attended in the mid-1970's.

<sup>5</sup> Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd Ed., p. 318, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> White, Ellen G., *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 1, p. 55, 1870.

<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G., *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 73-74, 1890.

<sup>9</sup> Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd Ed., 2005, p. 318.10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> White, Ellen G., *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 341, 1938.

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ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #21

# \$TEWARDSHIP

ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #21

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness.

COMMENTARY ON THIS STATEMENT

This Fundamental Belief correctly points out that we are called as God's stewards to all that He has given us: spiritual gifts, talents, money, time, and the natural resources of the earth. However, Scripture does not teach tithing as the method of supporting the New Testament church, nor does Scripture teach tithing, or any other human work, as a spiritual discipline that will give us "victory" over sin. To be fair, Seventh-day Adventists are far from the only church to misapply this doctrine. I do find it interesting, though, that this Adventist Fundamental Belief commands tithing but does not include any of the biblical verses in which God described the tithe to Israel in the law.

Some of the key misunderstandings which persist about tithing are resolved when the details of tithing are examined in God's law.

**1. Tithing and first fruits are often confused and mingled in Christian teaching on stewardship.** These offerings, however, are distinct from each other in the old covenant. While the Adventist Fundamental Belief does not specifically mention first fruits, the concepts of the first fruit offering are blended into the Adventist teachings on tithing and stewardship. Ellen White wrote in volume 4 of *The Testimonies For the Church*, "Of all our income we should make the first appropriation to

God. In the system of beneficence enjoined upon the Jews they were required either to bring to the Lord the first fruits of all His gifts, whether in the increase of their flocks or herds, or in the produce of their fields, orchards, or vineyards, or they were to redeem it by substituting an equivalent."

Unlike tithing, however, the first fruit offering was an undetermined amount. It consisted of the first ripe crops planted in the land, and this offering was commemorated each year (Lev. 23:9–14). Here are the definitions of the offering of first fruits:

Deuteronomy 26:2: "...that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name."

Numbers 18:13: "The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; everyone of your household who is clean may eat it."

Leviticus 19:23–25: "When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten.

But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. In the fifth year you are to eat of its fruit, that its yield may increase for you; I am the LORD your God."

**2. Tithe in the Old Testament was specifically from the produce of the land (plants and animals):**

Leviticus 27:30–33: "Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD. For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed."

**3. The Leviticus passage above also pointed out the tithe is not our "first and our best", as Adventists often teach because of Ellen White's interpretations.** Instead, it was the tenth animal that passed under the rod regardless of whether it was the best or the worst, and it was one tenth of the produce of the year's crops. The idea that one's tithe should represent one tenth of the first and the best of one's income and possessions is one of the errors that comes from confusing the unrelated ideas of first fruits and tithes.



# THE LEVITICUS PASSAGE ABOVE ALSO POINTED OUT THE TITHE IS **NOT OUR “FIRST AND OUR BEST”**, AS ADVENTISTS OFTEN TEACH BECAUSE OF ELLEN WHITE’S INTERPRETATIONS.

## 4. The Jews participated in consuming the tithe they gave; it was eaten in the presence of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 14:22–23 “You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.”

## 5. Tithe was not given as gold and silver (money), but always as food. Even if one sold their animals and produce, before it was tithed it had to be turned back into food and drink:

Deuteronomy 14:24–26a: “And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the Lord your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the Lord your God chooses, to set his name there, then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the Lord your God chooses and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves.”

## 6. Tithe consumption was not limited to the Levites; it was shared between the giver, the Levite, and those who might be in need (orphans, widows, and homeless):

Deuteronomy 14:26b–29: “And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household. And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you. At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.”

I have jokingly made the point that one could tithe, as defined in Scripture, by bringing produce from his garden to the next potluck. All humor aside, sharing one’s food at the church potluck is more similar to the biblical practice of tithing than is the practice of placing money in the offering plate. In fact, when one studies what the law teaches about tithing, Jesus’ comment to the Pharisees about tithing herbs (Lk. 11:42) makes sense.

## WHAT ABOUT PAYING PASTORS?

It is also interesting that the biblical laws on tithing included using the tithe to help the less fortunate. The Adventist organization has conveniently omitted this application of tithe money and instead distributes it for the benefit of its pastors and leaders.

This examination of the rules for tithing raises the legitimate question: “If I don’t tithe, how is the church supported?”

The New Testament gives us the answers to this question. Believers give to support pastors—technically elders and teachers (1 Tim. 5:17; Gal. 6:6–10) and missionaries (3 Jn. 5–7). Additionally, believers also give to support their own poor relatives, the needy in the church, the sick, and the elderly (Acts 6:1; Acts 20:35; Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 9:12; 1 Tim. 5:8–16). Nothing in Scripture suggests or dictates that all of this giving is done through the church. No amount is specified in the New Testament, and while individuals may consider a tithe (or 10%) to be a convenient starting point for giving, it is never presented in the New Testament as either a goal or a baseline.

Believers should not give out of compulsion—a required percentage would be compulsory—but instead, believers are always to give out of their joyful responses to the blessings that God has given them, specifically the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ (Mt. 10:8; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:5–12; 2 Cor. 9:6–7).

When we are in Christ, all that we are and all that we have is the Lord’s. Our freedom in Christ gives us both the choice and the responsibility to determine, guided by Scripture and His Spirit, both the amount and recipients of our stewardship. †

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# DEAR ADVENTIST, DO YOU TRIVIALIZE THE TESTIMONIES?

Many Adventists today are unfamiliar with the writings of Ellen White, and Lisa Winn 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.

**T**he Seventh-day Adventist church proclaims in its Fundamental Belief #18 that the writings of Ellen White (EGW) “speak with prophetic authority.” Nevertheless, I have heard this belief downplayed over the years in many ways: “she didn’t claim to be a prophet”; “she is the ‘lesser light’ leading to the ‘greater light’”; and “she never assumed infallibility.” These disclaimers can easily be deployed to gloss over EGW’s own claims for her work; however, brushing aside the authority of the Testimonies or any of Mrs. White’s writing seems inconsistent on the part of any Adventist. As Ellen White herself said, “To disregard light is to reject it.” If Ellen White really was given “prophetic authority” from God, and if one even entertains the possibility that this traditional Adventist belief might be true, then it would be wise for one to thoroughly study her work in order to know what she herself says about her own “authority.”

## More than a Prophet

Ellen White claimed 100% inspiration: “The Holy Ghost is the Author of the Scriptures and of the spirit of prophecy [her writings].” In describing her visions, she wrote, “I am taken into the presence of Jesus and angels, and am entirely lost to earthly things.” She supposed God guided her very hand as she wrote, helping her choose the best words to communicate her visions. While she never called herself a prophet outright, she did state: “My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there. It embraces much more than the minds of those who have been sowing the seeds of unbelief can comprehend.” She felt faith in the Testimonies was necessary for drawing one to God’s Word: “If you lose confidence in the Testimonies you will drift away from Bible truth.” She claimed divine revelation even for her letters and articles: “They

are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne...”

Mrs. White desired that “The Testimonies should be introduced into every Sabbathkeeping family... and be read again and again.” She wanted her books circulated “throughout the world” to “as many people as possible.” Her purpose in writing down her revelations was to “immortalize” them. In 1905, near the end of her life, she described her work as “one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence...” A year later she affirmed the entirety of her public ministry, stating that her writing would “bear the test of investigation.”

## Written to One, Intended for All

Many Adventists assume that Ellen White’s letters to individuals which have been published in the Testimonies do not apply to the Adventist church at large; however, she wrote that the purpose of publishing them was: “that those who are not singled out personally, yet who are as much in fault as those who are reprov’d, may be warned through the reproofs given to others.” Ellen White was aware that people twisted her writings as they pleased. She knew people pigeonholed exhortations of hers that crossed their own cherished ideas as merely “Sister White’s opinion and judgment,” and so proclaimed that those who belittled her testimonies this way have “thereby insulted the Spirit of God.”

## Dear Adventist,

Today more than ever, many Adventists distance themselves from the “prophetic authority” of Ellen White, yet still unquestioningly submit to the distinctive Adventist doctrines she affirmed and promulgated through her many “visions.” If you claim to be truly Adventist but recoil from the tougher (or sillier) teachings of Mrs. White, she has a question for you: “Is this work... from above or from beneath?” Ponder that for a minute. If you cannot in good conscience answer in her favor, she would retort,

“...why not act in accordance with your faith and have no more to do with a people who are under so great a deception as this people are? If you have been moving according to the dictates of the Spirit of God you are right and we are wrong... There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil.”

If you find yourself in the doubting camp, perhaps EGW is right, and it is time for you to take the leap of faith, leave Adventism, and seek Christian fellowship where the gospel is taught and the word of God is the only authority.

## “What Is Truth?” (Pontius Pilate)

Because of the prolific writings of Ellen White, the Adventist church seemingly has all the answers. “If I were to leave Adventism,” one might apprehensively say, “how would I possibly



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# HER PURPOSE IN WRITING DOWN HER REVELATIONS WAS TO “IMMORTALIZE” THEM. IN 1905, NEAR THE END OF HER LIFE, SHE DESCRIBED HER WORK AS “ONE STRAIGHT CHAIN OF TRUTH, WITHOUT ONE HERETICAL SENTENCE...”

know what is true?” Perhaps we can gain confidence from Scripture:

**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Heb. 1:1-2).**

The writer of Hebrews considered himself living in the last days and declared that God, in these last days, is speaking to us by his Son. Scripture is unequivocal: in these last days, including today, God speaks to us through Jesus—not through Joseph Smith, not through the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and not through Ellen G. White, either.

The Old Testament writers prophesied about Him, and the New Testament writers, most of whom were His called apostles and eye witnesses, testify about Him in their gospels and letters. Yes, the Bible is “ancient,” but it is not simply a static text from which one derives a system of beliefs: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

It is through the prayerful reading of the Bible with the supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit that God reveals himself to us today. Jesus says to Pilate, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of

the truth listens to my voice.” What more revelation could one possibly need? There was no need for Ellen White, over 1,800 years later, to rewrite, interpret, or add to the living word of God. †

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church Fundamental Belief #18.

<sup>2</sup> *Counsels for the Church*, p. 94.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Letter 92*, 1900 Par. 12 (to J.H. Kellogg).

<sup>4</sup> *Early Writings*, p. 297.4.

<sup>5</sup> *Letter 127*, 1902 Par. 10 (to brother and sister G. A. Irwin).

<sup>6</sup> *Letter 244*, 1906 Par. 18, “To the Elders of the Battle Creek Church”.

<sup>7</sup> *Counsels for the Church*, p. 94.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Selected Messages*, Book 1 p. 27.2.

<sup>9</sup> *Counsels for the Church*, p. 94.5.

<sup>10</sup> *The Review and Herald*, January 27, 1903, Art. B, par. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Manuscript 122*, 1903, “The Time of the End”, par. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Letter 329a*, 1905. Par. 3 (to Mabel White).

<sup>13</sup> *Selected Messages*, Book 1 p. 35.2-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 687.1.

<sup>15</sup> *Letter 92*, 1900 Par. 12 (to J.H. Kellogg) .

<sup>16</sup> *Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 68.1.

<sup>17</sup> *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 27.1.

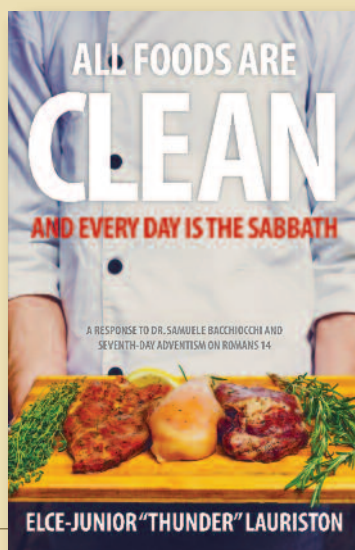
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 229.2.

## BOOK REVIEW: ALL FOODS ARE CLEAN AND EVERY DAY IS THE SABBATH

**Elce-Junior “Thunder” Lauriston**, whose testimony appeared in our Summer, 2016, issue of *Proclamation!* has recently written a book. Larry Dean, J.D., an avid sabbatarian researcher, says the following:

A searing examination of Romans 14, from the perspective of an ex-Adventist seminary student. A resounding affirmation of the principle of Christian freedom from both the Law and works. Based on this argument alone, the Adventist Sabbatarian and Mosaic dietary restrictions arguments are divisive and destructive intrusions into the Body of Christ, issues that are at best secondary. There are no more excuses for mandatory Sabbatarianism nor dietary restrictions. Now they know.



Clinton Baldwin, Ph.D., Associate Professor: New Testament Textual Studies, Baldwin’s Biblical Manuscript Research Institute gives this review:

Elce-Junior “Thunder” Lauriston has produced a well-reasoned, adequately researched, and very insightful book. Modern Sabbatarians and Seventh-day Adventists in particular, are again challenged on defending the obligatory nature of the weekly Sabbath and the Levitical dietary distinctions. Certainly, Lauriston has revealed many vulnerable points in the Adventist traditional arguments pro-mandatory Sabbath-keeping and abstinence from certain foods. Adventists and other Sabbatarians will do themselves well to consider his strong arguments presented in this volume.

Information on obtaining this book is on the web at [Ratzlaf.com](http://Ratzlaf.com).

# WHO CHANGED THE SABBATH?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Paul never taught that Sunday replaced the Saturday Sabbath. Instead, he taught that there were no longer any holy days; all days were equal opportunities to preach the gospel. In fact, in Galatians 4:10-11 he opposed any holy day.

The Adventist's challenge to "Sunday-keepers" to find the text where the Sabbath was changed to Sunday is a straw-man argument. There is no such text, and Bible-honoring Christians know the Sabbath was not changed. Rather, it was fulfilled in Christ. He has taken the place of the shadows of sacred days. Even though the Catholics claim to have changed the Sabbath, it was God who changed the seventh day from a holy day to merely one more day of which every one is alike.

Paul's pattern was clear; in every city he went first to the Jewish synagogue on Sabbaths where he had an open pulpit until the Jews would chase him out. After the Jews refused to listen, he went to the gentiles every day of the week. In short, the Adventists' claim that Paul always observed the Sabbath is unbiblical.

## THE SEAL

Finally, Adventists change God's Word for Christians when they teach that the seal of God in Revelation 9:4 is the Sabbath. In fact, the Sabbath is never called a "seal" in the Bible. Yet Adventists ignore the two things which are called seals—circumcision and the Holy Spirit. Circumcision was the seal of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17), and that seal was replaced for the church by the in-

dwelling Holy Spirit (Acts 15; Eph. 1:13, 40; 2 Cor. 1:22). The Bible clearly teaches that believers in the Lord Jesus and His finished work are sealed with the Holy Spirit who is a guarantee of their eternal security.

Adventists have often invited discussion by asking, "Who changed the Sabbath?" Their answer to that question has historically been, "The pope." We have seen, however, that Sabbath laws and applications have changed many times. God Himself expanded and explained Sabbath law throughout the history of Israel. The Lord Jesus revealed the truth of His superiority over the Sabbath, and the New Testament writers explained how Jesus Himself fulfilled the law—including the Sabbath. In the new covenant, the Holy Spirit replaces the law as the rule of godly living in the lives of believers (2 Cor. 3).

Finally, Adventists themselves have changed the biblical account of Sabbath. They have twisted the words of the New Testament to retain the Sabbath as a mandate for Christians. This misuse of Scripture, however, suppresses the truth and places adherents back under bondage to the law. In the words of Paul:

**"You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4)." †**

**Russell Kelly**, has a B.A. from Southern Adventist University (1972), a PhD from Covington Theological Seminary (2000) and learned Chinese Mandarin at Yale University. A former Adventist pastor, he has written extensively on many subjects including Adventism, tithing and the resurrection. His writings can be found at [www.tithing-russkelly.com](http://www.tithing-russkelly.com). You may email him at [russell-kelly@att.net](mailto:russell-kelly@att.net).

# YOU MUST RESPOND NOW TO KEEP GETTING PROCLAMATION!

**W**e at Life Assurance Ministries are committed to continuing to make *Proclamation!* available free. We want to share the gospel free of charge (1 Cor. 9:18), and our deep love both for those who share our Adventist past and for those with whom we now share in the body of Christ compels us to live for the sake of exposing deception and clarifying Truth.

The time has come, however, for us to "clean" our mailing list. We want to use the resources wisely that God provides.

## We are asking you to respond

If you wish to continue to receive the printed copy of the magazine, please let us know. You may respond one of two ways:

**1. You may email** us at [proclamation@gmail.com](mailto:proclamation@gmail.com) and say "Yes! Please keep me on the list"—and be sure you give us your name and current mailing address.

**2. You may mail** in the envelope inside this issue of the magazine and check the box "Yes, please keep sending *Proclamation!*" Be sure that you include your name and address.

We want those who desire the magazine to receive it as long as God makes it possible. We know that many people keep back issues

of *Proclamation!* and re-read them; furthermore, many people find printed pages more convenient than electronic documents. We also know that many people use the magazines as evangelistic tools and handouts. Additionally, there are some geographic locations where the internet is not free, and online access is limited.

Please join us in praying that God will continue to direct Life Assurance Ministries and provide for the work He desires us to do.

Romans 10:13-17 gives us the reason to keep publishing the good news that is the gospel of our Lord Jesus:

**For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."**

**How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**



## Adventist pride and arrogance

I am not an Adventist, but I do support what you do and enjoy the *Proclamation!* magazine. I know Adventists to whom I continue to witness using your website and materials. Your ministry is likely underutilized, and I pray more Adventists find out about you and use your ministry to come to truth. I have referred two to your website and find that they balk at being open to any other info. One made condemning comments about Dale [Ratzlaff]. That man has been a teacher of Adventist beliefs for years. We had some heated but friendly debates on the meanings of the Scriptures and Old vs. New Testament underpinnings to our differing beliefs, deciding upfront that our discussions had to be rooted in Christlike love.

I find that the Adventists are incredibly rooted in their beliefs, so much so that they have a hard time seeing truth even when confronted with the Scriptures. They are so deceived that they think they are the only ones who have the truth. There is an undertone of pride and arrogance in twisted and selective attempts to make the Scriptures support the false prophet White. I continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will bind Satan and open their eyes to New Testament truth.

## 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

However, as a former Adventist, you understand this better than I do. I'm glad that the Holy Spirit enabled you all "come out" to the truth to help others!

I am calling in a donation today and plan to continue to do so and encourage others to do so where the Lord provides opportunity.

COLUMBIA, SC

## Magnificent!

Dale, I just cannot stop marveling at your article titled, "The Continental Divide of Biblical Interpretation." It is extremely well-written and very easy to understand for all those who wish to understand and who do not have their heads buried in the sand. Thank you so much for your fine and well-written articles. I look forward to reading more of your new yet-to-come articles that will also contain solids to sink one's teeth into. Thanks again.

THE PHILIPPINES

## How Pathetic

Through Adventist teachings from the Holy Bible and the writings of Ellen White, millions will be in the kingdom. All of your staff are pathetic. Like Adolph Harstaff who broke away from the Adventist church in 1935 under the name Shepherd's Rod, you're spinning your wheels and will go nowhere. In 81 years, the Rods have a worldwide membership of 10,000. God has not blessed their devilish efforts and will not bless yours either. In my view, you are all devils out of hell.

RANDLOPH, NY

## After Adventism—where to?

I am a transitioning Adventist, and my wife is a Jehovah's Witness. From birth I was taught the Three Angel's Messages and that the Sunday law was coming; now I feel deceived.

I'm at a crossroad and uncertain of what's next. I've been witnessing to fellow inmates and also preaching the word, but when they ask me what church I go to, I tell them that I am "non-denominational". I am not sure if that's the way I should go. Could you

please give me and other transitioning Adventists insight in the magazine as to what the next step is after leaving the faith which we knew all our lives?

INCARCERATED

**Editor's response:** The most important thing is to find a church where the Bible is taught, the gospel of the Lord Jesus' finished work is central, and the Trinity is honored. Church is the place where the sheep come for food, not primarily a place designed to attract the lost although they are welcome. Look for a church where the Bible is carefully taught in context. Every congregation is different and needs to be evaluated individually and not only on the basis of denomination. In general, though, look for a church that emphasizes the gospel and not primarily the Holy Spirit, good works, or spiritual disciplines. These things are the fruit of the gospel, not the gospel. Look for a church that honors God's word as inerrant and sufficient for our understanding of God's will and where the purpose of the service is to teach the Bible in context. God's word is living and active and is the means by which we hear truth and are born again (Heb. 4:12-13, 1 Pet. 1:22-23).

## Answer in the judgment

My mother who is now dead received your magazine by accident. She was a wonderful, caring Seventh-day Adventist all her life as am I, her daughter. How you can build your church on the sand of knocking down the Seventh-day Adventist Church and call it a religion is beyond me. May you answer to our Lord in the judgment day.

BRUSH PRAIRIE, WA

**Editor's response:** We are not a church nor a religion. Life Assurance Ministries (LAM) is a ministry that is dedicated to helping Adventists as well as concerned Christians understand the glory of the new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus. We are also committed to clarifying the ways Adventism differs from biblical Christianity. We

at LAM attend different Christian churches in different states.

## I see some light

Please add me to your subscription list for *Proclamation!* I have been reviewing articles online and going over the website LifeAssuranceMinistries.org. My eyes have been recently opened to the fallacy of the investigative judgment and other Adventist doctrines. I am third generation Adventist, and finally—I see some light!

CALDWELL, ID

## No more garbage

Please do not send me any more garbage!

COLVILLE, WA

## Thanks for your work

My wife and I spent 40 years as members of the Adventist church (we are no longer members). I held the offices of head elder and deacon, and my wife held many offices also. Over the years we began to learn that many of the 28 fundamental beliefs were not in harmony with what the Bible said. When we would bring up a question or present a different view on a subject, we were told, "That's not what Ellen White said about it." Along came *Proclamation!* magazine. I was skeptical at first, but the more I read, the more the articles hit home.

We withdrew our membership from the Adventist church a few weeks ago, and we cannot tell you of the relief we have found as we trust in Christ's righteousness and not a bunch of rules! We are attending a local non-denominational Sunday church and love the fellowship and Christ-centeredness of the messages.

Thanks so much for the work you and your people are doing. To God be the glory.

VIA EMAIL

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

# Dear Adventist Friends

**T**hank you for the concern many of you have expressed since I began my life after Adventism. However, I think there are some misperceptions that I need to correct. You may be surprised to hear that I agree with many of the things you've pointed out to me. For instance, I agree with you that grace is never a license to sin; being obedient isn't legalism, and holiness is an expectation of the Christian life.

Secondly, I agree with you that the Bible never changes the Sabbath to Sunday and that the fourth commandment isn't merely a principal of keeping one day in seven. Israel was commanded to keep one specific day as the Sabbath, the seventh day, and observing that particular day was



**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](http://ProclamationMagazine.com). You may contact Chris by email at [ambulator@gmail.com](mailto:ambulator@gmail.com).

definitely an obedience issue. So, if keeping the Sabbath is commanded to Christians, then it's not optional, it's not legalism, and it's not Sunday.

Here's the issue, though. I think we also agree that at least some of the things commanded to Israel are not commanded to New Covenant Christians. For instance, we wouldn't call Christians "disobedient" for failing to offer animal sacrifices or for not observing annual Sabbath festivals or monthly new moon Sabbaths. Because we agree that there are some differences post cross, I think it's vitally important for us to read what God said to the fledgling church about these issues.

Hopefully, we can agree on the need to study God's instructions to the church. All too often though, we spend a lot of time looking at texts commanding Israel to keep the Sabbath or emphasizing the need for obedience—when we already agree on both of those points. Let's get beyond that discussion. We don't have to guess what we as New Covenant Christians should believe about Old Testament commands or Christian practices; we merely need to read and accept the instruction we've been given in God's word.

The issues of holy days, the Sabbath, and the law did come up in the early church, and the Holy Spirit addressed these issues through the authors of the New Testament. Because these issues are primarily our areas of disagreement, it would seem most productive to spend our time studying some of the differences between the two testaments, or covenants, rather than rehashing those things on which we already agree.

Look, if I'm misunderstanding the instruction that God gave to the church, then I want to be corrected. If Christians really are commanded to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, then I want to be doing so. I'm just asking that we spend some time looking at the Scriptures written directly to the earliest Christians to better understand these issues. If you're interested in what I believe the Bible has to say on this subject, then please check out "A Study of the Covenants" at [lifeassuranceministries.org/studies/covenants/](http://lifeassuranceministries.org/studies/covenants/). You might also enjoy Jerry Rector's study "Understanding the Sabbath" at [lifeassuranceministries.org/studies/sabbath/](http://lifeassuranceministries.org/studies/sabbath/). God has spoken through His Word; now we just need to listen and obey.

Sincerely and with love,

*Chris Lee*