

WHERE WILL YOU BE IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE?

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Proclamation!

FORMER ADVENTISTS

INQUIRING ADVENTISTS

SABBATARIANS

CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

WINTER 2017

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 3

THE CLEAR WORD AND THE LAW

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE
TO BUILD FAITH AND
NURTURE SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE CLEAR WORD

THE CLEAR WORD



COLLEEN TINKER

HIS BIRTH WAS SHADOWED BY THE CROSS, AND I CANNOT
CELEBRATE THE ONE WITHOUT HONORING THE OTHER.

Proclamation!

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CHRISTMAS REST AND THE **NEW COVENANT**

Christmas is twelve days away as I write this. The house is partly decorated, but the rest of the lights and ribbons have to wait until I finish my work on this issue of *Proclamation!* Sometime, I find myself thinking, I want to usher in Christmas with no distractions. I want to decorate, write a Christmas letter, and bake Christmas cookies without a deadline competing for my attention.

In my next sane thought, I realize that no such luxury is likely in my lifetime. The Lord has given me His work to do, and His glory and His great name are the reasons I live. Christmas, I realize, was never meant to be an isolated indulgence.

In spite of the deadlines, God has granted us unexpected joy this Christmas season. We have

my spirit knows His peace because I trust His word, His blood, and His resurrection. I now have His righteousness imputed to me, and even when I am unable to achieve anything close to perfection, the Father sees Jesus when He looks at me. My righteous Savior is the credit in my “account” with God, and when I am burdened with more work than time, I know that His sovereign promises—and not my anxiety—are the last word about my life.

This Christmas we want you to savor the gift of Steve Pitcher's article comparing what the Bible says about the law with what Adventism, as articulated by Jack Blanco in *The Clear Word*, says about the law. It's no wonder so many of us lived with anxious fear; Adventism obscures what Scripture reveals about the new covenant.

We also share Martin Carey's article, "Don't Be Anxious For Your Life". I share my experience of discovering that the cross is really at the heart of Christmas, not a distraction from it, and Margie Littell tells her story of coming to faith in Jesus. Dale Ratzlaff reflects on the spreading work of Life Assurance Ministries, and Rick Barker examines the Adventist Fundamental Belief on marriage and the family.

In this issue we say goodbye to our back page columnist Chris Lee. His incisive observations have helped many of us navigate our Life After Adventism. We will miss him, and we commit him to our Father who is leading him to His next assignment.

We pray that this Christmas you will know the wonder of the angel's words to Joseph: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). †

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USE THE ENVELOPE INCLUDED IN THIS MAGAZINE.

been studying passages in Hebrews in our Friday evening Former Adventist Fellowship Bible studies. A new family just making the transition out of Adventism has been attending, and they have had questions about the Sabbath. We have found amazing new covenant insights in Hebrews 7 where the author explains that Jesus is from a different priesthood than the Levites. Chapter 8 quotes Jeremiah 31 and flatly states that God has brought a new covenant because the first one was flawed; God found fault with the people and established a new covenant based on better promises.

Chapter 9 explains that blood was necessary for any forgiveness to occur, and Jesus' blood is the only eternal sacrifice. Chapter 10 reiterates the often-ignored fact that the law contained "only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very form of things" (v. 1).

As we have been preparing for Christmas and pondering the fact that Jesus took flesh and became a human baby in whom all the “fullness of deity dwelt bodily” (Col. 2:9), the stunning truths in Hebrews have made me well up with tears more than once. Jesus was born so that He could offer up Himself as an eternal sacrifice for sin. His birth was shadowed by the cross, and I cannot celebrate the one without honoring the other.

Moreover, I cannot hope to create a space of rest for “doing Christmas”. Quite the opposite is true: because of Christmas, I now have eternal rest—even in the push of a deadline and too many things to do in a small amount of time. My heart is praising the Father for sending Jesus, and

WHY DO CHRISTIANS MAKE SO MUCH OF CHRISTMAS?

Why do Christians make so much of Christmas?

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

Although this ancient verse was penned some 2,700 years ago, it still speaks a timeless message of good news to us today.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”

This Child is for us! He is heaven’s gift to us! The incarnate Christ is a gift from the Father to us. He is our Child, our Son. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He did not loan Him to us; He gave Him. He belongs to us, and we belong to Him. There is a new restored relationship when we receive this Gift. As a member of the heavenly Trinity, this gift unites us to the infinite God.

That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me (Jn. 17:21).

Like any gift, this Child, this Son, must be received.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (Jn. 1:12).

Packaged with the Gift of this Son are the other “good gifts” of grace: The Holy Spirit (Lk. 11:13), rest (Mt. 11:28), eternal life (Jn. 10:28; 17:2), the Father’s name (Jn. 17:6), glory (Jn.

17:22), the words of the Father (Jn. 17:8, 14), authority (Lk. 10:19), the kingdom (Lk. 12:32), and all the promises of God’s Word (1 Cor. 1:20).

Wonderful Counselor

How wonderful it is to have a Counselor who guides us into all truth and prepares our way before us.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:10, 11).

When following His counsel we are safe. He knows the end from the beginning. Unlike even the best of human counselors, in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

The mighty God, The everlasting Father

When we realize that this Son born as a babe is also the

“mighty God, the everlasting Father”, then like Paul, our eyes glaze over at the exceeding brightness of the revelation. We do not know nor can we understand this reality; we cry out like the ancient prophet:

Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean

lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts (Isa. 6:5).

Nevertheless, the revelation that this Son given to us is indeed named the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father who could say, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9) is a necessary confession of the Christian faith.

I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (Jn. 8:23, 24).

Here our Lord states that unless we believe in who He says He is, we will die in our sins. Couple this fact with John 8:58 where Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” The Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying and picked up stones to kill Him. He was saying that He was the “I AM”, the self-existent God who met Moses at the burning bush.

And what was the main reason He is given to us?

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45).

Have you accepted this Greatest of all Gifts? You can do it right now!

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

THE INCARNATE CHRIST IS A GIFT FROM THE FATHER TO US. HE IS OUR CHILD, OUR SON.

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

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

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



WHERE WILL YOU BE IN

MARGIE LITTELL

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“What are you going to do in the time of trouble now that you have left the truth and the church!” she cried, her fingers drumming on my desk between us.

Clearly, I could see her fear, her anger, and perhaps a hint of envy. Deeper than those reactions, though, I saw her troubled and fearful soul. I felt her pain. I knew her insecurity.

As I looked at her, my thoughts flashed back, and I saw again how God unrolled my life and wrote the story of my leaving the Adventist church. To get me to heaven, God had to lead me through hell.

For several months, I had been aware of my husband’s serial infidelity. At first I had ignored his verbal and emotional abuse which was possibly driven by his guilt. Nevertheless, it was not yet the time for me to deal with it. I had other crises.

My beloved daddy was dying a lingering death from pancreatic cancer. At the same time, my sweet and loving nephew, Jonathan, was heroically fighting a particularly strong form of cancer at St. Jude’s hospital. Faced with these life-and-death struggles, my mom, frail with diabetes and far more sick than any of us realized, needed help. I had moved into my parents’ home to help take care of her.

One morning, while daddy was away during one of his frequent hospitalizations, I walked into my mother’s bedroom to help her

prepare for the day. She was dead. I had to drive to the hospital and tell my dad. He died one month later.

My faith was depleted. Peace was impossible. God was there, but my eyes were too full of tears to see Him.

There was someone I could see, however: my brother David and his wife, Teresa. From inside my grief and despair I looked out at them and watched their faith growing and strengthening as they visited their critically ill son at St. Jude’s. David hugged me tightly at our parents’ funerals and leaned over to whisper, “Margie, God does not promise to take us out of the ‘valley of the shadow of death’; He promises to be there with us.”

A short book

One dark day, David said, “Margie, read Ephesians. It’s a short book!”

I took my Bible, and for the first time in my entire life, I read a whole book in one sitting, sentence by sentence. Previously, I had just hunted up verses to prove my own ideas or my church’s ideas. That day, however, I was stunned. The first two chapters of Ephesians completely contradicted what I had been taught in the Adventist church. What I had believed to be truth was not what God actually says! What I read that day literally knocked me to my

knees, and I knelt at the foot of the cross of Jesus. I felt—I knew—His arms around me. For the first time, peace came.

Eagerly, I read more and more. At the same time, I was invited to a church service at my dad's empty clinic. A wonderful young man, a soon to be ex-Adventist who had been reading his Bible, taught us verse by verse, book by book, God's gospel story. For the first time, I learned what the new covenant actually was—it was far more than mere words mumbled at the Adventist communion services. I learned I was at the wrong mountain—Mt Sinai—when I should be at Mt Zion. (See Hebrews 12:18–29 for more information).

My young nephew, Jonathan, testified of his healing and of his love and adoration of his best Friend, Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, my best friend in Virginia shared her testimony with me about Jesus' gospel—not the dismal, Adventist “different gospel which is no gospel at all” (see Galatians for more information), but the gospel

their cave to hide from the Sunday-keepers” on “my” mountain top near my home.

I smiled and said, “Which time of trouble? I have been through many of them.”

“Oh, don't be flippant,” she responded angrily. “You know what I mean.”

I did, indeed, know what she meant; my Adventist DNA is four generations deep. I am a stubborn old lady, and God had to work a long time to lead me out of the Adventist church.

I stood, walked around my desk, and took her hands. “My friend, you asked me where I will be during the ‘Time of Trouble’. I will be out there, on the sidewalk, yelling as loud as I can, “At last, dear God, at last!”

As I look back, I am astonished at God's power, His comfort, His sense of humor, His patience, His glory, and His wisdom. He

THE TIME OF TROUBLE?

of Jesus' completed work of salvation through His life, death, and resurrection!

As I continued reading my Bible, now duct-taped together, I was constantly having to decide—what do I believe: the Bible or Ellen White? One day at “clinic church”, I leaned over and asked a former teacher in the nearby Adventist college about this dilemma. He leaned over and whispered, “Read the minutes from the 1919 Bible Conference regarding Ellen White. It's on-line.” I read them, and I was appalled by how my own church had deceived me.

Everything I was learning was astonishing. Bible verses that I had read many times, now glowed with a golden light of joy. I watched God's “tender mercies” in my life; He was vividly showing me His love, His concern, and His faithfulness to me.

I now knew I was safe in His hand:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:27).

I was no longer in His mouth about to be spit out:

So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (Rev. 3:16–17).

It was a much better neighborhood. I knew the Truth. Jesus was my best Friend:

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).

Where I will be

I focused again on my Adventist friend in turmoil across the desk from me. I knew that she and her husband had “picked out

has been with me, just as David had said He was, and He led me through the deep waters of death and loss and deception and has placed me in green pastures. Now He feeds me with His truth and cares for me with His loyal love. He gives me His work to do, and He fills me with joy.

My heart is thankful—because really, it is all about Him!†



Margie Littell is a retired Clinical Audiologist dual certified in the state of Tennessee as a Speech Therapist who moderates several online former Adventist discussion groups. Her brother and sister-in-law, David and Teresa Littell, have written a book about their experience walking through their son Jonathan's illness and his death several years later from brain cancer, possibly precipitated by his earlier radiation treatments. For more information about obtaining their book, *TRUST IN HIS GLORY*, email them at delittell@gmail.com.

COLLEEN TINKER

I grew up in an observant Adventist family with parents who had lived through the Great Depression. Our Adventism did not forbid celebrating Christmas, but our prophet warned against Christmas indulgence only slightly less than she warned against Easter. My frugal mom and dad, committed to thrift and piety, made little of the day. We had trees with lights when my sister and I were very young, but as we reached our teens, whatever decorating that occurred at our house was done by my sister and me. We even cut a seedling fir tree from the woods outside our Oregon house one year and propped that pathetic branch in a pail of dirt in our living room, vainly trying to hide it with colored lights and tinsel.

My most vivid Christmas memories were of our annual steamed apple pudding and of our yearly Christmas Eve lutefisk which my Romanian mother would fix for my Swedish father. My sis and I disliked that lutefisk as much as my dad liked it, but I remember it as one of our few Christmas traditions.

I knew Christmas was the celebration of Jesus' birth, and I knew He had come to die for my sins. I knew He was God and man, but I didn't understand, when I was growing up, exactly what that meant. Mostly I thought of Christmas as a magical time outside our home. I loved the Christmas music on the radio, and I loved seeing the lights decorate the buildings in the city. In fact, it always seemed to me that somehow I could "catch" that magic if I knew how to try—I just never could figure out how to bring it home.

We sang "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" in our undecorated church, but there were no Christmas Eve services (they were Catholic!). And if Christmas fell on a Sabbath, we had to wait to open presents until after sundown. We could have no celebrating on the true holy Sabbath Day. After all, we believed Christmas was really pagan. Jesus wasn't really born then! Sabbath would always trump Christmas.

Bait and switch

Decades passed. It was 1995, and Richard and I were beginning to study the Bible with our Christian neighbors. Richard had been privately certain they would see the light and convert to Adventism—it is a fact that Adventists seldom have non-Adventist friends without an agenda to convert them. Surprisingly, though, we were becoming more and more astonished that the proof-texts we had known as Adventists sounded completely different when we read them in the context of their chapters.

December came, and our neighbors invited us to go with them to see their nephew perform in a Christmas musical. The pageant was produced by an evangelical church in Yorba Linda, and it was my first experience seeing a Christian church celebrate Christmas. I vividly remember what I wore—a denim dress with a jacket—and how I felt as we walked into a "Sunday church" for a religious service, even though it was not on Sunday. I was excited and felt a bit daring—I was progressive enough to share a Christmas service with Sunday Christians and to imagine that I wasn't all that different from them!

The lights dimmed, and the Christmas music filled the room as the drama began. The cast was skillful, and the leads had good

voices. Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, and the angels announcing the birth to the shepherds were warmly familiar. I felt that almost-magical feeling that the carols and the manger always evoked—but then things went "south". The musical left the Christmas story behind, and almost before I could catch my breath, the players were acting out Jesus' trial, passion—and most horrifying of all—they portrayed the crucifixion!

I was outraged. This was "bait and switch". The cross had absolutely nothing to do with Christmas, I felt, and including it in a Christmas musical was opportunistic and pathetic. Mention the cross at Easter if you must, but leave my Christmas alone! Christmas was sweet, sentimental—the magical Silent Night captured in glittery snow globes and celebrated with hot chocolate and carols and a glowing tree.

I left the church irritated. Christians had no business mixing up their holidays for the sake of proselytizing!

Clarity

Months passed, and our ongoing study of whole books of the New Testament with our neighbors began to change me. Jesus, I was learning, was not a meek and mild man who came to show me that I, too, could avoid sin if I prayed enough. Furthermore, I began to see that God wasn't expecting me to keep the law in order to prove to Him that I was safe to save. Jesus had done that for me!

In Adventism, the gospel was nebulous. It involved accepting Jesus into my heart (an undefined act) and then keeping the Sabbath and restricting my diet so God and the world would know I was loyal to Him. It included the Health Message and the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14—called by our prophet, "the gospel in verity". Sometimes the gospel was identified as the hope of the Second Coming. Nevertheless, however we identified the Adventist gospel, it always included the seventh-day Sabbath, and it never included an understanding that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection was all we needed in order to be right with God.

On the bottom line, Adventism did not teach that we are born dead in sin, with literal immaterial spirits that must be made alive through belief and trust in the Lord Jesus. When Richard and I learned who we really were—helpless, dead sinners who could never avoid sin by praying hard—and when we understood that Jesus is our Substitute, not our example of how to be saved, we knew we had to leave.

We had to face the shame of admitting we had thought we were true Christians, but we had believed in a false Jesus who was not really Almighty God. We had not understood that His blood literally cleanses us from our original sin. We had no idea what it meant to be born again. We had believed Jesus could have sinned and failed; His mission could have been a bust, and all creation would then be cast into chaos as the Trinity was broken up.

One day clarity came: Richard and I stood in the kitchen and knew we could not remain in Adventism when we no longer believed its teachings. We could not expect our sons to tell us the truth if we did not live in the truth we now believed. We could no longer give offerings to an organization that believed Jesus' blood was not

The Christ Who Changed Christmas



necessary for God to be “forgiving”, nor could we support a religion that taught Jesus’ atonement was not completed at the cross. Neither could we endorse a view of man that denied original sin. We had to leave the church we loved because it said we could not know we were saved. As Adventists, only our faithful obedience to the law would reveal our commitment to God, and that obedience could not be evaluated until Jesus came in judgment. Now we knew: Jesus had taken God’s judgment in our place. We could not deny Him by endorsing an anti-Christ gospel by continuing to function as Adventists. What we believed had to match our behavior.

Removing the grave clothes

In His sovereign mercy, the Lord planted us in a church where we could hear His word taught carefully, lovingly, and faithfully week after week. In 1998 Richard and I began listening to Gary Inrig preach the word, and reality became visible. It was shocking and exciting as our Adventist worldview was dismantled doctrine by doctrine in the light of Scripture. God was sovereign, and our free will was not the ultimate value in the universe. It was like discovering I had lived in an artificial world and suddenly bumping into the limits of my perception, realizing I had been lied to; reality was outside the paradigm I had learned, and only immersion in Scripture could fix me.

Leaving a cult, however, is not merely finding Jesus and going on. When a former cult member leaves her group, she has to be “deprogrammed” while concurrently being taught biblical reality. There is

a carefully-constructed internal framework on which every detail of life has been hung in a cult-member’s head. The gospel of the Lord Jesus’ finished work is the key that unlocks that prison and births that person into eternal life, but then the grave clothes have to be unwound. The Christians who receive the new ex-cultist believer must understand how those grave clothes were wound around them in order to help the fragile young life become freed from them.

Why do I make such a point of telling you these details?

Insight in a letter

I received a letter recently from a man named Dave in North Carolina who lives in a heavily Adventist community, and his letter explains the need for Christians to understand what Adventists believe underneath their right-sounding words. Dave has never been Adventist, but because someone once gave him a copy of Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy*, he began to research. He has done his homework, and he understands the nature and depth of Adventist deception.

In his letter he told me of his elderly Adventist neighbor with whom he has had numerous gentle sparrings in the yard. Recently the neighbor became sick, and Dave visited him. He writes:

My wife and I went by his home to check on him. The first 15 minutes of our visit he unloaded the full Adventist doctrinal message on us like never before (emphasis on the Ten Commandments). He apologized for talking so long and asked if we had anything we’d like to talk about.

I retrieved my Bible from the car. I told him up front that I was going to explain, using the Scriptures without commentary, why I believe the Ten Commandments in their original old covenant form were obsolete; why I believe the fourth commandment is not a “moral commandment”; why the Sabbath is not the seal of God for the believer, and that salvation comes only through believing in Jesus’ finished work of salvation. He listened patiently, and at one point started following along in his Bible.

I was surprised how much he didn’t know the Scriptures. I thought, since he was so outspoken about God and the Ten Commandments, that he would know the Bible. But, as we read selected passages, I saw his countenance begin to fall. Several times my friend used Adventist/EGW explanations to interpret verses. When I brought to his attention that those weren’t biblical interpretations, it forced him to give the Scripture a second look. He seemed almost confused that the two interpretations were basically opposites.

In the end I told him the Sabbath was a shadow of the Substance—Jesus. He told me he would put some information together to explain the covenants to me. He prayed, we hugged and said we loved one another.

Afterward, I hoped what I told him didn’t make him feel [confused] the way I had felt when I read *The Great Controversy*. I began to think: maybe it is reckless to stir up an Adventist community with the gospel. Where might these people land if they leave the Adventist church? I have no doubt the Holy Spirit can direct them. But, I still pondered the idea of a community church plant that understands the complex Adventist doctrine and the impact it has on the Adventist member, and is equipped to minister to those questioning or separating from the Adventist church.

I’m not confident that local churches understand the Adventist doctrine well enough to satisfy the deep needs a separating Seventh-day Adventist would require. My experience (limited) is that most church folks in this area believe Sunday is the “Christian Sabbath” and that the Ten Commandments are the “rules that guide our lives”.

Please pray for my Adventist neighbor and his wife. Also, pray that if God wills, the pure gospel of Jesus Christ would invade our community. And lastly, that He would gather together a group to minister to those that might be questioning or separating from the Adventist church.

Thanks to all of you former Adventists for doing the hard work of compiling the resources that helped me cull out the lies and recognize the truth of the gospel of Romans 3.

Christian churches not prepared

Dave makes an excellent point: not all Christian churches are prepared to help people leaving Adventism unwrap their worldview.

Richard and I are blessed to be part of a new church planted in Loma Linda: Redeemer Fellowship. By God’s grace, we are growing, and in January we will be moving out of our current meeting place in the Holiday Inn Express conference room in Loma Linda and will be gathering in space vacated by another group. From this new space we can see Loma Linda Academy and Loma Linda University Medical Center. The Lord has provided this space in a community that is spiritually dark but masquerades as an angel of

light. Loma Linda is one of the world’s largest centers of Adventism. It also has a large population of Catholics, and right on our doorstep are Muslims and a host of Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, and pagans.

We at Redeemer Fellowship meet every Sunday to rejoice in our common faith in the Lord Jesus and to be strengthened by Gary Inrig’s faithful preaching of the Word, but we will also need to be alert. Whether we like it or not, we are being called to be apologists for the gospel.

The Christians at Redeemer Fellowship need to understand the Adventists who live around them and who may come through their doors—just as Dave said in his letter. Those who have never been Adventist cannot assume they understand their Adventist friends when they say they are saved by grace or that they have been “born again”. In fact, Adventists themselves often do not know that their understandings are different from Christians’.

The gospel does answer every warped cultic doctrine, but an Adventist can listen to the gospel and read the Bible and never “hear” what they say because of his Adventist interpretive grid. At the same time exiting Adventists are becoming immersed in Scripture, those who minister to them need to understand the worldview behind their benign-sounding words in order to help them emerge from the crippling paradigm that deafens them to truth.

Celebrating the Baby born to die

This Christmas I rejoice in the provision of a new venue for our fledgling congregation. As I look at my local church, I am overwhelmed at the way the Lord is building this body and placing people of all ages and gifts together for His glory.

Even more amazing to me, though, is the fact that knowing the real Jesus of the Bible has completely changed Christmas. It’s no longer a sentimental birth story with sweet shepherds and kings and sparkling stars. Now it is a miracle. God the Son took on flesh, and “all the fulness of deity dwelt in Him bodily.” Jesus was born a human baby—but WITHOUT a dead spirit. He was the only baby ever born who did not have to be born again; He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and Life was His from the moment of conception.

Now, I cannot think of Christmas without also seeing the cross. Now I understand that the blood of Jesus—the blood that so offends the people who still live in the Adventism I once embraced—is the reason that Baby was born. He was born to die, and Christmas is the day we celebrate the greatest gift God has given man.

This Christmas, rejoice in God the Son who became man in order to put away human sin through shedding His own blood. If, as you go through this Christmas season, you encounter Adventists, don’t assume they know the Lord. Realize they have a completely different set of definitions underneath their words than most Christians have.

The Lord who called us will equip us, and our willingness to understand the worldview of those He brings to us will help us unwrap the grave clothes from those who have been stunted by lifetimes of deception. The Baby who was born to die has given us His life, and He is walking with us into this new chapter of our life in Loma Linda.†

ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #23

ADVENTISM'S MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #23

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving, tender, and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons.

COMMENTARY ON THIS STATEMENT

A cursory reading of this Fundamental Belief would likely lead most readers to conclude that it is entirely orthodox: marriage is a life-long union between a man and a woman based on a promise (covenant) to each other and to God. There are, however, several Adventist teachings hidden within this statement.

This Fundamental Belief states innocuously that marriage should only occur between those “who share a common faith.” In fact, Scripture plainly teaches that believers shouldn’t marry non-believers. For the Adventist, however, a “common faith” means Seventh-day Adventism. In fact, most Adventist pastors will refuse to perform a marriage ceremony for an Adventist marrying a Christian from any other denomination. What Adventists are saying when they refuse to perform a marriage between one of their church members and a member of any other Christian church is that the “outsider” is an unbeliever.

Ephesians 4:4-6 describes the unity that all believers share; it includes one Lord and one faith. “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Insisting that a Christian does not share the “one faith” with an Adventist is an admission that Adventists do not, deep down, believe that they follow the same God as the rest of Christianity. All of the Adventist insistence that they are just another church is unmasked in this one simple teaching.

The most disturbing statement in the Fundamental Belief, however, occurs near the end of the statement: “Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message.” This sentence directly contradicts the words of Christ, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Mt. 10:34-36).

This scriptural contradiction, though, is less concerning than the phrase “the final gospel message”. In other words, the gospel message has changed at some point in time, and the “final gospel message” is somehow different from the gospel presented by Christ and His disciples. In fact, Adventists believe in a concept of “Present Truth”—a code for the new information provided specifically to Adventists through their prophet Ellen White. The prophetic writings of Ellen White teach this “final gospel”.

Adventists who claim to follow Scripture alone should carefully consider the implications of Paul’s words, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9). †

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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

One cannot fully understand Adventism and the content of *The Clear Word* on passages regarding law without understanding the centrality of the Ten Commandments in the religion’s great controversy world view. This insider understanding was established by Ellen White’s so-called “great controversy vision” and recorded in her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*.

In brief, Adventist theology teaches there is currently a “great controversy” between Christ and Satan, with Satan claiming God is unfair to expect His people to keep the law. The “law” is identified as the Ten Commandments and is claimed to be the eternal standard God expects His created beings to uphold—including keeping the seventh-day Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment. Thus, the great controversy has at its heart the requirement to keep the seventh day in order to vindicate both God’s character and the fairness of the law.

Adventism’s eighth Fundamental Belief articulates its position on the great controversy in part as follows:

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. ... Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated.¹

Primarily, the great controversy is over God’s law and his character, but God will “ultimately be vindicated” at the end of this controversy. This teaching is contrary to Scripture which teaches that Jesus, through His work on the cross, His death, and His resurrection, has “disarmed” Satan and his minions, triumphing “over them through Him” (Col. 2:14). Hebrews 2:14 also tells us, “Therefore, since the children have flesh and blood, he himself also shared the same things, so that by his death he might destroy the one who has the power of death (that is, the devil).”

Moreover, Romans 3:25, 26 reveals that the only “controversy” that existed was not an accusation that God was unfair to require people to keep the law, but rather the question was whether God was just in leaving “the sins previously committed” unpunished. Jesus’ propitiatory death proved that God was just, because He both took the responsibility for paying the price of human sin, and He justifies those who have faith in Him. Any unanswered questions were answered at the cross, and Jesus was the victor.

By contrast, Adventism teaches that the work on the cross was only the beginning of the atonement; it would not be finished until the end of the investigative judgment.

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THE WORD ON LAW

Adventist understanding of law

Along with understanding the great controversy theme, an understanding of Adventism's view of God's law will help us interpret some of the changes made in the text of *The Clear Word*. Fundamental Belief 19 provides our initial insight into this belief:

19. The Law of God: The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. ... Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives and therefore strengthens Christian witness.²

Notice that this statement asserts that salvation is "all of grace", but that its fruitage is "obedience to the Commandments" which "is an evidence of our love for the Lord..." This reasoning betrays the Adventist belief that salvation is of grace, but staying saved and loving our Lord require keeping the Ten Commandments. In fact, Adventism teaches that the seventh-day Sabbath "is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people."³ Thus the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the universal sign, or seal, designating a person as one of God's people.

In contrast to Nehemiah 9:12–14 and Galatians 3:19, Adventism denies that the Ten Commandments were delivered through Moses only to the people of Israel. Instead, Adventism argues that the Ten Commandments have been binding on all people at all times, including Adam and Eve, Noah, the patriarchs, and all Gentiles. Notice the statement in fundamental belief #19 above that claims this law is "binding upon all people of every age."

Since Adventism teaches that the Ten Commandments are binding upon all people of every age, members must, therefore, consider obedience to all of them to be necessary for salvation. In fact, the General Conference Ministerial Association admits this conclusion in its book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. On page 267 of the second edition of that work we read the following:

As the expression of God's character and love, the Ten Commandments reveal His will and purpose for humanity. They demand perfect obedience, "for whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). Obedience to the law, as the rule of life, is vital to our salvation.⁴

Not only does Adventism teach that the Ten Commandment law has been binding on all humans who ever lived, but it also teaches the law was known to the angelic beings even before the creation of Adam and Eve. *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe* further states:

That Lucifer and his angels sinned gives evidence of the presence of the law even before Creation (2 Pet. 2:4).⁵

Ellen G. White, prophetess⁶ of the Adventist organization, wrote about this belief in her book *Spirit of Prophecy*:

The law of God existed before man was created. The angels were governed by it. ... Adam taught his descendants the law of God, which law was handed down to the faithful through successive



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generations. ... The law was preserved by Noah and his family, who for right-doing were saved in the ark by a miracle of God. Noah taught his descendants the ten commandments. The Lord preserved a people for himself from Adam down, in whose hearts was his law.⁷

Not only were the angels and the pre-flood population of the earth “governed” by the Ten Commandments, according to Ellen White, but she also says that the law will be the “standard” against which God will judge everyone in the judgment:

In order to be prepared for the judgment, it is necessary that men should keep the law of God. That law will be the standard of character in the judgment.⁸

Two more of Ellen White’s classic statements round out Adventists’ perception of the Ten Commandments:

The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of divine love and wisdom. The harmony of creation depends upon the perfect conformity of all beings, of everything, animate and inanimate, to the law of the Creator.⁹

God requires perfection of His children. His law is a transcript of His own character, and it is the standard of all character. This infinite standard is presented to all that there may be no mistake in regard to the kind of people whom God will have to compose His kingdom.¹⁰

Because of Ellen White’s many comments about the centrality of the Ten Commandments in all existence, Adventists believe that the law is the “transcript” of God’s character, and that their obedience to every one of them is required for salvation. In fact, however, Jesus is the “transcript” of God’s character. Ten commands do not embody the character of almighty God. In Jesus, however, “all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). He is eternal God incarnate. In contrast, the law was not given until Mt. Sinai, and it lasted until the “Seed” came (Gal. 3:19). Contrary to Ellen White’s pronouncements, the law is not eternal, and no temporary document can be a transcript of the eternal, omniscient, one true God.

Clear Word and eternal law

There is no scriptural support for the belief that the Ten Commandment law is eternal and that it governed Adam and Eve. But what does *The Clear Word* have to say to us about the law? Here we will compare several texts with the *English Standard Version* (ESV) to demonstrate that author Jack Blanco has twisted the plain words of Scripture in order to convey Adventist doctrine in this paraphrase of the Bible.

Notice the subtle but serious change that is made to the following passage from Matthew.

Matthew 12:5–6

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

If you’re worried about My disciples working on the Sabbath, don’t you realize that priests work harder on that day than on any other? But they’re doing God’s work. I know what’s right to do on the Sabbath and what isn’t.

The Clear Word

If you’re concerned about work being done on the Sabbath, what about the priests who work harder in the Temple on the Sabbath than on any other day of the week? You don’t realize it, but you’re talking to One greater than your Temple.

English Standard Version

Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

Note in TEECW and TCWfK Jesus does not claim to be “greater than the temple” but is merely knowledgeable about what’s right and what isn’t right to do on the Sabbath. In fact, Jesus was declaring that He was greater than the center of Judaism. By saying He was greater than the temple, He was claiming that everything inside the temple was fulfilled in Him. He is the Bread of Life and the Light of the world. He is the Sacrifice, and in Him and His blood is atonement. He is the author of and the fulfillment of the law; all morality is in Him. Even the sign of the covenant, the Sabbath, is fulfilled in Him and His blood which He poured out for sins. Rest and ceasing from our works is found in Him.

Furthermore, Jesus clearly points out that the “priests ... profane the Sabbath and are guiltless,” while Blanco changes the account to read that the “priests ... work harder ... on the Sabbath

than on any other day.” In Adventism, someone may work very hard on the Sabbath yet be exempt from the guilt of breaking the law if one has certain “exempt” jobs. For example, within Adventism, a doctor or nurse may work on the Sabbath and not incur guilt because they are doing what Jesus did on the Sabbath day—helping and healing sick people—even though they are receiving compensation for their work. In contrast, a factory worker, for example, who continues to work on the Sabbath day cannot become a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The priests’ Sabbath work and Sabbath sacredness itself come into focus with Jesus’ words in the next verse where He states that “something greater than the temple is here.” Given the context, that Jesus is greater than everything—including the law—which is contained in the temple, one could argue that “one greater than the Sabbath is here.” Since Jesus is the creator of the Sabbath, He could “profane” the day and yet be guiltless because He had authority over it. Jesus makes this clear in the next two verses:

Matthew 12:7–8

Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

In the Scripture God says, “I want My people to be kind to others. That’s more important than bringing me offerings.” If you would remember that, you wouldn’t always be judging people. God’s Son is Lord of the Sabbath and He’s the one who made the rules.

The Clear Word

If you understood what God meant when He said, ‘I would rather you show mercy than to offer endless sacrifices for sins,’ then you would not have condemned the innocent. It would have been obvious to you that my disciples were simply trying to satisfy their hunger after attending the synagogue. It is the Son of Man who is the Lord of the Sabbath.

English Standard Version

And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

As usual, *The Clear Word* adds many words to the text. In TEECW and TCWfK Blanco adds that Jesus is the one “who made the rules.” Furthermore, the Bible does not hint that Jesus is subject to any such rules. Instead, Scripture states that Jesus’ authority over Sabbath put Him above any “Sabbath rules” because He was greater than the Sabbath, not subject to it.

Furthermore, Blanco diminishes Jesus’ authority over Sabbath and established “rules” by adding the idea that the disciples’ picking and eating grain was simply “Sabbath dinner”. The Bible does not say Jesus and His disciples had been in the synagogue before plucking and eating grain, and it never establishes the Adventist practice of “Sabbath dinner”. Blanco deliberately reinforces Adventist Sabbath-keeping and church attendance with this addition. He destroys Jesus’ point that He is greater than the Sabbath and consequently has complete authority over it.

If the Ten Commandments were eternal and universal, handed down from generation to generation from Adam and Eve forward, we would expect to find all of them repeated in the New Testa-

ment, particularly at the time of the foundation of the new Christian church. To be sure, the moral principles contained in the Decalogue are repeated many times in the New Testament. The Sabbath, however, is never required, nor is Sabbath-breaking listed as a sin in the New Testament epistles.

When questions about the law and its application to the Gentiles arose, however, church leaders agreed at the first church council recorded in Acts 15 that only four stipulations from the Mosaic covenant would be required of Gentile believers:

Acts 15:28–29

English Standard Version

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.

The Clear Word

We feel that the Holy Spirit has directed us not to put any burden on you except the following necessary guidelines, in order to promote greater fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. First, don’t identify with paganism by eating things sacrificed to idols. Second, don’t eat food prepared with blood or eat meat from strangled animals as the pagans do. And third, don’t adopt the sexual practices of the world with its many perversions. If you do this much, you’ll do well. Best wishes from us to you.”

Blanco presents these guidelines as being for the purpose of promoting “greater fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.” Scripture, however, does not explain them as social pragmatism. Although they may help to some degree, these four laws are not sufficient to promote fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. For example, the food Gentiles eat (and notice that Jewish food laws were not included in the list of requirements) would be considered unclean by Jewish believers. Moreover, Jewish believers were keeping the Sabbath, yet no such commandment had been given to the Gentile believers. While the requirements listed in this passage helped facilitate table fellowship among Jewish and Gentile believers, they primarily protected Gentiles from practices connected to pagan worship.

Furthermore, the occasion of the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15 would have been an excellent time to teach the Gentiles about the “perpetuity of the law” and Sabbath-keeping if the law was required of Christians. However, the Ten Commandments are completely missing in this letter from the leaders of the Church at Jerusalem.

Ceremonial and moral laws?

Adventism, as well as many in the evangelical world, divides the law into parts: ceremonial, civil, and moral. While the commands within the law do apply to different aspects of life, the parts cannot be separated from one another. Scripture treats the law as a unit and never divides it into separate categories. The law stands or falls as a unit. Jesus did not fulfill only ceremonial aspects of the law; He

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fulfilled the whole law. Adventism’s rigidity about this divided law, however, derives from Ellen White who writes:

God’s people, whom He calls His peculiar treasure, were privileged with a twofold system of law; the moral and ceremonial. ...

From the creation the moral law was an essential part of God’s divine plan, and was as unchangeable as Himself. The ceremonial law was to answer a particular purpose in Christ’s plan for the salvation of the race. The typical system of sacrifices and offerings was established that through these services the sinner might discern the great offering, Christ. . . . The ceremonial law was glorious; it was the provision made by Jesus Christ in counsel with His Father, to aid in the salvation of the race. The whole arrangement of the typical system was founded on Christ. Adam saw Christ prefigured in the innocent beast suffering the penalty of his transgression of Jehovah’s law.¹¹

Adventism’s teaching of the divided law is key in their argument that the Sabbath is an eternal moral principle. They argue that the Ten Commandments are “moral”, not “ceremonial”, and because the Sabbath is in the center of the Ten, it must, therefore, be a moral requirement. Thus they argue that the “ceremonial law” of sacrifices was done away at the cross, but the Sabbath continues as part of the “transcript of God’s character”, Adventism’s definition of the Ten Commandments.

This artificial division of the law, however, confuses the New Testament’s clear teaching about the new covenant and Jesus’ fulfillment of the law. Adventists use this argument to state that because the Sabbath is in the Decalogue, it is a moral law in exactly the way the commands against murder, stealing, and adultery are eternal moral laws. They argue that the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, are eternal. In reality, however, the weekly Sabbath was a ritual law exactly as were the yearly and monthly sabbaths such as Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the New Moon. (See Leviticus 23 in which the religious festivals are listed and explained.)

Paul’s epistles explain clearly how the law and the Sabbath are obsolete in the new covenant. Not surprisingly, in the preface of his first edition of *The Clear Word*, Jack Blanco admitted that “The epistles of Paul were the most difficult to paraphrase.”¹² In fact, it is in Paul’s letters that we see some of the most serious differences between TCW and the Bible as Blanco incorporates Adventist theology into his paraphrase of the biblical text.

According to Adventism, whenever we come across a passage in the New Testament that says the law has been done away or made obsolete, we should understand those passages to apply only to the ceremonial law, not to the whole law including the Ten Commandments. *The Clear Word* is clear on this point, as seen in the following passage:

Colossians 2:16–17

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Don’t let anyone tell you that you have to go through certain rituals, eat certain foods, keep certain feasts, or observe extra sabbaths to be saved. All these things pointed forward to Jesus. So now they’re meaningless.

The Clear Word

Don’t let anyone control your life by giving you a set of ceremonial rules about what to eat, what to drink and which monthly festivals or special sabbaths to keep. All these rules about ceremonial days were given as a shadow of the reality to come, and that reality is Jesus Christ.

English Standard Version

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.

Blanco has changed Paul’s warning not to allow anyone to pass judgment on one’s food or drink by adding the words “ceremonial rules”, “rituals”, and “feasts” to the text. He does not allow this verse to declare that one may eat all foods without limiting himself only to those foods declared to be “clean” in the Mosaic law. Furthermore, Blanco changes Paul’s command not to let anyone pass judgment on the keeping of any Sabbath—whether it’s a yearly festival, a monthly new moon, or a weekly Sabbath—by twisting the text to refer only to “special”, “extra”, “festival” Sabbaths.

The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a moral issue in Adventism; therefore Blanco changes Paul’s reference of the weekly

“Sabbath” to “special sabbaths” in order to obscure Paul’s prohibition against requiring a weekly Sabbath observance. Yet it is clear in Scripture that no one is to judge another in matters of food, drink, or a Sabbath day, specifically referring to the weekly Sabbath. Moreover, TEECW and TCWfK state that no one must require another to “observe extra sabbaths to be saved”—a command which implies that there is a Sabbath that must be observed to be saved. This requirement is, of course, the seventh-day Sabbath.

Paul famously addresses the fact that observing a Sabbath is not a requirement but a personal decision in Romans. Blanco, of course, must amend Paul’s clarity:

Romans 14:5

The Clear Word

The same thing applies to religious festivals. One person thinks he has to keep every Jewish festival, while another thinks those days are no different from other days. About nonessentials like these, everyone needs to make up his own mind.

English Standard Version

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

Paul’s “days” here most likely include the weekly Sabbath as well as the monthly and yearly Jewish festivals. Blanco, however, disallows the weekly Sabbath in Paul’s statement that personal conviction determines how a day is esteemed. He even states that Jewish festivals are “nonessentials”. He eclipses Paul’s declaration that personal conviction determines whether one esteems some days as more important, or whether he esteems each day alike. Clearly there are no intrinsically holy days, but Blanco’s paraphrase does not allow that meaning in the text.

In the following passage Paul uses a formula repeated throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. He lists the Jewish holy days in ascending order from days to years (sometimes this formula is reversed, listing them from years to days). Blanco, however, changes “days”, which would clearly refer to the weekly Sabbath, to “religious holidays”. He makes this change so *The Clear Word* will remain consistent with the Adventist teaching that the weekly Sabbath is a requirement, a moral issue, not just an issue of preference. “Holidays” will remove any sense of the passage referring to the seventh-day Sabbath.

Galatians 4:10–11

The Clear Word

You’re putting a saving significance on observing all kinds of religious holidays, months, seasons and years. I’m really worried about you, and wondering whether all my work for you has been in vain.

English Standard Version

You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

In 1 Timothy we are taught that the law is good when used lawfully, and Paul explains that it is for the ungodly and sinners, not for the just. Blanco, however, changes Paul’s meaning.

1 Timothy 1:8–11

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

We know that the law of God is good if used the right way. It’s not against good people. It’s against criminals, murderers, kidnapers, liars and those who have impure lives. It’s even against Christians who live contrary to God’s commandments. Sound doctrine brings the law and gospel together. That’s what God told us to teach.

The Clear Word

We know that the law of God is good if it is rightly understood and applied. The law does not condemn good men but those who are lawless. It’s against criminals, lawbreakers, irresponsible members of society and those we generally call sinners. It’s against the unholy and profane, those who mistreat their parents, who are murderers, prostitutes, sexual perverts, slave traders, kidnappers, liars and perjurers and anyone who lives contrary to God’s commandments and the gospel. Sound doctrine harmonizes the law and the gospel, which our glorious and blessed God entrusted me to teach.

English Standard Version

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Scripture clearly states that the law condemns sinners, not the just. *The Clear Word*, however, sets up a false contrast between “good men” and the “lawless”. Significantly, Jesus Himself declared there is no one good but God (Mk. 10:18). The “just”, however, are those who have been justified by faith and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, as Paul explains in Romans 5:1.

Furthermore, *The Clear Word* versions all state that the law and gospel are to be “harmonized” or “[brought]... together.” TEECW and TCWfK even state that the law is “against Christians who live contrary to God’s commandments.” (Of course, this designation would include all Christians who do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath—the vast majority of Christians.) Contrary to Blanco’s paraphrase, however, sound doctrine does not bring “the law and gospel together”. On the contrary, sound doctrine makes a clear distinction between the two and uses them in their proper spheres. The law is not the rule of faith and practice for Christians.

The law is changed

Not only does the New Testament teach that Christians are not under the law, but the book of Hebrews brings us face-to-face with the fact that the law has been changed. Chapter seven introduces this change, and the author explains it in detail. Blanco, however, has edited Adventist theology into Hebrews to make it say that only the “ceremonial” law is changed, leaving the rest of the Mosaic law intact.

Hebrews 7:12

The Clear Word

And if there is a change of priesthood, there must also be a change of the law that forms the basis of the priesthood.

English Standard Version

For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

Notice that Blanco states the change is “a change of the law that forms the basis of the priesthood” rather than simply “a change in the law.” Blanco reveals the Adventist belief that the Ten Commandments are eternal, predating the levitical priesthood. According to this belief, the Decalogue cannot be changed; only the ceremonial laws governing the priest’s performances of the sacrifices and the temple service could change.

In fact, Blanco overtly introduces the idea of the “ceremonial law” as opposed simply to the law, or “a former commandment”, in verses 18–19:

Hebrews 7:18–19

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

So the old rituals of the Levites and priests at the Temple are no longer needed. Besides, those rituals were weak and could not change people’s lives. All they could do was point us to Jesus. So now we have a better hope, because through Jesus we ourselves can come into the very presence of God.

The Clear Word

So the ceremonial law with its rites and symbols and all the instructions given to the Levitical priests had to be set aside because it was ineffective and no longer needed. That is to say, the law of ceremonies had no power to perfect our salvation but only to point to it. Now a much better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God. This hope came to us through Jesus Christ.

English Standard Version

For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

It is not only the “law of ceremonies” that has become ineffective and useless, but the entire law, because “the law made nothing perfect”. It was, as the author of Hebrews demonstrates in Hebrews 10, only a shadow of the good things in Christ. The entire law was changed when Jesus came as a new kind of high priest—one in the order of Melchizedek instead of according to Aaron (Heb. 7).

In chapter 8 Blanco continues his decimation of Hebrews’ powerful declaration that the old covenant was flawed, so God established a new one. He invents what he calls “the Levitical covenant” and forces the text to render that fictional entity obsolete. In fact, Hebrews 8 quotes from Jeremiah 31:31–34 where God rendered the old covenant—of which the Ten Commandments were its very words (Ex. 34:28)—obsolete. Notice how Blanco distorts God’s word:

Hebrews 8:7–8

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

If the first agreement God made with Moses under the old priesthood had been perfect, why make a new one under the priesthood of Jesus? People misunderstood the old priesthood. They had faith in it instead of in what Jesus would do for them. So God said, “The time is coming when I will make a new agreement with my people.”

The Clear Word

If the Levitical covenant made at Sinai under the leadership of Moses had been faultless and final, then why would there be need for a new priestly covenant under the leadership of Christ? But God found fault with how the people accepted it, placing their faith in what they could do instead of in what Christ would do. In the days of Jeremiah, He said, “The time is coming when I will carry out the promise I made to Abraham and will set up a new order of things with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”

English Standard Version

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

Not only does Blanco create a fictional “Levitical covenant” to avoid God’s declaration that He found fault with the old covenant, but he also avoids the statement that God found fault with the people themselves—not merely with the way they accepted the covenant. Then Blanco changes the meaning of the text by having God say He would keep His promise to Abraham by setting up “a new order of things”. With this statement, Blanco is introducing the Adventist teaching that there is only one covenant but various expressions of it. This text, however, is not referring to the Abrahamic covenant. Rather, it clearly describes a new covenant promised by Jeremiah, and Hebrews 8 states that the covenant He made with Israel at Sinai is obsolete.

Moreover, TEECW and TCWfK say the people misunderstood the priesthood and were to look forward to Jesus. This idea is not in the text. The Israelites at Sinai had not had Jesus clearly revealed to them; they were expected to trust the God who led and provided for them. Nowhere does Scripture suggest that ancient Israel was expected to “have faith in what Jesus would do for them”. Rather, they were to obey God’s word and trust His promises. God’s word did foreshadow the Lord Jesus, but Israel did not fully understand that fact. They knew that their God delivered them and provided for them, both materially and spiritually, and they were to trust Him.

In Hebrews 8:12–13 Blanco further obscures the reality of the new covenant by continuing to write about Abraham and a “Levitical covenant”, neither of which are in the text:

Hebrews 8:12–13

The Clear Word

“I will be merciful and forgive their wickedness, and I will remember their sins no more.” When God talked about a new

covenant, He was not talking about doing away with the covenant of righteousness He had made with Abraham, but the Levitical covenant which has now become obsolete and old.

English Standard Version

“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Distorted central passage

One of the central passages in the New Testament regarding the law is 2 Corinthians 3. This chapter clearly explains that believers are “servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” It even states that the law is a “ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones.” Blanco’s paraphrase clearly reveals Adventism’s true belief that the law continues. In fact, his first edition of *The Clear Word* was even more distorted than his current edition. Therefore, we will quote at length from 2 Corinthians from both the first edition and the current edition in order to demonstrate how this paraphrase twists God’s word for the purpose of reinforcing Adventist theology.

2 Corinthians 3:7–16

The Clear Word Bible, 1st Ed.

The good news of salvation was spelled out in the Old Testament at the time God wrote the commandments on tables of stone and told them to build Him a sanctuary. Those events which were accompanied by incredible glory are today misunderstood and misapplied by the Jews until they sound as if God pronounced a death sentence on mankind. When Moses came down from the mountain, the Israelites couldn’t even look at him, his face was so radiant with glory. But that glory had to pass away and the glory of Christ had to come. When you think of what the Holy Spirit is doing and what He’s writing on peoples hearts, isn’t that more glorious than God writing His law on tables of stone? If a system of religious services which contained only promises of salvation and in itself could not give life was so full of glory, how much more glorious is God’s offer of salvation today now that those Old Testament promises have been fulfilled and ratified by Jesus Christ! Because of the glorious act of God giving His Son to die for us, the Old Testament services are now at an end.

If that which only lasted for a short time was so glorious, how much more glorious is that which lasts forever! We can talk to you plainly and with confidence because our hope has been secured. The glory we proclaim is much more radiant than that of Moses. He had to have a veil over his face to hide his glory when he talked to the people. But that glory faded away. It had to give way to the radiance of Christ. The Israelites are wearing a veil over their faces today when they read the Old Testament and misapply what they read, because only in Christ can those Old Testament services be understood. Even today when they read the writings of Moses every Sabbath, a veil of ignorance and misunderstanding continues to hang over their faces, keeping them in the dark. When they do open their hearts to the truth, as some of them have, and turn to the Lord

Jesus Christ, that veil of misunderstanding falls off and the significance of the Old Testament services are seen for what they are.

The Clear Word

At Sinai God wrote the law on tables of stone. The giving of the commandments was accompanied by such glory that when Moses came down from the mountain, the Israelites couldn’t even look at him. But that glory had to pass away. When you think of the Holy Spirit writing the law on people’s hearts, isn’t that more glorious than God writing His law on tables of stone? If that system of religious service containing only promises of salvation was full of glory, how much more glorious is God’s offer of salvation today now that those Old Testament promises have been fulfilled and ratified by Jesus Christ. Because of the unspeakably glorious act of God in giving His Son to die for us, the Old Testament services are now at an end.

If that which lasted for only a short time was so glorious, how much more glorious is that which lasts forever! That’s why we can preach with such confidence and boldness, because the hope we have has been secured by Jesus Christ. The glory we proclaim is much more radiant than that of Moses. He had to have a veil over his face to hide his glory when he talked to the people. But that glory faded away. It had to give way to the radiance of the cross. In one sense, the Israelites are wearing a veil over their faces today when they read the Old Testament and misapply what they read, because only in Christ can those Old Testament services be understood. Even when they read the writings of Moses every Sabbath, a veil of ignorance and misunderstanding continues to hang over their faces, keeping them in the dark. When they do open their hearts to the truth as some of them have, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil of misunderstanding falls off and the significance of the Old Testament services are seen for what they truly were.

English Standard Version

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it.

For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Of first importance is the fact that, in verse 7, Blanco avoids any hint of the “ministry of death” when referring to the letters engraved on stone. To refer to the law as a ministry of death would be contrary to the Adventist teaching on the importance, permanence, and eternality of the Ten Commandment Law. Furthermore, Blanco consistently changes references to the law to refer only to the Old Testament sacrificial system, the levitical law. In fact, the

Adventist theology has Jesus leading its members to the law. Accepting Jesus, in other words, means embracing the law as one's attainable standard of righteous obedience because one has Jesus' example and power on his side.

sacrificial laws comprise only a portion of the whole Mosaic Law. Significantly, Blanco applies the references to fading glory only to the fading glory on Moses' face; he does not refer to the fact that the Bible actually speaks of the Old Testament law having a fading glory which was coming to an end.

Verse 8 is about the ministry of the Spirit as compared to the ministry of death. Blanco omits the contrast between a ministry of death and the ministry of righteousness and instead contrasts the law being written on stone with the law being written on the heart. This distortion obfuscates the purpose of this passage of Scripture. The law was to bring Israel to a point of desperation where they recognized their need of a Messiah, and it demanded death for disobedience. In these ways it was a burden and a ministry of death.

In verse 9 Paul speaks of a "ministry of condemnation." Blanco eliminates these words and instead refers to the Old Testament promises being fulfilled in Christ. "Ministry of condemnation" is too strong a term for Adventism to apply to the law; it is akin to "ministry of death". Blanco simply avoids using the words Scripture uses to describe the law.

In verse 10 Paul, referring to the law, says that "what once had glory has come to have no glory at all." Blanco changes this passage to say that the "Old Testament services are now at an end." Again he avoids identifying the law as something that has no glory. To ra-

tionalize his statements, he artificially divides the law into "ceremonial" and "moral" segments and insists that only the glory of the ceremonial portions of the law has ended. He cannot have the glory of the law itself coming to an end; to do so would contradict the Adventist understanding of the centrality and eternity of the Ten Commandment law.

In verse 13 of TCW Blanco adds that the glory of the former covenant must come to an end and "give way to the radiance of the glory of the cross," or, as he stated in his first edition, it gave way to "the radiance of Christ". This addition to the verse reveals his Adventist belief that only the ceremonial elements of the law ended because they were fulfilled in Christ. Adventism does not believe that the law came to an end; it has no understanding of Jesus fulfilling the Ten Commandments. The Bible, on the other hand, simply states that the old covenant represented by Moses and the fading glory were coming to an end.

Scripture says, in verse 14, that their "minds were hardened". Blanco, on the other hand, doesn't mention their hardened minds—a figure of speech which describes unbelief. Instead, he rewrites the verse to suggest the Israelites were simply misunderstanding the meaning in Moses' writing and misapplying it to their lives. Blanco does not want his readers to see Paul's clear indictment of those who read the law and ignore the new covenant and life in the Spirit.

Verse 16 replaces "when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" with "that veil of misunderstanding falls off and the significance of the Old Testament services are seen for what they truly were." Blanco wants us to read this passage and think it is only speaking of the ceremonial portions of the law rather than explaining that the whole law of Moses is replaced by the new covenant. In fact, 2 Corinthians 3 is specifically an explanation of the fading glory of the Mosaic covenant—including the Decalogue written on stone—and the increasing glory of the new covenant of the Spirit which has replaced the old covenant.

Adventism, however, cannot have the entire law coming to an end because Adventism teaches that the moral law, as preserved in the Ten Commandments, will remain unchanged for eternity. In fact, Ellen White wrote about the "immutable" nature of the Ten Commandments:

The law itself would have no glory were it not that Christ is embodied in it. The revelation of Jesus Christ cast its glory back into the Jewish age. The law had no power to save. It was lusterless, except as Christ was represented in the law as the One full of righteousness and truth. And when Christ was revealed in His advent to our world, and died man's sacrifice, type met antitype. Then the glory of that which is not typical, not to be done away, but which remaineth, God's law of ten commandments, the standard of righteousness was plainly discerned as immutable by all who saw to the end of that which was abolished.¹³

According to *The Clear Word*, when Christ died, He fulfilled the prophetic symbolism of the sacrificial system. Type met antitype, and only the ceremonial law came to an end. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* states:

As a reflection of God's character, the Ten Commandment law is moral, spiritual, and comprehensive, containing universal principles.¹⁴

But for the ceremonial laws:

No more worries about the ceremonial laws, with their complex requirements regarding food and drink offerings, celebrations of various festivals (Passover, Pentecost, etc.), new moons, or ceremonial sabbaths ... , which were only a “shadow of things to come” (Col.2:17).¹⁵

Note that Adventism does not include the weekly seventh-day Sabbath in the “shadow of things to come”. For Adventists, the weekly Sabbath is a moral principle and must be observed—it is not a shadow. This belief is made clear in the *Church Manual* of the Adventist Church where Sabbath-breaking is given as a reason for disciplining church members. Continued Sabbath-breaking will eventually lead to disfellowshipping of the individual in question. In fact, item number two under “Reasons for Discipline” reads:

2. Violation of the law of God, such as worship of idols, murder, stealing, profanity, gambling, Sabbathbreaking, and willful and habitual falsehood.¹⁶

Eternal law

Finally, Blanco tampers with Romans 5, that seminal chapter that explains man’s sinfulness in Adam that sentences us to death even without the law. Notice how he alters Romans 5:14 in order to connect sin with the law:

Romans 5:14a

The Clear Word

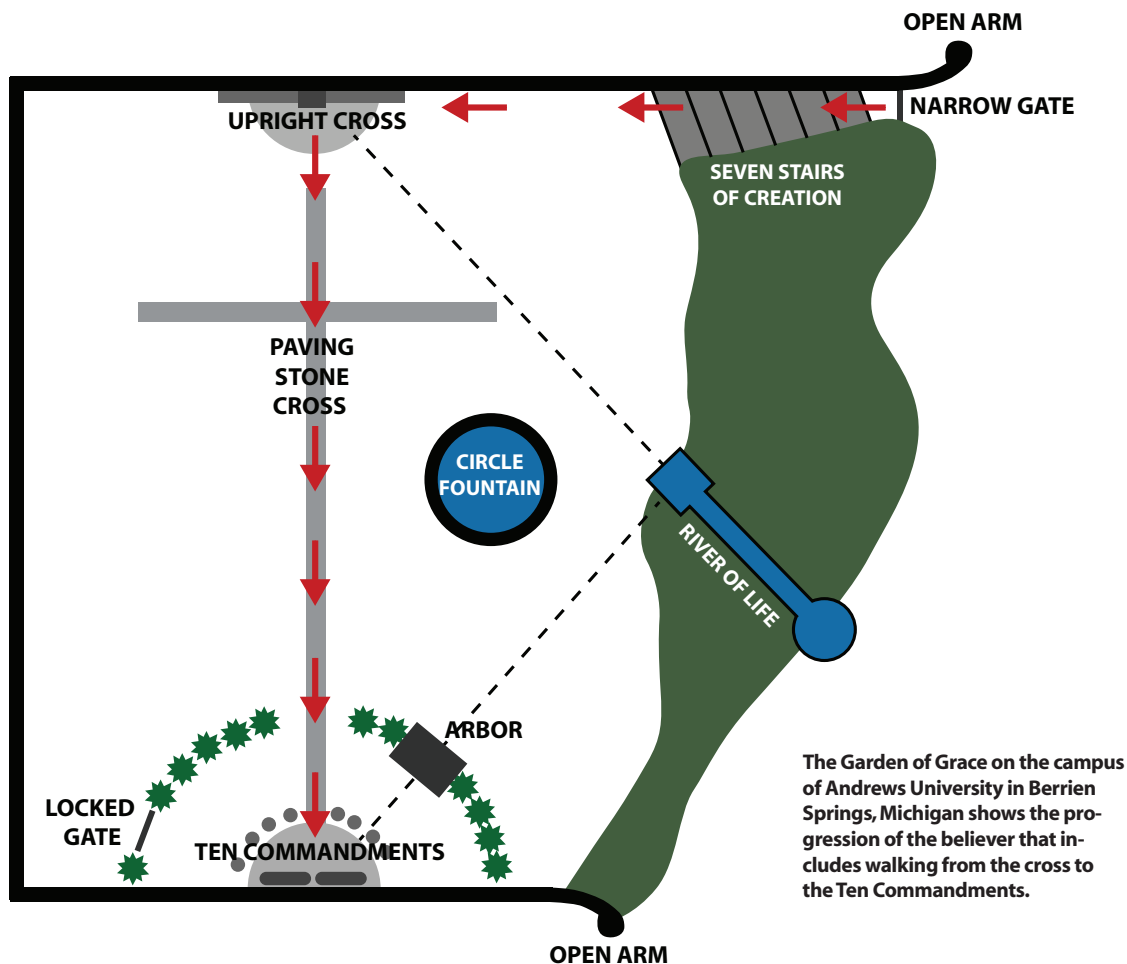
Yet the law was there because people died from Adam to Moses before the law was written out ...

English Standard Version

Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses ...

Blanco would have us believe that the law had been taught to mankind from the time of Adam. In fact, he uses the fact that people died before Sinai as proof that the Ten Commandments existed and were known, and their disobedience to that unwritten law was what constituted their sin. Yet Romans 5:13 tells us:

...for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.



The Garden of Grace on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan shows the progression of the believer that includes walking from the cross to the Ten Commandments.

According to the Scripture, there was no law from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, “yet death reigned” (Rom. 5:14a). Death can exist even in the absence of law.

In Adventism, however, the Law is considered to be on the same level as God. Ellen White said,

The law of God is as sacred as God Himself. It is a revelation of His will, a transcript of His character, the expression of divine love and wisdom.¹⁷

An Adventist writer has recently emphasized this Adventist view of the law’s being God’s revelation of Himself with these words:

There is the inclination to think of God as a Being of living power with infinite possibilities of exercising His will. We tend to see the law as being a much lesser thing, merely the spoken will of the Supreme Ruler and certainly not something which is the expression of Himself.¹⁸

Therefore, to place God on a level of infinite greatness while relegating the law to a lesser plane is to hold a position of serious error. They must be thought of as being as holy, as great, as infinite, and as sacred as one another.

Likewise, the understanding that Jesus came to reveal the Father is to comprehend that Christ came to magnify the law. These were not two separate tasks to be accomplished in turn or even in concert. They were one and the same work. The revealing of God’s character was the magnification of the law.¹⁹

In other words, Adventism sees the law as being the “transcript” of God’s character. It is the perfect statement and revela-

tion of God Himself. Jesus, who came to “reveal the Father”, in fact came to reveal the law. In Adventist theology, Jesus came to “magnify the law”, to demonstrate that humans could keep it, and that God’s requiring it of all mankind is fair and just.

Within Adventism, Jesus did not come to make the law obsolete by fulfilling it. He did not come to replace the law as the living source of righteousness and justice. In fact, Adventist theology has Jesus leading its members to the law. Accepting Jesus, in other words, means embracing the law as one’s attainable standard of righteous obedience because one has Jesus’ example and power on his side.

The Garden at Andrews University

This fact is demonstrated in the *Garden of Grace* on the campus of Andrews University and the Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan. One enters the garden by way of the cross, then one turns from the cross and walks toward “the Father” at the opposite end of the garden. The presence of the Father is represented by the Ten Commandments, and one arrives there by passing the cross which supplies the power to attain the law-keeping which enables being in God’s presence.

The “Description of the Garden” explains:

The Cross: Standing at the foot of the Cross you imagine Christ where everything behind the cross is washed with the water of life. And looking up, as though looking into heaven, you read the promise, “I Will Come Again”. Standing there in the calm embrace of your experience, you see your reflection in the polished granite [behind the cross]. You, the Cross, the Water, and the commandments all reflect into one image. And you are inescapably part of the story. The Cross, at the center of the circle, represented as the earth and at the pavement’s edge the mountains and the valleys form the earth.

The Commandments: Reflected. The Commandments beckon from across. It seems a long walk, like leaving earth, and entering the universe of the Creator. The path from the Cross leads directly to the Commandments and there is another way through the Holy Spirit from the quiet waters through the arbor...Once within the circle, up close and intimate, we read what the hand of God wrote in millenniums past. Simple and embraced by the Father’s arms, intimate in His presence.



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

This garden illustrates the heart of Adventist theology: the law does not lead one to Christ where His finished works frees one from the curse of the law and one finds new birth and eternal life in the Lord Jesus. Instead, Adventist theology sees Jesus as the power source or the down payment for salvation. Adventists believe that the law is eternal, representing and defining God and their own potential. For an Adventist, Jesus is the “ticket” to being able to keep the law and thus finally to experience the eternal perfection of God.

Conclusion – Freedom in Christ

The gospel message of freedom in Christ through belief and trust in His finished work of life, death, and resurrection is a joyful clarion call to Adventists to leave the legalism found in their religion. The gospel calls them to be born again and to become a part of the Body of Christ. It is “for freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1a.). Freedom in Christ is a powerful weapon against legalism, whether found in the Adventist Church or any other community. This freedom is not a freedom to sin, but a freedom from our own works and from the curse of the law. When we receive the righteousness of Christ our Lord and Savior by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone, we then know a freedom to choose to do his will. We were not free to obey Him in our unsaved state because we were formerly slaves to our sinful natures.

In Christ, however, we are transferred out of death into life (Jn. 5:24). The law no longer rules over us; we are free in Christ, and His own righteousness is credited to our account (Phil. 3:9). In Christ we are free from the law, and our eternal security is based on the grace of God in Christ alone! †

Endnotes

- ¹ Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd Ed., 2005, p. 113.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 263.
- ³ See *Ibid.*, p. 281, Fundamental Belief number 20, The Sabbath.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 267. Emphasis mine.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 270.
- ⁶ “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.” White, Ellen G., *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 36, 1958.
- ⁷ White, Ellen G., *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, 1870, pp. 261, 262.
- ⁸ White, Ellen G., *The Great Controversy*, 1911, p. 436.
- ⁹ White, Ellen G., *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890, p. 52.
- ¹⁰ White, Ellen G., *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 1900, p. 314.
- ¹¹ White, Ellen G., *The Faith I Live By*, 1958, p. 106.
- ¹² Blanco, Jack J., *The Clear Word Bible*, first edition, 1994, p. ix.
- ¹³ White, Ellen G., *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 10, p. 330, 1990. Emphasis mine.
- ¹⁴ Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd Ed., p. 265, 2005.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- ¹⁶ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 2010, p. 62.
- ¹⁷ White, Ellen G., *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 1890, p. 52.
- ¹⁸ Straub, Kevin (Compiler), *As He Is*, Teach Services Inc. Publishing, 2012, p. 104.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.



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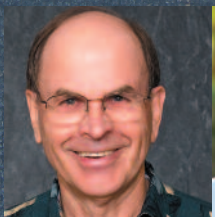
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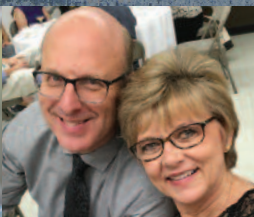
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Don't Be Anxious For Your Life!

MARTIN L. CAREY

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious for your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on, for life is more than food, and the body more than clothing” (Lk. 12:22–23).

She sat very still in her chair across the room, her face without expression. “The attacks come suddenly without warning,” she said. “My heart races, my chest hurts, and I can’t breathe.” She was a young mother who stayed home with her baby while her boyfriend was mostly gone, supposedly working. She had no outside help, no social life, and no church family. The panic attacks at 1:00 AM finally drove her to seek help from a therapist. I was fresh out of graduate school, eager to apply what I had learned, and on that day, I was to be tested.

We looked over her life situation as I tried to show concern for her suffering. With a new baby, a self-absorbed boyfriend, and a sense of being abandoned by everyone, her life was bleak. I encouraged her to remember her friends and family, to get enough sleep and exercise, and I referred her to our psychiatrist for possible medication. Although she answered all my questions and seemed agreeable, I worried for her safety. Gently questioning her intentions, she denied wanting to hurt herself or her baby. Her mood never seemed to change, though, and her fear and despair filled the room. This session wasn’t going well; I was clearly out of my depth. I was selling therapeutic cough drops to someone dangerously choking in deep water. After the session ended, she left and never returned.

As a secular therapist I didn’t have the answers the desperate young woman needed. A more skillful counselor may have helped her feel better, but at a deeper level, something important was missing. We mental health professionals are taught to offer solutions—retraining worried thought patterns, talking to friends, deep breathing, exercise, and good diet, and these may bring temporary relief. When our solutions are exhausted, however, the deep roots of our anxiety remain, only to sprout up again and again.

Now I know what I didn’t know that day long ago: the real solution for emotional despair must strike anxiety’s spiritual roots.

The Impossible Command

We will look closely at Luke 12 to find some answers to this human dilemma of worry and anxiety. We don’t choose to be anxious—to feel weak, worried, irritable, and out of control—but those feelings can overwhelm us. We live in a perilous world with our media constantly streaming disaster, crime, and suffering. In the midst of it all, we desperately need real answers. Jesus’ words still ring out, “Do not be anxious for your life!” How can His words help us, and what do they reveal about our needs?

It is common knowledge that anxiety is an affliction of the mind that brings suffering. Merriam-Webster defines anxiety as “an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and

increased pulse rate).¹ Anxiety's symptoms are not only troubling to us; others also suffer when we are impatient and irritable. In our therapeutic culture we like to say, "Don't judge me!" We resist others' moral judgments, especially on how we express our emotions. But remember that guy on the freeway? He expressed his anxious mood with his car, cutting suddenly into your lane. You felt he was wrong, and you delicately said so.

If we are honest, we know that emotional responses to stress are deeply moral. They cannot be separated from our motives nor from our trust in God, and we all fail those tests that trigger our anxieties.

Now as a Christian professional, I am convinced that many followers of Christ who suffer from the strongest forms of anxiety need our understanding and prayers. Some anxiety conditions, such as panic disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder, can have severe effects on ordinary life functioning, such as earning a living or caring for children. We may even thank God for psychotropic medications, small gifts of common grace to help with our physical symptoms. Changing our brain chemistry may alleviate pain, but bad chemistry is not our root problem. Anxiety is a soul problem that needs regular doses of faith, repentance and forgiveness, trust in God's promises, and living obedient lives.

Nevertheless, it may also be God's will not to remove some afflictions, but to show His power made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:7–10). Sometimes the Lord teaches us to trust Him and to act with integrity instead of rescuing us from our pain.

For all of us, life is hard and dangerous, so who can avoid anxiety? Jesus anticipated our objections to His commands not to worry or to be anxious, and as the One who bears our afflictions and carries our sorrows, He is most sensitive to our pain. Furthermore, He doesn't just give us commands and then step back to watch us struggle. He knows our minds better than we do, and He knows exactly how to help in every crisis. He is always there to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19). In Luke 12:22–23, however, Jesus teaches us why we don't have to be anxious.

First, let's look at the words. What did Jesus mean by "anxious"? The Greek word used in Luke 12 is *merimnao*. It means to be distracted, fractured into parts, and to be over-concerned with cares and troubles.² That word gives us a clue about the spiritual battle underneath our suffering—we worry because we forget what is truly important. This passage is not focused on our body's reactions or even our feelings of apprehension. Our Lord is peeling back our self-protective layers of worry and revealing that underneath our fears is a lack of faith.

How Much More!

Jesus knows what anxiety feels like, and He offers strong medicine, not merely suggestions to feel better. In this passage, He gives us the ultimate reasons not to worry.

First, life is much more than food and clothing, the stuff of physical life. The Greek word used here for life is *psuche*, which means your soul life, your core self. We can worry a great deal about the ingredients of our food and whether it will contaminate our bodies, but life is greater than any physical ingredients,

Jesus says. Our true life, who we are as persons, is much more than what we eat or wear!

Second, God is sovereign. He rules over all the earth's creatures and cares for the least of them. How much more will He care for His children! We are much more valuable than birds or flowers. He is also sovereign over our lives, especially when we are born and when we will die. We cannot add one hour to our lifespans by worrying, as many people try to do. All of us have an appointment with death, set by God Himself. Before we were born, all the days that He formed for us were already written down in His book (Ps. 139:16). God reveals this reality not to depress us, but to give us confidence in His loving care. His sovereign rule of our lives is much better than ours could ever be, so we are to be grateful.

God's sovereign care over us, however, does not mean we are to be reckless with our lives and health. As Jesus says in Luke 12:30, He knows what we need in order to live; it's important to Him, and He lovingly supplies it. Nevertheless, Jesus isn't teaching us to be fatalists, but to trust our heavenly Father who holds our eternal life in safe keeping (Jn. 10:28–30).

A third ultimate reason not to be anxious is that we are not pagans. "The Gentile nations eagerly seek after these things." We should not act like people with no God, constantly chasing after material things—food, clothing, and money, as if those things defined the good life. The pagan gods are worshiped for the purpose of getting things and reaching success in this life."³



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Now I know what I didn't know that day long ago: the real solution for emotional despair must strike anxiety's spiritual roots.

Our Father truly cares for us and offers us a life much more abundant than a big house, a luxurious car, or the best food. When prosperity preachers teach us that we can live our “best life now,” they are talking like pagans. The nations without God anxiously seek these things. We have a Father who knows what we need to live.

A fourth ultimate reason not to worry is that our greatest pursuit in life is the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In the gospel, we learn that the infinite, perfect righteousness of Christ is counted as ours. The sinless One was made to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) who have faith in His sacrifice for our sins. We can add nothing to His righteousness, for it is complete. Then as justified sinners, our faith in Him is lived out in righteousness towards everyone around us, living as citizens in His kingdom here and now. That is “the good life” we pursue first. Then, He will add those other things.

The Father's motive is very personal. “Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” This is a picture of how our Father looks at us, like a little flock of sheep, vulnerable and weak, but greatly loved. We remember the good Shepherd pictured by Isaiah:

He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young (Is. 40:11).

It is His joy and pleasure to give His kingdom to His sheep, so why are we so desperate to chase after things that will decay, depreciate, or be redistributed? A wiser investment is to store up treasure in heaven by giving to people in need—without fear.

What we treasure most reveals where our hearts are set. If we treasure Christ more than anything we own, we have something we cannot lose. We must ask ourselves, what do we love most?

Casting All Our Burdens

We saw how Jesus' great answer to our anxieties in Luke 12 is the sovereign care of our heavenly Father. Every aspect of our lives is in His hands, so it is not rational to worry about our lives here. In short, anxiety is irrational for Christ followers! So why is this so hard for us? Peter gives us some inspired wisdom into the psychology of anxiety and its link to pride. He urged church leaders not to be domineering to the members, and for younger members to humbly submit to their elders. But then he says,

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Pet.5:5b-7).

“Clothe yourselves” uses a Greek word that suggests putting on a servant's apron or sash that showed everyone a person was there to serve. That servant-apron is for all of us to put on, regardless of our status.⁴ What does this humility look like? Does it mean to lower ourselves by pretending to be weak and incompetent?

No, we are to estimate ourselves with “sober judgment,” according to our “measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). We tend to be very concerned, even anxious, about how much respect and service people owe us. The humble person, by contrast, is more concerned with how she is showing concern and honor to others. Most important, prideful people are resisted by God in a very formidable way, as with military force. There is no winning a prideful battle with God!⁵

How can I arrive at church in the morning, ready to show my humble attitude and behavior? Not easily! This humility requires divine power, and Peter tells us how we access that grace. Instead of putting on our royal robes of pride, we humble ourselves, for God “gives grace to the humble.” He has given us this instruction:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Notice the chain of thought, “Humble yourselves...casting all your cares.” How do we humble ourselves? By casting all our cares and anxieties on Him, the one who cares for us. We have to throw, fling, give over, or cast, all our cares on Him. Peter is citing Psalm 55:22,

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

This phrase, “cast your burden,” is rich in the original Hebrew. It literally means that we cast our lot, our burden that has been given to us, on the Lord. Our “lot” is the burdensome circumstance in which we find ourselves.⁶ The ancients would cast lots as we would throw dice, tossing pieces of wood or stone randomly to obtain answers to difficult problems. They hoped for

their god's help in obtaining a truthful answer.⁷ We remember those brave sailors casting lots, trying to save Jonah, and God guiding their lots to find Jonah's guilt. However, the Psalmist never gambles with his troubles. He says simply, cast your situation on the Lord, and He will sustain you. His children never cast their fortunes on chance.

Flinging our troubles on God is humbling, because we want to feel competent and handle things ourselves. The Greek word in 1 Peter 5:7 for "casting" is used in one other place in Scripture, when Jesus arranged to enter Jerusalem on a colt as recorded in Luke 19:35:

And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

The donkey was a humble beast of burden, and the disciples were able to cast their cloaks on that donkey that faithfully carried the Lord. The King of the Universe is also asking us to fling all our burdens on His back so He can faithfully carry them. Jesus has made it clear that those worries are not our load to carry, no matter how strong we think we are. He asks us to humble ourselves by bringing to Him all those anxieties, without hiding any from Him. If they bother us, they concern Him. We are to name each one and tell Him we cannot carry them. He promises to take them all, right now. We may feel low and depressed now, but notice His words (1 Pet. 5:6). He has promised that He will lift us up again at the right time.

Facing the Roaring Lion

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Pet. 5:7-8).

I was raised to greatly fear Satan, and I mean really be afraid of what he could do to me. Before I went to bed, I wanted the closet door shut and the night light on. I was trying to resist and be watchful by keeping lights on and my eyes wide open, but really, I was just scared. There wasn't much reassurance in hearing those Ellen White passages before bedtime. I didn't know the weapon of God's word.

The devil does prowl around like a hungry lion, looking for victims, as Peter says in this text. He is much smarter and stronger than we are. Are we to fear him? No, not if we resist him, being firm in the faith. What is that faith that makes us strong to resist so powerful an enemy? Peter tells us in the first chapter:

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

The death and resurrection of Jesus is ours to claim by faith alone. He dwells with us, and we have his promised inheritance as a living hope. That inheritance cannot die, be defiled, or fade away. It is kept safe for us forever. The gospel gives us that assur-

ance. God promises to guard us by His power, no matter how bad things are, for salvation at the last day. Even scared little boys can effectively use God's promises to wield as a mighty weapon in the dark.

What does Peter mean by "sober and watchful"? The sober man does not allow anything to dull his awareness or distract him from approaching danger. The Bible does condemn being drunk with wine, but Peter is warning us of spiritual dullness. We can be drunk with pride in our own strength and importance, as he mentions in the previous verses. Pride is a kind of spiritual stupor, for proud people are out of touch with reality. The more we inflate our own importance, the more we will minimize very real dangers. The sober and watchful believer, therefore, is the humble believer who knows his weakness for sin and trusts in God.

The devil also attacks our confidence in God and our hope in the gospel promises. Jesus promised never to allow anyone to snatch us out of His hand (Jn. 10:28). Our adversary the devil is the slanderer who attacks us by accusing us day and night (Rev. 12:10). He tries to break our trust in God's word, in His promises, in His love for us, and by attacking our assurance when we are most vulnerable. He will try to convince us that God doesn't really love us and that our guilt is greater than God's forgiveness. When he attacks, draw out a sharp weapon from its scabbard, such as this:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

When we resist the slanderer with such a fierce weapon, he will flee from us (Jas. 4:7). And finally Peter reminds us, we are not alone in our suffering. There are brothers and sisters all over the world who suffer the same way. A good answer to our fears is to pray for those who are suffering, and claim God's promises for their faith and courage. That way, we will also be strengthened.

One of the hardest worries to bear is the anxiety over the salvation of our loved ones, especially our children. When they have grown into unbelieving adults while showing no inclination toward the gospel, even after our tearful prayers over the years, our hope reserve can become very dry. We believe in the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9), especially as parents on behalf of our children, so we never stop interceding for them. We can ask God to do whatever it takes, no matter how difficult, to bring them to Himself. Ultimately, salvation is the miracle of God bringing the spiritually dead to life. No matter how effective we may have been as parents, only God can call the dead to life (2 Cor. 4:6). The salvation of our loved ones is in His sovereign hands, so we keep giving that burden over to Him.

The Prayer of Anxiety

Paul must have understood as well as anyone how it feels to be lost and hunted, with all his resources gone. He wrote his letter to the Philippians from a Roman prison. We could say Paul was an expert on offering up the desperate prayer. Even so, in chapter 4, we find a wonderful model of prayer for those overcome with anxiety.

ety. Paul knew that when we feel overwhelmed with apprehensions and troubles, we are likely to be unreasonable, irritable, ungrateful, and vulnerable. He begins his lesson on anxiety by saying, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!” This is no easy assignment, but that is the command. Then he tells us, “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” Being reasonable means gentleness, moderation, self-control—another difficult assignment! But then Paul gives us the most impossible command, and the gold standard of prayer that shows us how it all becomes possible, even for the most-anxiety ridden.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (vs. 6).

As in Luke 12, the word “anxious” means to be overly concerned, distracted, even torn apart by troubles. Instead of our feeling overcome with them, however, we take them to our Father in prayer. The prayer is humble, honest, child-like, and holds nothing back. “Supplication” in the Greek describes a heart-felt petition that arises from deep, urgent, personal need.⁸ In God’s presence, we fully disclose what is burdening us, no matter how uncomfortable or foolish it makes us feel. We have to own our total dependency on Him, even as we can expect His daily mercies to us (Lam. 3:32). We fully surrender all those burdens to Him, knowing that He will make them His burdens. Then, we always include thanksgiving for His care for us, and that we know He always “acts for those who wait for Him” (Is. 64:4).

What can we expect after such a prayer? “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). The peace that comes from God will become a mighty fortress for us, even though we cannot fully understand or analyze how it works. It is divine in origin, and it is real. All the mindfulness therapy in the world cannot bring us that kind of peace; this is a unique gift from Him who loves us.

Living The Good Life

When we imagine the perfect life, we tend to think of a stress-free existence with no threats of suffering or losses, no uncertainties, in a place that provides everything we could ever want. Most of our modern thinkers would heartily agree. The Psalmist did not share that philosophy. His ideal life was much simpler, and much more ambitious:

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple (Ps. 27:4).

The one thing he seeks above all is not edible or wearable, and it will not build his social status. He wants to be in that one place where he can dwell with the Lord and gaze on His beauty. David didn’t have to wait until death to visit God’s temple and gaze on His majesty. When he visited the tabernacle tent and witnessed the bloody sacrifices held there, he understood those services as a vision of God’s glory. He saw animals being violently offered on the altar; he saw the cost of sin answered with blood.⁹ David faintly saw in symbols what God would do, once and for all, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26).

David was confident He was granted what he needed more than anything he had eagerly sought after. He had access to God’s presence:

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you (Ps. 63:2).

God’s design for our troubles is complex, painful, and perfectly designed to prepare us to live with Him. At the end of all our troubles, when all our worries are finally taken out of our reach, anxiety will cease forever. Waiting for us on the other side will be the one Person who is able now to bring us fresh mercies for each of our troubled days.

When Mary, Martha’s sister, left her serving duties to sit at the feet of Jesus, Martha’s frustration and anxiety drove her to ask Jesus, “Do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” Jesus answered her,

Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her (Lk. 10:42).

The one thing that is necessary is the best of all, which we will never, ever lose. Life is so much more than what our felt needs demand here; our life is a Person. There is nothing better than knowing Jesus, because He is infinitely more glorious than any other gift that we could ask from Him. He will be waiting to greet us by name, and with Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and the vast crowd from every nation, we will sit down and listen. With Him, our joy will be complete. †

Endnotes

¹ Merriam Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anxiety>

² *Helps Word Studies*, BibleHub, <http://biblehub.com/greek/3309.htm>

³ Kevin DeYoung, 7 Reasons Not To Worry, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-cure-for-worry/>

⁴ Meyer’s New Testament Commentary, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_peter/5-5.htm

⁵ Vincent’s Word Studies, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_peter/5-5.htm

⁶ Benson Commentary, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/55-22.htm>

⁷ Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/jonah/1-7.htm>

⁸ *Helps Word Studies*, <http://biblehub.com/greek/1162.htm>

⁹ Tony Reinke, “Why Do We Envy the Wicked?” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-do-we-envy-the-wicked>



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

The Gospel continues to change lives

DALE RATZLAFF

The Gospel is growing in Ethiopia

Several years ago I mailed a box packed full of our books to Salfiso Kitabo in Ethiopia. After some time I received a letter stating that over 30 churches there had left the Adventist denomination. Then, about a year ago, I received a second letter stating that the number of churches which had left the denomination was about 80. I sent another box packed with books and DVDs. Today as I write this I received an email from Salfiso with updated information.

I will summarize the main points of Salfiso's communication with me to give you an idea of what is happening within Adventism in Ethiopia.

According to Salfiso's correspondence, Adventism is about 70 years old in Ethiopia. Salfiso's father was among the first Ethiopian converts, and Salfiso and his nine siblings were all born into the religion. His dad resisted Salfiso's claims that Ellen White is not a prophet of God, but he finally was convinced of the truth, and he joined his son in leaving Adventism.

Salfiso went to grades one through 12 in Adventist schools and participated in Pathfinders, in Missionary Volunteers, and in church and school singing groups. He always questioned Ellen White's teachings, but he thought his questions were sins, so he suppressed them. It was on December 15, 2008, while he was sitting in his office searching the internet to find information about Ellen White, that he stumbled upon the *Truth or Fables* website. There he found Walter Rae's article "The Making of a Prophet: How Ellen white Turned Fiction into 'Truth'", republished from the March, 1987 issue of *Adventist Currents* produced by Mars Hill Publications.

Over 12,000 members leave Adventism

Adventism in Ethiopia is a stronghold and had not been seriously questioned prior to the discovery of the websites exposing Ellen White, but the organization had been meeting growing resistance because of its management practices. Websites exposing Adventism fueled the unrest among those who felt they could not question the organization because of its strong claims to be the remnant church and because of its indictment of any who chose to worship on Sunday.

Currently the number of churches that have defected from the Adventist organization are more than 86 with over 12,000 members. The challenge, as small congregations leave Adventism, is that the church buildings are owned by the Adventist organization [as they are everywhere]. The members raise the money and build the churches, but the local conference owns the titles to the real estate and the buildings. The Adventist organization is not allowing defecting congregations to remain in



Salfiso Kitabo and his family in Ethiopia have left Adventism and have been distributing books from Dale Ratzlaff, helping others transition out of the Adventist organization.

their buildings but is securing court orders to evict the people from the church-owned buildings.

In some cases, people—including Salfiso's father—who have property are giving land to defected congregations so they can build church buildings for themselves. During the past three years, the number of churches leaving the organization has increased. Salfiso says the challenge he and others like him face is "making sure these defecting members really understand why they are leaving. Some leave because of the oppression they face; some follow the crowd, and others are informed of the truth. It is our mandate to make sure Adventist members in Ethiopia are clear about the wrong teachings of Adventism."

Salfiso says one of their greatest needs is printed material (translated into Amheric if that is possible) such as my books exposing the truth about Adventism. In fact, I have sent Salfiso a large box of *White Washed* by Sydney Cleveland and my latest book *Gospel Transformation*. For those who have internet access, all of our eBooks are available to them free of charge.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Pictured here and on the facing page is the main church Salfiso and those joining him in leaving Adventism have built in the Southern Region of Ethiopia. Growing numbers of people are leaving the Adventist organization. They need our prayers that the gospel will dismantle their beliefs and cause them to experience new life in Jesus.



Please join me in prayer for the Ethiopian people that they would fully understand the gospel of God's saving grace in Christ and see the errors of Adventism and discern how Adventist teachings undermine the gospel. Pray that God will supply the necessary means for these brave people who are losing their church buildings to be able to build new ones.

The Gospel is growing in Jamaica

Recently, several pastors, an evangelist, and a professor from the Adventist Northern Caribbean University have left the Adventist church. These include Elce Lauriston, who has recently been on Jamaica TV and has authored the book *All Foods are Clean and Every Day is the Sabbath*, an in-depth study of the "days" in Romans 14 and Colossians 2. It is available on our website: www.ratzlaf.com (click on "Books"). Clinton Baldwin, PhD, who taught at the Adventist University recently published his book *The Sabbath: More Than a Day—a Person*. You can find it on Amazon. These men are skilled in discovering truth and are sharing it with others.

The gospel continues to grow in Australia

Tim and Trina Ward have been reading our materials for a number of years as well as doing their own investigation. Tim has done some research on Ellen White and her sources and has written a book entitled *The Authors Versus the Testimonies—A Search for Truth*. He had this book printed in Australia, and he tells me that it has helped a number of people in their search for truth. Tim just sent me a pdf file of this book and has consented

to make it available on our website free of charge. Find it at: lifeassuranceministries.com (click on "Articles").

It is 62 pages in length.

The gospel continues to grow in the United States

Nearly every day I have someone who is not already in our data base contact me regarding our books, YouTube presentations, *Proclamation!*, questions on Adventism, or how to make a donation. We have been receiving inquiries from evangelicals and former members of the Worldwide Church of God. Some of these Christians are giving monthly donations to our ministry in support of *Proclamation!*.

Most of you know that we have had to limit the number of *Proclamations!* that we print and mail to only those who have financially supported this ministry or have personally requested to be on our mailing list. Some may think that our ministry is shrinking. It is not. True, there are some who have supported this ministry who no longer feel a need for it. We fully understand this phenomenon. Most have found a healthy Bible teaching church and now focus on their involvement with their local church. We would ask, however, that as others supported this ministry which helped you transition, that you consider continuing your support of this ministry as many new people are just starting their transition. You can help them as others helped you. While we may be cutting back the number of printed *Proclamations!*, the internet websites, blogs, emails, Facebook, YouTube, eBooks and the weekly email *Proclamation!* are expanding our ministry, reaching out to the whole world, something the printed version could never do.



Make the gospel available free of charge

Over and over again Paul made it clear that he wanted to make the gospel available free of charge and that has been our desire since the founding of Life Assurance Ministries. We praise God that *Proclamation!* is still free to anyone who wants to receive it. LAM Publications has sent hundreds of free books to those who cannot afford them. We continue to make our eBooks available free to those living in third world countries. I wish we could send free books to everyone everywhere! I agree with Paul when he wrote:

That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:18).

Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; (2 Cor. 11:7-8).

The laborer is worthy of his wages

When Jesus sent out the 70 to proclaim the gospel He gave these instructions.

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in that

house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city (Lk. 10:1-12).

When Paul was writing to Timothy he included this instruction.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Praising God

Carolyn and I believe that God has called us "To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion." We are thankful to share this work with Richard and Colleen Tinker, and we are grateful to the editorial staff that writes and edits faithfully for *Proclamation!* as well as for the weekly emails. We also praise God for the support and shared ministry we enjoy with the Life Assurance Ministries board of directors. We invite you to pray for us that we might make the gospel clear. Pray that God will supply the funds so that we might devote ourselves completely to this work. †

Things I wish I had known

Please keep me on your mailing list! I just read the “Resignation Letter From Nigeria” [by Owolabi Paul, Fall, 2017]. Wonderful! I have been so blessed by your magazine. This last one was especially good for me. I am learning to understand things I wish I had known a long time ago! Thank you and God Bless your work.

GRAYLING, MI

Helps reach Adventists

Please continue sending us *Proclamation!* magazine as this has been helpful to us in reaching Adventists for Christ.

SENIOR ASSOCIATE PASTOR
PLYMOUTH, IN

Making your point with lies

Paul Owolabi’s article “Resignation Letter from Nigeria” was excellent. He made a lot of very valid observations, and came to some valid conclusions. But Chris Lee’s editorial on the back page of the magazine (vol. 8, issue 2) left much to be desired. After a brief synopsis of the film *The Village*, Lee concluded, “I need not pedantically enumerate the parallels with life in Adventism. They are all too obvious to anyone reading this.” Well, actually, they aren’t. I’m wondering whether Lee couldn’t think of any

parallels, so it was easier to just state that the parallels are “too obvious” to “enumerate.” I have been an Adventist for over 60 years, and I have never observed anything even remotely like the life in the village as presented by Lee. Per-

rors in Adventist doctrine, much like Paul Owolabi did in his excellent article, but the journal would be more valuable if it didn’t use lies to get its point across. It’s not just this issue, I have noticed in nearly every issue statements regarding

WE EXPECT THIS TO BE THE END OF
PROCLAMATION! IN OUR MAILBOX, AND
MAYBE EVEN THE END OF THE RATZLAFF
NAME WITH WHICH I HAVE A LONG
ASSOCIATION...SO MANY YEARS.

haps Lee has been reading about Adventism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But few, if any, of his readers were Adventists in the early twentieth century.

In the days prior to the mid-60s, Adventists may have feared contamination from the world, but this fear, however much of it existed (surely not as much as in the film *The Village*), has not been “obvious” since the mid 60s. Lest you think my experience in Adventism is limited to southern California, let me assure you that in addition to southern California, I have lived in Northern California, Hawaii, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, England, Sweden, Finland, South Korea, Kenya and Uganda. And I have not seen anything in Adventism even remotely like Lee’s summary of the film. I haven’t observed any “fear” of the outside world. I haven’t observed any fear of employment in the outside world...Other than in our high schools, I haven’t observed any attempt to enforce rules. In fact, I have no idea what rules Lee has in mind, or what lies and hoaxes the church perpetuates to keep people from learning about the outside world which is all around them.

I have no problem with Life Assurance Ministries pointing out er-

Adventist belief or practice that I have never heard taught.
TUCSON, AZ

Editor’s reply: Before I left Adventism, I would also have been outraged at the comparison of *The Village* to Adventism. For at least 10 years I was an “evangelical Adventist” and very broad-minded and accepting, seeing fairly clearly many of the problems with Adventist doctrine. It was only after being confronted with the gospel and realizing that one cannot be loyal to two opposing world views that Chris Lee’s perspective began to come into focus.

Yes, to be sure, modern Adventism is far less fearful of the “outside”—on the surface—than it used to be. The problem, however, is that Adventism does not teach the pure biblical gospel, and because Adventists live within a worldview shaped by their Adventist (EGW-derived) biblical interpretation, they live with a completely different worldview than do Christians who have embraced the Lord Jesus alone and have been born again. This contrast is not even visible until one actually leaves “the village” and moves into the reality of knowing Jesus. Truly, every single thing looks different and is “inside-out” from what we learned as Adventists.

The Adventist worldview shaped by the great controversy, by Adventism’s belief in the material nature of man, by Adventism’s fallible Jesus who gave up one of the attributes of God—omnipresence—by taking a body, by the deeply-held belief that Satan is the scapegoat who ultimately carries the sins of the saved into the Lake of Fire—this worldview is completely different from a biblical worldview, and individual Adventists, even very liberal ones, cannot see that difference.

It is this blindness and unawareness of the “outside” that Chris Lee was comparing to the character in *The Village*. One simply does not know what that “other” reality is unless one trusts the inerrant word of God and repents, submitting to the 100% completed atonement and resting his eternal security on the fact that the Lord Jesus has already done what needed to be done—and if we believe and trust, we will be given eternal life at that moment and transferred out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the beloved Son (Col. 1:13). Only then will the biblical reality of an utterly sovereign God who needs no vindication begin to be visible. Only then will one’s eternal security become knowable; only then will the difference between the darkness of Adventism and the eternal light and life of the kingdom of the beloved Son become discernible.

Hard to reach the brain-washed

Please send *Proclamation!* to the enclosed names. The article by the young Nigerian is amazing. You may know one of these names I sent; he has taught at [one of the Adventist universities] for many years and is facing a terminal illness. He and his wife and I grew up together in Berrien Springs. We were in the same first grade class and went all through school together.

It’s so hard to reach those who have been brain-washed in any cult. They are so comfortable and that “we have the truth” phrase blinds them even more! It takes

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

the Holy Spirit to change a heart. God bless you.

UNIVERSITY PARK, IL

Garbage!

Please never send another of these blasphemous journals.

Garbage!!!

UKIAH, CA

Insane false prophet

The Friday emails have been excellent. Bless everyone who puts out such wonderful articles.

I left the Adventist church 41 years ago. I must tell you; I resent the 18 years I was in the delusion of an insane false prophet. Your organization has shown only love and patience toward those who choose to remain in darkness, demonstrating the heart of God to those who need to understand grace.

SPARKS, NV

Adventist abortion hypocrisy

Thanks for the *Family News* [newsletter for donors]. I've also been enjoying *Word Search* online. [*Word Search* is the weekly Bible study by Gary Inrig; videos are on the Former Adventist YouTube channel.]

Our local crisis pregnancy center recently held its annual gala. The testimonies of people who have been touched by abortion are sometimes overwhelming. In many cases the Lord has provided reconciliation, but in some cases the shame and pain of abortion still divides families.

As I sat listening, I was divided in my own heart. You see, the local Adventist hospital is the primary sponsor of the pregnancy center here. They provide all of the necessary tests and care for these women questioning whether they should abort their children.

The gala is held on the Adventist campus. Ironically, this was the same campus to which one of the speakers was taken as a 14-year-old by her father to have an abortion. That old hospital building still stands.

I'm not sure anyone else in the audience picked up on that detail.

Knowing the history of the Adventist position on when life begins

and its connection to abortion, it is hard to sit still and listen as the hospital administrators speak about how precious life is. [See "Abortion in Adventism: Why Seventh-day Adventism Promotes Abortion" in the Summer, 2014 issue of *Proclamation!*]

I have nothing against the people; I just don't appreciate the hypocrisy.

HENDERSONVILLE, NC

Self abuse and consumption

I was watching a Q&A session from the 2011 Former Adventist Conference. Colleen Tinker said that EGW says tuberculosis was caused by masturbation. Since this unspeakable topic was introduced, I did a search on her writings. I

the original book it says this: "The loss of vital power by means of this drain [masturbation, or self-abuse] renders man less able to resist the effects of change of climate, and of malarial poisons and miasma. It impoverished the blood, and induces consumption, dyspepsia, nervous diseases, and mental derangements, with the long train of sequences which follow in their wake."

"Consumption" is the old-fashioned word for tuberculosis, and EGW used the term "self abuse" for masturbation. In context her statement was in a chapter on the evils of self abuse.

End of Ratzlaff name

It is so kind of you to afford us the opportunity to no longer re-

ceive your publication... You put a great deal of study and research into your articles, but why is it so necessary to degrade the Adventist church? We currently support and regularly attend a Methodist church, but that does not cause us to fault Adventists, with the possible exception of President Ted.

SOUTH DAYTONA, FL

Stop sending magazine

Please stop sending this magazine. I was, am, and forever will be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I am first of all a Christian and believe that the Adventist church most accurately teaches Biblical truth.

PORTLAND, OR

Gladventist confession

I am a Gladventist (a happy Seventh-day Adventist) rejoicing in God's complete forgiveness by the blood of Jesus. Rejoicing in the rest weekly and eternally He has given me as I trust in His love. Rejoicing in the concern God has for my health giving me true advice amid the confusing ideas in the world, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit He offers those who ask. It's a wonderful life. I'm praying you find what I did reading my Bible. Please remove me from your list.

WINSTON, OR

Editor's response: The health advice the writer mentions is a reference to Ellen White's counsels. With that reference the underlying interpretation of the writer's Christian-sounding words becomes clear. The mention of Ellen White reveals the writer's dependence on an extra-biblical authority and the resulting unorthodox understandings of Christian doctrine.

Pray for churches to understand

We just received the recent *Proclamation!* Thank you. We pray for the success of your critical work on behalf of exiting Adventists and of the evangelical churches as they try to make sense of Adventism.

HOPE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

IT IS YOUR MINISTRY AND THE STORIES OF FORMER ADVENTISTS THAT HAVE HELPED ME TO SEE THE MISTAKES OF THE ADVENTIST CHURCH THAT ENABLED ME TO LEAVE.

found lots of references to TB but nothing on masturbation. For example,

"During this period of uncertainty and bitter disappointment Ellen's health, already impaired, worsened rapidly. Tuberculosis, it seemed, would take her life. She could speak only in a whisper or broken voice. Her heart was seriously affected. She found it difficult to breathe lying down, and at night was often bolstered to almost a sitting position. She was frequently awakened from sleep by coughing and bleeding in her lungs" (WV 23.1).

Could you provide the reference to back up her comment, please?

ALBERTA, CANADA

Editor's response: I have a copy of Ellen White's book *A Solemn Appeal*. On page 83-84 of

Thank you for the inspiration

Yes! Please keep me on the list. Thank you for the inspiring stories of those who have left the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I know that I am totally grateful for being out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church myself. It is your ministry and the stories of former Adventists

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:
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THE LIFE AFTER WITH CHRIS LEE

Dear Reader,

I started my transition out of Adventism in earnest sometime around 2001 and wrote my resignation letter in March 2002. Sometime in that period, I discovered a magazine which had only been around since late 2000, *Proclamation!* In working through my transition, I found writing about my thoughts, feelings, and epiphanies to be cathartic. Eventually I decided to send the magazine an unsolicited piece I had been working on titled, “Are Some Foods Unclean?” Fortunately for me, the editor decided to take a chance on an unknown writer and publish my material. I will always be thankful to Dale Ratzlaff and to Richard and Colleen Tinker for giving me that opportunity.

Proclamation! truly was a godsend in the most literal sense. Not only did it give me an opportunity to work through my own recovery by writing about issues and doctrines I was working through, but it connected me to a world of others with the same questions and struggles. I would very much like to think that sharing some of my thoughts was a blessing to others. I know having such an outlet and contact with other formers was a tremendous blessing to me.

It wasn’t always the easiest road, though. Over the years I’ve had my share of angry emails, random phone callers wanting to debate in the middle of dinner, packages delivered stuffed full of SDA “proof”, and even an Adventist book thrown in my front door by an unknown ding-and-ditch-witness. But the hardest part was the reaction of those closest to me. I think

I AM LIVING THE LIFE AFTER

some could have found a way to forgive, or at least live with, the fact that I was no longer actively attending an Adventist church. But in publicly declaring myself a former Adventist, becoming an evangelical Christian, and writing about the differences between the two, I lost a lot of relationships that I had thought would be forever.

I can remember being on my knees in the living room late one night, bent over the couch, pleading with God to release me from the ministry. There are only a small number of times in my life in which I feel certain I “heard” the will of God very clearly in answer to prayer. His answer that night was, “You’re not finished.”

Around 2009 I started becoming very interested in what it looked like to live life after Adventism, fully integrated into the Body of Christ. That fall I began writing the back page column, “The Life After”. Writing “The Life After” was equally cathartic during this phase of my recovery as writing doctrinally-focused articles had been earlier on. Again, I’d like to think it has been helpful to others seeking to take their next steps in recovery.

I now feel like I am yet again at a transitional point. After fifteen years, I find I’m running out of things to say. More importantly, I believe I can again sense God’s will clearly and believe He has given me permission to pursue other ministries in the Body. I’m sure you’ll hear from me occasionally in an article, blog post, or forum posting. But for now, I’m taking a step back from writing and am not entirely sure where God is leading next. All I know for sure is that, by the grace of God, I’m going to be out there living the life after. I hope you will be too.

Sincerely, Chris. †



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