

FROM ADVENTIST TEACHER TO BIBLE TRANSLATOR

INTERCESSOR FOREVER

ProclamationMagazine.com

# Proclamation!

FORMER ADVENTISTS

INQUIRING ADVENTISTS

SABBATARIANS

CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

FALL 2018

VOLUME 19, ISSUE 2

CREATED FOR WORK





COLLEEN TINKER

## THE LORD IS IN THE FUTURE

**W**e entered 2018 riding a wave of change; our church plant, Redeemer Fellowship, moved into its own space on January 2. That move left us just over a month to prepare the facility for our first FAF Conference in our own church in Loma Linda.

Besides its being our first conference in Loma Linda, the 2018 FAF weekend will always remind me of the paradigm-shattering realization we had as we prepared for it: Adventism has intentionally taught that Jesus is an old covenant priest by depicting him wearing the garments of

... WE ARE TRUSTING GOD'S DIRECTION AS WE LOOK FORWARD TO CONDUCTING MORE TRAINING SEMINARS IN LOCAL AREA CHURCHES WHERE THERE IS A DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND ADVENTISM.

## Proclamation!

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LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES

Aaron in the heavenly sanctuary. In other words, in opposition to Hebrews 7, Adventist art teaches the investigative judgment subliminally by showing that Jesus is like Aaron, not like Melchizedek.

The year brought other landmark events as well. Even though our print magazine has reduced to two issues this year, *Proclamation!* has experienced a growing online audience and increased its content by delivering new material every week through its email and blogs.

In October my mother died. Even though she had been on hospice for several months, her final stroke came without warning. For just over a week we sat with her, sang to her, and comforted her as she made her transition from life in her body to being fully alive in her Lord Jesus.

Two weeks after her memorial service, we boarded a plane for Midway airport in Chicago with fellow Life Assurance Board members Cheryl Granger and Carel Stevenson and his family—Nicole, Joshua, and Abigail. We were to meet Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff at The Chapel in St. Joseph, Michigan, where we were conducting a one-day FAF Conference and three training meetings for the members of The Chapel.

On the day we convened in St. Joseph, Dale and Carolyn learned that their grandson had died tragically, and they had to leave immediately to be close to their son. We reconfigured a couple of the meetings, and the Lord enabled us to carry on with the conferences and kept the Ratzlaffs safe as they drove back to the Southwest.

Now, completing our year-end edition of *Proclamation!* as we rush into Christmas, we are thanking our Father for providing for us and for confirming that He has given us not only the work of helping Adventists transition out of their religion but also of helping Christians to understand Adventism. The Michigan conference helped us clarify the needs Christians have for understanding the differences between their beliefs and Adventist beliefs so that they can have productive conversations with the Adventists in their lives.

As we look forward to 2019, we are preparing for our second FAF Conference in Loma Linda at Redeemer Fellowship. "Pure Gospel" is the title of the conference which will take place, the Lord willing, February 15–17. You may register with the registration form in this magazine, or you may register online at the URL listed on the Conference page. We would love to meet as many of you as can come!

As we end this year, we thank each of you for being part of this ministry. Your support of LAM is an encouragement and a blessing, and we are trusting God's direction as we look forward to conducting more training seminars in local area churches where there is a desire to understand Adventism.

**In this issue** we share Kaspars Ozolins faith story, and Richard Tinker shows how Ephesians 2:1–10 explains his growth in the Lord from his childhood in Adventism to his work with Life Assurance Ministries. Wes Ringer tells us how he was fired from his Adventist teacher position and how he came to be a Wycliffe Bible translator in the Sudan. Martin Carey shows us how Jesus is our intercessor forever, and Rick Barker unpacks Adventism's twenty-fifth Fundamental Belief. Nicole Stevenson reminds us that contentment is God's gift to us as we thank Him for His provision for our Life After.

We pray for the Lord to bless us all as we walk into the next year. He is already in the future!

## Your help is needed.

The costs of maintaining this ministry are high, but the results are priceless. Use the envelope in the center of this magazine today.

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORD JESUS' BIRTH

**T**his Christmas season let us focus on the significance of the birth of Christ rather than on the event.

**But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:4-7).**

## But when the fullness of time came.

This required the sovereignty of God working through Caesar Augustus to declare a census so that Joseph and Mary would be forced to go to Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. It required Mary to give birth during the time she and Joseph were in Bethlehem. It required Jesus being born at the right time so years later His ministry would culminate in the crucifixion when the Passover Lamb was killed.

## God sent forth His son, born of a woman.

Immediately we note that, contrary to Jewish custom, no human father is mentioned. He who created the human family now becomes a member of the human family.

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, *Gospel Transformation*—which teaches what the Gospel is and accomplishes, and *Romans Alive!*—Dale's study on the first eight chapters of Romans.

Each of these books is available at [Ratzlaff.com](http://Ratzlaff.com) or by phoning (928) 554-1001.

## Born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law.

The law could not save; it could only point out sin and be a shadow—not the reality—of grace. By being born of a woman, Jesus came under the law. He who was greater than all law placed Himself under the law. He who was greater than His mother became her child. Jesus came under the law so that He could once and for all time redeem us from the domination of the law.

## That we might receive the adoption as sons.

The law said "do" or "don't do". The problem with the law was that no one was able to do all the good that the law required nor was anyone able to refrain from doing all the law forbade. As Paul said earlier in Galatians, no one is justified by

the Law before God, for "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (Gal. 3:11-13).

JESUS CAME UNDER THE LAW SO THAT HE  
COULD ONCE AND FOR ALL TIME REDEEM US  
FROM THE DOMINATION OF THE LAW.

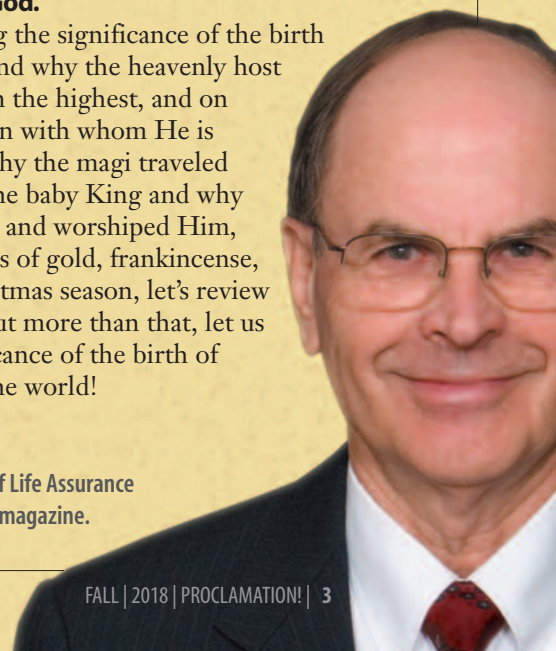
## Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Now that we have been redeemed from the law, God sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts! We now cry out "Abba [Daddy] Father!" We do not earn sonship, we "receive" it. We were not born free; rather our Lord adopted us. Unlike living under the law, we do nothing but receive His grace and power.

## Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Now, understanding the significance of the birth of Christ, we understand why the heavenly host sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." We realize why the magi traveled long distances to see the baby King and why they fell to the ground and worshiped Him, presenting to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This Christmas season, let's review the Christmas story, but more than that, let us understand the significance of the birth of Christ, the Savior of the world!

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





# I WAS DEAD BUT NOW I

KASPARS OZOLINS

There is a passage from Scripture that has become something of a life verse for me in the time that I have been a born-again Christian: Galatians 2:20. Paul says, “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.”

Kaspars and Ieva Ozolins shown with their two sons.

**M**artin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, gave the following instructions regarding this verse (above): “Read these words with great vehemence: ‘lives in me’ ... ‘loved me’ ... ‘gave himself for me.’”

The fact of the matter is, as a Seventh-day Adventist, I could not have followed Martin Luther’s instructions. I could not read this verse in that way, because I could not and did not understand it in that way. I believe now that I did not have the spiritual eyes to see that verse, because of the organization that shaped my background.

I am originally from Latvia, a country in Northern Europe (which explains my strange name!). When my brother and I were still very young, we moved to the United Kingdom in order that my father could pursue an education at Newbold College, which is a major Seventh-day Adventist educational institution in Europe.

As a matter of fact, I have very deep Adventists roots. I was a fourth-generation Adventist. My ancestors were some of the first people to be evangelized by Adventist missionaries in Latvia. My father is to this day a Seventh-day Adventist minister and seminary professor. We would eventually move to the United States, to Los Angeles, after my father had completed his education at Newbold. I went through the entire Adventist educational system, starting from first grade, through high school, and then to Newbold College where I returned to study for a semester.

I grew up in a very loving family with wonderful parents. In some ways we were raised as traditional Adventists. I remember vividly Friday evening preparations for the Sabbath—cleaning the house, getting everything ready. Then came sundown devotions, Sabbath school the next day, and the iconic Sabbath activities: potlucks (with haystacks, which I still love to make!), afternoon nature walks, and so forth. All these are still clear in my memory, and in some ways I feel a great warmth about my childhood. Yet in other respects, we were perhaps not so traditional.

My father rarely talked about Ellen White and almost never preached referencing her. I would come across White’s writings on my own initiative, not his, and gained some interest in them in my early teens. There were also stimulating conversations in our family about legalistic Adventism, and this or that other negative aspect of our religion.

In my childhood, I acquired something of a reputation of a Bible nerd. I would carry around a big blue NIV Bible almost everywhere with wonderful life-like Bible illustrations. I was always active in Sabbath School, and later on, I would occasionally teach or lead discussions. I was baptized in my teens by my dear father, which was a very emotional event both for him and me. These things, I believe, make it hard for some to believe that I really could have been lost—an unbeliever at heart—and not truly born-again.

# LIVE



I entered college, first in Newbold, and later in Latvia, where I got my Bachelor's degree and also got to know and fall in love with my future wife, Ieva. I was an active participant in church life there as well. I remember fondly engaging in spirited theological discussions and debate with my Latvian grandfather, who leaned more to the conservative wing of Adventism, even though he was a very sharp thinker and open to new ideas. He had been horribly persecuted for keeping the Sabbath during his mandatory army draft which occurred at a time when Latvia was illegally occupied by the Soviet Union.

## Denying Jesus

I returned to the United States after graduating with my Bachelor's degree and began my studies at the University of California Los Angeles, as I had been planning to do. I studied for a PhD in historical linguistics—a field concerned with ancient languages and their evolution across time. I remember having great ambitions for scholarly and financial success, yet these desires were also mixed with my sad realization that life was short, that an academic could never hope to attain the riches, success, fame, and power of someone like a president or CEO of a major corporation or like an innovative scientist. These trappings of success were the very things I craved, yet they eluded me. I thought a lot about mortality and was quite

morbid about death, although I don't think I evidenced it externally. Life seemed unfair. It felt like I was grasping onto something with as firm a grasp as I could muster—even as that very thing was slipping from me before my eyes. In fact, I had a strange preoccupation with the subject of death, as I used to read about the deaths of celebrities with a mixture of fascination and horror.

Besides this restlessness and death-fixation, I had begun to slip further and further into sin. While outwardly I still played the part of “the Bible guy,” I fell into secret sin and became enslaved to it. Yes, I knew what I was doing was wrong, but it was here that my Adventist understanding of God sold me short. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians instructs Christians not to live in the passion of lust like the Gentiles—who do not know God.

You see, I didn't know God. In particular, I didn't know the attributes of God. I was like the wicked man in the Psalms who says in his heart, “There is no God,” as he lives and sins as if there were no God. In particular, the concept of God's utter holiness and wrath against sin and even sinners was foreign and abhorrent to me.

This ignorance of God expressed itself in certain ways. My brother had meanwhile begun his own journey of doubt, and after reading Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion*, he came to me really frightened that he might lose his faith, which he absolutely did not want to do. I myself had even begun entertain-



**By God's grace, I became utterly convinced that I was on my way to an eternity of eternities in hell—a place that I with my Adventist theology had abhorred as being contrary to the very character of God. There was no mistaking that the God I now had encountered did not match the God I had believed from my Adventist background.**

ing little doubts about God's existence, and I distinctly remember telling him one day, "Look, don't be afraid to go where the truth leads. You have to be brutally honest with yourself. If there is no God, there is no God."

Looking back now, I am amazed and think to myself, "Does that really sound like someone who knows Jesus Christ?" Another time, I remember driving home one evening from Malibu with my wife, and she asked me, "So, you know my boss is Jewish. Do you really think that he's not going to be in heaven simply because he doesn't believe in Jesus?" My answer was sheepish. "I don't know, I'm not the judge. It's up to God. We can't know these things." I didn't realize it then, but I had denied Jesus Christ before men.

### **I am God's property**

In my darkness, an intellectual pursuit of mine became watching YouTube debates between atheists and Christians on the subject of the existence of God. In the process, however, I came across some YouTube sermons by Francis Chan, a well-known pastor whose ministry has impacted many lives. If you've ever heard Francis preach, you know he has an earnestness and passion that I haven't seen anywhere else. He preaches constantly about eternity, about the nature of God, about sin. I was struck by a number of things while listening to him. They might sound obvious and apparent to you, but they got to me in a very profound way. My first realization is hard to describe and may sound trivial, but I kept saying in my mind, "There is a God! There is a God."

Francis used to use an illustration that demonstrated God's centrality and sovereignty in the lives of all human beings (whether or not they acknowledge Him) in a powerful way. He asked his congregation to take a breath. Then another one. He then said, "Don't you realize that God just gave you that breath? And the next one? Every single breath, every moment of life, is a direct gift from God! Don't you realize that He could take away your breath, your life, just like that!?"

How much had I thought about this truth, if ever? I realized that the vast majority of human beings go about their daily lives planning, working, playing, and busying themselves...how much do they even stop and think about their Creator? He who made them personally owns them! I am God's personal property! He has a right to me by virtue of His having created me.

It was at that point that I began to understand the ugliness of sin. Up until then, I had nursed a grandfatherly image of God that I believe came partly from my Adventist background. I had a nebulous concept that God's grace would somehow eventually cover everything, but I had no understanding of the basis and application of the biblical concept of grace. I had to come to terms with the Being against whom I was sinning.

This was my realization: I was a sinner, hostile by nature to God. Because God is infinitely good and wonderful, altogether beautiful, I could never make things right or repay the wrong I had done. By God's grace, I became utterly convinced that I was on my way to an eternity of eternities in hell—a place that I with my Adventist theology had abhorred as being contrary to the very character of God. There was no mistaking that the God I now had encountered did not match the God I had believed from my Adventist background.

### **No longer the same person**

I believe now that God saves desperate people. I was a desperate person faced with a horrifying truth. One prominent preacher I later heard put that truth into stunning words: "If God is good, He cannot forgive you." That comes as a shock to most people who claim to have some religion. But the more I examined my life and my sin, the more I could see no other explanation. How could a good God ever forgive me in my wretchedness?

The only answer had to be the gospel—that story that I had heard a thousand times, yet never understood spiritually. That very same God who is utterly unapproachable in His holiness stooped down to humanity, and took on flesh. He perfectly lived the life I could not live for one second. He loved His Father and fellow man with the perfect love that is demanded of all by the greatest commandment.

Yet sinful men took him and beat him mercilessly, hanging him on a tree shamefully. Jesus Christ faced the wrath of sinful man alone. More importantly, Jesus Christ alone stood in my place and bore the righteous wrath of a holy God! Every sin I had ever committed against God and my fellow man, every cruel word, every sinful glance, every prideful thought—all of it was placed upon the Holy One of God. He was crushed for my iniquities, but praise God, three days later He was raised for my justification! Because of my Savior, God is now "just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

I praise God for His wonderful Son, and I praise God for His penetrating Holy Spirit. God brought me to the light of the gospel, and I became a new creature in March of 2013. I, who had been dead in sins and trespasses was now made alive in Christ! In those early days I remember often singing a song to myself: "Lord, I need you; Oh, I need you. Every hour I need you. My

one defense, my righteousness. Oh God, how I need you!” My sins dropped away from me like rocks off a cliff, and I was forever free from guilt and condemnation. God also began a process of sanctifying me and growing me in holiness—a process that has often been painful and humbling. But I know whom I belong to, and I know that I am not the same person I was.

### Leaving Adventism to retain integrity

My salvation then launched me on a three-year quest. I wondered, “Why had nobody from my Adventist background told me that I must be born again, as Jesus said in John 3?” Should I (or could I) stay in the Seventh-day Adventist church? At the time, although I had serious disagreements with the denomination in which I had grown up, I was unwilling to condemn it as a cult outright. For a while, I continued to believe in the validity of the Seventh-day Sabbath for Christians. I was also largely unaware of many of the underlying issues, such as the Great Controversy worldview, the Adventist doctrine of God, and the serious implications entailed by the Adventist understanding of man. Along the way, however, I also began to delve into these issues, especially through the online ministry of *Proclamation!*

As I became aware of the cultic origins of the Seventh-day Adventist church, I examined the modern church and considered it. I imagined that there were three broad camps in the current church. The first, historic Adventists, fully accepted the teachings of Ellen G. White and other Adventist pioneers. The second, progressive Adventists, were largely like progressive mainline Protestants. They didn’t believe in the supernatural, downplayed the authority and accuracy of the Bible, and minimized the gospel. My sincere hope was that a third group existed, an evangelical group of Adventists, if you like. They would reject Ellen G. White as a false prophet and refute the unbiblical Great Controversy worldview.

The difficulty was identifying such a third grouping. I considered organizations within Seventh-day Adventism such as the One Project. Certainly, here was a group that claimed to advocate for the supremacy of Jesus Christ in the church. Outwardly, the songs they sang and the services they held had the appearance of being just like an ordinary American evangelical worship service. I noted, too, that one of their preachers had at least acknowledged the Arian heresy of the Adventist pioneers. Yet what was his response to the tritheism into which the early Adventist understanding of Christ had morphed? They often used words like “gospel,” but what exactly did they understand it to be? Did they call for sinners to repent and place their entire trust in Christ and his finished atonement on the cross? Did they understand the absolute deadness of man in his sin, and the necessity of the new birth?

I came to realize over a long period of time that it is not enough for a church merely to downplay its old heresy or sweep things under the rug. How could I ever be sure that the old Adventist worldview no longer influenced those who would style themselves as “evangelical” if they refused to acknowledge that Ellen G. White was a false prophet? By nature, I am not con-

**My sins dropped away from me like rocks off a cliff, and I was forever free from guilt and condemnation. God also began a process of sanctifying me and growing me in holiness—a process that has often been painful and humbling. But I know whom I belong to, and I know that I am not the same person I was.**

frontational at all, and I was reticent to call a person esteemed in the church of my family a false prophet. In time, however, I came to realize that I had to leave the Seventh-day Adventist church, if for nothing else than to maintain my integrity. I understood that if I wanted to be a reforming voice that would point Adventists to the gospel of Jesus Christ, I could not do so while still an Adventist myself.

Acknowledging this reality was one thing, but actually leaving was another story! After all, my beloved family was Seventh-day Adventist. The church in which I had served and had so many friends was Adventist. The majority of the people I knew on Facebook were Adventists.

It took a good bit of coaxing from some dear brothers and sisters on the Former Adventist Fellowship online forum for me to take the final step and write a letter requesting my membership removal. A month before I left, I became a student at The Master’s Seminary (TMS), a school founded by Pastor John MacArthur. I like to joke that I am most probably the only Seventh-day Adventist who has ever been accepted to TMS!

Currently, I have just completed my studies and have moved to the UK for a research position at Tyndale House, Cambridge, an evangelical research library that serves the global church. Thanks be to God for His precious gift of life, for my dear wife, my two boys, and above all else, the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ my Lord, “who loved me and gave himself for me.” †

**Kaspars Ozolins** was born in Latvia to an Adventist family. They moved to Los Angeles where Kaspars attended Adventist elementary and high schools in Glendale, California, and his father was an Adventist pastor. He met Ieva, his wife, while studying in Latvia before pursuing a doctorate at UCLA in historical linguistics. Kaspars just completed an M. Div. at The Master’s Seminary in Sun Valley, California, and lives with his family in the the UK where he is a Research Associate in Old Testament and the Ancient Near East at Tyndale House, an evangelical biblical research center in Cambridge.

# Created for V

## EPHESIANS 2:1–10

**D**id you try to get better before you finally trusted Jesus? Maybe you were considering baptism, or maybe you were thinking about starting church attendance. Maybe you were just a child, and you started to try to not fight with your brother or sister. Some of you might have tried to stop lying, cursing, drinking too much or maybe doing drugs or pornography or—fill in the blank.

How did your plan work? Did you make yourself feel good enough to come to Jesus?

As an Adventist I often tried to clean up my act, but I never felt good enough. Even now, as a born again Christian, I see that there is often a temptation for believers to fall back into this deception—feeling that we need to clean up before praying, or opening our Bibles, or coming to church.

Ephesians 2:1–10 is to me one of the best and clearest statements in the Bible of the progression of the believer—from being dead to becoming a living worker for the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus.

The first time I sat in a biblical church, our pastor Gary Inrig was teaching through this passage. I was sure that he must have heard that I was coming and had chosen this passage just for me—later my wife told me she thought that it was just for her!

Here is this amazing passage written by the apostle to the Gentiles—our apostle Paul:

Ephesians 2:1–10—And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

### We were dead

You—me—all of us were born into this world spiritually dead. In fact, Paul not only says that we were dead in our trespasses and

sins, but we were by nature children of wrath. In other words, the only thing we deserved was God's wrath—everlasting hell.

You might ask, "Why were we born deserving wrath and hell? Babies haven't committed any sins yet when they are born!"

Remember what God said to Adam and Eve? He told them that if they ate fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would surely die, and they would die the very day they ate it. They did die—they became spiritually dead—their spirits were dead—and they were unable to be good or seek God (Rom. 3:9–18). They hid from Him in shame.

Their spiritual death is our inheritance, Paul explains in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. Because our first father Adam died, he gave us death for a legacy. Now we need a new Father who can make our spirits alive again.

I grew up in Seventh-day Adventism. We were taught that Adam and Eve "began to die", making God's statement that they would die the day they ate the fruit less than accurate. Because Adventists don't believe that we have a human spirit that can be separated from the body, they can't understand either spiritual death or spiritual life. They don't grasp the truth that we can be born again and made spiritually alive. Instead, to Adventists like I was, human death is purely physical, and spiritual death is more of a mental attitude and bad genetics that cause us to have "propensities to sin".

I did not understand that those who are dead and never respond to God's call will eventually suffer eternally, like those whom John says will worship the beast at the end of the age. In the book of Revelation, he describes this reality in the context of those who worship the beast and its image:

...he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name (Rev. 14:10, 11).

In my past I did not believe a good God would make people suffer eternally for a few years of sinning. I believed John's words were a metaphor for wicked people suffering until they were burned up. Since I didn't understand spiritual death or the sovereign holiness of God, eternal suffering made no sense.

The Bible tells us the truth, though. Our natural position before our Holy God is that we were born into a lost race. We had no merit in ourselves to change that destiny of an eternal future which



# Work

RICHARD TINKER

involved torment. We were “dead men walking”, as the saying goes, as certainly as are those who are on death row as they walk to their punishment.

## Adventist beginnings

I was born in an Adventist hospital, early Sabbath morning. I was born one month early, but because my parents couldn't afford the expensive hospital care that premature babies often need, the doctor declared me healthy enough and sent me home. My mom told me later that I looked awful—I had no forehead, and she thought I looked like a devil child. (The Adventist prophet Ellen White said that Satan has a sinister sloping forehead, and my head reminded my mother of him.)

But that assessment was not far from reality. Indeed, I was born into the kingdom of darkness—I needed to be saved!

Hope comes in Ephesians 2:4,5:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...

Did you see that? God made us alive together with Christ, and we didn't have to clean up first. God gives us life in Christ when we are dead!

My memories of my religious upbringing centered around our Adventist “more than a prophet” Ellen G. White. My family had worship time twice each day. Morning worship almost always involved a short devotional reading from Ellen, and then at bedtime, worship involved my parents reading the day's lesson from the Sabbath School quarterly. The lesson would feature a Bible text and then teaching that was mostly based on Ellen's writings.

I began to realize that I wanted to belong to Jesus when I was about seven. I got a Bible for Christmas and carried it proudly to church each Sabbath. I tried to read it but soon got bogged down in all the strange statutes and laws that were given to the Israelites.

When I was ten, I went to summer camp. At the first meeting around the campfire, I prayed to God to forgive me and make me His. The camp pastor prayed a prayer that any camper that needed to get right with God wouldn't be able to sleep that night. I went to bed with quite a bit of fear that God would keep me up all night, but I slept very well. That was my first glimmer of hope that salvation was a gift and not by works!

I realize now that God was calling me even when I was a child, but I still thought that works were somehow a part of the salvation





package. These works included Saturday Sabbath observance, vegetarianism, and a lot more! But that experience at camp showed me that God was the power—not my works.

If you reading this look alive to those who see you, but you know inside that you are dead in your sins, respond to God's call and repent of your sins and trust the Lord Jesus—trust his death, burial, and resurrection—that his death has been enough to pay for all the wrath that you deserve.

## Grace not works

...by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph. 2:5,6).

Not only is it by grace that we are saved—not by our works or by cleaning up our act—but we are spiritually seated with our Lord Jesus in heavenly places. That promise is real; it is not a metaphor. Do you live in a tiny apartment, or is your house on a street where

God gives us the faith we need to believe and trust in Jesus. There is nothing that we do to get this amazing kindness from our Lord.

## Created for good works

God doesn't stop with simply saving us. Once He makes us new people with His own eternal life, He surprises us again. He gives us His work to do for His glory. Verse 10 says,

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

My training as an Adventist included my not swimming or riding my bike on Sabbath or doing anything else that might distract me from the holiness of the day. I also was taught to eat the Eden diet—which meant I was a vegetarian. We didn't play with regular playing cards, didn't go to bowling alleys or movie theaters, or even to the circus. The way we dressed was also important. Our prophet wrote councils against wearing tight clothing or belts, so I had to wear sus-

penders for a time in grade school. There were other things we were compelled to do as well: we had to give at least 10 percent for tithe, but we were strongly encouraged to give 20 percent.

All these do's and don'ts were the works I did in my past, but are these the good works that we are created to do?

They were works of the flesh, not of the Spirit. They were detailed by a modern prophet and required by a false religion. Furthermore, there are civic clubs, neighborhood watch groups, ladies quilting clubs, homeless feeding programs,

and countless other organizations that exist to do good works. These good deeds can be done by anyone—spiritually dead or alive—but God has created us for good works that are His own.

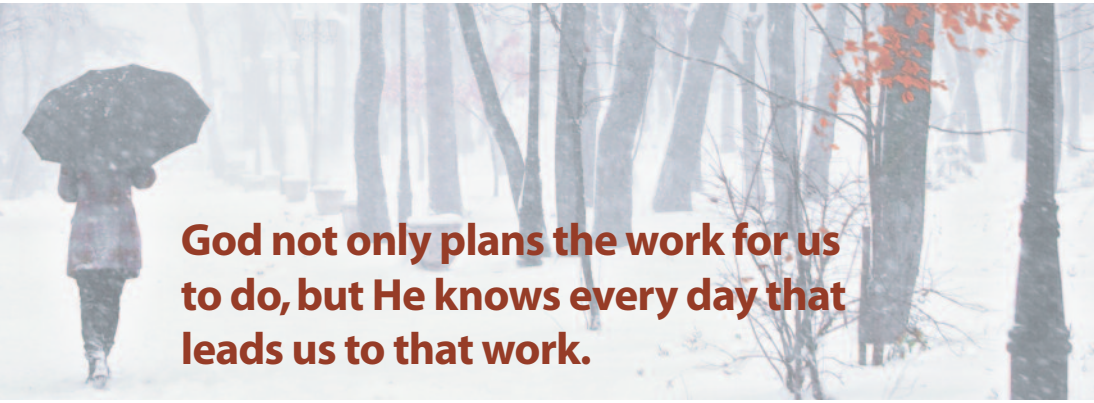
God makes us alive when He saves us, and then He gives us His work to do, which He prepared for us beforehand. What a wonderful, gracious God we have. He saves us, He makes us alive, and He gives us work that was prepared specifically for us to do—it all comes from the hand of our Father who loves us.

## Works of God vs Works of the flesh

This subject of good works is often misunderstood. Since the works may look the same, how can we tell the difference between works of the flesh and works of God? As an Adventist I believed that all those works I did demonstrated that I loved God. They were my proof that I was right.

Jesus told us the difference between works of the flesh and works of God in Matthew 7:22–23:

On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera in a snowy, misty forest. The person is wearing a dark coat and carrying a large black umbrella. The trees are bare and covered in snow, with some red leaves visible on a tree to the right. The overall atmosphere is quiet and serene.

**God not only plans the work for us to do, but He knows every day that leads us to that work.**

drug-trafficking is common? This earth is not your home. If you have believed and trusted Jesus, you are always with Him in heavenly places. Even death cannot remove you. And that spiritual reality will become a physical one as well when our Lord Jesus raptures us to be with Him forever.

...so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7).

And this passage says more—this reality that we experience in Christ Jesus is for the purpose of showing the riches of God's grace which cannot be measured. His kindness to us in making us alive in Jesus and giving us salvation is God's Exhibit A of His grace which He displays to heaven and earth through all the ages to come. Our eternal life is for His glory!

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8, 9).

And then, to make it absolutely clear in which direction the good stuff is flowing, the passage clearly states that even the required faith is a gift of God. We do not generate our own faith.



God's works are His gifts, and they flow out of a life that has been made alive in Jesus. Works of the flesh flow out of a human heart that has not trusted Jesus and been born again. We cannot always look at another person's good works and know whether or not they are born again, but the Lord knows.

When we believe Jesus and trust His blood to pay for our sins, God gives us new life. We are born again. From then on He asks us to trust Him, and He will give us His work to do. He does not ask us to work in order to get His approval. He asks us to trust Him, and He uses us to glorify Him.

We might wonder what work God has prepared for us to do. In fact, the New Testament gives us many examples. In I Peter 2:9 we are told that we are chosen so that we may proclaim the excellencies of our God who called us out of darkness.

For example, Life Assurance Ministries actively calls people out of a false religion into Biblical truth. It is so fun to witness new believers who are excited to know Jesus. They can't help but tell others the awesome changes they have experienced by believing and trusting in Jesus—they can't stop telling of his excellencies!

This declaration of God's goodness is a work of God that He has prepared for us.

In Hebrews 3:13 the writer tells of another work that we as believers are called to do. The text says:

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

We can help someone keep from being hardened by sin by teaching and encouraging them. Sometimes we feel down or maybe even are considering sin, and a brother or sister in the church gives us wise counsel and we are encouraged. This exhortation and encouragement is the work God gives us to do in the Body to build one another up.

Another work that is given to us is made clear in Galatians 6:1-2:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

By bearing each other's burdens we fulfill the law of Christ. I was raised to believe that my greatest efforts should be directed towards the task of keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly—and this obedience would result in vindicating God's character—as if any creature can vindicate the Creator. But here we find that we can fulfill Christ's law by bearing one another's burdens—and we can only do that work by having Jesus' life in us. There is no hint of the Old Covenant in this command.

Remember the judgement scene that Jesus taught about in Matthew 25? He talked about two groups of people—those on His right and those on His left. Those on his right who were saved—the ones whom God knew—had done the good works He had brought to them. Those works included feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, giving clothes to the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison. Those on the left had

not cared for the people that crossed their paths. The difference between these two groups was their condition: the ones who cared for people were alive in Christ. The ones who didn't recognize those who needed their help were still dead in their sins. God did not "know" them.

So, when God makes us alive in Christ, He makes us new creations. Our new birth is His workmanship, and He gives us this new life in order to do good works for His glory.

Paul talks about how doing God's work looks in a local church. In Romans 12 he teaches us how the church body works together, each member using his or her unique abilities to do the work that God has assigned each one—much like our bodies have many parts that work together to sustain our life. Sometimes the work the Lord gives us in His body seems mundane and repetitive, yet it is what God gives us. Sometimes His work is changing diapers and disciplining our kids, or mowing the lawn, or caring for an elderly parent. God asks us to honor Him by serving each other joyfully.

So, Ephesians 2:10 tells us two important things: God creates us new in Jesus, and this new life is His preparation of us to do His work. In other words, our new birth includes God's redeeming us for His glory so that in Him we are equipped to do the work He planned for us to do. Let's read that verse again:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

## Prepared in advance

When I was still wandering in the wilderness of a cultic religion, even though I didn't know it, God was preparing me for work He would eventually give me. Let me tell you about my journey and how God led me through school, and then job after job to prepare me for the work that He had already prepared beforehand.

When I enrolled at Pacific Union College, all I could think about was being a music teacher. I studied music history, theory, composition, conducting, and practiced endlessly on my trombone. But God had other plans. So he led me through a journey of changing majors several times, resulting in my learning printing, photography, news writing, and ultimately I graduated with a degree in public relations with a media emphasis. But my education wasn't finished.

For a reason unknown to me back then, I also took an evening class in accounting, thinking it might be useful. It seemed random at the time.

After I graduated, my first job was at the Pacific Union Conference headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist church for the five-state Pacific Southwest region. I ran the print shop and designed educational materials for the different departments headquartered there. But God was also teaching me about the inside of Adventism—how the leaders work and behave in their offices, and how the machinery of the organization functions. I saw and learned things most young Adventists do not see.

I later moved to an Adventist publisher that was in charge of producing the Sabbath School teaching lessons for the church's high-school aged students. I worked under an amazing designer

who gave me an understanding of the design and layout of publications. Because of that good experience, I was able to get a job later as art director at The Quiet Hour Ministries in Redlands, California. There I was in charge of designing all their printed products, including magazines, books, pamphlets, and advertisements. God was still training me—but I had more to learn!

I was offered a job at Loma Linda University's School of Dentistry in their Educational Support Services department. I later became the director and learned by experience how to lead a team of workers in the production of educational art, movies, books, and online programming.

At each point in my life, God was leading me and teaching me, so that when I lost my job at Loma Linda, I was prepared for the next step.

God knows before we are born the life we will live and the work we will do. God doesn't waste anything. Psalm 139:16 says:

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Every day of our lives was formed before we were even alive. God not only plans the work for us to do, but He knows every day that leads us to that work. We can trust God with our lives—no matter what stage of life we are in.

Furthermore, Hebrews 12:10-11 explains that the discouragement and despair we sometimes feel is part of His teaching us to trust Him so that we can do what He asks us to do:

...he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Sometimes our discipline seems unrelated to our work for the Lord, but He is teaching us to trust Him and to learn to live by His word as His Spirit convicts us. God taught me to wait for Him and to trust His timing as I worked in an increasingly hostile place during my years at Loma Linda University.

In June, 2006, I was fired on the very day that God had planned for me, when He had prepared me for His next assignment. I was fired for cause because of my work with Former Adventist Fellowship and *Proclamation!* magazine. I felt adrift; I had no income for

four months, and I didn't know what I would do next. My wife reminds me that I even seemed a bit depressed, forgetting to shave and shower sometimes. Yet I saw God sustain us until He brought the next step to me.

That next step was one I never would have planned. He gave me work overseeing Life Assurance Ministries, a ministry which exists to help others leave the church into which I was born and in which I had stayed for over 40 years.

Now, in this job, on a daily basis, I use all the education and skills and knowledge that my past gave me. And that crazy accounting class—it helps me as I serve on three different boards that present quarterly financial statements that I am expected to understand, and it helps me prepare and administer the operating budget for Life Assurance Ministries.

Moreover, all my knowledge of the dark core of Adventism drove me to dream of a Biblical church planted in the very town where I used to worship each Saturday, where I worked long hours at the School of Dentistry during the week. Now, by God's grace, we worship every Sunday at Redeemer Fellowship in Loma Linda under the shadow of a Health Sciences University and Hospital dedicated to the pagan belief that man is only physical, and there is no hell to fear.

## Summary

We can summarize Ephesians 2:1–10 with four points.

**First:** We are born dead in sin. Our spirits are dead, and each one of us is by nature a child of wrath, following the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. We are born condemned to eternal death.

**Second:** God intervenes in our hopeless state. Because Jesus came into our condemned world and died the death our sin demanded, God raised Him from the dead. Now, when we believe Jesus and trust in His blood as the payment for our sin, God raises us to life in Christ.

Not only does He raise us to life and literally seat us spiritually with Christ in heavenly places, but God uses our new life in Jesus as His demonstration of who He is. His kindness to us condemned humans, taking us from death to life in Christ, is an eternal display of His grace.

**Third:** Our new life is a miracle. It has nothing at all to do with any work we do. We are saved by His grace through faith—and even our faith is His gift to us. We can never say that we are saved because we pleased God, worked hard, or did our best. We have faith because God gives us faith, and we are saved because God raises us to life in His Son when we believe with the faith He gives us.

**Fourth:** When we are born again, our new life is God's workmanship. When He gives us new life in Christ, He creates us for His work. Our new life and His Spirit in us equip us to do the work which He gives us. When we are still dead in our sin, the Lord knows who we will become and what He will give us to do. He prepares our work, and He prepares us for that work!

We can praise God for rescuing us from certain death, for making us alive in Jesus, and for equipping us for His purpose. †



**Richard Tinker** is the president of Life Assurance Ministries and an elder at Redeemer Fellowship, an evangelical church in Loma Linda, California. Richard and his wife Colleen have co-led Former Adventist Fellowship since 1999 and rejoice in the freedom they have found in living by the Spirit.



## ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #25 THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

### ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #25

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times.

### COMMENTARY ON THIS STATEMENT

This may be the most orthodox of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs espoused by Seventh-day Adventists. The two most widely accepted ecumenical creeds both state the belief in the Second Coming:

**Apostles' Creed:** On the third day (Jesus) rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

**Nicene Creed:** (Jesus) shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead.

Within the Christian Church there are multiple views on the Second Coming of Christ that are considered orthodox by the majority of people. The main views on the Second Coming are often grouped according to when the Second Coming will be relative to the Millennium (1,000 years of Rev 20:4):

- Premillennial – Jesus will return before the 1,000 years
- Postmillennial – Jesus will return after the 1,000 years
- Amillennial – The 1,000 years is symbolic of the time between the Cross and the Second Coming; Jesus can return at any time.

These are, by necessity, gross over-simplifications of the different views. Even within one of these groups there may be vast differences in the details. For example, premillennialism can be further split into the groups of Dispensationalism and Historic Premillennialism. Neither Dispensationalism nor Historic Premillennialism are single viewpoints either; each of these schools of thoughts have multiple understandings within that viewpoint. For example, Dispensationalists are further split between whether they advocate a rapture of the church before (pre-trib) during (mid-trib) or after (post-trib) the Great Tribulation and/or 7 last plagues. The Seventh-day Adventist view would fall as a sub-set (one of many) of Historic Premillennialism.

Dispensationalism with the associated doctrine of the rapture of the church is probably the most well-known. Seventh-day Adventism specifically rejects a secret rapture of the church but proclaims a visible Second Coming. Dispensationalists believe Jesus will rapture the church prior to His visible return. Most Christians believe in a visible second coming, and Seventh-day Adventism is within the range of normal Christian beliefs on this subject.

The resurrection of the dead is a belief shared in common across orthodox Christian churches, and the inclusion of that statement in the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs wouldn't be any reason for concern except that Adventism means something slightly different when it refers to "resurrection". A more complete examination of this teaching will be presented in response to Fundamental Belief #26 which specifically deals with death and resurrection. However, in brief, Adventism differs from mainstream Christian teaching by proclaiming that there is no part of man that remains alive between death and the resurrection at the Second Coming. That teaching isn't clear within Fundamental Belief #25, although it is made clear in the following, Fundamental Belief #26.

Similarly, this belief statement emphasizes the death of the wicked, a teaching that is expounded on in Fundamental Belief #27. Technically, it isn't the death of the wicked that should concern any of us, but rather the Second Death described in Revelation 20:14:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

The wicked dead are raised again to stand in front of the judgment seat of God (v 12) and, in accordance with their wicked deeds, are thrown into the lake of fire (v 15). Scripture defines the second death as "the lake of fire" (v 14). The lake of fire is where the devil, the beast, and the false prophet are placed to be "tormented day and night forever and ever" (v 10).

The final statement that could cause concern is the comment that we need to be "ready at all times". The concept of being ready is biblical. For instance, Matthew 24:44 states, "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

The only question is what it means to a Seventh-day Adventist to "be ready". Like many details in Adventism, this question

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

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



# FROM ADVENTIST TEACHER TO BIBLE TRANSLATOR

WES RINGER

I was raised a Seventh-day Adventist—a legacy that yielded blessings and challenges. Ironically, the challenges have ultimately yielded blessings as they helped me prepare to become a Bible translation consultant working to bring God’s word to the peoples of South Sudan.

One of God’s blessings to me was being raised by parents who loved me and wanted to serve Christ. Another blessing was my parents’ consistency in their faith. Matthew 25:34-40 spoke deeply to my mother’s heart as she sought to live out Christ’s teaching in practical ways by reaching out to the poor in our community with other ladies from our church. In addition, my father’s faithfulness to my mother helped to protect me from my desire to act out sexually during my college years before coming to Christ.

In 1969 I went with my parents on a short-term mission to Haiti where my father’s high school French came back to him. He so much enjoyed his time there, that my parents went on to serve in Korea from 1971–81 with the Adventist church, my father as a dentist and my mother as a worker in an orphanage. I followed their example of mission service by teaching English and Bible at the Adventist language schools in Busan and Seoul from 1973–74.

Ultimately, their leaving to serve in missions when they were in their fifties led me to follow their steps after my children finished college. Instead of going as an Adventist missionary, however, I left to serve Christ in South Sudan as a Bible translator. But I am ahead of my story.

## No assurance of salvation

From early childhood, I desired to be a Christian, yet I was never certain that I would finally be saved. I remember the fear that I felt during my academy and college years as I thought of the future time of trouble when Jesus would cease to be mediator for our sins. I had never met anyone who even claimed to have reached sinless perfection, and I felt certain that I had no hope of ever doing so. I was certain that I would never be prepared to stand before God without a mediator.

I remember a particular Sabbath school discussion when I attended Grand Ledge Academy (1963–67). The question was asked, “How should we answer if other Christians were to ask us if we were saved?” After much debate the final consensus was this: we should ask our questioner for five minutes to think about it. After carefully reviewing our memories, if we were sure we had confessed all of our sins, we could say that we were saved at that present moment. Nevertheless, we still would not know if we would continue to be saved tomorrow.

By the time that I attended Newbold College in 1968–69, I had come to despair of ever being saved. Then, on Easter Sunday in 1969, I was walking through a park in central Edinburgh, when I came across a group of college students sharing the





Jackie and Wes Ringer serve with Wycliffe Bible Translators in South Sudan.

Easter story of the risen Christ. Stopping to listen, I told myself that I was just curious to know what church they belonged to. As I listened, however, I was impressed that these young people really knew the risen Christ in a personal and living way, while I only knew about him.

I felt my heart grow hungry to know Christ. Within a few minutes one of the young men from the group approached me and asked, “Do you know Christ?” I still remember distinctly the dilemma that his question posed in my mind. I felt that if I said, “Yes” I would be lying, but if I said, “No” I would be denying Christ. I actually cannot remember how I answered him, but I do remember trying to shift the conversation to the prophecies in Daniel, since I had been taking a Daniel and Revelation class at Newbold College. Yet as I attempted to shift the conversation, I knew that I was acting just like the Samaritan woman at the well when she tried to shift the conversation away from her personal moral failure to a discussion about where one should worship God.

For the next 18 months, I was sustained by my encounter with those young people in Edinburgh. The fact that they really knew Christ gave me hope that I could somehow also come to know him as well. I returned in the fall of 1969 to Andrews

University and found myself at a religious retreat at the beginning of the year. The “Jesus Movement” was beginning to flourish during the late 60s and 70s, and it was impacting Adventism. At that conference, I heard Paul Jensen, a Seventh-day Adventist on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, sharing about his campus ministry at Michigan State University.

I told Paul about a friend of mine, Dennis from my academy days, who had left Andrews to get away from “Christians” and had gone to Michigan State. I hoped that Paul would be able to share Christ with him. Somehow, I never seemed to doubt that God could save others, even though I was certain that I would be lost.

After taking down the contact information that I had, Paul looked up at me and asked, “So how is it with you and the Lord?” I was finally ready to admit that I did not know him. He began sharing the Four Spiritual Laws with me. Nothing that he shared was new to me, and I readily acknowledged my desire to have a Christ-controlled life. However, when he turned to the next page which had a prayer to accept Christ, I immediately said, “I have already done that at least a hundred times, and it just does not work.” What I meant when I said that was that these prayers of acceptance never assured me that I could

I had never met anyone who even claimed to have reached sinless perfection, and I felt certain that I had no hope of ever doing so. I was certain that I would never be prepared to stand before God without a mediator.

live a perfect life and therefore finally be saved after Christ had ceased to forgive sins during the time of trouble.

Paul then turned to his *Living New Testament* and began to read from 1 John 5:9-13,

“If anyone does not believe what God has said about his Son he is calling God a liar. He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son does not have life. I have said these things to you so that you might know that you have eternal life.”

These words struck me like a blow from a sledge hammer. Again, I found myself in an irreconcilable dilemma. I knew on the one hand that God was not a liar and that His word was true, but I also felt utterly convinced that I could not be saved. On the other hand, I also saw that God clearly said that if I received His Son I could now know that I had eternal life. At the same time, I was utterly certain that I could not be saved because I did not see how I could stand before God without an intercessor after Jesus would cease his work as a mediator for sinners.

### Grappling with Paul

Paul Jensen gave me his pocket Living New Testament, and I read and re-read the Pauline epistles in particular during my junior year at Andrews. I could identify both with Paul's wish to keep the law of God in Romans 7 and with his inability to actually do it. I felt that Paul was trapped as I was with no way of escape when he cried out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” I could visualize my-

self cornering Paul in a blind alley and demanding that he explain himself.

Then, to my puzzlement, Paul suddenly escaped from his predicament before my eyes when he cried out, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” How could Paul, who was so unable to keep the law in Romans 7, suddenly have so much confidence that he now stood un-condemned before Christ at the beginning of Romans 8?

One year later at a similar religious retreat at Andrews, I heard many fellow students share how they had come to know Christ. God opened my heart and gave me the faith to believe that He would save me. As I accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord, God gave me the assurance that I was entered into an eternal relationship with Him as my heavenly Father.

As God opened His word to me, I began to discover more and more passages that confirmed the assurance that God had given me that night when He gave me the faith to accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord. How sweet it was to wake each morning with the assurance that I stood without commendation before God only because of the shed blood of his Son.

That year was one of deep joy, as God's word seemed to open before my eyes. I came to understand that my salvation was secure because of Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross. I experienced deep fellowship with my fellow students who had come to Christ and increasingly with non-Adventists when I discovered that they knew Christ. It was a joy to share Christ, and I saw many come to know him as their Lord and Savior.

During those months Andrews became a place divided between those who knew Jesus as their Lord and Savior and those who did not. I would often start conversations during meals with, “What do you think about what has been happening here on campus?” I could tell by their answer whether or not they knew Christ.

### Adventist inconsistencies with the Bible

Immediately upon coming to faith, I began to wonder why I had never understood the gospel—and what else might not be right in Adventist teaching. I decided to put all that I had been taught on a shelf. What I could confirm from a study of God's word, I would take off the shelf and embrace, and what could not be confirmed, I would leave on the shelf.

A month later in November, 1970, I read through the book of Hebrews. I thrilled at what I read of the work of Christ as my high priest, but I was puzzled as to how the book of Hebrews could be reconciled with the traditional 1844 Adventist sanctuary doctrine.

As I read Hebrews 9 and 10, it was clear that the work of the earthly high priest on the Day of Atonement was being compared and contrasted to the work of Christ as our high priest in heaven. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and that but once a year. He could never enter without taking the blood of goats and bulls. By contrast, Christ as our high priest entered the heavenly Most Holy Place once for all by means of his own blood.

As I read and re-read Hebrews in November of 1970, a number of questions came to my mind. If Christ at his ascen-



sion entered the heavenly Most Holy Place as our high priest by means of the blood of his once and for all sacrifice, then what—if anything—did happen in 1844? If nothing happened in 1844, how, then, could Ellen White be a true prophet of God? If Ellen White is not God's true end-time prophet, how could the Seventh-day Adventist Church be the only true remnant church on earth?

Since I had first read Hebrews in the Living New Testament, I purchased a New American Standard Bible and read through Hebrews over and over again during the next two years, looking up all of the cross references and comparing the account of the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 with Hebrews. I noted that the NASB consistently translated the Greek word *hagia* as Holy Place, but I saw that when *hagia* spoke of the place where the high priest went once a year, it was clearly speaking of the Most Holy Place.

I looked up all of the cross references and read extensively of the work of the high priest in the Law of Moses. I was particularly drawn to the account of what happened on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and saw how Christ fulfilled the work of the Day of Atonement when He sat down at the right hand of God. Finally, in 1972 I wrote to Roy Allen Anderson (one of the authors of the infamous book *Questions on Doctrine* published in 1957 to convince Walter Martin not to classify Adventism as a cult) about my conflict, but I received no helpful answer. He just urged me to continue reading the book of Hebrews and Ellen White. He never revealed that he knew the conflict between the sanctuary doctrine and the book of Hebrews to be a deep theological problem in Adventism, nor that he had been on a committee that had studied this issue in the 1960's without being able to explain how Hebrews could be made to fit into the Adventist's traditional teaching about 1844.

I do remember observing to myself shortly after coming to faith in Christ, that Paul did not seem interested in promoting the Sabbath or kosher food laws. I noted that Paul certainly did not see himself as obligated to keep the whole Law of Moses, and he never admonished Gentile believers of their need to keep the Sabbath. In fact, Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, spoke of festivals, new moons and Sabbaths all being a shadow of Christ, and as a result believers were not to be judged regarding them. I saw that Paul had to deal with a whole number of problems that new Gentile believers faced as they learned to live new lives in Christ. Certainly, Gentiles who had never kept the Sabbath would have had many questions about how to observe it, but I found that questions about how to keep the Sabbath never came up in any of Paul's epistles.

Furthermore, I also had from my Adventist heritage a firm belief that the Ten Commandments were all part of the unchanging moral Law of God. As a result, I was uncertain that I could really trust what I seemed to see Paul saying.

### Finding peace with Paul

In 1972 I came across D. M. Canright's book *Adventism Renounced* in a Christian bookstore. I did not buy the book, but I did look through it to find out what he had to say about the Sabbath. I

already well knew that Adventists said Paul was not speaking of the seventh-day Sabbath in Colossians 2:16, because the Day of Atonement was also called a Sabbath of Sabbath rest. I was unprepared, however, for the number of Old Testament passages that Canright cited that spoke of festivals, new moons and Sabbaths. It was clear from these passages that the festivals referred to the yearly feast days, the new moons referred to special sacrifices offered at the beginning of each month, and the Sabbath referred to the weekly Sabbath. In fact, a number of these Old Testament passages also speak of the sacrifices offered every evening and morning. I saw that there was clear progression from the yearly, to the monthly, to the weekly, and to the daily.

Why, I wondered as I pondered these passages, would Paul have used these three terms if he did not intend to include all of the holy days of the Jews—including the weekly Sabbath—as being shadows of Christ? Yet could I believe that Paul was really saying that the weekly Sabbath of the Ten Commandments was something that the Gentile believers were never called to keep any more than they were called to keep the Passover, Pentecost, or the Day of Atonement?

I had begun to teach history at San Gabriel Academy in California in 1977, and the next year I was also given Bible classes. Then, in the fall of 1979, I first heard Desmond Ford on tape explaining his own struggle in attempting to reconcile Hebrews with the Adventists' traditional understandings of 1844. It was

That year was one of deep joy, as God's word seemed to open before my eyes. I came to understand that my salvation was secure because of Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross.



Wes and Jackie Ringer attending a dedication service for the new Baka New Testament translation.

Immediately upon coming to faith, I began to wonder why I had never understood the gospel—and what else might not be right in Adventist teaching. I decided to put all that I had been taught on a shelf. What I could confirm from a study of God's word, I would take off the shelf and embrace, and what could not be confirmed, I would leave on the shelf.

vindicating to realize that I was not the first Adventist to see a contradiction between Hebrews 9 and 10 and the Adventist teaching about what happened in 1844!

I was puzzled, however, that Ford would continue to try to affirm Ellen White as a prophet while stating clearly that Hebrews taught that Christ entered the Most Holy Place once and for all at his ascension. After all, it was Ellen White's early visions occurring between 1844-1851 which confirmed the traditional Adventist teaching, and Ford rightly saw them as conflicting with the clear teaching of Hebrews. How could a true prophet have visions confirming something opposed to Scripture?

Then came the Glacier View meetings where, in July, 1980, Desmond Ford was stripped of his Adventist ministerial credentials. I clearly saw then that my own days were numbered as a history and Bible teacher within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I wrestled the longest over whether or not Christians were still called to keep the Sabbath. I read Samuele Bacchiocchi's *From Sabbath to Sunday* and was surprised that he acknowledged that Colossians 2:16 was talking about the weekly Sabbath. I noted that Jesus healed on the Sabbath and justified working on that day because his Father was always working.

Then, in 1981, I did an exegetical study of the book of Galatians and saw that Paul clearly stated that the Law was to last only until the coming of Christ. He uses the example of the slave-*paidagogos* who supervised the minor child only until he became an adult, as the illustration of how the Jews were kept under the Law until Christ would come. Once they believed on Him, they were no longer under the Law.

Finally, in the summer of 1981, my fighting with Paul was over. I saw that, indeed, the weekly Sabbath is a fitting shadow of Christ. God called the Jews to remember two things about Him as they kept the Sabbath: first, that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and second, that He redeemed them out of their slavery in Egypt. Certainly, Christ is both the Creator of all things and our redeemer from our slavery to sin.

### Disfellowshipped

I was suspended from my teaching position at San Gabriel Academy in August, 1981; however, I was kindly granted a study leave by the Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This leave extended from August of 1981 to April of 1982, and I spent my time reading extensively the primary documents dating from 1840-1853 on Ellen White's first seven



years of visions related to the sanctuary and the Shut-door. Without this study leave, I would not have had the time to have thoroughly read through much of the original sources that I cite in the paper that I wrote for the Southern California Conference, *The Shut-door and the Sanctuary: Historical and Theological Problems*.

At the end of this study leave as I gave this paper to an official at the Southern California Conference, he told me, “Wes, you may well be right, but we do not want to deal with it, so do not feel bad when we fire you.” That same month my wife and I were disfellowshipped from the Temple City, California, Adventist Church.

Disfellowshipping resulted in a number of changes in my life. First was a change of occupation; I spent the next twenty-three years as a painting contractor. Sadly, another change was that within a year and a half of leaving the Adventist church, our marriage ended in divorce. I was left alone, cut off from the religious and social circles that had defined my life and stripped of my profession, to attempt to continue to be a father to our two small children.

I went through a time of deep grief, but God remained faithful. Gradually He showed me that He had a future plan for my life. I would caution other couples going through the considerable stress of leaving Adventism to realize this added stress can place a strain on their marriage. It is important to pay attention to how leaving is affecting each person and to seek to prevent the breakup of their marriage.

### Gift for language

I never would have guessed that God granted me a gift for languages. I had had a difficult time in my first attempt to learn German in college, never even understanding the meaning of four English words, nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative, that I heard repeatedly during the two years that I studied German.

Meanwhile, I did learn enough Korean to get around and bargain in the market place during the year that I was there. However, I was impressed that my father was able to recall his high school French while in Haiti, that he had studied German for two years so that he could speak to his German-speaking dental patients, and that in his early fifties he and my mother had both learned Korean.

I also realized that, because my BA was in history, if I were to consider myself to be a serious student of the New Testament, I needed more linguistic studies. I needed to be able to read the text in Greek.

For over ten years I had a Greek New Testament and Lexicon sitting in my bookshelf, which I would open from time to time and quickly close again. I feared attempting to take Greek at seminary, since my first attempt at German had not gone well.

Then, in 1994, I met a member of my church, Chris Gordon, at a men’s prayer breakfast doing a Greek word study. I went up to him afterwards and asked him if he would teach me Greek. He agreed, and we studied together once a week for the next five years, first completing the reading of John, and then com-

pleting a beginning Greek grammar. I well remember reading John 1:1 and suddenly understanding how the nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative cases actually worked in that verse. I looked forward to our time each Monday evening as we met in a coffee shop and studied Greek.

I’d had a heart to serve Christ in overseas mission for many years, a desire planted there, I believe, first because my parents had served in Korea, and secondly because I had enjoyed living abroad, first in England and then in Korea. But in what way could I best serve?

In 1994 I knew that God had impressed on me that I was to learn Greek well, and I developed a faithful habit of almost daily reading the New Testament Greek text of John, 1 John, Romans 1–8, and then other New Testament books. I found that by reading and re-reading the text, that I grew both in understanding of words and, most importantly, in understanding how Greek sentences carry meaning.

It finally began to dawn on me that perhaps I could best serve in working with Bible translators. So, I applied by letter to Wycliffe Bible Translators in April, 1999. They seemed eager to accept me to help paint their buildings, but they were certain that at 51, I was too old to work in Bible translation. I was discouraged but did not give up my ongoing study of the Greek New Testament.

At the end of this study leave as I gave this paper to an official at the Southern California Conference, he told me, “Wes, you may well be right, but we do not want to deal with it, so do not feel bad when we fire you.”

On a short-term mission trip to Mexico to build homes for poor families, I poured out my frustration to a friend named Bijan, mourning that this door to missions now seemed closed. Almost a year later, Bijan heard a mission presentation by Ron Binder, a representative of Wycliffe Bible Translators, of the great need for more workers and asked him why they were making it so hard for me to join them.

Ron gave him his phone number and invited me to give him a call. I finally called him in January, 2001, and he encouraged me to apply again. I had purchased a computer in the fall of 1999 so that I could now email and send with my application a number of exegetical papers that I had written using my Greek. I sent them off and waited for several months before receiving an invitation from Freddy Boswell to come to Dallas, Texas, for a job interview.

Freddy encouraged me to take a linguistic class or two at Biola University within an hour's commute from my home. I enrolled in August, 2001, and graduated with a MA in Applied Linguistics in 2004. While taking my linguistic classes, I also took four upper division New Testament Greek classes and a hermeneutics class at Talbot Seminary which was on the same campus. I was very thankful that I had begun the study of New Testament Greek when I did, or I would never have been ready to understand the linguistic courses that I needed to take for my MA.

Finally, five and one-half years after initially applying, I became a member of Wycliffe Bible Translators in November, 2004, and was given an invitation to join the Sudan Branch to train to become a translation consultant. I arrived in the field in September, 2005. Since then I have been pleased that we have better translation software called Paratext that now allows me to learn much about the seven languages that I have worked with on an ongoing basis.

I am able to learn much about these languages through the use of an interlinear window that allows me to see an English word or phrase under each of their words. Together with my linguistic studies, the interlinear helps me to understand how sentences work, and soon after beginning to work with a team, I can spot words or phrases that they are leaving out and often suggest the word that is missing.

Since coming to Sudan, I have had a lot to do with helping the Baka, Didinga, Keliko, Gbaya and Tennen translators complete not only their New Testaments but also Genesis, Exodus 1–20, Ruth, and Jonah. It has been a special joy to check the book of Hebrews with six different languages.

I have just now finished reading, verse by verse with the use of the interlinear in Paratext, with the Gbaya all of their books. It is an amazing privilege to work with men who have dedicated years of their lives to help bring God's word to their people. I have developed deep bonds of friendship and have the joy to know that I have helped to make God's word clearer and more accurate in these languages. I look forward, God willing, to help in the revision and completion of several more New Testaments before I must retire from the field.

I shared earlier the deep pain that I went through when my first marriage ended in divorce and wondered if I would ever re-marry when I came to work with languages of South Sudan.

However, God led me to develop first a deep friendship and then love for Jackie Marshall. We married in 2014, with Jackie serving as the director of our work and I as both the translation coordinator and translation consultant. Yes, God does plan good things for us that we will discover as we walk faithfully with Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Each day I find great joy in serving him. †

## Endnotes

1. White Ellen G., *The Great Controversy* p. 425. "Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator."
2. John 4:19.
3. Romans 7:24.
4. Romans 8:1.
5. Assurance of Eternal Life: I recall Bible marking classes in my Adventist church when I was young, where we underlined and connected proof texts for important Adventist doctrines. But the assurance of salvation was not one of those doctrines. John 10:27-29, Romans 8:28-39, Ephesians 1:3-10, Ephesians 2:1-10, Philippians 1:6, Philippians 4:2, Colossians 1:1-14, 1 John 5:9-13, Jude 24.
6. Hebrews 9:7.
7. Christ fulfills the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement: Hebrews 6:19-20; 9:11-12; 9:24-26; 10:18-22; 13:11-13.
8. Wesley Ringer, *The Shut-door and the Sanctuary: Historical and Theological Problems*, See Appendix I, p.7-8, Raymond Cottrell, *The "Sanctuary Doctrine" Asset of Liability?* I digitized this paper with some updated revisions in 2011. It can be down loaded at [www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com)
9. 1 Corinthians 9:19-21.
10. Colossians 2:16-17.
11. Leviticus 16:31; 23:32 *σάββατα σαββάτων ἀνάπαυσις* sabbath of sabbath rest.
12. Numbers 28-29, 1 Chronicles 23:30-31, 2 Chronicles 2:4, 2 Chronicles 8:12-13, 2 Chronicles 31:3, Nehemiah 10:33, Isaiah 1:13-14, Ezekiel 45:17, Ezekiel 46:1-15, Hosea 2:11.
13. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977, p. 358. The seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary interprets the "sabbaton-sabbath days" as a reference to the annual ceremonial sabbaths and not to the weekly Sabbath (Lev. 23:6-8, 15, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37, 38). It is a fact that both the Sabbath and the day of atonement in Hebrew are designated by the compound expression *shabbath shabbathon*, meaning "a sabbath of solemn rest" (Ex. 31:15; 35:2; Lev. 23:3, 32; 16:31). But this phrase is rendered in the Septuagint by the compound Greek expression "*sabbata sabbaton*," which is different from the simple "*sabbaton*" found in Colossians 2:16. It is therefore linguistically impossible to interpret the latter as a reference to the Day of Atonement or to any other ceremonial sabbaths, since these are never designated simply as "*sabbata*."
14. John 5:17-18: "Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."
15. *slave-paidagogos*: *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*: paidagogos (1) literally boy leader, a trusted attendant who supervised the conduct and morals of a boy before he came of age guardian, trainer, instructor.
16. Galatians 3:19-25.
17. Exodus 20:8-11.
18. Deuteronomy 5:12-15.
19. Wesley Ringer, *The Shut-door and the Sanctuary: Historical and Theological Problems*, 1982. I revised this paper and digitally formatted in May of 2011. It can be down loaded at [www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com)
20. Nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative: The nominative is subject of the sentence; the genitive means the possessive, for example something is "of God"; the dative is the location of the instrument, for example, "in the garden with the hoe", and the accusative is the direct object—to whom or for whom something is done.



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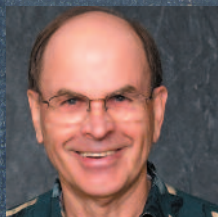
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MARTIN L. CAREY

# INTERCESSOR FOR

**O**n a clear day back then, you could gaze up into the blue Judean sky and see forever. One afternoon, a little cluster of people stood together on the Mount of Olives for a long time, gazing upward, hoping and longing. They could only see a bright cloud, now receding away into the blue. They kept staring hopefully at the cloud that hid Him from their sight, but He was gone. They suddenly noticed two men in white standing nearby, who now spoke:

**Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).**

That day as they followed Jesus up the hillside above Bethany, they were filled with expectation of what He might say and do next. Climbing the dusty path behind Him, they watched Him and wondered. This man was the Jesus they had known and loved, a man with a real body, just as He had proven

to them the night after His rising. He had flesh and bones like them, for they touched His scars and watched Him eat broiled fish. His body wasn't an illusion or a simulation.

**See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have (Lk. 24:39).**

Jesus Himself was with them again. Yet, He had changed since coming out of the tomb. On a walk to Emmaus with two disciples (Lk. 24), they were prevented from recognizing Him. They only recognized Him when He raised His hands to bless their meal, and then instantly He vanished. Later that same evening He suddenly appeared in a room with locked doors. This was no ordinary human body, and with His mysterious appearances and signs, they knew He had the power to do anything.

Jesus had called Himself the "Son of Man," placing Himself at the center of Daniel 7:13, where one like a Son of Man was presented to the Ancient of Days. Now the Son of Man and His





# EVER

disciples had stopped in a clearing, and they gathered around Him, ready to ask their big, burning question:

**“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).**

He answered with a gentle correction and a promise;

**It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:7–8).**

This conversation wasn’t going the way they expected. Jesus’ kingdom would come with mighty power—not by military conquest, but by proclaiming that His kingdom had arrived. The Spirit’s power was coming to equip them to be the King’s wit-

nesses, to proclaim His gospel with power to the world. It was time for cherished beliefs to be overthrown with something much better.

After speaking to them, He lifted up his hands to bless them (Lk. 24:51), and while still blessing them, His body began to rise off the ground. What a strange way for Him to leave them! There were no lights, angel choirs, or fiery chariots—just a man quietly rising higher and higher from the earth, blessing them. Then the cloud took Him out of their sight.

Watching Him, they wondered how they could be comforted when Jesus was gone, but they knew He had promised to send them the Holy Spirit:

**“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you” (Jn. 14:16–17).**

By the Spirit of God since His ascension, Jesus has become ever-present with His children and will never abandon them, no matter what. Now, through His Spirit, Jesus lives in us and is closer to us than He was even to His disciples while they walked with Him on earth.

## Where Did Jesus Go?

Since Jesus’ body ascended into space, we wonder where He went. Perhaps if we flew a space ship fast enough we could approach heaven, or with a big enough telescope we could sneak a peek at heavenly glory.

Some of us tried to do just that. Growing up with a love for the stars, I would point my little telescope at a glowing patch in the constellation of Orion. Adventists are taught by their prophet Ellen White that Jesus will return from somewhere in Orion. White’s “Opening in Orion” grew into an elaborate Adventist legend over the years, leading us to believe that God’s throne is somewhere inside the nebula M42, a glowing gas cloud. Astronomers tell us that M42 is about 1500 light years away,<sup>1</sup> a relatively close neighbor in our Milky Way galaxy of 100,000 light years across. It is a beautiful object even in binoculars, regardless of what its clouds may hide. We know that M42 fills a limited amount of space, about 25 light years across. It glides along in the Orion arm of our Milky Way galaxy, and although the galaxy is vast, it is just one among 200 billion other galaxies—give or take a few billion. From Ellen White’s two statements, many Adventists have come to believe God’s heaven is contained in a gas nebula nearby. For you astronomers, that puts heaven’s address at RA 5h 35m | Dec -5° 23.<sup>2</sup>

Does God have an address inside our observable, physical universe? The reformer John Calvin once remarked,

**What? Do we place Christ midway between the spheres? Or do we build Him a cottage among the planets? Heaven we regard as the magnificent palace of God, far outstripping this world’s fabric.<sup>3</sup>**

How far into the heavens did Jesus ascend? Scripture gives no location in the universe for God's throne, nor is there any mention of God coming from or living near Orion. Jesus' actual ascension flight plan, however, is hinted at in Hebrews 4:14: Our great high priest "has passed through the heavens." He is "separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). The writer of Hebrews borrows language from David in Psalm 57:5: "Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let your glory be above all the earth."

Solomon's prayer when he dedicated the temple also reveals God's transcendence over creation:

**"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" (1Kings 8:27).**

The term "heaven of heavens" is used in Scripture to indicate the realm of God's immediate presence beyond the visible starry heavens. There is no place loftier or more glorious than His throne, a place beyond scientific observation. The Son of Man rules in heaven, a realm fitted for One who dwells in "unapproachable light" (1Tim. 6:16) where His will is done perfectly (Mt. 6:10).

## The Scandal of Christmas

When Christians celebrate the Christ child in the manger every December, we sometimes forget the glorious scandal of Christmas. That night in Bethlehem, Mighty God became a crying little baby who needed His mama to change His swaddling clothes. That night, He brought the kingdom of heaven down to earth. The Word became flesh, and when the humble shepherds beheld His glory, they knelt down to worship the tiny baby. Who would believe the shepherd's report?

The incarnation of the Almighty is a shocking, disruptive, even blasphemous message—that the eternal creator God entered a woman's womb and became flesh! Yet that tiny baby was the Eternal One, not someone less divine than the Father. "For in Him, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

Jesus' bodily ascension to heaven is an essential part of the gospel, yet its significance has been neglected throughout Christian history. A man's body ascending into space is a fantastic-sounding story, very hard to believe. Yet to many it hasn't seemed spiritual enough, writes Gerrit Dawson, and we look for ways to spiritualize Jesus' return to heaven.<sup>4</sup>

Ancient Greek philosophers, especially Plato, still influence Christians into having a low opinion of physical flesh. There is a tendency to think that somehow the body corrupts and disables the human spirit. There is a great deal written about how we must liberate our spirits by cleansing our bodies with better diet and exercise. We tend to equate the body's genetic inheritance with our tendencies to sin, especially if we were raised on the Adventist health message.

Yet God's incarnation into mortal human flesh does not diminish His divinity or His humanity. That Christmas baby was Mighty God who still held all things together from the feed trough (Col 1:17).

We could change the story to say Jesus unzips His skin suit and then ascends to heaven as a spirit. Jesus arrives on earth appearing as a man, wearing human flesh as a costume, only to shed it before returning to heaven. Spiritualizing Jesus that way has a certain appeal, says Dawson.<sup>5</sup> It might offer us a way to escape the messy limitations of physical reality as He did. This change to the story of Jesus would make the ascension story ethereal and give us a rather ghostly Jesus. Absent from earth, this ghostly Jesus would need us to finish His work on earth by transforming the world and building up His kingdom by putting humanity back into the presence of God, as Chester and Woodrow explain in their book, *The Ascension: Humanity in the Presence of God*.<sup>6</sup>

The ascension, however, protects us from such perversions of Jesus. It keeps us from reinventing Him into a "Christ principle," says Dawson, or from creating a "Christ in you" ideal, or whatever else our imaginations desire. The truth is that Jesus is the man who walked the earth 2000 years ago, bringing us to know and worship the wondrous person who gave His life to save the world. The ascension keeps us grounded in the Jesus of Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

If the incarnation was scandalous, it was even more scandalous to both Jews and Greeks for Christ to return to heaven with a human body, as Chester and Woodrow point out. How could God (or any god) humiliate Himself by first becoming flesh, and then by carrying a lowly, servant body back to the heavens?

The scandal is not just that God has left heaven to be 'enfleshed' on earth, but that God returns to heaven in the flesh. As John ('Rabbi') Duncan, the Scottish theologian and missionary, said, "The dust of the earth sits on the throne of heaven."<sup>8</sup>

Origen, a third century church theologian and philosopher, taught that Jesus did not retain His human body when He ascended to heaven but returned to His previous form as a spirit to exist only as pure intellect. As a universalist, Origen believed that existing as only mind was the goal of salvation for all, that salvation comes by attaining purity of intellect over the flesh.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Origen's thinking is alive and well today among certain modern theologians, who promote Christ not as a person but as a set of principles and ideals that we emulate.

What does Scripture teach us about the present form of the ascended Christ?

**For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1Tim. 2:5).**

The ascension of the man Jesus to heaven shows us that His incarnation, being made flesh with us and for us, is a continuous incarnation. He is the same Jesus, but now He has a glorious resurrection body that we will share with Him:

**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory (Phil. 3:20-21).**

**For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11).**



Jesus' humanity is an inseparable part of His nature (Jn. 1:14; Phil. 2:7) qualifying Him as a priest forever (Heb. 6:20). In fact, we can call Jesus our Brother because He took our flesh and blood, so that we might become like Him.

## Open The Gates!

After Jesus ascended and was taken by the cloud, it was time for His return to the royal residency He had left 33 years before. What was this reunion like, and what happened there? From Psalm 24 we have a glimpse into that heavenly drama. The Son has changed since He left home; now He comes back as not only as the Son of God but also as the Son of David. In Psalm 24, King David describes a royal arrival that begins with, "The earth is the Lords, and all it contains!" He asks in verse 3, "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?" Only the one with clean hands and a pure heart, with nothing false in him—he can stand in God's presence and be blessed. Who is pure enough to stand in His holy place (v. 4)? There is only one "who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). That blameless man can approach the gates of Zion with confidence.

Psalm 24 has been called the "Song of Ascension," to be sung during David's reign when the ark of the covenant was carried up the road to the gates of Jerusalem. We discover that this arrival of the ark to the holy city was a shadow of something greater: the arrival of the Lord of Glory, the Son of David. The triumphant king returns from battle and seeks entrance into the city. The King has come, ready to enter through the ancient doors in triumph.

In this Psalm we can imagine Christ's ascension and return to heaven. Charles Spurgeon wrote:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ could ascend into the hill of the Lord because his hands were clean and his heart was pure, and if we by faith in him are conformed to his image we shall enter too. We have here a picture of our Lord's glorious ascent. We see him rising from amidst the little group upon Olivet, and as the cloud receives him, angels reverently escort him to the gates of heaven."<sup>10</sup>

The Son of Man approaches the eternal gates of heaven, knowing they have been shut tight against any man since Adam's rebellion. But now as He approaches, thousands of excited angels gather around Him, and they shout to those inside, "Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!" (v. 7).

Those behind the gate ask, "Who is this king of glory?"

From the outside comes the shout, "The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle!" and they shout all the louder, "Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!"

"Who is this king of Glory?" They want to hear His name again.

"The Lord of Hosts; He is the King of glory!"

The Lord Jesus is the Son of Man prophesied in Daniel 7, and He has arrived in a cloud of glory to be given sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the world (Dan. 7:14). Now having triumphed

over all His enemies through the blood of His cross, He has one pressing appointment that cannot wait. Jesus immediately sits down at the right hand of His Father, at His side as the co-regent of all creation. He told His disciples, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18). His ascension was the inauguration ceremony for the King of Kings, and He remains as our sovereign King to this day.

Now reigning in the heavens, Jesus is establishing His kingdom by sending us His Spirit, by distributing spiritual gifts for building up His church (Eph. 4:7-12), by representing us to the Father, and by asserting His control over all the powers of this world. His power extends to everywhere. As Tim Keller has stated, Jesus is still human and our Advocate, "yet now he has been so glorified that everything he does has a cosmic scope . . . any time-space limitation passes away."<sup>11</sup>

## The Veil Was Torn

Adventists have taught that Jesus had been in the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, the Most Holy Place, making intercession for us until 1844, when He entered the Most Holy Place and began a work of judgment to see who was worthy. This belief is central to the Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment which we will not discuss in detail. In fact, Ellen White saw a vision in which Jesus was ministering in the Holy Place in heaven together with God the Father.<sup>12</sup> According to this vision, God the Father entered the Most Holy Place just before Jesus did. The vision implies that for over 1800 years, Jesus and His Father were not in the Most Holy Place which apparently stood empty all that time. With Father and Son absent, the mercy seat was apparently abandoned, with no divine presence there. During that time before the Father and Jesus entered it, the Most Holy Place in heaven was being polluted by the accumulating sins of God's people. At some point, according to Ellen White's revelation, the heavenly sanctuary must be "cleansed" of all that pollution.

This doctrine raises some questions:

1. Why would Jesus imitate the futile ancient daily sacrifices, which never took away sin? His completed atonement put away sins once for all (Heb. 10:11-12).

2. If God was not present in the Most Holy Place before 1844, what made it holy? Isn't the most holy place where God is?

**FROM ELLEN WHITE'S  
TWO STATEMENTS,  
MANY ADVENTISTS  
HAVE COME TO BELIEVE  
GOD'S HEAVEN IS  
CONTAINED IN A GAS  
NEBULA NEARBY.**

3. Why would the heavenly sanctuary need two compartments, divided by a veil? The veil of the earthly temple was a shield between the glory of God and the sinful priests. That veil was torn down the moment Jesus died, announcing complete access to the Father. Jesus' torn body gave us fearless entrance into the very throne room of the Father.

Let's look again at a familiar text, and consider if any Christian believer since AD 33 was ever excluded from complete, immediate access to the mercy seat and the Father:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since [we have] a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:1-22).

When Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, heaven and earth were shaken to allow believing sinners bold entry into the throne room. Jesus went immediately to the Father's right hand, where He has remained for 2000 years.

As Charitee Lee Bancroft wrote, "Before the throne of

God above I have a strong and perfect plea, A great high priest whose Name is Love, Who ever lives and pleads for me."<sup>13</sup>

### Who Shall Separate Us?

He entered heaven in our name so that by His blood we may enter also, even though we are by nature filthy and unworthy sinners. That statement means that right now, if you know and trust in Christ, you are seated with Him in heavenly places. This fact is not just a pretty metaphor, but a spiritual reality. He lives in us by His Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14), and we have our life in Him. The Christian's life is joined to Christ's life forever:

**For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4).**

Full assurance of faith stands in contrast with the teachings of Ellen White, who said that at some unknown moment, Jesus will

abruptly end His priestly intercession in heaven for us. On that day, there will be no further possibility of any sins being forgiven:

"Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil."<sup>14</sup>

Many Ellen White statements threaten believers with Jesus abandoning them if they are not perfect when their names come up for judgment. Thank God, His word remains true, even during the Time of Trouble:

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom. 8:34-35).

"I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

But he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:24-25).

Nothing "can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39).

Our Mediator will never walk off the job or turn against His own children, for His priestly work always continues. Would He ever stop making intercession for us? No! His intercession and our eternal life are guaranteed, because Jesus can never die again (Rom. 6:9)! With Him, our place in heaven is as secure as He is, where no power can remove Him.

As Charitee Bancroft continues in her poem, "My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart, I know that while in heaven He stands No tongue can bid me thence depart!"<sup>15</sup>

### We Have Such a High Priest

The high priests of ancient Israel were men appointed to mediate between sinful people and their holy God. Moses set the pattern for them when he ascended Mt. Sinai and entered the cloud alone to speak with God (Ex. 20:21). Later, the tabernacle became the meeting place between God and man. On the Day of Atonement every year, the high priest entered the most holy place of the tabernacle, carrying the blood of sacrifice to the mercy seat on behalf of all God's people (Lev. 16:29-34). When Jesus ascended to heaven as our High Priest, the Father had already accepted His shed blood on behalf of all who trust in Him. As our Substitute, Jesus had broken the curse of death, and we who believe enter the presence of God in Him. If you trust in Jesus, you are there now with the Father, with no "sin pollution" barrier. We have "this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His'" (2 Tim. 2:19). The Ascended One personally brings us to God.



**For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God (1Pet. 3:18).**

Jesus is a better high priest because He is not like the priests of the Old Covenant:

1) He is a priest forever, unlike the priests of old who died (Hebrews 7:24). He “always lives to make intercession for them” (v. 25).

2) He was the perfect and sinless priest, and sacrifice (v. 26). He is “holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners.”

3) He made one sacrifice, “once for all when He offered up Himself” (v. 27).

To be all of those things, Jesus had to share our flesh and blood to be our sympathetic and merciful high priest. He knows what pain, joy, grief, and fear all feel like because He is our brother.

**Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17).**

Our high priest is forever one of us, and only in Him we are complete and “faultless to stand before the throne.”

**This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:19-20).**

Standing before the Father, Jesus is our Mediator and Intercessor: He prays for our salvation, for our joy, for protection against the evil one (Jn. 17:9-14). Jesus knows what we need every moment.

Just how desperately do we need His prayers? My mom was single when she raised us three kids and was often at her wit's end dealing with us. I confess, we were a handful. I remember certain nights hearing her fervently praying for us in her bedroom. She sounded so helpless and needy as she poured out her tears on the throne of grace. I wondered if God was taking her seriously. Now, years later, I know the answer. We have someone praying for us in the very highest heaven, one whose prayers are powerful and never failing. We are more helpless and wayward than we can know. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote:

“If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”<sup>16</sup>

He will never abandon the struggling soul who calls on Him; for He saves to the uttermost. We are commanded to put sin to death and live by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14). As we will and work to please Him, our victory only comes by His willing and doing in us (Phil. 2:12-13). It is foolhardy to think of ever living apart from Him—as if we could prove our ability to live on our merits. He has a better plan:

**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6).**

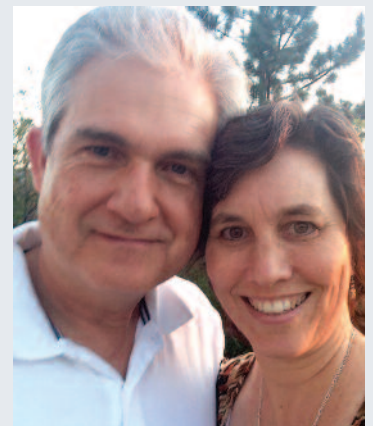
If you trust in Jesus, you are there with Him now, victorious in the Father's presence. He will be our righteous Mediator tomorrow, at world's end, and a trillion years from now. Our lives are always hidden with Him.

“One with Himself, I cannot die; My soul is purchased by His blood; My life is hid with Christ on high, With Christ, my Savior and my God.”<sup>17</sup>

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# Why Christians Need to Understand Seventh-day Adventism

**T**he Chapel in St. Joseph, Michigan, gave a gift to the Life Assurance Ministries board on the first weekend of November this year. It wasn't a gift in the tangible sense—but it was a gift that continues to encourage us.

The gift we received was The Chapel's commitment to knowing the truth about Adventism. Pastor Phil Bubar and his staff asked us to conduct three educational meetings for their congregation. Because The Chapel is located just minutes from Berrien Springs, the home of Andrews University and the Adventist seminary, the members encounter Adventists often. Pastor Bubar has a passion to equip his sheep with the understanding they need in order to talk with Adventists without being deceived or dismissed.

The Chapel agreed to host a one-day Former Adventist Fellowship conference during the weekend before we began our meetings for the church, so on Saturday, November 3, the Tinkers, the Stevensons, Cheryl Granger, Tim Martin from The Centers for Apologetics Research, and Jim Valentine from Christian Apologetics Research and Information Services, conducted a day of meetings for a group of nearly 30 people questioning or processing Adventism. One attendee was a Bible teacher from a neighboring Bible church who wanted to learn more. He had already been teaching classes about Adventism to a Sunday school class using Rick Barker's articles on the Adventist Fundamental Beliefs from *Proclamation!* magazine as his primary source material.

On Sunday we were able to address nearly all the adults of this large church in two combined Sunday school classes. Richard Tinker interviewed former Adventist Rolaant McKenzie who talked about his research in the Heritage Room at Loma Linda University in the 80s, and Colleen Tinker addressed the underlying impact of Adventism's skewed "natures": the nature of man, of God, of sin, and of salvation, and explained how these unseen but powerful skews alter the way Adventists hear the gospel when Christians talk to them.

Sunday evening Carel Stevenson shared his faith story with The Chapel members, and Tim Martin gave a presentation on Adventism's confusing history of Arianism, anti-trinitarianism,

trinitarian-sounding statements, and its current vague stance resembling tritheism. In the process, Tim clarified the difference (which Adventists have trouble seeing) between a "Being" and a "Person". One new former Adventist said, "I understand what the Trinity is now for the first time!"

On Monday night Richard Tinker and Carel Stevenson explained the way Adventists understand certain common Christian words compared with the words' actual meanings. Words they discussed included grace, sanctification, born again, faith, hope, and others. Colleen Tinker then showed how the "Five Solas" of the Reformation—*Sola fide* (faith alone), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (through Christ alone),

*Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone)—which define evangelical Christianity, are reinterpreted within an Adventist framework.

Although Adventists would likely affirm these five "solas" if questioned, in practice they interpret each of these five in private, unique ways that change their understanding of God's word, the gospel, and the identity of Jesus.

Monday evening's presentation ended with a Q & A with Pastor Bubar moderating the questions directed to a panel of

all the presenters who were there. The Q & A session was highlighted by an Adventist woman who had attended both the Sunday school presentations as well as Monday's program. She came armed with a "paper" she had written which she demanded that she be able to read.

"This will only take five minutes; you've already had 30 minutes," she said as she insisted we had twisted the truth and didn't really understand Adventism. Pastor Bubar reminded her that all of us had been Adventists, and she got up and walked out.

## Why Adventism needs to be exposed

The woman's outburst may have been extreme compared to many Adventists' public presentations, yet it was an indication of true Adventism. Historically Adventism thrived on public debates marked by rapid-fire proof-texts designed to confuse and silence

**The Christian concern that explaining Adventism might put people's attention on falsehood instead of truth is a fear, not a reality. It is not possible for us to explain Adventism without defining biblical truth.**



Christians who frankly do not understand the Adventists' arguments or agenda.

In fact, although the woman's interruption seemed irregular, it illustrated Pastor Bubar's conviction that his congregation needs to understand Adventism in order to engage effectively with Adventists.

Many Christians believe that they should be known not for what they oppose but for what they believe. Their argument is important because Christianity is being eclipsed in many circles today by inclusive language that obscures Jesus' penal substitutionary atonement, the nature of Christ, and the Trinity, not to mention the inerrancy of Scripture.

While the basics of Christianity must be taught, however, there is a parallel need to inform Christians of the skews of the "Christian cults". Adventism especially must be exposed, because it most cleverly uses the same words Christians use, espousing the same beliefs, the same salvation, and the same Jesus.

Their words are deceptive, however, and Adventists do not believe in the same Jesus, the same way of salvation, or in the inerrancy of Scripture.

Perhaps most skewing of all, Adventists do not believe in the same nature of man that the Bible teaches. Because Adventists hold to a materialistic view of man without an immaterial spirit, they mean something different than Christians mean when they "agree" about human sin, about Jesus' ministry on our behalf, about the nature of salvation, and about Jesus' role in the Trinity.

Many Christians who do not understand an Adventists' private definition of Christian words believe the Adventists to whom they speak know Jesus and are "true Christians". They are confused by Adventists' questions, and may be puzzled by an Adventists' declarations of "loving Jesus".

Conversely, an Adventist who desires to "do the right thing" needs to hear how his private beliefs are wrong. If an Adventist were to step into a Bible-teaching church, he would likely agree with most of what he heard. Because Adventists themselves do not usually understand that their definitions of Christian words differ from their true meanings, when they hear a Christian talk, the Adventists generally agree. What an Adventist needs is for a Christian to be able to confront his understanding with truth.

Unless Christians understand how Adventists "hear" words like "we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone", both the Adventist and the Christian may think they are in agreement. Unless a Christian knows that an Adventist does not believe he has an immaterial spirit that is born dead, the Christian will not realize that an Adventist thinks of "conversion" or "new birth" as a mental agreement rather than as one's spirit literally becoming alive.

Adventists who hear Christians teach the Bible and explain the gospel usually agree with them, privately amending the Christian's talk with words such as "Poor man—he just doesn't understand the



**Richard Tinker and Carel Stevenson compared the meanings of common Christian words with the Adventist meanings of those same words.**

'Sabbath truth,' or "Well, the God I serve would never punish a person in eternal hell."

Adventists edit their Christian friends internally when they hear them talk. The Adventists believe they espouse all the truths a Christian believes, but they also have "the rest of the truth". Christians will not realize the Adventists have a different worldview underlying their words, and Adventists do not realize that their own definitions of Christian words are not accurate.

Because of these deliberate deceptions built into Adventism, it is imperative that Christians understand Adventism in order to communicate truth to an Adventist.

## **Includes the truth**

Importantly, helping Christians understand Adventism must always include clear teaching about biblical truth. It is true that many Christians are not clear about their own central doctrines. Because of this lack of clarity, such Christians would be unable to help an Adventist even if they understood what an Adventist believed.

When we teach Christians what Adventism teaches, we always explain what the Bible says about each doctrine. We explain how Adventism obscures the power of the gospel, and we state what is true, using Scripture as the foundation that reveals reality and exposes the Adventist "skew".

The Christian concern that explaining Adventism might put people's attention on falsehood instead of truth is a fear, not a reality. It is not possible for us to explain Adventism without defining biblical truth.

Looking back at our weekend in St. Joseph, we are thankful to the pastors and also the congregation for their desire to understand how to talk to Adventists. Their interest in knowing what Adventists believe so that they could speak to them without being confused has renewed our energy and commitment to this work to which God has called us.

If we assume that Adventists are actually born-again Christians because they say they are, we risk cutting them off from the gospel. When an Adventist uses words that Christians use, he likely does not mean the same thing Christians mean.

Because Adventism teaches a false gospel based upon an incomplete atonement and a weak Jesus, Adventists are likely not believing unto salvation. They are believing a substitute idea that includes their own obedience as part of their salvation requirements.

We owe it to our brothers and sisters in Christ to explain Adventism to them for two reasons: we are commanded by Scripture to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and we have to understand how Adventists misunderstand this delivered faith. †

**Deceived and tricked**

I just wanted to tell you how grateful I am for the wonderful work you all are doing in helping people to come to know the biblical truth. I was an Adventist for thirty-five years and left that denomination two-and-a-half years ago. During my long stay, there was often something inside me that kept saying something was not right. Many of their doctrines sounded contrary to what the Bible said. If I went to an elder or someone better versed in the Bible and Ellen White than I was, they would explain anything I wanted to know. It would sound so right. I always believed that I could trust a pastor

or someone else that was more familiar with the Bible than I, so naively I would believe.

I always heard of the investigative judgment, but I didn't understand it. For some time I had been feeling quite uneasy about what they were teaching; [it seemed that] no matter what I did, it was a sin. I would pray and ask God to help me obey all the rules and regulations which I really thought were from Him. My salvation means everything to me, but as time went on, I knew I'd never make it. I couldn't do anything right.

Then, after much prayer and pleading with God to show me the truth, I came across your website. I read everything you wrote and bought all your books and watched your YouTubes, and I decided to study the Bible myself with no Ellen White books, just God's word. I did use some of your helps, but I also had to make sure you were teaching biblically.

During the next six months I studied day and night, and what I found shocked me. By then I was so confused and sad. I couldn't believe what I had learned. I would take God's word and put it next to what the Adventists and EGW taught, and nothing matched up. Of course, I took what the word of God said above anyone else.

I can't begin to tell you the deep sadness I then experienced. At first I thought that I must be wrong, so I re-studied everything many, many times, but it came out to the same thing. I had been deceived and tricked into a cult; how

could I have let that happen to me? How could I have been so stupid? I lost all that wasted time when I could have been worshiping God the correct way and could have been much happier.

So many times in that thirty-five years I would ask God to give me the rest that He promises in His word, but I could never seem to find it. However, when I finally realized through continued study that the rest was actually in Jesus Christ, I finally found my rest and peace that I had never had before.

I didn't have to be a vegetarian; I didn't have to keep all those rules and regulations that they taught. I had known, when they taught that I would have to stand before God without a mediator, that something was very wrong. In fact, that was the point that I started studying deeply into God's word to find truth.

Your work has helped me so much. It helped me to realize that so many others were going through the same thing. I cried so many times over many others' testimonies; it was like hearing them describe the exact same thing I was going through.

Because of your site I have helped two others out of darkness into the true light. I will always love my Adventist friends, even though I am basically shunned from them. I will always pray for them and all the other so-called cultic churches, that they will find the true Jesus and the peace that only He can give.

I continue to go to your site and read and study. What a bless-

ing you all are! I especially like how I can go back to previous magazines—all the way back to your beginning.

Now for my last question: my friends and I who have left that Adventism would like to know how so many get caught up in such lies and deceit? How do people like doctors, lawyers, and highly educated people get drawn into a cult? In fact, how does anyone fall for such lies? Even when I try to show them what the Bible says and what the church teaches and the contrast is plain as day, they will not accept it.

I will continue to pray for your ministry, that many others like me will find their rest in Christ. God bless you all.

PELHAM, NH

**Editor's response:** Christians who become caught in Adventism are usually unaware of two things. First, they often do not really know the biblical teaching of the new covenant and the fact that Jesus fulfilled the law, making it obsolete (Heb. 8:13). In other words, they don't really understand the impact of the gospel, that Jesus died according to Scripture, was buried, and rose on the third day according to Scripture (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Second, they do not know that Adventists have a completely different worldview than biblical Christians have. They do not know that Adventists believe humans do not have an immaterial spirit that is by nature dead in sin, the object of God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). Because Adventists have an unbiblical view

## 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

## ADVENTISM EXAMINED

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

is tricky to nail down. Some Adventists would tell you that your character needs to be perfect before Christ returns. Others would say that you can't have any remaining willful sins (apparently "accidental" and "spur of the moment" sins are a different class of sin). I have also heard Adventists who would say that one can't have any unrepented sins.

None of these definitions of "ready" are discussed in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. Rather, those who are "not ready" are described as not having "been sealed by the Holy Spirit" (p. 384). This phrase is a blatant example of Adventist

code words. To the person unfamiliar with Adventist doctrine, the statement seems completely reasonable. However, the "seal" in Adventism is the Sabbath. The underlying message here is that those who don't keep the Sabbath aren't ready for Christ's return and will be cast out.

While this statement may be one of the most orthodox-sounding of the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, it still contains references to uniquely Seventh-day Adventist teachings that would not be apparent to the casual reader. Outside of the context of Adventism I could read this statement without having any concerns. This belief statement, however, is not separate from the context of Adventism, and words like "resurrection", "death", and "being ready" have special meanings within this context. †



of humanity and thus of Jesus, their doctrines teach another gospel than the gospel of Scripture.

Christians need to know what the Bible actually teaches, and they need to know what Adventism actually is.

#### Don't need religion with errors

Neither my mother nor I adhere to your teachings and can see many errors in your understanding. If you are interested, my mother would be happy to share her reasons for this.

For the record, my mother has tried to unsubscribe in the past but was told it had to come from me, the addressee. I do have to apologize for not getting around to doing it before now, and thank you for your generosity in sending the magazine in the past. It was certainly helpful when I first came out of Adventism. However, since we both decided to follow the Scriptures, starting at the beginning of the book and allowing the Spirit to teach and guide us in our understanding of His Word, we don't need church or religion in which truth and error is taught. Consequently, we have not read the magazine for some years now.

My mother and I would both appreciate it if you could please unsubscribe me from your mailing database.

QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

#### I finally understand

Only those willing to "come out of her" know just how dark the darkness of Adventism is and how the legalism and fear choke the life out of a person! I could not even shower without hearing in my head just how EGW said I should do it! I understand how hard it is to leave! I came close to a breakdown when I left.

I loved God (still do!), but Ellen White reminded me how I kept failing to show my love. Now I realize her counsels were nonsense and brain washing of sorts.

Then I remembered what a happy Christian I had been before joining that church. Everything seemed to snowball then. The Adventists followed us and threatened

us when we visited another church. We began doing research into some of Adventism's statements and found they distorted and lied. Then we received a copy of Walter Rea's *The White Lie*—and then my marriage of 15 years suddenly ended!

I was reeling! God got us (the kids and me) through it all. That was in 1987, and I STILL did not know all that Adventists believe at the start of this year, 2018. I still wondered about the Sabbath. I wondered about some lessons that

OUR DECISION TO LEAVE ADVENTISM IS LIKE A DIVORCE. THERE IS SO MUCH EMOTION, GUILT, AND LOSS. EVEN WHEN WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THE TEACHING OF ADVENTISM IS HERESY, IT IS STILL IN OUR BONES, AND THERE ARE SO MANY TRIGGERS THAT BRING BACK THE FEELINGS OF DOUBT.

never made sense. Nothing seemed to answer the Sabbath issue authoritatively to me. I felt like I was rationalizing.

Thanks to you, I finally understand and am totally free! I praise God for your ministry! Thank you!

RESPONSE TO A  
PROCLAMATION! BLOG

#### Your heinous doctrine

LAM, take my name off of your mailing list!!! I want nothing to do with an organization that believes that our loving God would torture His enemies for eternity without end! That doctrine makes a liar out of Jesus who said in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 7:27, "Love your enemies."

Also, Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death." Death is not death if you're alive forever being tortured!

Your heinous doctrine makes a liar out of Jesus and Paul!

I am destroying and discarding your magazine without reading it! I also threw away all your books!

FORMER ADVENTIST  
GILBERT, AZ

**Editor's response:** When Jesus said that the wicked would "go away into eternal punishment," He used the same word, "eternal", that He used to describe "eternal life" in the same verse (Mt. 25:46). Punishment involves knowledge and awareness. Furthermore, the second death, identified as the lake of fire in Revelation 20:14, is not describing "life".

Adventism's materialistic view of existence cannot conceive of "death" meaning anything other

God," and Hebrews 12:29 says, "for our God is a consuming fire."

If the consequence for believing in the Life Giver is eternal life with Him, the consequence for not believing must be equally serious but opposite. We are born dead in sin, but in His mercy God sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sin. To refuse to believe in Him is to remain under the curse of sin, spiritually dead.

Eternal punishment is the judgment on all who refuse to believe the Life Giver. I can think of nothing worse than falling into the hands of the Living God and being unable to be in relationship with Him because of refusing His life. That condition is death.

#### Leaving is like divorce

I have been reading your magazine since the first edition came in the mail and have very much benefited from the enlightenment it brings me. Your magazine is such a treasure and is visually beautiful...

The Spring, 2018 edition was written just for me! I did not realize it, but I have been needing the articles you wrote. Finally, I have clarity on the reasons for my confusion about the sanctuary, the priesthood, the scapegoat, and the investigative judgment...

Thank you for all your efforts to bring to us the truth about what we have believed all our lives. Our decision to leave Adventism is like a divorce. There is so much emotion, guilt, and loss. Even when we are convinced that the teaching of Adventism is heresy, it is still in our bones, and there are so many triggers that bring back the feelings of doubt. Your magazine and books clarify biblical teachings which make our journey in leaving Adventism easier and reveal Jesus in every word.

OOLTEWAH, TN

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## LIFE AFTER WITH NICOLE STEVENSON

**“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4).**

**F**or many of us who’ve left Adventism, the holidays can be particularly tricky and sometimes painful. Not everyone experiences the consequences of leaving Adventism in the same way, but for many the fallout is real and often devastating—especially inside the family. In spite of the trials, though, the holidays are also a time for celebrating our God and for focusing on the gift of Jesus Christ and the salvation He brings.

Scripture tells us that following Christ brings consequences, that even family relationships may be severed for the sake of the gospel. Even so, we can rejoice—returning to the source of our joy and offering our broken hearts as platforms of praise to our God, who is the heartbeat of these holidays we love.

Rejoicing often comes for me as I surround myself with music rich in theological truths, or when I read and copy Scripture. Returning to the source of my joy means setting my heart and mind on the truths of who God is and what He has done.

When I focus my mind on what the holidays really honor, my emotions are also refocused, and the joy of the Lord becomes my strength even when I feel loss. When I express my thankfulness to God, I remember that I no longer live locked in the confusion of my depravity, or under the weight of my

sin and shame, or in the uncertainty of life after death. Those chains have been broken by the miraculous incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

I have been escorted into the light of Christ and transferred to the King-

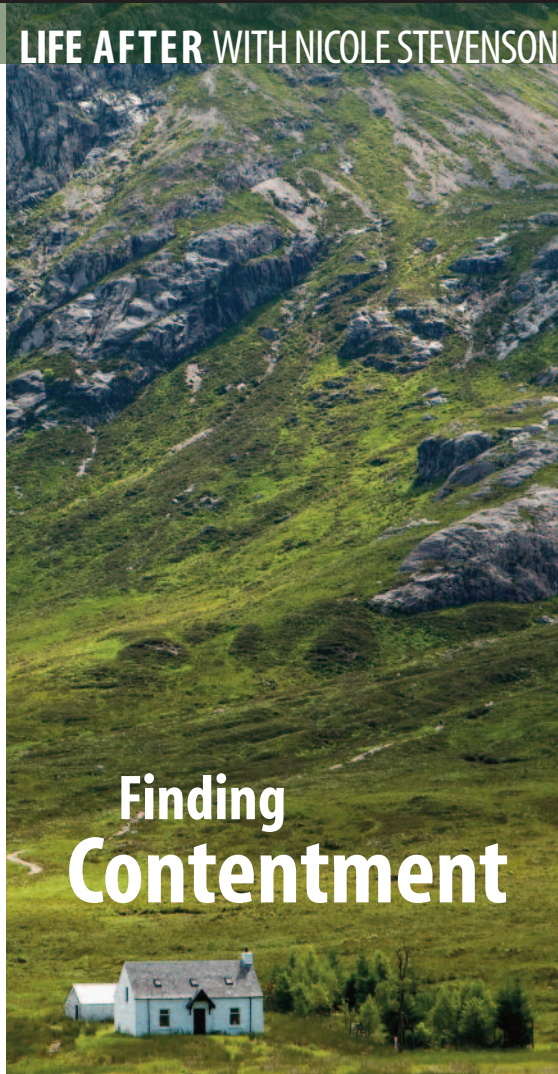
dom of the beloved Son where I’ve been given new life and the ability to know truth. I’ve been reconciled to and adopted by the Father, and I am sealed forever by the Holy Spirit who guarantees my salvation! This new reality is Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter all packaged together!

We can rejoice and be content no matter what we face this holiday season—because of a baby. This helpless baby, the incarnate Word gifted to us by the Father, grew up knowing resentment, rejection, and hate. Finally, He was led to the slaughter on our behalf. This holy, helpless infant, born under the cloak of night, bore the fullness of God into our evil world to rescue His people from the clutches of sin and death!

It is to Him, our Most High God, that we owe our deepest loyalty and gratitude, our fullest attention, and our highest praise! It is to this Merciful One who knows what it is to suffer that we can bare our broken hearts, placing our burdens at His feet, and thank Him for what He is doing in us in the midst of our trials and loss.

Our Savior knows what it is to walk a path paved with the certainty of calamity for the glory of God. Because we share in His sufferings and His comfort, we can know His compassion through trials and cling to hope no matter the outcome.

All the power of the Trinity works to lead us home. Though we may walk through dark valleys of loss or rejection, we are never without our Great Shepherd. We fix our eyes on Him, and our hearts rejoice and praise Him for the life we now have—in spite of our personal losses. It is in this place of worship lived out—with our minds fixed on truth and our spirits worshipping God—that we find our deepest and most lasting contentment in the Life After. †



**Nicole Stevenson** lives in Southern California with her husband Carel and her two children, Joshua and Abigail. Nicole graduated from La Sierra University with a degree in social work and is currently staying home to raise their kids. Nicole, with her husband Carel, was on the launch team of Redeemer Fellowship, an evangelical church in Loma Linda, California.