

UNBORN DEHUMANIZED

THE COVENANTS PUT SABBATH IN ITS PLACE

ProclamationMagazine.com

Proclamation!

FORMER ADVENTISTS

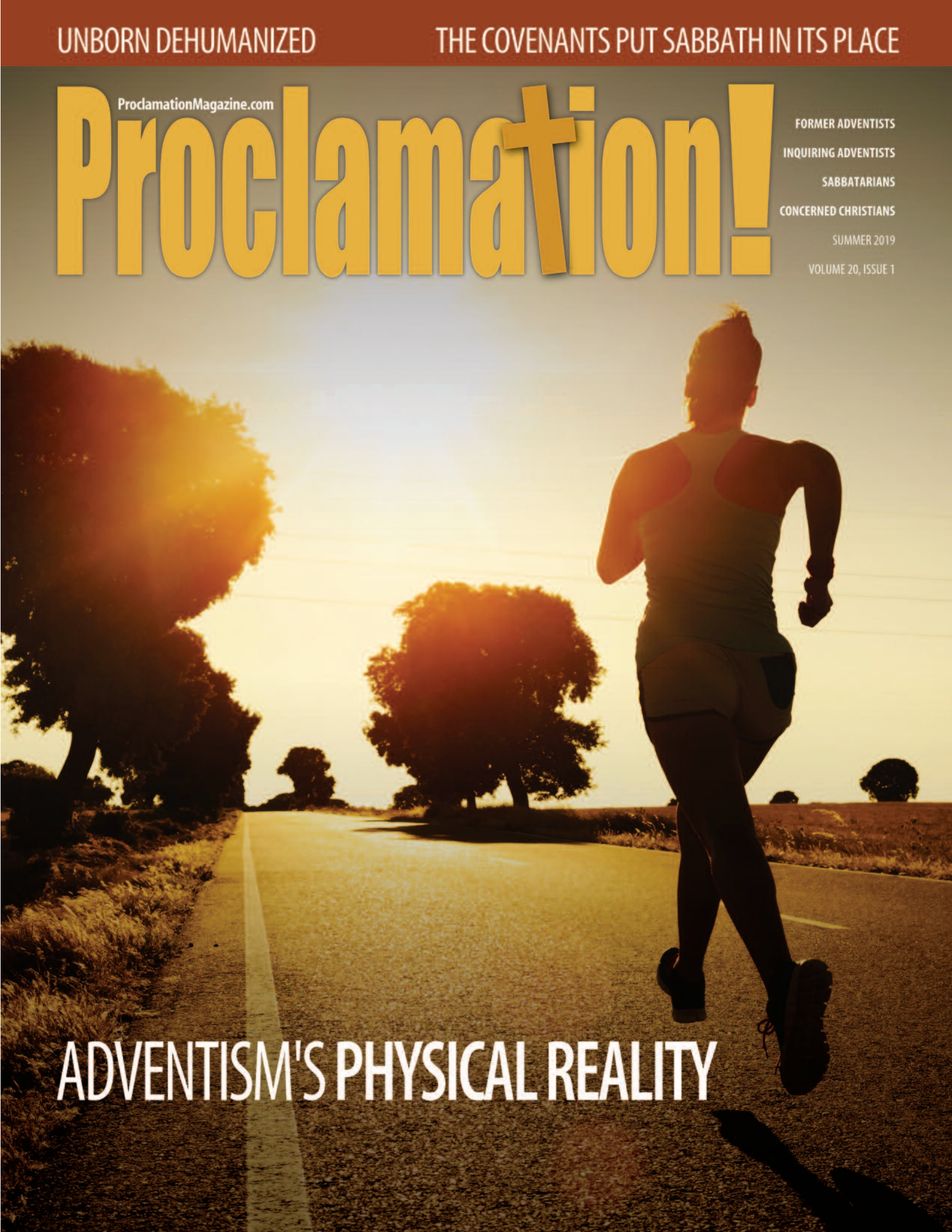
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS

SABBATARIANS

CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

SUMMER 2019

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1

A photograph of a person running on a paved road during sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The runner is in the foreground, seen from behind, wearing athletic gear. The road stretches into the distance, flanked by trees and fields.

ADVENTISM'S PHYSICAL REALITY



COLLEEN TINKER

ADVENTISM'S PHYSICALISM DENIES SPIRITUAL REALITY

In the past nine months, Richard and I have each lost a parent. My mother died in October, and Richard's dad died in July. Losing our parents has sent both of us to God's word to find a safe place to stand as we process loss and the unknown.

My mother, a former Adventist, did trust Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Shortly before her stroke, she said, "I know my sins are forgiven. I want to be with Jesus." Although she had much unresolved trauma and pain, I know that I will see her in the kingdom, and I know that she is now with Jesus (2 Cor. 5:1-9).

JAMES WHITE INTRODUCED THE IDEA THAT GOD HAS A PHYSICAL BODY IN ADVENTISM'S EARLIEST DAYS, AND WITH THAT BELIEF ESTABLISHED THE RELIGION'S PHYSICALISM.

Richard's dad was a loyal Adventist. Although his health had been failing over the past months, his death came suddenly. He lived in Oklahoma, and because of the distance, he died without saying "good-bye". His passing left us with a sense of unfinished business and uncertainty.

As I reflect on these two deaths, I thank God for two things His word has taught me. First, He is sovereign. He knew and designed every one of us before one of our days came to be (Ps. 139:16). He ordains our births and the days of our deaths. Second, salvation is of the Lord, not of ourselves (Eph. 2:8, 9). He knows how to deal with each person, and He can meet people even as they face death. His Spirit can deal with the human spirit in a place that doesn't need a person's full consciousness. Whatever uncertainties we have about our loved one's salvation, we can trust our faithful Father to be both just and merciful.

I thank God that His word dispels the fear and uncertainty of the Adventist belief that we are merely bodies plus breath. The Adventist worldview is built on the belief that both God and man are primarily physical beings. James White introduced the idea that God has a physical body in Adventism's earliest days, and with that belief established the religion's physicalism.

The denial that man has a spirit that survives death means Adventists understand humans to be merely bodies that breathe. Thus, salvation depends on physical obedience to the law. The Bible, however, declares that salvation is based solely upon spiritual new birth through belief in the shed blood and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

In fact, Adventism's physicalism declares that the seventh day, a created segment of time, is eternally holy. Physicalism also demands adherence to the health message to bolster the body's strength and ability to hear the Holy Spirit. It denies that we know God through our spirits (Jn. 4:24; Rom. 8:16), and it declares that we cease to exist when we cease to breathe. The hopelessness and despair of believing that physical bodies and breath comprise human existence leave most Adventists fearful and resentful as they face death.

In this issue, Jordan Quinley, one of this magazine's proofreaders, has written a response to James White's pamphlet *Personality of God*, showing that biblically God cannot be physical. Rolaant McKenzie argues that Adventism's date-setting leavened the organization with heresy to the point that it dehumanizes the unborn, rendering them vulnerable to abortion.

Rick Barker examines Fundamental Belief #26, Death and Resurrection, and shows that this doctrine denies the literal human spirit. Dale Ratzlaff explains that the epistle of James is not promoting physical obedience to the law but rather shows that spiritually born-again believers will display their salvation through good works born of their new hearts and spirits.

I discuss the biblical covenants and explain that all are unconditional, depending only on God's unfailing promises, except for the Mosaic covenant. Only it demanded human obedience. The New Covenant is kept between the Father and Son, and in Christ, we are inheritors of all God's promises on the basis of His faithfulness. Finally, Nicole Stevenson explores what it means to be born again.

We pray that the reality of our eternal, sovereign God who is Spirit will forever change your paradigm of salvation and bring you to life in Jesus through faith in His shed blood and His resurrection!

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MINISTRIES

Your help is needed.

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ARE YOU SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL

Recently, Carolyn and I had some Adventists stay with us for a few days. As is our custom, each night before we go to bed, we read a chapter of the Bible and pray together. We did this when our friends were with us and invited them to join us. After we read the chapter in the Bible, I invited them, if they wished, to join us in prayer. We noticed that each night they prayed, “Lord, help me overcome sin in my life.”

Now, there is nothing wrong with that prayer, but as they prayed it each night, they prayed in such a pleading way, I began to question their understanding of the gospel. After prayer near the end of their stay, I asked them, “Are you trusting the righteousness of Christ that is ‘in Christ’ or are you trusting the righteousness of Christ that is ‘in you?’” Immediately, their answer was, “We are trusting the righteousness of Christ in us. We have to be holy; we believe in obedience to the Ten Commandments.”

Some who read this may think that we are nit-picking without realizing that this issue was the central issue at the very heart of the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic Church believes in “infused grace”—the grace of God that is placed into our lives. For Catholics,

the method of God infusing grace into their lives is participating in the sacraments of the church.

Without knowing it, many Adventists are seeking “infused grace”—not by the method of the sacraments, but by the method of obedience to the Ten Commandments. The result is the same: there is no lasting assurance. One is always falling short and has to make sure there are no unconfessed sins. One never knows when he has enough of Christ’s righteousness infused into his/her life to merit a pass in the judgment.

This is why the Reformers, and those of us at LAM, seek the perfect righteousness of God which is “in Christ.” Once we fully understand that it is Christ’s righteousness that merits our salvation and we trust our lives totally to Him and His righteousness that comes to us on the basis of faith, then we are free to obey from the motive of love. We serve because Christ has saved us. It is His imputed righteousness that satisfies God’s justice.

There are many references we could list that support the true gospel. Here are three of primary importance.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (Rom. 3:21).

Saving righteousness is “apart from law.” Not only is saving righteousness received apart from the law, but those who are seeking saving righteousness by obedience to the law actually nullify the grace of God and the importance of Christ’s death on the cross.

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly (Gal. 2:21).

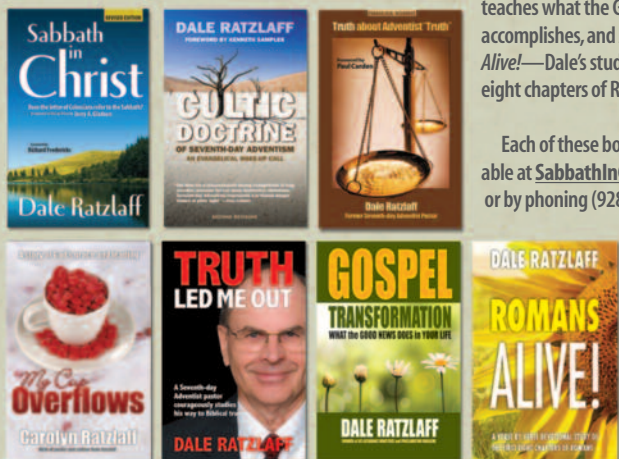
We can see the importance of precisely defining saving righteousness. A text that is one of my favorites because it makes this so clear is Philippians 3:9:

...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil. 3:9). †

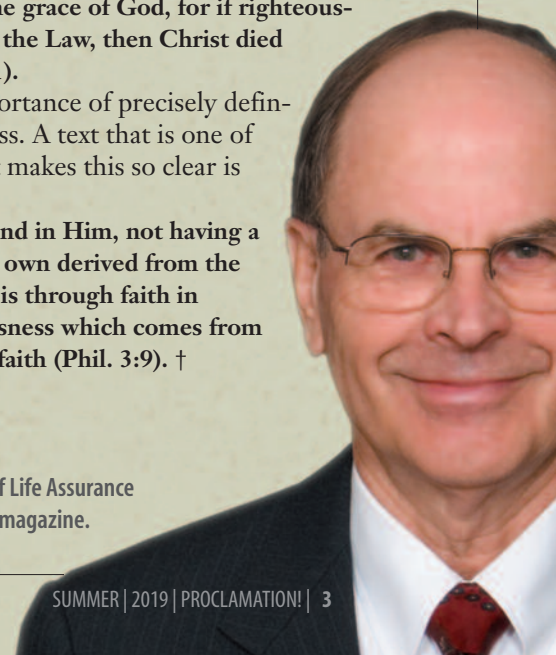
WITHOUT KNOWING IT, MANY ADVENTISTS ARE SEEKING “INFUSED GRACE” —NOT BY THE METHOD OF THE SACRAMENTS, BUT BY THE METHOD OF OBEDIENCE TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff, both founders of Life Assurance Ministries, have authored seven 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, *My Cup Overflows*—in which Carolyn Ratzlaff tells her story of studying her way out of Adventism as a pastor’s wife, *Truth Led Me Out*—in which Dale Ratzlaff tells his 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 SabbathInChrist.com or by phoning (928) 554-1001.



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



I HAVE FOUND MY REST

MICHAEL WERK

The year was 1969, when a young man from England met a farm girl from the Canadian Prairies. He was working in Canada that summer to pay for university. Their time together was short-lived, and soon he returned home for school. Little did either of them know the last time they saw each other that months later a baby would be born. The two would lose contact with each other, and a single 17-year-old, along with the support of her parents, would have to raise her son without his father.

That young woman was my mother, and she would later marry another man who would become my dad. My parents would have two more children, and so my brother, sister, and I would be raised in Western Canada. Dad was raised a Seventh-day Adventist—a third generation Seventh-day Adventist—but he had left his church to pursue the world, much like the prodigal son. After a few years of marriage, however, he returned to the Adventist church of his roots, and he along with my mom were baptized as Seventh-day Adventists.

My parents raised us siblings as fourth generation Seventh-day Adventists. Other than a couple years of high school, I was educated from the first grade through college in the Adventist school system. I grew up in the Adventism of the 1970's and 80's, a time when it was a rules-based religion preaching salvation by works—you know, salvation based on being vegetarian (a rule which thankfully we never followed), salvation based on keeping the Sabbath, and salvation based on not drinking alcohol or caffeine, just to

name a few of our distinctive practices. Sadly, there are many Adventists who still believe that salvation requires keeping these rules today.

To say we were indoctrinated as Adventists is an understatement. Our lives were centered in the church, and almost all our friends were Adventist. Yet from this sheltered world I still claim some of my closest friends. Some of them have been in my life going on 40 years. They are friends who are closer than family, friends who wrapped their arms around my family and me when my dad lost his life in a plane crash 25 years ago.

My biblical knowledge and my great controversy worldview I learned through the lens of Adventist teachings I received in their schools and churches. We were taught how to study the Bible by picking a verse here or there to support the Adventist doctrines. We were never taught to read in context. Even minoring in religion in college, I was only taught the Adventist way of studying, which always included Ellen White's writings.

As Adventists we already had all the answers on topics such as the Sabbath, the coming Sunday laws, death, and how the world was going to end. What more was I—or anyone else—going to add? Besides, Adventists could “prove” everything through their selective picking of verses in the Bible combined with—of course—Ellen White.

Oh, I knew all the main Bible stories, but my depth of understanding was determined by the lens of Adventism. I accepted Jesus as I understood Him and was baptized into the Seventh-day Ad-



Michael Werk with his wife Laurie and children Austin, Ethan and Megan.

ventist Church at the age of 12. Looking back, I realize just how ignorant I was of true biblical knowledge.

What do I believe?

A few years later as I was flying to serve as a student missionary, a fellow passenger asked me about my church. All I could tell her was that we went to church on Saturday Sabbath and had 27 Fundamental Beliefs. I honestly did not know the gospel, and I was never able to explain Adventist doctrine. She was shocked that a church would send someone to be a missionary who could not explain what his church taught and believed.

After my year abroad I returned home to finish college. It was during that time I decided to look at God more logically. As I saw it, there were two choices: either God wasn't real, so I might as well enjoy what life had to offer because there was nothing afterwards; or second, God was real, so I needed to obey and hope that I would be good enough to be saved. I reasoned that as an Adventist, at least we had issues like the Sabbath, death, and hell right, not like those Sunday-keepers who believed in life after death and eternal punishment. So I stayed in the Adventist church.

I think Jesus spoke of me in the parable of the prodigal son. In the story there are two sons. Everyone focuses on the one that left, and rightly so. But what about the other son, the one who stayed behind? I was like the son who hadn't run off. I stayed home; I stayed in the church because I believed that my staying in the 'right

church' would somehow be enough. Yet I was just as lost as the son who had left.

Spiritually empty

As Adventists we were not taught the inerrancy of the Word of God, and because the Bible supposedly had some errors in it, we were taught that God provided Ellen White to help us understand and interpret His Word. I believed in God, but I wanted proof, something more than just hope and faith. Sadly, I had never read the gospel—the evidence I craved—found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6:

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time

The gospel is simple, compelling, and complete—but I did not know it.

After college I married an Adventist girl, and off we went to start our lives. We settled on an Adventist church where we felt we could put down roots and raise our family. The years went by, and three children later, in the middle of our careers, I realized I was spiritually empty.

Oh, I believed in God, but I had little more. Sadly, I did not know my wife felt the same way I did. We found ourselves so occu-

...we all had different “ah-ha” moments that caused us to question what we knew as Adventists. For me it was the gospel I learned studying in Galatians. My wife’s “ah-ha” was the plagiarism of Ellen White, but for my children it was the story of Adam and Eve.

pied with the busyness of church, kids, and work that we did not know how spiritually empty we were. Little did I expect that God wasn’t finished with me yet.

Have you ever heard the saying, “When the student is ready the teacher will appear”? Well, that’s what happened to me when I received a text message from Scott, a former Adventist, who was inviting me to his Bible study. I readily accepted.

I have to add that I was not looking to leave the Adventist Church; rather, I wanted a better understanding of God and of the Bible. Had my wife known what would happen as a result of that study, I wonder now if she would have encouraged me to attend.

We spent the next four months reading line by line, verse by verse, the book of Galatians. We read verses including:

...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly (Gal. 2:29).

For as many as are under the works of the Law are under a curse (Gal. 3:10).

Here in these texts was the proof of grace alone, and yet my Adventist doctrine stood in opposition to it.

Let me add that I was never a big fan of Ellen White or the investigative judgment, but I thought as most Adventist do, that we could pick and choose what we wanted to believe and follow. I even thought the Adventist organization could survive without its prophetess and its central doctrine!

Sadly, however, every doctrine and practice of Adventism is based on Ellen White and the investigative judgment.

Armed with questions, I turned to my former Adventist friend for answers, and that’s when I learned about Dale Ratzlaff. I learned Dale was a former Adventist pastor who had all the answers to my questions. I ordered *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* and began to read that book and others.

As I studied, attending church on Sabbaths became increasingly difficult as everything I heard seemed to stand in opposition to the Bible. I started to see that keeping the Sabbath and the food laws were things I was doing for my salvation.

As my wife and I discussed these ideas in disagreement, she continued to focus on what she had to do for salvation, and I kept reminding her, it’s not about YOU! It was not a happy time in our household!

By the fall of 2015, I knew I could not continue attending the Adventist church. Telling my wife I was going to stop attending church with her and our children was the hardest discussion we have ever had, and certainly it was one neither of us had ever dreamed would occur.

I immediately stepped down from my church positions and stopped attending. I stopped attending because it became an issue of integrity for me; I could not continue to attend and lie about what I believed. I knew it would be impossible to change the church from within, so I would have to leave. Besides that, what would my kids think when they grew up and learned the errors of Adventism and learned I kept them there?

Relearning

The gospel was so clear to me now, and I was so frustrated that my wife could not see it. I shared with my children that I no longer believed what the Adventist church taught and needed time to figure things out.

My first Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF) Conference was in 2016, and Gary Inrig walked through the prophecies of Daniel and utterly destroyed the horrible false teachings of the investigative judgment that the Adventist organization continues to propagate.

Dale Ratzlaff, Colleen Tinker, and others built my confidence that leaving the Adventist church was the right choice. But I still had so much more to learn. Dale and Carolyn had a Q&A session, and I decided to question Dale on the topic of death! As I used those familiar Adventist talking points, he gracefully used the Bible to explain death.

Even though I had left the Adventist church, I still was thinking like an Adventist.

Later I would ask my kids questions, probing what they learned in Sabbath School, and I tried to explain to them about Ellen White and how she was not a true prophet of God.

One night I asked my wife and kids where Adam was when Eve took the fruit in the garden and sinned. They all answered that Adam was in the garden away from Eve. I asked them to get a Bible and look at Genesis 3:6:

So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Our kids thought maybe the difference in Adam’s being away or “with her” was just the version they were reading, so they brought out every Bible version we had and began to read Genesis 3. Surprisingly, every Bible version said the same thing—Adam was “with her”—every version, that is, except for the Adventist *The Clear Word*. No surprise there!

The seed was planted; maybe Dad wasn’t so crazy after all. If all the Bibles were so clear on this simple point, maybe there were other things they had learned that were wrong.

Let me add here that I was just a little upset at God because my family had not left with me. We were not on this journey together. I had considered removing my membership, but I really did not want to take that step without my wife. I honestly doubted that she would ever leave, but I continued to act as if she would.

Thankfully my wife said I needed to find a church; she would never be open to the idea of not attending church with our children.

That first Sunday was not easy because those old Adventist tapes still played in my head, but I had gone to Redeemer Fellowship, and Gary Inrig preached on Jesus from the Gospel of John. I knew that's where I needed to be: a church where real biblical expository preaching was happening.

Besides that, those Sunday "keepers" weren't as crazy as I had been led to believe as an Adventist.

I knew there were former Adventists in attendance, and it seemed every Sunday Carel Stevenson and I would discuss a different doctrine as he helped me see that the words of the Bible meant what they said, and I could trust them.

Slowly, one by one, my family agreed to attend church with me. Maybe they agreed to go for the free donuts after the service, I don't know, but I knew if I could just get them in church, they would hear real Bible preaching. It took time, but eventually they started to come with me every week.

We learned Redeemer Fellowship had an FAF Bible Study on Friday nights, and at my wife's insistence, we decided to attend. Within months I learned more than I had in the previous two years on my own. I watched as Nikki Stevenson, Cheryl Granger, Colleen Tinker, and the other women wrapped their arms around my wife and did what I was unable to do.

It was as if God said to me, "Watch!", and in January, 2018, my wife told me that she needed to leave the Adventist Church.

I don't want to share her story—that's for her to tell—but I was given a front row seat to watch as that veil described in 2 Corinthians 3 was torn from her eyes. She began to see the gospel and clear away the false teachings of Adventism. Suddenly my children wanted to come to church and wanted to come Friday night to Bible study. Church was no longer a burden. We all wanted to share this good news with our Adventist friends and family, and we all have a burden to help others see the false doctrines of Adventism.

Change of identity

Let me add here that we all had different "ah-ha" moments that caused us to question what we knew as Adventists. For me it was the gospel I learned studying in Galatians. My wife's "ah-ha" was the plagiarism of Ellen White, but for my children it was the story of Adam and Eve.

I know that every former Adventist saw or heard something that made him or her question the religion. Keep questioning, keep searching; God isn't finished with us yet.

In June, 2018, we decided together as a family that it was time to leave formally. We met with the Adventist pastor to let him know we were leaving the Adventist church together, as a family.

I share with you our letter:

Dear Pastor,

It is our desire to have our names removed from the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with membership in the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

This decision was not taken lightly and was not caused by the actions of any individuals. Over the years we have received friendship and love from the pastoral staff and made many lifelong friends within the church.

Our decision is based solely on our study [which showed] that the Fundamental Doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not in harmony with the Bible. Issues include, but are not limited to:

- Ellen G. White as a prophet, a continuing and authoritative source of inspiration;
- The fundamental doctrine and belief of the Investigative Judgment;
- The belief that the Sabbath is required for salvation and is the Seal of God.

As third generation Seventh-day Adventists, it pains us to see the church has continued to propagate doctrines that are not in harmony with sound biblical teachings. In good conscience we can no longer remain Adventist.

We therefore respectfully ask you to fulfill our request to remove our membership, and we request a letter confirming that this action has taken place.

A few months later we received our letter confirming that our membership was removed. Praise God.

I am so grateful to Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff who started Life Assurance Ministries so many years ago, not knowing that the foundations they laid would impact my life and the life of my family. I thank Richard and Colleen Tinker for continuing their work, for the Stevensons, the Grangers, and the Careys who share in this work as board members of Life Assurance Ministries and now people whom I call my friends.

God's plans for my life started by bringing two unlikely people together. In His perfect timing I met my biological father on Father's Day, 2009, and he met the son he never knew. That September, as I met my Grandmother, we stood, just the two of us, and I knew I was home. I was fully loved and fully accepted in that moment.

I've often imagined what heaven will be like when I get to see my Lord, and now I know. I know that I am fully accepted, fully loved, and fully forgiven, not because of anything I have done, but because My Lord Jesus has called me to be His Own. My salvation is secure in Him, and in Him I have found my rest. †

Michael Werk lives in Riverside, California, with his wife Laurie and children Austin, Ethan and Megan. Born and raised in Western Canada, Michael was a third generation Adventist who was educated in Adventist schools starting in first grade. He earned his Bachelors Degree in Education from Union College and later a Masters from Cal State San Bernardino. For over 20 years Michael has taught high school students with learning disabilities. Michael and his family currently attend Redeemer Fellowship in Loma Linda, CA.

The Source of Adve

JORDAN QUINLEY

Adventism's theology was built around James White's denial of "spirit" and his belief that God—and thus man also—was physical and not spirit. Ellen White adopted the view that God has a body and man has no spirit except "breath". Jordan Quinley shows biblically why God cannot be physical.

Of all the surprising things that I have learned about Seventh-day Adventist teaching, the one that bowled me over more than any other was the teaching that God has a body of flesh and bone. The idea is astonishing to me. An article about it published on the Life Assurance Ministries blog cited the earliest Adventist defense of this idea—a pamphlet by Ellen G. White's husband, James White, on the "Personality of God." James White's paper exhibits important misunderstandings, and so I would like to address his main arguments from an evangelical perspective. He discusses four broad points and ends by criticizing the concept of an immaterial (non-physical) God as being nearly indistinguishable from atheism.

White begins by talking about man as the image of God, as described in Genesis 1:26, stating that this likeness refers to physical form. Next, White points to anthropomorphic language (that is, language describing God in partial or full human form) used in the Bible. This he takes literally. Third, he argues that since Jesus, who was a man, is the express image and exact representation of God, God also has a body like a man's. Fourth, White argues that the classical doctrine of omnipresence destroys the idea of heaven as a place of God's unique dwelling.

Let me begin by addressing the title of James White's article, "Personality of God". White does not define "personality" as Christians historically have. For him, personality means bodily existence. We see this when he offers "proof that God is a person," and speaks of those who "deny the personality of God," meaning those who deny the physicality of God. But we do not deny that God is a person. His personhood is tied to his ability to think, to will, and to act. So while for White, "immaterial person" would be a contradiction in terms, for us it is not. Recognizing that misunderstanding, one can see why White might find the classical Christian view nonsensical.

White starts with the claim that man was made in the image of God. This is true, but he goes on to say that "those who deny the personality of God, say that 'image' here does not mean physical form, but moral image."¹ He notes how this definition is used to prove the immortality of the human soul. "But this mode of reasoning," says White, "would also prove man omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, and thus clothe mortal man with all the attributes of the deity."



ntism's Physical God



He insists that our being made in God's image must mean that our physical form is a copy of God's physical form. It must mean this, he believes, because if the shared image meant anything other than this, such as a "moral image," it would prove too much. From an Adventist perspective it would prove that God also bestowed his omni-attributes on us.

White, then, could not have been well informed regarding the doctrine of the image of God in mankind, known as the *imago dei*, as classically expressed in Christian thought. Christianity has long distinguished between the attributes of God we can share in lesser measure (communicable attributes), and those we cannot (incommunicable attributes), and has never taught that the *imago dei* endowed human beings with "all the attributes of the deity." There was never any concern that if the image of God referred to metaphysical realities, it would logically follow that God had bestowed all his own attributes on his creatures.

Writing in 1861, White would have had access at least to the writings of John Calvin if he wanted a clearer picture of the Christian view on the image of God. In chapter 15 of his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, speaking about the *imago dei*, Calvin says:

In Colossians 3:10, [the Apostle Paul] states that the new man is renewed in the image of the one who created him. Again we read "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). Now we must look at the details Paul includes in the new life. First he mentions knowledge, then true righteousness and holiness. So we infer that in the beginning, God's image was evident by clear intellect, upright heart and integrity in every part. This has to be a brief summary, but the principle remains that what is of primary importance in restoration must also have been pre-eminent in creation. Paul says that as we gaze on the glory of Christ with unveiled face, we are transformed into his image (2 Cor. 3:18). Christ, of course, is the most perfect image of God and as we are renewed in him, we can bear the same image in knowledge, purity, righteousness and true holiness. The idea that the image is physical can be dismissed. The passage in 1 Corinthians 11:7, in which man alone is called the image and glory of God, obviously refers to civil order. The "image" includes anything which has relevance to spiritual and eternal life.²

Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 give us clues as to what the image of God meant at creation, since in our regeneration and sanctification we are being restored in this image. Thus Calvin is working backwards to discover the biblical definition of the *imago dei*. The New Testament tells us that God is working in his people to restore them to the image of their Creator, so whatever is being

restored is that which was lost when the image of God in humankind was distorted by sin. In Colossians and Ephesians, the image has to do with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. There is no hint here that our conformity to God's image has anything to do with our physical bodies. Christian theologian Louis Berkhof concurs:

The condition to which [man] is restored in Christ is [...] one of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. These elements constitute the original righteousness, which was lost by sin, but is regained in Christ. It may be called the moral image of God.³

The fact that the *imago dei* is nonphysical does not mean that man must therefore be omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. Scripture, not human reason or logic, must determine what the *imago dei* must mean—though there is room for discussion as to the full extent of its meaning and implications. There is much to suggest that the image of God is also substantially defined by the covenantal relation in which humans uniquely stand before God. Pastor and theologian Michael Horton notes that “‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in this ancient Near Eastern context especially have to do with the relationship of fathers and sons rather than forms and appearances.”⁴ In other words, our being in God's image has less to do with how we replicate some godlike attribute than with our original, lost, and restored righteousness.

Horton remarks that although humans do possess immaterial souls, this fact alone does not make humans in God's image. Rather, it is “because they are created in true righteousness and holiness that they bear God's image and likeness.”⁵ In fact, people were created with an innate sense not only of God's existence (Rom. 1:21), but also of their duty to do God's will (Rom. 2:14, 15). In other words, even though there may be differences of opinion about what characteristics of God our *imago dei* reflects, whether having to do with our faculties, such as rationality and abstract thought; our position of stewardship–dominion over the earth; or our ethical relation in covenant toward God and our neighbor image-bearers, the verses from Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Corinthians show that the restoration of the image of God in us, which was distorted by sin, is part of our salvation.

If James White's theology were correct, though, there would be no need to restore this image since we already possess human bodies. The *imago dei*, therefore, must have to do with something intangible.

Sharing God's shape?

Even if the image of God itself is not about our shape, does the Bible nonetheless imply that we share God's shape? White points out several passages from Scripture that speak of God in bodily terms. But if these references mean that God is corporeal, how can one explain that God is invisible (Col. 1:15, 1 Ti m.1:17)? Physical persons are not invisible.

White also talks at length about when God passed before Moses and showed him his back. If this account is to be taken literally to mean that God showed Moses a physical back, however, how do we explain John's assertion that “no one has ever seen God” and “no one has seen the Father except the one who is from God [Jesus];

only he has seen the Father” (Jn. 1:18, 6:46, 1 Jn. 4:12)? These verses make it clear that whatever Moses was shown while he was in the cleft of the rock was a visible manifestation of God's glory, but it was not a glimpse of the person of God himself. The word-picture of this being God's “back” means that the vision, even such as it was, was veiled and limited.

Moses could not have seen the essence of God as he exists in himself. Remember, the apostle John says plainly, “No one has ever seen God” (1 Jn. 4:12).

Keep in mind, too, that several Bible verses speak of God having wings. Are we to believe that Psalm 57:1, 63:7 and Ruth 2:12 teach that God literally has wings? No, which means that such descriptions must be teaching us something else.

White quotes the book of Daniel, chapter 7, which presents us with a scene in which “the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool.” The Ancient of Days is then approached by “one like a son of man.” White asserts that if we “deny their personality,” there “is not a distinct idea in these quotations from Daniel.”

These portions of Daniel are apocalyptic in nature. Such literature is brimming with figurative speech. White should be more cautious. And of course, we do not deny the personhood of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man; we only deny their physicality. We have no problem affirming that the persons of the triune God relate to one another and interact with one another. They do not have to be material persons to be persons. Moreover, in Revelation 1, John sees a similar vision:

And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

I remember a sermon in which the pastor made a key point about these verses: they are telling us what Jesus is like, not how Jesus looks. It could be reasonable to believe that Jesus has white hair, but bronze feet? A sharp sword coming out of his mouth?

A few chapters later, in Revelation 5, John has another vision of Jesus when he sees “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes.” Here, Jesus is a young, seven-eyed, seven-horned sheep. On what basis would White say this vision is symbolic when he insists that other visions must be literal descriptions? Is a literal reading necessary for a proper understanding of what is happening in the heavenly throne room? A literal reading of this vision would in fact be a wild distortion of its true meaning.

And how big is God? Presumably the Ancient of Days of Daniel 7 was the same height and build as the Jesus who walked the roads of Galilee (remember, God the Father and God the Son look identical in Adventist theology). Yet the Bible says that God “has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand” and “with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens” (Is. 40:12).

If all the passages which attribute physical characteristics to God were simply telling us what God looks like, they would all give the same description. Because there is such variance, though, we can assume that the descriptions are telling us about characteristics of God which are symbolized by those physical traits, but which are not physical traits. These passages indeed teach us things about God—about his position, power, tender mercy, holiness, justice, or plan—but they do not tell us what God looks like. God is invisible. God is Spirit.

Ironically, White admits that his material God is Spirit. How does he understand this apparent contradiction?

First, White claims that angels, although spirits, are nonetheless material. “Angels are also spirits [Ps. 104: 4],” White says, “Yet those that visited Abram and Lot, lay down, ate, and took hold of Lot’s hand. They were spirit beings. So is God a Spirit being.”

Thus White reasons that although God is called a Spirit in John 4:24, this designation does not mean he is not material. His reasoning, however, is flawed. Spirit beings can present themselves visibly to do God’s bidding, but the fact that they can assume a shape does not make them “material”. This “proof” White uses cannot explain the fact that ordinarily spirits are not visible or in any way detectable (Col. 1:16, Num. 22:31).

Recall that in 2 Kings chapter 6, Elisha and the king of Israel are surrounded by the Aramean army. Elisha’s servant fearfully asks Elisha what they will do. Elisha tells him not to fear because those “who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Elisha prays that God will open his servant’s eyes, and the servant “looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” which he was not able to see until that moment.

The fact that angels can assume physical form does not mean they are essentially physical. On the contrary, the fact that angels and demons are ordinarily invisible means they must be immaterial, because material beings cannot be totally invisible.

What about Jesus?

White’s next point is that God must have a physical form because Jesus is his express image. White quotes Hebrews 1:3, which says that Jesus is the “express image of his [God’s] person” (KJV). We agree that Jesus is the perfect image of God, but is this form of “exact representation” (NIV) or “exact imprint” (ESV) of God’s nature no more than the same kind of likeness that one identical twin has of another?

According to Ellen G. White, Jesus is the express image of his Father’s person at least in part because he looks just like him. What implication does this theology have for our hope to be “conformed to the image” of God’s Son (Rom. 8:29)? Does conformity to Christ’s image mean that we begin to love like Jesus loves, to display obedience and service as Jesus did, to develop the fruit of the Spirit, to develop the qualities of 1 Peter 1:5–7? Or rather, does this mean we will all (including women) physically look like Jesus eventually? That’s absurd, of course. But if “image” in Romans 8:29 does not mean physical likeness, then it does not mean it in Genesis 1:26 or anywhere else either.

Rather, Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory and express image of God’s person, because Jesus is the clearest picture of God’s char-



[James White] insists that our being made in God’s image must mean that our physical form is a copy of God’s physical form. It must mean this, he believes, because if the shared image meant anything other than this, such as a “moral image,” it would prove too much.

acter the world has ever known. Jesus is the final revelation from God about himself. Hebrews gives us this definition of “express image” in the same passage, when it says that “in the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

The Gospel of John makes a similar affirmation when introducing Jesus. It says, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (1:18). That phrase “has made him known” means he expounds, explains, or exegetes God to us. He, who is himself God, comes to earth as a man to demonstrate for us at point blank range what God is really like, and that is why Jesus is the express image and exact representation of God.

James White later tries to tackle the objection that God is omnipresent (for how can a material God be everywhere at the same

time?). He doesn't outright deny the doctrine of omnipresence but redefines it so that it no longer means that God is really all places simultaneously. He offers two answers. First, that God is everywhere "by virtue of his omniscience," and second, that God is everywhere "by virtue of his Spirit."⁶

Psalm 139, a common proof text for divine omnipresence, does speak of God's omniscience in conjunction with God's omnipresence, but these two attributes are not the same thing. Notice the verses of the second stanza. David asks, "Where can I go from your presence?" (same in KJV). "If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there." etc. These seem to be speaking of God's immanent presence rather than simply a knowledge of what is going on in those places. Furthermore, Solomon observed, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1Ki. 8:27, cf. 2 Chr. 2:6 and 6:18). If God is a physical person, Solomon's declaration seems like an exaggeration, to say the least. God himself says, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24).

But, White says, "God is everywhere by virtue of his Spirit, which is his representative, and is manifested wherever he pleases, as will be seen by the very words the objector claims."⁷ And he quotes Psalm 139:7, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" Importantly, however, White did not believe in the Trinity, and for him, God's Spirit was an impersonal force or presence that came from God to help humans. Thus, speaking of God's Spirit as being many places at once was not a source of confusion for him. But while solving the dilemma, it does not actually deal with the psalmist's language when he asks "Where can I go from your presence?" because in White's theology, in which God's Spirit is not God, being in the presence of God's spirit is not the same as being in God's presence at all.

Still, White's next argument against omnipresence is more challenging. "God is in heaven" he asserts, "This we are taught in the Lord's Prayer." If this definition is true, however, White objects that "if God is as much in every place as he is in any one place, then heaven is also as much in every place as it is in any one place, and the idea of going to heaven is all a mistake. Agreed, and in fact I would also say that an acceptable definition of heaven is "where God dwells." We are all in heaven; and the Lord's prayer, according to this foggy theology simply means, Our Father which art everywhere, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is everywhere."⁸

White continues by showing that heaven is not everywhere, but somewhere in particular, since Enoch and Elijah were taken up to heaven, Jesus was received up into heaven, and Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. To overcome this argument, we who believe that God is omnipresent must show that God can be in particular places in some special or more intense way, while also being all places in some general way.

In light of all the verses cited above, we are forced to concede God's personal omnipresence. That is, He is not only "present in creation *per potentiam* (with His power)", as Berkhof says, but is present "with His very being and nature."⁹ Yet the Bible also reveals that God "is not equally present and present in the same sense in all His creatures. He does not dwell on earth as He does in

heaven, in animals as He does in man, [...] nor in the church as He does in Christ."¹⁰ Jeremiah 23 teaches that God has always been both "nearby" and "far away." And yet, in the incarnation, the Word "made his dwelling among us" in a new way. Jesus promised his disciples that "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them," but also promised that "I am with you always" (Mt. 28:20).

Then again, He previously told his disciples "you will not always have me" (Mt. 26:11) because, as He later explained, "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (Jn. 16:28). Psalm 139, as we saw before, says "if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (KJV). Yet Paul warns us that the wicked "will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord" (2 Th. 1:9). Indeed, in the very chapter in Jeremiah where God asserts his own omnipresence, God later tells the false prophets, "I will surely [...] cast you out of my presence."

What is going on here? The Bible teaches, for example, that God is one God, and yet identifies three distinguishable persons as that God, and so we must hold those truths in tandem in the doctrine of the Trinity. Similarly, if the Bible teaches that God is in all places, not in a diffused manner, but so that his whole being is all places at all times, and yet teaches that God's presence is specially manifested and concentrated in some sense in particular places and in a variety of ways, we must accept that God, as a Spirit, is able to interrelate with his creation in such a manner. This is a mystery, surely, but it's one supported by Scripture. The idea that God is bodily and spatially limited is absolutely impossible to match with the biblical data. Even though a "physical" God might seem more comprehensible than an immaterial one, such an idea has many more exegetical problems than does the orthodox doctrine of omnipresence—a doctrine which demands a God of immaterial essence.

Philosophical problems

Finally, I will comment on White's more general or philosophical problems with immateriality. I begin by observing the irony that while he accuses the "sectarians" (his word for evangelicals) of having so much in common with atheists, White shares with atheists the belief that material things are the only things that exist or can exist. He cannot see how an immaterial spirit could in any way interact with or influence a material being in a material world.

I admit that it is hard to know just how an immaterial being would "make contact" in such way as to have affect upon material things—that is, what the "touch point" would be. This lack of understanding, however, is only because we don't know how immaterial beings work. They are by definition outside the realm of observation. It should be enough to know that if divine revelation assumes the existence of spirits, such as angels and of God himself, then there is a way for such beings to occasionally make themselves known to the physical senses. Most of the time such beings are indeed undetectable (Num. 22:31, 2 Ki. 6:17).

Ephesians 6:12 says that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in

the heavenly realms.” Here Paul speaks of rulers and authorities (personal beings) that are not material, but which nevertheless interact with us. Of course, once one accepts that God is immaterial Spirit, as the Bible teaches, and that God created the material world intending to have fellowship with material people, the how of it becomes merely academic. Much more unworkable is the idea that God is eternally physical and resembles a human male. Also difficult (and I would say insurmountably problematic) is the idea that humans can think, feel, and exercise freewill without any immaterial aspect that is distinct from the brain.

Nevertheless, the fact that Christianity believes in an immaterial dimension does not mean Christians seek to escape to it. White is mistaken when he states of evangelicals that immateriality is their “anticipated heaven, [their] immortal self—[their] all.”

Christians have always believed in a physical eternal state on a new earth, where “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them” (Rev. 21:3). While we as Christians do believe that we will be with God after death in a disembodied state until the resurrection (Rev. 6:9), we also believe that state is temporary, and in that state we are not quite whole. Our expectation is to be reunited to our bodies and to live in a heaven that has been brought down to earth. Our eternity will be lived in our new bodies on a new earth. We claim we will have bodies forever!

The difference between the Christian view and White’s view is that White claims we are our bodies. In fact, the human soul can and does live apart from the body (2 Cor. 5:9) and is the seat of human consciousness. We were not meant, however, to be spirits only nor bodies only, but spirit and body in vital union (Gen. 2:7), both in this life and in glory. Immateriality is neither our anticipated heaven nor our immortal selves.

White says that if God is without body or parts it is like having no God at all—it is “the negative of all things which exist—and both [immateriality and atheism] are equally powerless and unknown.”¹¹ That assertion begs the question. That assertion only makes sense for someone who believes that only material beings exist. Someone who believes in immaterial beings is obviously not claiming the negative of God’s existence by claiming God is immaterial. Clearly, White equates existence itself with material existence. He defines immateriality as nonentity. He does this because he presupposes that mind cannot exist as spirit.

There is no rational basis for defining immateriality as nonentity. White’s proof that there is no such thing as an immaterial substance is that he cannot conceive of one! Incidentally, in assuming mind cannot exist as spirit and that there can be no way of proving the existence of anything immaterial, White is just like the atheist.

White says, “The atheist has no after life, or conscious existence beyond the grave. The sectarian has one, but it is immaterial, like his God; and without body or parts. Here again both are negative, and both arrive at the same point. Their faith and hope amount to the same; only it is expressed by different terms.”¹²

The atheist denies any afterlife or conscious existence beyond the grave, as White says. Evangelicals believe in an afterlife which is temporarily immaterial, but as immaterial spirit beings can have conscious existence from an evangelical perspective, that presents no problem. There is a qualitative difference between what the atheist says (you cease to be) and what we say (you continue on).

The atheistic and evangelical conceptions of the afterlife in no way whatsoever “arrive at the same point.” Indeed, I should point out that in Adventist theology, until the resurrection occurs, the state of the dead is ABSOLUTELY IDENTICAL to that of the atheist!

Both the Adventist and the atheist, in fact, need to explain why there is any difference at all between what is alive and what is dead. As I said, White believes that mind cannot exist as spirit. I, on the other hand, believe that mind can only exist as spirit. Why? Because awareness, perception, and the experiencing of sensations are not properties of matter. No arrangement of inanimate matter can cause it to “wake up” and begin to think and feel. This is impossible in principle.

Our consciousness must be a property of soul, which in this life is connected to our bodies as its vehicle of expression. In this life, we do need eyes and brains to see, but to know that we are seeing something, we need a soul. This must be true of all physical creatures that have awareness or feel pain or pleasure (Eccl. 3:21). In the end, Seventh-day Adventism’s conception of a corporeal God fails to explain the nature and actions of God described in the Bible, as well as what it means to be made in God’s image. White argues that we cannot conceive of an immaterial being. So what? God is far beyond our comprehension.

Endnotes

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UNBORN DEHUMANIZED

ROLAANT MCKENZIE

Adventism was built on the investigative judgment, a false doctrine used to excuse its unbiblical (and unfulfilled) date-setting. Soul sleep was developed to support the investigative judgment, and the resulting belief in the purely physical nature of man has led to Adventism's practice and support of abortion.

Several years ago, I heard a portion of an interview of Cecile Richards, the previous president of Planned Parenthood, on Fusion TV's America With Jorge Ramos (February 27, 2014). She was asked the question, "When does life begin?" After some evasiveness, she expressed her view that her children began to live when she delivered them. This reminded me of a common Adventist belief that a person is not truly alive until the first breath of air is taken at birth.

This belief is illustrated in an excerpt from "Seventh-Day Adventists Believe", which is an explanation of the organization's 28 Fundamental Beliefs. It clearly states that a soul comes into existence when a child is born:

As we have already mentioned, in the Old Testament "soul" is a translation of the Hebrew *nephesb*. In Genesis 2:7 it denotes man as a living being after the breath of life entered into a physical body formed from the elements of the earth. Similarly, a new soul comes into existence whenever a child is born, each "soul" being a new unit of life uniquely different and separate from other similar units. This quality of individuality in each living being, which constitutes it a unique entity, seems to be the idea emphasized by the Hebrew term *nephesb*. When used in this sense, *nephesb* is not a part of the person; it is the person and, in many instances, is translated "person" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005 ed., pp. 94-95).

This foundational belief, that a person becomes alive when he takes his first breath, helps to explain why many Adventists have a pro-choice, really pro-abortion, viewpoint. This belief is also why Adventist hospitals perform abortions. The rationale is that since

the child has not taken his first breath, he is not truly alive, and so a living human being is not really being killed.

The progression of leaven

The Bible says, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). Leaven is used often in Scripture to illustrate how sin can start in such a seemingly innocuous way and lead to much greater and pervasive sin.

How did this teaching come to have such a foundational place in Adventism? The early Adventists disregarded Jesus' teaching that no one could know the day or the hour of His return (Mk. 13:32) by setting the date of October 22, 1844 for His return. When this date-setting message failed, instead of repenting and returning to Scriptural teaching, the early Adventists formulated the doctrine of the investigative judgment to validate their date-setting message.

The doctrine euphemistically known as "soul sleep" was adopted to support the investigative judgment teaching. It was reasoned that a person cannot have an immaterial soul that goes to heaven at the death of the body before the investigative judgment was completed, otherwise the Lord would have to expel people from heaven who did not pass it.

As a result, the nature of man came to be understood in Adventism as being a physical body plus breath, with no immaterial "soul". This belief led to the de facto dehumanization of unborn children and the disposal of an unwanted child through abortion being permissible.

An important conversation

About 10 years ago, I was doing informational technology support work at a local Jewish Community Center. The Jewish librarian, knowing I was a Christian, asked me a question regarding what

I thought of the abortion issue. She was in favor of keeping this practice legal. I think I gave her an answer that she did not expect, because it was not really a political one.

I told her that 150 years ago people that looked like me were considered less than fully human. Consequently, it was permissible to enslave people like me and dispose of us when we were no longer considered useful or convenient. More than 65 years ago in much of Europe, people like her were declared to be less than human, the cause of the ills of society, and inconvenient to be allowed to exist. Therefore, it was permissible and mandated that they be exterminated. Today, there is another group that has been similarly dehumanized because they were not considered useful or convenient. Tens of millions of this group have been killed already. They are babies in the womb.

I went on to say that when a society dehumanizes and exterminates the weakest and most vulnerable among them, none of us is safe from being similarly treated. Where there is no sanctity of human life, when we come to some point in life when society deems us to be inconvenient or not useful, then we will likewise be dehumanized and eliminated.

I do not know if she ever changed her mind regarding abortion, but I could tell that what was said gave her something to seriously consider.

Creeping consequences of false doctrine

One of the reasons God found so many of the inhabitants of Canaan so detestable that He sent the children of Israel to utterly destroy them was because they practiced, among other evil things, passing their children through the fire. That is, they sacrificed children as burnt offerings to their gods.

As Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, the Lord through Moses gave the following warning:

When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable

to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you (Dt. 18:9-12).

Having sons or daughters “pass through the fire” meant making them a burnt offering to the false pagan god Molech. If the Lord so judged those nations that were engaged in child sacrifice, I wonder what will become of nations today that do so on a greater, more industrial scale through abortion?

Some Adventists may object and say that their organization does not advocate for or practice this kind of child sacrifice. That may be so, but the point is to show the progression of false doctrine and the catastrophic consequences it can have. The inhabitants of Canaan over time adopted a wrong view of man that allowed them to view their own children as a sacrificial commodity by which they could “purchase” benefits from their gods.

Much of western society, however imperfect, previously had a strong Judeo-Christian foundation. It held to a belief in God and our accountability to Him. There was a general belief in the Biblical view of humanity. In addition to being God’s special creation made in His image, human beings were more than physical bodies plus breath. There was an immaterial aspect to each person formed from the womb that made human life unique and sacred, consistent with being made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). But when western society centuries later adopted Darwinian evolution and rejected God, materialism became the prevailing view. Human beings were no longer made in God’s image, but were just body plus breath formed out of random chance with no immateriality. In time this view has contributed to the idea that a person is not alive until birth and the first breath of air taken. Children in the womb could be sacrificed when deemed inconvenient or profitable. Today, there are even some in society openly promoting and working to pass laws to kill babies after they are born.

Similar to many who hold to a Darwinian evolutionary worldview, Adventists have a materialistic view of man. It presents the idea that human beings are merely body plus breath, with spiritual life residing in a physical brain. The spiritual, or immaterial, aspect is denied. This unbiblical view has contributed to the development of the belief that a person is not truly alive until the first breath of air is taken at birth; therefore it is permissible for Adventist hospitals to terminate a child in the womb.



The small amount of leaven in the dough that started this downward path began with not believing the words of Jesus regarding setting a date for His return. Refusing to repent of this error and formulating new and unbiblical teachings to save face has led to the leavening of the whole lump, and the participation in modern western culture's shedding of innocent human blood on an industrial scale.

Acceptance of this practice in its hospitals while claiming to be the "remnant church" is reminiscent of Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day who maintained the belief in their exclusive relationship with God and adherence to the Law, faithfully and piously going to the synagogue every Sabbath, while plotting the betrayal and murder of Jesus.

Can leavened dough become unleavened?

Of all the kings of Judah and Israel, Manasseh of Judah was probably the most evil one of all. His story can be found in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. He engaged in the kind of evil that characterized the abominations of the nations that God had driven out before Israel. He erected altars to pagan gods, worshiped the host of heaven, and built altars for them in the temple courts, shed much innocent blood from one end of Jerusalem to the other, practiced witchcraft and divination, and took part in sorcery and consulted mediums. He even made his own sons pass through the fire. His reign of evil misled and encouraged the people of Judah to sin more than the nations that the Lord destroyed before Israel.

At some point early in his life, Manasseh chose not to follow the godly example of Hezekiah his father. This likely did not begin with one big decision, but with small choices that gradually led to his life becoming engulfed in evil. This corruption, like leaven spreading through a lump of dough, filtered down to the common people of the kingdom.

Even though God spoke to Manasseh and the residents of Judah, they refused to listen and turn back from their downward spiral into depravity. In response, the Lord sent the nation of Assyria against Judah. Manasseh was captured, bound, and carried off in humiliation to Babylon.

But in Manasseh's affliction, something wonderful happened.

When he was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God (2 Chr. 33:12-13).

The rich grace and restoration of God led Manasseh to a genuine repentance (Rom. 2:4). For the remainder of his reign he worked to undo all the evil he had done. He destroyed the pagan idols and altars, and called upon the people of Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel (2 Chr. 33:15-16). This return to the Lord set the stage for the great national revival that took place under his grandson King Josiah.

Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the LORD their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the LORD God of their fathers (2 Chr. 34:33).

Then the king commanded all the people saying, "Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this book of the covenant." Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to the LORD in Jerusalem. Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him (2 Kings 23:21-25).

Many of us previously in life held to false religious or philosophical worldviews. Assent to these views may have started as small steps away from truth that over time developed into acceptance of, or participation in, some very evil things. But thanks be to God for the grace and forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ. Just how big is God's forgiveness? It is big enough to forgive the worst of sins and the worst of sinners. How great is the cleansing power of Jesus' blood? It can make the most deeply embedded crimson stain of sin whiter than snow (Is. 1:18).

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom. 5:6-1).

By the grace of God, even people in leadership who have been led astray can experience miraculous change and set the stage for those who follow them to change also. Repenting of the error of participating in setting a date for Jesus' second coming, of promoting extra-biblical revelations as inspired messages of God on par with Scripture, of the subsequent manipulation of Scripture in formulating doctrines teaching an incomplete atonement at the cross, and of an incorrect view of humanity would set the stage for the unleavening of the dough. Such repentance would open the door to not only embracing a Biblical view of humanity and the sacredness of the life of the unborn, but the salvation of a people formerly in darkness through believing the Biblical gospel. †

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ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #26

DEATH AND RESURRECTION ASSUMES MAN IS PHYSICAL

ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #26

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later.

COMMENTARY ON THIS STATEMENT

There are only a few Seventh-day Adventist beliefs that are vehemently defended by most Adventists: free will, state of the dead/annihilationism, Sabbath, and possibly diet. The doctrine of death is one of the key pillars of Adventism's belief system; it is directly tied to the nature of humanity. For example, if a person is nothing more than the functions of their physical bodies, a direct entrance to heaven isn't possible. This doctrine is also critical in maintaining the sanctuary and investigative judgment doctrines. If believers go straight to heaven at death, 1844 loses all significance, and the Adventist church can't identify itself as The Remnant Church.

There is one word in this belief statement that could be misleading: "unconscious". Technically, Adventists believe that the dead do not have consciousness because in their theology there is no part of the person that remains after death. They cease to exist entirely except as a memory of God.

What the words mean

Let's examine the statements in this Fundamental Belief beginning with "The wages of sin is death". It is hard to argue with a direct statement from Scripture taken in context. This is an accurate statement about sin and death. The gap in this belief statement is the scriptural understanding of death. When one applies a secular meaning to a spiritual term, the result can be confusion. For example, consider Nicodemus' confusion about being born again.

The term "death" in Scripture has a unique definition. Ephesians 2 provides a clear example: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... 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" (v. 1, 4-5). The term "death" in Scripture often references a separation from God, but there is also a sec-

ond definition that is directly linked to this separation. This second definition is difficult for Adventists to grasp because they have been taught that the spirit is only breath.

Man has a spirit, not just breath, and this spirit can even be distinguished from the soul (Heb. 4:12). Only believers are described in Scripture as having a living spirit (1 Cor. 2:11; Heb. 4:12; Jas. 2:26). When the Bible speaks of being made alive in Christ and being born again, these are not mere metaphors; they are speaking about a reality that occurs within the person.

When the Bible speaks of being made alive in Christ and being born again, these are not mere metaphors; they are speaking about a reality that occurs within the person.

The result of sin is death. In the immediate time frame, those without Christ are spiritually dead and separated from God. But there is also an eternal death defined by Scripture in Rev. 20:14b: "This is the second death, the lake of fire." The wages of sin is also, and finally, found in the lake of fire. (The fate of the wicked will be discussed further in the next issue discussing Fundamental Belief 27.) The Bible provides its own definitions when one is willing to set aside one's secular mindset.

The other main question to address in this Fundamental Belief is what happens to believers at the time of their death. According to Adventist beliefs, a person ceases to exist when they die until they are re-created at the resurrection (while these aren't the phrases that an Adventist would typically use, it does accurately describe Adventist belief). This idea is not what Scripture teaches. Jesus declares, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn. 11:25-26a).

The fact that Adventists believe people cease to exist at death is likely why this belief statement uses the phrasing "unconscious state" to describe death. If they openly admit that nothing about the believer remains alive between death and resurrection, they would openly contradict these words of Christ. By using a sufficiently vague term, Adventism can obscure this contradiction with Scripture.

There are multiple places where Scripture describes believers being in heaven immediately upon death:

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Philippians 1:22–23 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Hebrews 12:22–23 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Luke 23:43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The Hebrews 12 passage is an important, and often overlooked, contribution to this discussion. This passage doesn’t place this heavenly Jerusalem only in the future (or even only at the time of the first century Hebrew Christians), but in the now. When we worship God (see Heb. 12:28) we enter not only into His presence, but into the heavenly Jerusalem, the presence of angels and the “spirits of the righteous”. The straightforward reading of this passage indicates that the spirits of departed believers reside in heaven with God the Father, Jesus, and innumerable angels.

Adventists are quick to dismiss Jesus’ words in Luke 23 because of what they claim is a misplaced comma. There are several flaws in that argument. First, the phrasing simply doesn’t make sense. Jesus is obviously making the statement today, rather than yesterday or tomorrow. More telling, however, is that Jesus uses the phrase “Truly, I say to you,” over 30 unique times (and over 70 times total across all four Gospels) in Scripture without informing people that He is saying it “today”. Jesus’ repeated use of the phrase plainly argues for continuing to use the phrase in the same way that He uses it in all of the other cases: the comma belongs before the word “Today”.

Jesus could not have been in an “unconscious state” in the grave, as Adventist doctrine claims, and also have been instrumental in raising Himself as He said He would do.

Adventists also argue that Jesus was dead in the tomb rather than with the Father, so Jesus couldn’t have been promising the thief that he would be with Christ in paradise that day. However, this claim is based on their flawed theology of human nature that denies having both a physical body and a spirit. When we understand that Jesus had both body and spirit and that He was fully man and fully God in both body and spirit, Jesus could truly suffer death in the body yet continue to have a living spirit. The thief’s body could die and be in the grave, just as Jesus’ body was. Yet the thief’s spirit could also be with Christ’s spirit in Paradise. Jesus could not have been in an “unconscious state”

in the grave, as Adventist doctrine claims, and also have been instrumental in raising Himself as He said He would do (Jn. 2:19–21 and Jn. 10:18). Jesus had the consciousness and the power to take up His life again, just as truly as He laid it down.

...passages that discuss the dead no longer planning, worshipping, or having knowledge are properly understood as referring to our earthly perspective. Those who have passed on are no longer involved in our earthly life.

The other big confusion for Adventists is how they understand certain Old Testament passages about the dead ceasing to praise God or have conscious activity. However, this view depends on cherry-picking a few verses and insisting on the interpretation that these few verses would provide. By expanding the search (and surrounding context) one can see how the Old Testament authors used these expressions. For instance, Psalm 115:17–18 reads, “The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord!”. If one only reads the first part of this passage it would be easy to conclude that the writer was supporting the Adventist viewpoint, but if one continues with the passage, the “forevermore” tells us the rest of the story. From the perspective of the living, the dead are no longer engaged in our daily activities. But this fact does not mean that the righteous dead are not engaged in any spiritual or heavenly activities. They are praising God “forevermore”. There are two perspectives, an earthly and a heavenly. By understanding that these two perspectives exist, sometimes in the same passage, one can rightly interpret the verse. Therefore, passages that discuss the dead no longer planning, worshipping, or having knowledge are properly understood as referring to our earthly perspective. Those who have passed on are no longer involved in our earthly life.

This Fundamental Belief presents Adventist teaching on the subject innocuously, but that doesn’t mean that the Adventist teaching is accurate. The passages of Scripture that this belief statement ignores are critical for having a proper understanding of the doctrine. †

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Knowing the Covenants

COLLEEN TINKER

Adventism's belief that man is purely physical makes its soteriology dependent upon man's sanctified behavior. Adventists believe that God's promises are always conditional upon human obedience, but the Bible describes only one conditional covenant: the Mosaic. All of God's other covenants are unconditional. God's promises will come to pass in spite of man's obedience or disobedience. His word cannot fail.

As an Adventist I was not taught the biblical truth about God's covenants. I understood that there was only one eternal covenant that applied to all people for all time. Any individual covenants that might be mentioned in the Scripture, I learned, were simply new bits of information that were added to the one big covenant God made with humanity.

Central to this one big covenant, I learned, was the Law God gave through Moses, and I understood that the Law God gave was the Ten Commandments. These were eternal, existing before God wrote them on stones and lasting forever into eternity future. I further learned that this Law was the “transcript of God's character” and revealed His marching orders to all His creatures—including His Sabbath command which applied to everyone who ever lived.

These were the things I understood as an Adventist.

Some things did confuse me, though. For example, I remember reading in Hebrews 8 as an Adventist and puzzling over these words:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest (Heb. 8:10, 11).

I knew “Sunday Christians” who believed in Jesus and lived godly lives, but they felt no conviction about worshiping on Sabbath. I saw in the New Testament that God said He would write His law on the hearts of His people and that when He did, they wouldn't have to teach each other to know God. I could see that “Sunday Christians” were convicted of nine commandments out of the Ten. They loved God and despised idolatry, and they would never defame His name. They honored their parents, would never kill, commit adultery, or steal. They even had soft hearts that believed they should not covet.

Yet one thing puzzled me: these earnest, sincere, godly “Sunday Christians” had no heart conviction that the Sabbath was holy. They had to be TAUGHT that Sabbath was holy.

This fact confused me. If the law was written on their hearts, where was the fourth commandment?

What is the gospel?

Then came the day in the mid 90's when I heard Dale Ratzlaff explain that the covenant God made with Israel through Moses at Sinai was fulfilled in Jesus. He drew charts demonstrating the differences between the old and the new covenants, and he explained that Jesus, as our Substitute, not only kept the requirements of the old covenant on our behalf, but He also keeps the terms of the new covenant with the Father on our behalf.

That day was the first time I began to understand that the new covenant was completely different from the old. Moreover, I saw for the first time that the gospel was summed up in Jesus, not in my obedience to the law.

My husband Richard and I delved into studying what the Bible said about the law and the covenants, and I realized that I had never understood the gospel as an Adventist. Ultimately, I realized that understanding the gospel was inseparable from really understanding the biblical covenants. As the reality of Jesus' atonement and finished work came into focus, I began to see that the Bible's revelation of God's covenants explained how God works in and among us.

I had to face the fact that my blurred understanding of the Adventist “gospel” contradicted what Scripture reveals about God's promises.

When I tried to define what “the gospel” was from my Adventist perspective, I realized there were many different ways to explain it. In fact, different Adventists had different definitions which often included different “components” and practices.

Some “gospel definitions” within Adventism include: Jesus died for my sins; the Three Angels' Messages (the gospel in verity); the health message; all sins are forgiven; I would have to “opt out” in order to be lost; God is forgiving and doesn't require Jesus' blood in order to erase our sins.

There are many other details that Adventists may include in their definitions of “gospel” including keeping the seventh-day

Sabbath, the state of the dead, and the sanctuary doctrine. Some may say those Adventist “distinctives” are not specifically part of the gospel, but they may say that these doctrines are necessary in addition to the gospel.

In fact, I realized that within Adventism, the word “gospel” is murky and is mostly understood to mean “good news”. The exact definition of that news was never clearly explained, but it was generally understood to mean that God would somehow forgive sins, and we could benefit if we did the things God wanted us to do.

You might resonate with my surprise when, some years later, I learned from our pastor Gary Inrig that there is a central passage that defines the gospel: 1 Corinthians 15:3–5:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

In other words, the gospel is not an indistinct piece of news that may be understood different ways by different people. On the contrary, it is precise and simple, and its definition cannot be misunderstood. The gospel is the reality that Jesus died for our sins as Scripture said He would. He truly died and was literally buried, and on the third day, just as Scripture said He would, He rose from death.

Moreover, He had eyewitnesses who saw Him after He rose from death. His resurrection, in other words, was not an unsubstantiated rumor. In His resurrection body He appeared to hundreds of people (v. 6) who would be able to attest to His being alive.

I saw that definitions matter; an unclear gospel does not lead to salvation. Only the simple gospel of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection leads a person to repentance and saving faith. I realized I had to be willing to submit my Adventist worldview and my Adventist definitions of biblical terms to the words of Scripture. I had to let go of what I thought was reality and allow God to renew my mind with His own words. I had to repent—to turn away from—my Adventist worldview and commit myself to God’s definition of me and of Himself.

This realization and repentance was not a mental decision, although I did make a choice. It was an act of God. When He showed me what His word said, I had to trust it, but He had to give my heart the ability to believe. I had been trained to resist anything that contradicted my Adventist understanding. It took God’s intervention to open my heart and mind to the truth of reality.

Adventism’s gospel confusion

Because I know the confusion of the “Adventist gospel”, I also know the Adventist confusion of how to be saved. I also know Ad-

ventism’s refusal to admit a person may know without doubt that he or she has eternal life and cannot lose it.

If I were to ask Adventists how to be saved, I could expect a variety of answers, depending on the individuals and upon the “brands” of Adventism they endorse. Adventist answers might include any of the following: Accept Jesus (what does that mean?). Follow the teachings of Jesus. Renounce the false Sunday Sabbath and keep the seventh day. Renounce “life after death”. Keep the Ten Commandments and overcome sin. Accept and practice the health message. Obey each new “truth” as you learn it. Believe in a loving God who forgives.

The Bible, interestingly, never tells us to follow Jesus’ teachings in order to be saved. Instead, Scripture says God must grant us “repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). This repentance given by God is a move away from our false beliefs and our false view of reality. It is a turning away from our internal deception toward God and His word.

When we have repented of our cherished beliefs and personal idols and turned to God for truth, we are asked to believe in the Lord Jesus and His finished work—the gospel of our salvation (Eph. 1:13–14).

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,” (Acts 16:31) Paul told the Philippian jailor.

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (Jn. 6:29), Jesus told the Jews.

Jesus, God the Son, also made this astonishing statement—a statement I never really “saw” when I was an Adventist:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life (Jn. 5:24).

The Bible is very clear how one is saved and that we can know that we are saved eternally. How, then, is Adventism so unable to define the gospel or to teach the finished work of Jesus? Why can’t Adventism offer assurance of salvation?

The answer is complex, but there is one core reality: the doctrines of Adventism are not truly Christian. It is a “new religion” that has been designed to mimic Christianity, but it was founded by anti-trinitarians who by their own admission did not understand the Bible (*Lightbearers to the Remnant*, Dept. of Ed., General Conference of SDAs, 1979). Adventism’s theology is established on the idea that when one “accepts Jesus” it leads one back to the law where one learns how to please and obey God.

This Jesus-back-to-the-law understanding is exactly the opposite of biblical teaching. Galatians 3:15–29 explains that the law was given to guard God’s people until Jesus came, and once He came, His people no longer need the law’s guardianship. The law led people to Jesus; Jesus does not lead us back to the law.

Jesus doesn’t save people by making bad people good; He makes dead people alive (Jn. 5:25).

Puts Sabbath In Its Place

Yet one thing puzzled me: these earnest, sincere, godly “Sunday Christians” had no heart conviction that the Sabbath was holy. They had to be TAUGHT that Sabbath was holy.

Adventism’s emphasis on obedience to the law (especially to the Sabbath) reveals its misunderstanding not only of what Jesus has actually done but also of the covenants God made with His people. His covenant with Israel on Sinai was what Hebrews calls the “old covenant” which has become obsolete (Heb. 8:13). The new and living way opened to the Father through Jesus’ body and shed blood (Heb. 10:20) is the “new covenant” Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied. Adventism utterly misses the significance of these covenants.

What is a covenant?

A covenant is a treaty or alliance. In the ancient near east, there were two kinds of covenants: covenants between equals, and covenants between vassals and lords, and they were enacted with blood sacrifices and self-maledictory oaths.

In the Bible, there are two kinds of covenants: unconditional and conditional. Unconditional covenants are those in which God makes promises with no requirements imposed upon the recipients, and no human promise back to God is involved. Conditional covenants are those in which God establishes conditions for blessings and curses (blessings for obedience; curses for disobedience); in response, humans promise to do what God required.

An example of an unconditional covenant in Scripture is God’s promise after Noah exited the ark never again to destroy the earth with a flood. No human was involved in making any promises back to God. Conversely, an example of a conditional covenant was God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai, when He promised to bless the nation if they obeyed and to curse them if they disobeyed. Israel responded that they would do everything God said.

The covenants in Scripture reveal God’s unconditional and conditional promises, and they reveal His faithfulness to His own word. Understanding God’s covenants explains the function and authority of the law. Even more specifically, understanding the covenants resolves the Sabbath question.

Furthermore, we were not taught that there were “conditional” and “unconditional” promises, or covenants, from God. We were taught that every single promise of God was for everyone and was conditional upon our obedience. We believed that we determined

whether or not we received God’s blessings. We simply did not learn that when God makes promises without making demands, those promises WILL be fulfilled.

We did not learn that God is sovereign over all things; we understood that we had the “last word” about whether or not God would be able to bless us and do what He promised. Our obedience was the key ingredient. This idea is false, and it ultimately covers up the power and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as our Substitute and Sacrifice.

Our belief that we determined whether or not God would keep His promises made Him subject to us and cut us off from the gospel. God’s covenants, however, reveal a far different God—a far more powerful and consistent God than the one in whom we believed as Adventists.

The Biblical Covenants

The Noahic Covenant

The first covenant named in the Old Testament is God’s covenant after the flood. When Noah and his family exited the ark, God made unconditional promises as Noah offered burnt offerings. Genesis 8:20, 21 and 9:8–17 record God’s promise never again to destroy the earth and “all flesh” with a flood. The covenant sign was the rainbow, and it would remind all flesh—and also God (Gen. 9:16)—of His covenant. The earth and all flesh living on the earth are the recipients of God’s covenant promises of that unconditional Noahic covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The next great unconditional covenant in Scripture is the Abrahamic Covenant. God called Abraham, a moon-worshiper (Josh. 24:2), and promised him seed, land, and blessing (Gen. 12:1–3). After Abraham responded to God’s call, God asked him to prepare animal sacrifices for a covenant He was going to make with him. Genesis 15:8–21 tells the story of this covenant. God was covenanting that He would make Abraham a great nation, that He would give him and his descendants the land later known as Palestine, and that the world would be blessed through him.

According to the custom of the day, the parties of a covenant cut up animals and walked together among those sacrifices making self-maledictory oaths to one another: “So be it to me if I break this covenant.” God instructed Abraham to prepare the typical sacrifices, but he spent all day chasing the birds away from the carcasses—and God did not appear.

Then, as evening approached, Abraham fell into a deep sleep—a sleep which he apparently could not resist. As Abraham slept, God appeared in the forms of a smoking pot and a burning furnace, and those two fiery objects moved among the covenant sacrifices and confirmed God’s promises to Abraham.

Abraham made NO promises to God. He was not even allowed to participate in the covenant’s ratification! God Himself made and ratified the covenant to Abraham—a promise that He would bless the world through Abraham and his descendants. This promise did not depend upon Abraham’s faithfulness or obedience. It was a unilateral promise made TO Abraham BY God. No human participa-

tion or promise could make those promises conditional. God's promises cannot be broken. He absolutely will do what He declares.

God renewed that covenant promise to Isaac and then to Jacob. The patriarchs, as Abraham's descendants, each received confirmation that they inherited that same covenant promise which God made with Abraham. In fact, the Abrahamic covenant continues throughout salvation history; it does not have an ending point. No subsequent covenant makes the Abrahamic obsolete, and the new covenant enlarges and fulfills the Abrahamic covenant.

Genesis 17:9–14 tells that God gave Abraham a covenant sign: circumcision, and Hebrews 6:13–20 confirms the New Testament fulfillment of this unconditional covenant in and through the person of the Lord Jesus. In Jesus, the promised Seed, God is fulfilling every promise He made to Abraham.

Importantly, Abraham's response to God's unconditional promises is the prototype of how every person is declared righteous: he believed God, and God credited that belief to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). All the descendants of Abraham—all Jews and gentiles who believe God and trust His promises and provision (Rom. 4)—will inherit the promises God made to him.

The Mosaic Covenant

Four hundred thirty years after God covenanted with Abraham, He made a covenant with the nation of Israel (Gal. 3:17). God met Israel at Mt. Sinai and spoke to the fledgling nation through Moses their leader. This covenant was temporary: it was to last “until the Seed” would come (Gal. 3:19).

Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, this Mosaic Covenant was two-way, not unilateral. God and Israel made promises to each other (Ex. 34:27, 28), and the terms were simple: blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience. The sign of the covenant was the weekly honoring of the seventh-day Sabbath (Ex. 31:12–17).

This covenant was conditional; its promises depended upon the Israelites' keeping their promises to God. If they failed to be obedient to their covenant promises, God would punish them with drought, famine, illnesses, attacks from enemies, and ultimately exile.

This covenant was mediated by Moses who offered sacrifices and sprinkled the people with blood as they affirmed their acceptance of the covenant (Ex. 24:1–8).

Unlike God's unconditional covenants which are eternal and do not depend upon human cooperation or promises, this conditional covenant is temporary and impermanent. It includes faulty human promises (Heb. 8:6, 7), and its blessings are not guaranteed as are unconditional covenant blessings. This conditional covenant functions as a temporary guardian (Gal. 3:23–25).

As Adventists we were taught that the Decalogue was eternal, something that existed from eternity past and was the “transcript of God's character”. We understood that the Ten Commandments were incorporated into the Mosaic covenant but were not its “essence”, and we believed those commandments—including the fourth—applied to all people for all time, even in eternity with God where we would keep the Sabbath with Him.

Scripture, however, teaches differently. The Ten Commandments are part of the **CONDITIONAL**, not any unconditional,

covenant. In fact, God “wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Ex. 34:27, 28). They were the actual words of the conditional Mosaic covenant. They were not an eternal list, but they were the essence of the temporary covenant.

Moreover, the New Testament tells us the truth about the Ten Commandments. They kill and are the “ministry of death” (2 Cor. 3: 6, 7). They veil Christ (2 Cor. 3:14), and they are merely shadows of Christ (Heb. 10:1) and are obsolete (Heb. 8:13).

What, then, was the purpose of the Mosaic law which included the Ten Commandments?

God gave them to Israel to increase sin (Rom. 5:20). They were intended to imprison people under sin (Gal. 3:22) and to be a tutor to lead people to Christ (Gal. 3:24). They witnessed of the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:21), and they foreshadowed the reality in Christ (Heb. 10:1).

Importantly, the law did not replace the promises God made to Abraham (Rom. 4:13–15; Gal. 3:17, 18). Rather, it made people aware of their depravity and of the atonement necessary to resolve the problem of sin. Jesus fulfilled the law, and when He did, the law became obsolete (Heb. 8:13).

It's important to understand that the Mosaic covenant operated parallel with the Abrahamic covenant. It was not added to the Abrahamic covenant as many people are taught. In fact, they could not be combined because they were completely different kinds of covenants made with different parties. Instead, Israel as a nation operated under the terms of the Mosaic covenant for a period of time while the promises of the Abrahamic covenant never changed. God's promises to Abraham are unconditional and have no ending point. The Mosaic covenant, however, was a temporary provision for a nation, and this conditional covenant operated separately from the Abrahamic covenant but under its eternal promises.

The Mosaic Covenant has specific inheritors of its promises: the nation of Israel. The Israelites made reciprocal promises to God. They agreed to receive blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, and they promised to do all that God had said. The covenant blessings apply only to the obedient Israelites who were part of the two-way promises with God.

The new and living way opened to the Father through Jesus' body and shed blood is the “new covenant” Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied. Adventism utterly misses the significance of these covenants.

The Davidic Covenant

This unconditional covenant stated in 2 Samuel 7:8–17 is one most of us as Adventists were not taught. God promised David an eternal throne, a dynasty, and a kingdom. His descendant would have God as father and His eternal lovingkindness. This covenant was a one-way promise God made to David, and David made no promises back. God required no conditions for this covenant to be realized, but He unilaterally promised He would give David an eternal throne.

In Psalm 110 David connects his kingship with an eternal king and priest in the order of Melchizedek, and Hebrews 7 uses Psalm 110 to confirm Jesus as the promised Davidic King and Priest.

Ultimately the Lord Jesus is the One who receives the eternal Davidic throne. All believers, however, benefit from the Davidic Covenant in the person of the Lord Jesus.

The New Covenant

The new covenant was promised in several places, but Jeremiah 31:31–34 is a central passage that is quoted in Hebrews. It is completely NEW. In it God promises that His laws will be written on our hearts. He promised that He would be His people’s God, they His people, and they would know Him. He promised to forgive their iniquity and forget their sins.

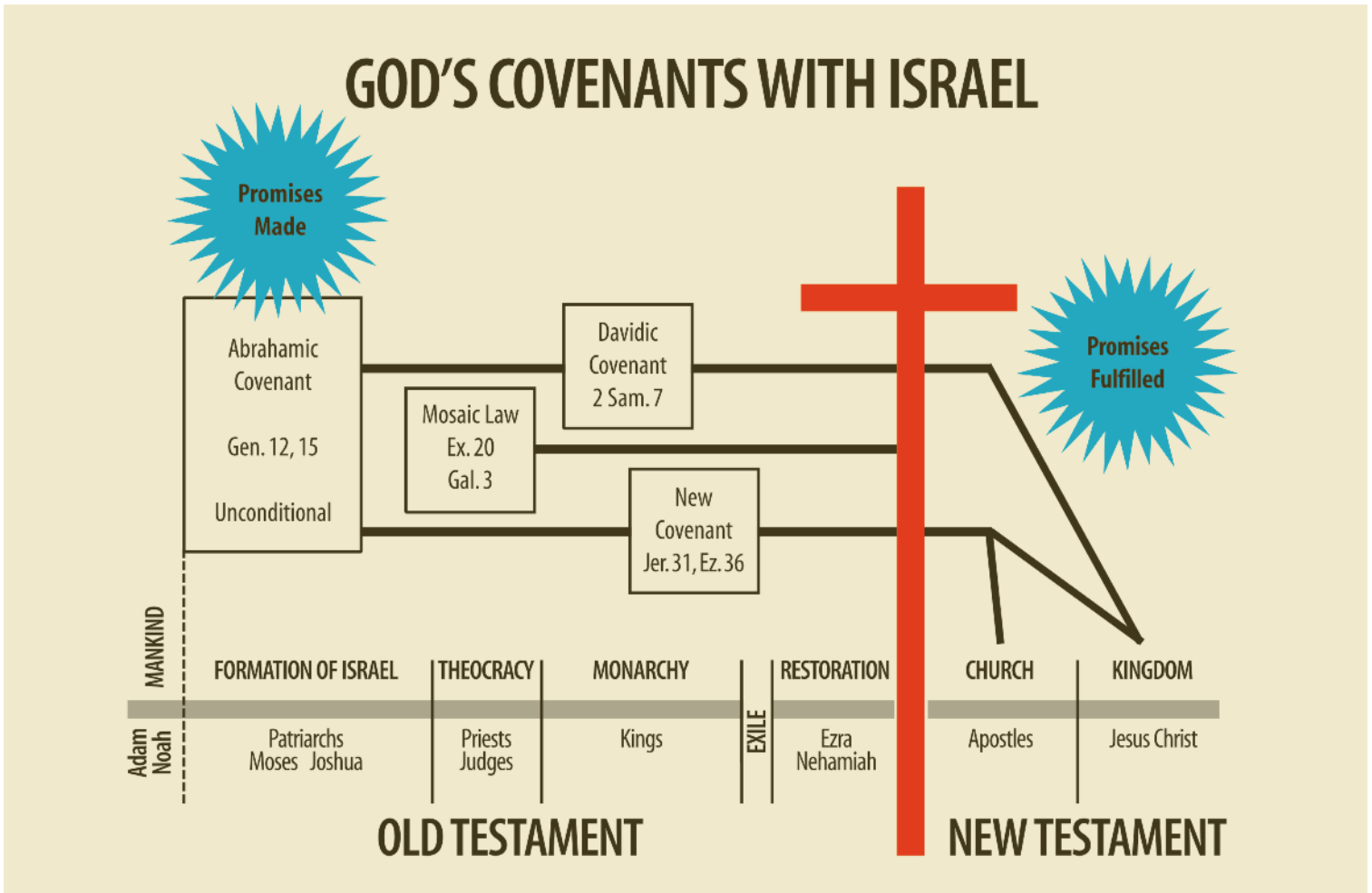
God even gave a new “remember” in the new covenant: the Lord’s Supper. Those under the old covenant were to “remember the Sabbath”; in the new covenant we remember the Lord’s death and burial until He comes. We eat and drink in remembrance of Him.

It is new because it is inaugurated by a unique sacrifice: Jesus’ “blood of the covenant” (Mt. 26:27–29). It opened a “new and living way” through the veil—Jesus’ body (Heb. 10:20). Now all people may approach God directly on the basis of Jesus’ blood.

The new covenant has a new priesthood in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7) as well as a change in the law (Heb. 7:12). Now Jesus eternally intercedes for us (Heb. 7:23–25); we no longer need a temporary human priesthood, and we will NEVER stand without an intercessor before God! Furthermore, our Intercessor is our sufficient sacrifice (Heb. 7:27).

Most importantly, the new covenant is superior to the old covenant because it is enacted on better promises than the old one: God’s promises (Heb. 8:6). There are no sinful human promises involved anywhere. In fact, the new covenant is guaranteed by Jesus Himself (Heb. 7:22).

The inheritors of the new covenant promises are all of Abraham’s descendants, Jew and gentile, who trust in Jesus’ shed blood, burial, and resurrection for the atonement of their sin (Rom. 4). (See covenant chart below.)



The chart shows how the biblical covenants relate to each other. The Noahic covenant continues from the time Noah exited the ark, and its promise is forever. The earth will never be destroyed again by water.

In the Abrahamic covenant, God promised eternal blessings for him and all his descendants. He covenanted a holy Seed and descendants of promise that would outnumber the stars and the sand, and He guaranteed that the descendants of promise would ultimately inherit the land. Most importantly, the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional. God cannot lie, and His promises cannot fail. These promises will come to pass without human cooperation.

The Mosaic Covenant came 430 years after the covenant with Abraham. It was a two-way agreement, a conditional covenant, between God and Israel, the promised sons of Abraham's body. The Mosaic Covenant defined a tangible religion for Israel which foreshadowed the work and person of the promised Seed. It provided governance and culture which separated God's people from pagan corruption.

The Mosaic covenant provided definitions of sin, and it specified the consequence for sin: the curse of death. This curse sentenced all people, because no one is without sin. In fact, it had built-in failure: Israel could not keep its covenant promises.

The Davidic Covenant unconditionally guaranteed there would be a king from David's lineage with an eternal throne—and that king is our Lord Jesus who already sits at the Father's right hand!

God's unconditional new covenant guaranteed that He would give His people new hearts and spirits. He would write His laws on their hearts, and He would be their God and they His people. He promised that all would know Him, and He would both forgive and forget their sins.

The UNCONDITIONAL covenants reveal God's work that never stops. They show us His faithfulness and sovereignty over our faulty promises and failures. On the other hand, the CONDITIONAL, Mosaic covenant revealed Israel's work and failed promises.

Jesus is the Singularity who fulfilled the Mosaic covenant, who further revealed God's promises to Abraham, and who ushered in the new covenant.

What we learned and what we know

As Adventists we learned that we were spiritual Israel and entrusted with the law (and the Sabbath). If we kept the law, God would bless us with salvation, but if we disobeyed (and trampled the Sabbath) we would be lost.

We believed there was only one covenant which had different expressions, and we thought we had to keep the covenant with God in order to obtain His blessings. In fact, we believed that all God's promises were conditional, based on people's obedience or disobedience.

The truth, however, is revolutionary. God's unilateral promises are UNCONDITIONAL and cannot fail! In fact, God's conditional covenant was made only with Israel, and Jesus, the Perfect Israelite and the promised Seed, fulfilled every shadow of the Mosaic Covenant. He was sinless and perfectly obedient; He was the sufficient sacrifice. He became a curse and became sin for us (Gal.

3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21), taking the law's death sentence and breaking its power over humanity.

As the Son of Man and Son of God, Jesus kept all of Israel's promises to God. He fulfilled God's requirements of perfect righteousness and death for sin, and He shattered death and redeemed humanity. Only as the Son of God could He have shattered death and redeemed us, and only as the Son of Man could He have paid the price for human sin.

Jesus, not we, fulfilled the Mosaic covenant, and when we trust His finished work, our lives are hidden with Him in God (Col. 3:3). Then, hidden in Christ, we are credited with Jesus' own righteousness (Phil. 3:8, 9) and inherit all new covenant promises. We are eternally secure because we are in the Son!

The new covenant is NEW because Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection opened a new way to God. When we trust Him, we are born again and made spiritually alive; we become new creations. We don't have to please God to be saved; rather, Jesus has kept all the righteous requirements as our Substitute.

When we trust Him, we pass from death to life (Jn. 5:24) and are transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the Beloved Son (Col. 1:13). Because Jesus has pleased the Father as our Substitute, when we trust Him we are credited with His own righteousness!

Now, in the new covenant, Jesus is the covenant partner with the Father who guarantees our security when we trust Him.

Implications

Because Jesus perfectly kept and fulfilled every requirement of the law, which was only a shadow of "good things to come" (Heb. 10:1), it is now obsolete (Heb. 8:13). Because Jesus replaced the Levites with His eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11), the law has been changed (Heb. 7:12), and we are now under the law of Christ (2 Cor. 9:21). Now the sign of the obsolete old covenant—the Sabbath—is replaced with the remembrance of the Lord's Supper.

Because of Jesus' blood, the temple veil tore, and all may directly approach God in repentance (Heb. 10:20). Because Jesus has fulfilled every shadow of the law, we have to leave the law behind. A veil covers our hearts when Moses is read, but that veil is removed in Christ (2 Cor. 3:14–16).

We have to face the fact that we cannot enter the new covenant and cling to the sign and governance of the old covenant (Acts 15:1–21). The Sabbath, which was the sign of the old covenant, ties us to the law, but Scripture is clear: to return to the law after knowing the gospel is to fall from grace and to be enslaved by what is "no god" (Gal. 4:8–11).

When we see the reality of the new covenant, we who have been Adventists must repent for having believed a false gospel that diminished Jesus and made us responsible for our own salvation. When we repent and believe that Jesus is our Substitute who took God's wrath for our sin, we inherit the unconditional promises of the new covenant in Jesus' blood.

As heirs of God's new covenant promises, we are His born-again, adopted children (Rom. 8:14–17), and nothing can ever snatch us out of His hand (Jn. 10:29, 30). †



James Teaches Salvation Apart From Law

DALE RATZLAFF

Adventism's belief that man is purely physical shapes their interpretation of the epistle of James to demand law-keeping. In context, James is teaching that our new hearts and spirits, born again by faith in the finished work of Jesus alone, yield visible gospel fruit that witnesses to our faith in Him.

For former Adventists, nothing is more cherished than the Pauline gospel of justification by faith without the works of the law. Amen! Those of us who used to read Ellen White's writings remember the many quotes that took away all assurance and joy out of the Christian life.

If you want an example, look at the chapter, "Living in the Judgment" in my book *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*. Now, though, when we read the books of John, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Hebrews where we find the new covenant gospel clearly spelled out, we sing, dance, and shout, "Thank you, Lord!"

Before we look at James 2, which will be the focus of this study, I want us to review the testimony of Paul regarding justification by faith. We can never read these verses too many times.

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

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH (Gal. 3:11).

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Gal. 3:24-25).

What do those texts mean?

Paul, the theologian of the Christian church, is clear and definite. We are justified by faith without any of the deeds of the law. However, when we turn to the epistle of James, chapter two, we find some seemingly difficult verses. Two problems arise.

First, many have used James 2 to promote continued Sabbath-keeping. We at Life Assurance Ministries have had many people use James 2 in this way. When I was an Adventist pastor, I did the same thing. Does James 2 promote Sabbath-keeping?

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (Jam. 2:10-11).

Because James quotes from two of the Ten Commandments, that shows, some say, that the Ten Commandments are in view and are still binding; therefore, if you break the Sabbath commandment, then you have become a transgressor of the law.

That looks like good reasoning. Right?

The second problem strikes at the heart of the gospel of justification by faith. Speaking of Abraham, James says,

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (Jas. 2:24, 25).

How do we harmonize James with Paul? Or, as some would say, which one is right and which one is wrong? I have had a number of calls from educated, degreed people who have told me that Paul misunderstood Christ, and James had it right.

Martin Luther even said that James was a “right strawy epistle, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.”

However, if we maintain the authority of Scripture, and we do, then we must start with a presupposition that there is underlying harmony if both Paul and James are interpreted correctly. Would you agree?

Therefore, let us do a contextual study of James 2 seeking answers to two questions:

One, Does James teach the continued application of the Ten Commandments, which would mean continued Sabbath-keeping?

Two, Does James teach that works are needed for genuine justification?

Harmonizing James and Paul

Often James is pitted against Paul. The Epistle of James has a strong moral or ethical tone, and Paul’s emphasis is the administration of the new covenant among born-again believers in Jesus. However, both James and Paul are part of inspired Scripture. Both teach truth, and when rightly interpreted, they agree. Therefore, instead of James and Paul standing in face-to-face conflict shouting at each other, as do the political activists in

highly charged, mob-like demonstrations, they stand back to back addressing different concerns, each promoting truth.

I believe there are three keys to understanding James 2.

First key: Determine what law is in view when James refers to “law”. Is it the Ten Commandments, or is it the Law of Christ—the law of love?

Second Key: Recognize that James uses “faith” in three different ways.

Third Key: There are two types of justification; Paul emphasizes justification before God. James speaks primarily about justification before men. I like to call Paul’s justification “invisible justification”, and James’ justification, “visible justification.”

I cannot overemphasize the importance of contextual study. It will help us discover truth, and it will expose error which may be lurking in some dark corner of our belief system.

“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism” (Jam. 2:1).

Here, “faith” is not so much “belief” or “trust” but rather “faith,” in this context, is a holder of moral and ethical values. For example, we might ask someone, “To what faith do you belong?” If they answered, “Baptist,” or “Pentecostal,” or “Seventh-day Adventist”, we would know at least something of their doctrines and ethical values.

So James is saying that the moral teachings of Christ do not contain an attitude of personal favoritism.

Next, James gives an illustration of how some may be showing favoritism (Jam. 2:2-7).

“For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?”

In these verses, James teaches that Christians are not to show personal favoritism based upon wealth or looks or any other reason.

The temptation to show favoritism is a real problem for pastors. When a wealthy person joins one’s church, it is so easy to put that person in a position of influence, hoping that he will give liberally. Then, when that person gives liberally, he often expects the pastor to do his bidding. He has power over the pastor. Most pastors have faced this temptation.

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (Jas. 2:8, 9).

What is the Royal Law? Notice that James does not say, “If you are keeping the Ten Commandments you are doing well.” Why? There are two reasons: first, Christians are not under the Ten Commandments; second, the Ten Commandments do not forbid having an attitude of favoritism.

The history of Israel is proof that focusing on law is not the way to achieve righteousness. Look again with me at James 2:10, 11:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,’ also said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

We note that James is using the Ten Commandments as an illustration. The Royal Law, or Kingly Law, however, is not the Decalogue; it is the Law of Christ:

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you (Jn. 15:12).

This “Law of Love” covers the whole spectrum of life, much more so than did the Ten Commandments. This fact is vitally important to understand. When we say that we are not under the Ten Commandments, we are not saying that we have no moral compass. Rather, under Christ’s Law applied by the Holy Spirit, we are to reach a higher moral standard than that found in the Ten Commandments.

James is writing to Jewish Christians. They understand that if one breaks one part of the law, he becomes guilty of all. However, the sin of favoritism in the context of James 2, is not found in the Ten Commandments, rather it is in the law of love. One cannot have unconditional love and at the same time hold an attitude of favoritism.

The problem with the righteousness of the old covenant law is twofold. First, the law does not speak to every moral and ethical situation. Second, no one keeps the law perfectly. Paul makes this failure clear in Galatians:

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.’ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; 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—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of

Often James is pitted against Paul. The Epistle of James has a strong moral or ethical tone, and Paul’s emphasis is the administration of the new covenant among born-again believers in Jesus. However, both James and Paul are part of inspired Scripture.

Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

Now we come to James 2:12:

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

The law of liberty

Some will tell you that the Ten Commandments are the law of liberty. Is that true?

First, as noted above, the context for understanding “law” in James 2 is regarding holding an attitude of favoritism. This sin is not found in the Ten Commandments.

Second, the Ten Commandments are not called the law of liberty. Here is how Peter and Paul described the law:

Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are (Acts 15:10-11).

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor [law]. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:24-26).

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 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!” (Gal. 4:1-6).

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts the Ten Commandments, which he calls the “ministry of condemnation,” with the “ministry of the Spirit.”

But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:15-17).

We see, then, that the Law of Liberty is not the Ten Commandments, but the Law of Christ. The Ten Commandments are a ministry of death. James continues:

For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment (Jam. 2:13).

The unsaved person who has a false faith will be shown no mercy in the judgment. The person who has saving faith and shows mercy will be exalted in the judgment.

Now we will see that James's focus is ethical teaching, not a works-based salvation. Let's first look at a summary of James 2:1-13:

1. James uses "faith" as a holder of ethical and moral values.
2. James uses "faith" as true, saving faith.
3. Showing personal favoritism is a violation of the Royal Law, also called the Law of Liberty or the Law of Christ.
4. James illustrates the concept of even one violation of the law, making one a transgressor of the law, even if he keeps all the rest of the law.
5. We cannot escape judgment if we hold an attitude of favoritism, even if we abide by other aspects of moral living.
6. God's mercy is greater and triumphs over judgment. Even if we have sinned and held an attitude of personal favoritism, there is forgiveness in the blood of Christ.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

Even if we have shown personal favoritism, if we are believers, God's mercy abounds to us as Paul said in Romans 5:20:

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

Now James is going to illustrate the third type of faith. He will show the difference between true, saving faith and a false faith that does not save.

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself (Jam. 2:14-17).

At first read, it is hard to see how faith and taking care of a person with needs fit together. James is showing that the Royal Law—the Law of Love—covers all aspects of life.

The Royal Law of Love has a wider reach than does the Ten Commandments law. The "faith" that shows no compulsion to help a person in need of food or clothing is not saving faith but is a "dead faith."

But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But

are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (Jam. 2:18-20).

There are two things we need to recognize in verses 18-20. First, James states that the "faith" described in these verses is the same "faith" that the demons have. What kind of faith is that? It is only an intellectual faith, not a trusting faith; it is a false faith.

Let me illustrate. A person may know the basics of Christian doctrine. Yet that same person can be so demanding, confrontational, and so self-righteous and unloving that we may question if that person has true, saving faith.

Second, those who have true, saving faith, leave "footprints in the sand."

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as 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 so that we would walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

We see now that James has used "faith" three different ways. (1) As a holder for moral and ethical values. (2) as true, saving faith, and (3) as false faith which cannot save, the same belief or faith that the devils have. In summary of this section: true faith leaves evidence.

Over time both Abraham and Rahab allowed God to work in their lives. They both were justified by faith alone—invisible justification before God. Then, sometime later, they were justified by visible justification before men—the outworking of righteousness in the life.

The role of works

Next James moves from faith and works to justification and works. As James describes several types of faith, so in this section he describes two types of justification: invisible justification and visible justification. We might say it another way: justification by faith alone before God and justification by faith and works before men.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,' and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone (Jam. 2:21-24).

Gen. 15:5-6 records Abraham's justification by faith alone—"invisible justification":

And He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'

Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Nothing visible took place here. Abraham was counted righteous based upon God's declaration. Not long after this declaration, we find in Genesis 20 where Abraham lied, stating Sarah was his sister. We see that in his person, Abraham was still not righteous.

Yet James also says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?"

The offering of Isaac took place about 50 years after Abraham was declared righteous by his faith. His previous invisible justification has now become visible to all.

He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen. 22:12).

He was invisibly justified many years before by faith alone by God's declaration. Fifty years later, by his obedience to the word of God, we can all see that his justification was for real. Now his righteousness is visible to all.

Next James gives the example of Rahab the harlot:

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (Jas. 2:24-25).

Here we have an example of someone who was justified as a sinner. She had an immoral lifestyle and told a lie to protect the spies.

For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. [Here we have her declaration of faith in God.] Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth (Jos. 2:10-12).

Here we see that Rahab the harlot believed in the Lord. She was counted righteous with an invisible justification.

Then, sometime later, her actions in hiding the spies and sending them out another way gave visible evidence that she was a believer, trusting in God. This is visible justification.

A short time later, when Joshua took the city of Jericho, we have this record:

However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho (Jos. 6:25).

Notice that she is still described as Rahab the harlot. We can follow Rahab the harlot in Scripture; she is listed in the genealogy of Christ and in Faith's Hall of Fame:

Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse was the father of David" (Mt. 1:5,6).

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace" (Heb. 11:31).

Over time both Abraham and Rahab allowed God to work in their lives. They both were justified by faith alone—invisible justification before God. Then, sometime later, they were justified by visible justification before men—the outworking of righteousness in the life.

Paul speaks primarily of justification by faith alone—"invisible justification" before God. James speaks primarily of justification by works—"visible justification" which is the outworking of being justified before God by faith alone.

Earlier in James 2, James declares that true faith will leave evidence. There will be evidence in the life of a person who has saving faith.

However, we must be very careful in judging another's standing in Christ. Only God can look at the heart. The amount of personal righteousness one develops in the Christian life depends upon many factors, including one's cooperation with the Spirit of God. Paul, when considering this concept said this:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Summary

1. James 2 says nothing about keeping the Sabbath and nothing in James can legitimately be used to support Sabbath keeping.

2. Christians are to live by the Royal Law, the Law of Liberty, called the Law of Christ or the Law of Love.

3. The Royal Law encompasses all the situations of life.

4. True saving faith leaves evidence.

5. There is justification before God by faith alone—which I call "invisible justification."

6. There is justification before men, as seen by a person's work—which I call "visible justification."

7. We must be very careful in evaluating another's walk with God. Only God knows the heart, but we should always seek to encourage others to trust Christ when we do not see evidence of saving faith.

Yes, we can still rejoice that we are counted righteous by faith alone. As we focus on the gospel and our standing "in Christ" we will be transformed into the image of Christ. We can sing, dance, and shout "Thank you, Lord!" When we place our faith in Christ, we are righteous with the very righteousness of God "in Christ." †

Blessing after brain surgery

I had brain surgery recently and thankfully am home now. I just wanted to let all of you know what a huge blessing you are and were to me while I was in hospital. At night (between interruptions) when I was all alone, I would listen to your messages of truth on YouTube via my android cell phone. What a comfort!

I do not have cancer, praise the Lord, but my right side was paralyzed. However, with rehab we are re-training those neural pathways, and the use of those limbs is returning!

I was in bed in the hospital and rehab for 31 days. I was going MENTAL! (No pun intended.) I am so very thankful these videos were made available to everyone. I believe sometimes it takes another Adventist (former) to help a (former) Adventist see the light. I did not like the New Testament much before, but I recently noticed that the pages of the New Testament in my new NASB Bible showed more wear more than do the Old Testament pages.

I am so grateful to God and also to Dale, Colleen, and all the others who have worked so hard and studied so long to discover the truth and are willing to share it!

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

My brain is still swollen a little bit, and nausea and fatigue continue, but am gradually returning to my routine. I will continue to support you in the future.

Again, thank you so very much!
LINDA ROLLINS
AUGUSTA, GA

Stop your tongue

I saw you on YouTube. All I saw was hate for Seventh-day Adventists. I didn't hear you talk any about your love for God. What a shame. God is love. Adventists love God. I have been a believer for 61 years. I pray for God to stop your tongue from speaking against God's people.

VIA EMAIL

Discovered by chance

Thank you for your very important ministry! It has been a true blessing to me—an ex-Adventist who just by chance discovered your website a few years ago. Please keep up the good work!

ANNISTON, AL

Discrediting is evil

It is with sadness I read your accounts and experiences. Of all the denominations I have encountered, it appears that the most condemning and vindictive people are the former Adventists. I understand there are varying differences in beliefs and interpretations even within a church or organization, but what baffles me is the evil intent and vicious attack you make towards Adventist beliefs. Sadly, this is not Christlike. If you want to convert others to your beliefs and interpretations, why not just present your case and be convincing in matters you are passionate about?

To attempt to destroy an organization or discredit it because you have found a “new” revelation is evil. Do you do that with other organizations or religions you don't agree with?

I'm praying that the spirit of God's love be the cornerstone of your message, not hate, anger, or fear or whatever is the real intent of your hearts. God judges the heart.

VIA EMAIL

This is a cult!

I was raised Lutheran and naively thought all churches taught a similar simple gospel of being saved by Jesus!

Several years ago I decided to learn a foreign language and began studying Portuguese online. I happened upon a Seventh-day Adventist church for Portuguese speakers, and I went every Saturday and attended all the weeklong lectures by pastors visiting from Brazil...

As my language skills improved I started making friends and getting invited to their homes. About six months ago a friend invited me to a beginner's study program called *Bíblia Fácil*, or *Easy Bible*. The last lesson presented their ideas on death. I remember my friend saying, “When you die, that's it; you're just dead.” I thought, if that's the case, why are we bothering to study in the Bible?

I felt like I was suddenly among atheists!...She started inviting other people from church into her home to talk to me. They were no longer just nice visits with a friend and her family. One man came and told me about our sins being written in a book, and they have to be examined. After this complex process, God is judged by the other creatures of the universe! How can creatures judge the creator?

Another man, stranger yet, had an entire computer presentation about death. If I am correct, they believe that people don't have souls! Afterwards he gave me a “comic” book featuring a grim reaper and scary drawings—one of a bed set up in a graveyard to explain that death is just sleep.

The next presentations were about Daniel and the Little Horn. By this time I had discovered your resources and was somewhat prepared. I had been invited to somebody's home for lunch, but they decided I needed to be given this presentation with four other people present. When the presenter got to the Little Horn, he became excited and started speaking very fast. The other people there got excited as well, and the people who I thought were my friends suddenly become crazed strangers.

I thought, this isn't a church, this is a cult! The whole experience was beyond disturbing.

Shortly after that I was looking online and stumbled upon the information that the Adventist hospitals perform abortions! I was shocked! That closed the deal for me!...

I am never going to attend an Adventist church again. I am very sorry to see so many good people lost by following a bad prophet.

VIA EMAIL

I've been indoctrinated

I want to thank you for all you do in shining the light in dark places. I live in northern Michigan, and I watch as many YouTube videos as I can. Thanks again for your recent study on Hebrews 7.

I left my church almost a year ago, and after listening to the studies and Q & A sessions, I realize I've been so indoctrinated—I had no idea! I pray for my old church members.

Thank you!
LUTHER, MI

God, please forgive me

I am a 68-year-old woman who has been an Adventist all of my life. I helped start a congregation in the 70's in my town because there was no Adventist church there. We now have a beautiful church only one mile from my house.

I now believe—yes! Seventh-day Adventism is a cult. God, please forgive me. I had no idea what was wrong with the church. Now I need to find a new church. It will be hard.

EDMOND, OK

Makes a difference

I'm “this close” to fully accepting the truth of eternal security, and you were the first to lead me in that direction. Your ministry makes a difference!

BUCHANAN, MI

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LIFE AFTER WITH NICOLE STEVENSON



What does it mean to be
Born Again?

Had someone asked me as an Adventist what being born again meant I would've said, "Choosing to follow Christ and being baptized". To me, the new birth was a metaphor for a new way of life which was entirely dependent upon and sustained by my cognitive decisions and behavior changes. Succeeding, I believed, meant remaining committed to "Adventist truth" and protecting myself from the deceptions of Babylon and worldly temptations. If I failed, "grace" meant that I could be "born again" *again* by being re-baptized and re-committing myself to the doctrines and life-style of Adventism—"God's remnant church".

Retrospectively, I see that my concept of being born again was about my relationship to Adventism and not about my dead spiritual nature which needed life.

In 2010, everything changed. The Lord opened my eyes to the truth about Jesus and about my depraved nature and need for a Savior. Through a series of providential encounters with people, Scripture, books, videos, and ultimately the FAF conference, I came to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Scripture alone. I knew that despite all my efforts to live right before God, I never had saving faith. How can one have saving faith without the gospel that saves? At the end of that conference I repented and confessed my need for Jesus. I also told

Him I wanted to spend the rest of my life getting to know Him on His terms—through His Word!

The days that followed brought a cascade of new feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and desires which all became my new ongoing reality. I

knew these changes were happening to me, not because of me, and the newness of life I was experiencing was explained to me clearly by the Scriptures, which had suddenly come to life! God had caused me to be born again by the resurrection life of Jesus Christ and sealed me with His Spirit, changing my heart and causing me to walk in His ways (Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:13-14; Ez. 36:26-27; Rom. 6:4)! This reality isn't a metaphor, and isn't the result of human will; it's the creative work of God in a literal human spirit (Jn. 1:13, Eph. 2:4-9)! Further, this new birth is sustained by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5)!

Understanding the secure position of God's born-again children moves us past faithless and pathological do-gooding and gives us a better understanding of our perpetual Sabbath rest through the finished work of Christ. In that rest we can give our greatest effort to knowing our true Father as He revealed Himself in His Word. The study of God has been the most rewarding endeavor of my life! As I've grown in my knowledge of Him I've also grown in my love for Him and in the desire to live faithfully, striving to serve and obey Him—counting losses as gain.

Dear reader, we who were once Adventist cannot assume we received the true gospel inside Adventist theology—it just doesn't teach it. We must be certain we're trusting the unadulterated gospel of Scripture. Another gospel simply will not save (Gal. 1). It's only in believing the "word of truth", the gospel of our salvation, that we're literally born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:23). I pray that you know the miracle of new birth in Christ, and that you would give your life to knowing Him according to His Scripture as you walk with Him 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.