

Journey from fear to faith

BARBRA CREW SCHAAK

LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

Proclamation!

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS
SABBATARIANS
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008
VOLUME 9, ISSUE 6

CHRIS BADENHORST

Protecting the Faith given to us

PAUL CARDEN

False teachings addressed in Africa

DALE RATZLAFF

This man receives sinners

O little town of Bethlehem

COLLEEN TINKER



I have been to **Bethlehem**

RICHARD TINKER

Our bus traveled south from Jerusalem and headed toward the wall. We stopped while young soldiers with guns slung casually over their shoulders checked our passports.

*O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.*

Our Jewish guide was replaced with a

Palestinian Christian, and we were allowed to proceed. Soon we were walking toward the entrance of the ancient Church of the Nativity and the probable place where God revealed himself as a baby.

*For Christ is born of Mary,
and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.*

We joined hundreds of other pilgrims waiting to see the garish silver star that marks the traditional epicenter of that greatest of gifts. I maneuvered my wheel-chair-bound friend around the crowd to the back entrance and soon found ourselves in the tiny room watching as the travelers bowed to honor that holy place.

*How silently, how silently,
the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His Heav'n.*

As we left the crowds and clamor and moved back out to Manger Square and our waiting bus, the wailing of loudspeakers calling Muslims to prayer echoed across the darkening hills; the same place where shepherds heard angels sing two thousand years ago. I silently prayed that Jesus would reveal himself again in this place.

*O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today.*

The good news is that we can receive the gift today that was announced that Christmas evening. Jesus came to save people from their sins. He died in our place. He was raised and now intercedes for us in heaven!

*We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!*

Put your faith in Jesus now by believing and trusting Him and receive the greatest gift this Christmas.

A year of praise

This past year has been an exciting adventure in trusting and following God, and doors are being opened for expanded ministry opportunities this next year.

We praise God for many of you who value and support this work with your gifts and prayers. As the economy has become less predictable, you have kept giving. Please pray that we will end the year financially and spiritually healthy—we so desperately want this ministry to honor God and bring glory to Him.

We are busy planning what we think will be the best Former Adventist Fellowship Weekend yet. We've added two more meetings with the last meeting scheduled on Sunday morning, including a farewell lunch after church. Make sure to sign up now to ensure a space. We have room for only 150 participants again this year.

In this issue

In this issue **Chris Badenhorst** explains his personal commitment to contending for the gospel revealed in Jesus. **Paul Carden** explains his commitment to the work of apologetics and to protecting the body of Christ from the cults. **Dale Ratzlaff** reveals God's faithfulness to find and treasure the lost as demonstrated in Luke 15. **Colleen Tinker** shares her reflections on our recent trip to Israel and to seeing Bethlehem, and **Barbra Schaak** praises God for her journey of faith.

May you discover the hope that was born in Bethlehem as you read this issue. †

Put your faith in Jesus now by believing and trusting Him and receive the greatest gift this Christmas.

Proclamation!

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Why repeat the Gospel?

Question: Why do you keep repeating your understanding of the gospel?

Answer: In this world of good and evil there is a vitally important principle that often flies unseen on our radar screen. Like smart bombs from a stealth bomber, this devastating principle may produce obvious results, but we may not notice its source. This deadly reality affects all of life.

To illustrate, recently I rototilled our garden area, and Carolyn planted beets, peas and transplanted a row of little broccoli plants. Three days later she informed me that the beets were up. I went out to look at them the next day, and I could not find any. They were all gone. The same thing happened with the peas. The broccoli plants, though, were doing well. A day or two later, however, the quail came and started eating them. Carolyn read in a garden book that a

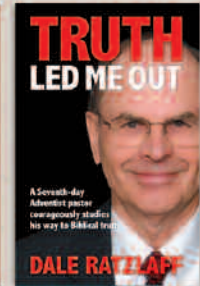
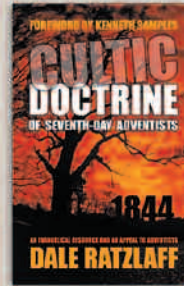
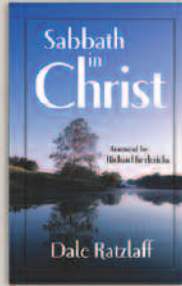
Without persistent, intentional defense and declaration of the gospel, subtle invaders from all sides will chip away peoples' awareness of the simple, distinctive truth that the Lord Jesus' life, death, and resurrection eternally secured the salvation of all those who believe.

special organic garlic spray would keep the birds from eating the plants. We ordered it and sprayed the broccoli as per instructions. We found too late that crickets love newly sprouted beets and peas—and quail really enjoy garlic-flavored broccoli. We were faced with either declaring war on the bugs and birds or letting the garden idea go for this fall.

Students used to be taught to be honest and not cheat on tests. Over time, however, cheating has increased dramatically. According to Google, 83% of college students in China cheat on examinations. More than 75% of college students in the USA admitted to cheating. What will happen to society as these cheating students become the CEOs of large corporations, political leaders, and, dare we say, church leaders? Sadly, just look around!

The law of entropy says that in the physical universe things left to themselves will become less organized and more random—everything over time unravels toward disorganization and sameness.

Without persistent, intentional defense and declaration of the gospel, subtle invaders from all sides will chip away peoples' awareness of the simple, distinctive truth that the

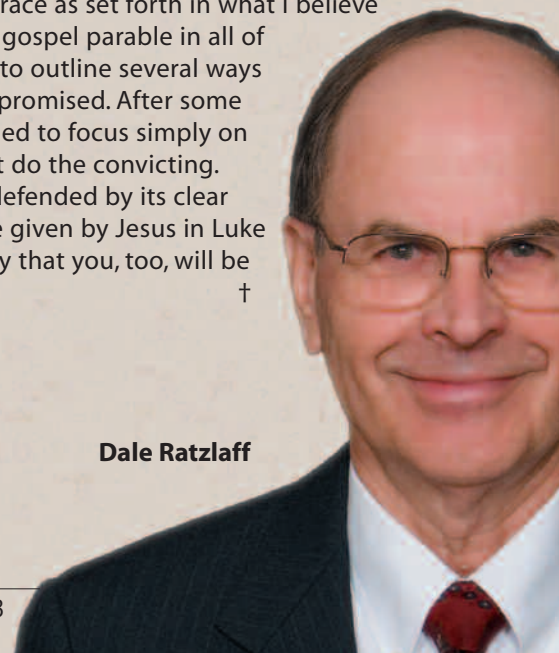


More answers can be found in Dale Ratzlaff's four books available on the web at LifeAssuranceMinistries.com or by phoning (800) 355-7073.

Lord Jesus' life, death, and resurrection eternally secured the salvation of all those who believe.

As I write this our pastor is teaching contextually through the book of Judges where the cycle of spiritual entropy is repeated seven times. Israel enjoyed God's blessings. Over time, however, they would forget God, start to worship idols, and God would strengthen their enemies who then would enslave Israel. After some time of enslavement, Israel, in repentance, would cry out to God. God would then raise up a judge who would take God at His word and help Israel defeat its enemies—and again there would be a period of time during which Israel would worship the true God and enjoy peace in the land. This cycle is repeated over and over again—in Judges, in Israel, in the history of the church, and in the church's understanding of the gospel.

In this issue of *Proclamation!* I have endeavored to peer into the depth of God's grace as set forth in what I believe to be the most profound gospel parable in all of Scripture. I was planning to outline several ways the simple gospel is compromised. After some thought, however, I decided to focus simply on the gospel itself and let it do the convicting. Often truth can be best defended by its clear presentation. The parable given by Jesus in Luke 15 is a case in point. I pray that you, too, will be blessed by its study. †



Dale Ratzlaff



Journey from fear to faith

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BARBRA CREW SCHAAK

Within the march of a few years we have journeyed from a works-based religion toward a new belief system based on faith. The path from works to faith has not been smooth. Menacing boulders blocked our way; we stumbled and fell, but bruised and battered, continued on, mindful of God's watchful hand guiding each stumbling step.

Faith is simple, direct, and necessary. A belief in works is neither simple nor direct. It requires an energetic and often slavish capacity to follow a variety of rules, laws, and mandates regardless of understanding.

Throughout the course of our personal journey, faith has been the ultimate goal. We have tried to duplicate the prayer of the New Testament father whose son was cruelly possessed by demons as he answers Jesus saying, "I do believe; help me in my unbelief" (Mark 9:24 *New American Standard Bible*.)

In the past, our family faithfully (see how mindlessly I tossed that word out) attended church services each Sabbath in a small downtown Seventh-day Adventist church and could be counted upon to participate in all aspects of church faithfulness (yes, there is that word again) from filling church offices doing anything from teaching tiny tots or teens, to church elder, and most responsibilities in between. We faithfully (yes, our word once more) took our four sons to church, and when they seemed of an age to understand the concept, celebrated their desire for baptism into the "true" church. We were good Old Testament Christians, having a sparse, but not a working identification with the New Testament covenant of faith, a concept we did not fully comprehend.

It seems strange now, that with our feet firmly planted in works, we clung to the faith text of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that anyone who believes in him should have eternal life." (*The Living Bible*) Looking back we realize that the true message of faith and belief in this text eluded us.

This had long been our church—our faith. It was the church to which my grandmother had taken me as a child—the denomination into which my husband had been born. We had learned to accept it as the "true" church. After all, we felt it was necessary to understand and to obey all of God's many commandments.

There were pitfalls—our salvation was purchased by what we did, said, and thought. To achieve this required diligence—a careful watchfulness of each thought and action, a daunting if not impossible task. We bought all the "prophecy" books and tried to understand the E.G. White philosophy of salvation through obedience and works. We poured through the religion's periodicals without finding any understanding of God's purpose for salvation. We simply had to *work* harder.

Halting steps toward faith

Our first halting steps away from works and toward faith came as the membership grew out of the tiny downtown church, and a "building project" was begun. Denominational fundraisers descended upon the little congregation; families were separated, and the husbands were pressured into signing a pre-determined monetary pledge for the building fund.

About a mile from home he was struck and killed by a drunk driver. Life as we had known it was over. Survival was unquestionably impossible without this eighteen-year-old ray of sunshine. Devastation settled in upon our entire family.

There was simply no way we could meet our assigned “pledge” amount and also obtain the basic necessities of life. We had four children to feed, clothe, and send to church school on one salary; money was beyond tight. I was taking education classes at a nearby university hoping to avoid returning to the secretarial jobs I had previously held.

The specter of this wretched pledge made financial stability impossible. We could never work hard enough or cut back enough to cover all necessities and also keep up with the seemingly “mandated by God” enormous pledge payments. Depression set in. Our eternal fate was sealed. We knew from our Old Testament and E.G. White studies that God would hold us in default of this pledge. There was no way out. A large tear began to make an insidious rip in our religious armor.

When I received my teaching credential, I accepted a position teaching in a small church school two hundred miles away, since there were no openings close to home. Faith was tried once again. My husband left his secure job of fifteen years, and we sold our home so that we could take advantage of this opportunity and God’s leading. We moved. The family dynamics reversed for a time, and we found ourselves once again existing on one salary—this time mine. At the time, women in denominational employ would not be considered “head of the household” and thus were paid on a separate and lower scale than men. I also found that I was the only state-credentialed teacher in the school, but there was mandated religious and E.G. White coursework necessary to obtain the denominational credential required by the church. Since my degree was from a state university, I could not continue teaching in the Adventist school without it. Our financial hardships continued, and the old pledge remained a huge, darkly-ominous mountain.

In the midst of this financial uncertainty, the unthinkable happened. At the close of my fifth year at the school, I lost my job! No reason was given—just termination. Looking back, I’m sure my firing was in part precipitated by my stubborn determination not to march in the lock-step pattern preferred by denominational education, and also by my habit of treating all children as valuable individuals, regardless of their financial situation. We were certain now that God had utterly forsaken us, most probably due to that unpaid but far-from-forgotten pledge.

Unthinkable tragedy

Time passed, and to our surprise, complete disaster did not materialize. My husband took and passed the contractor’s license test and opened his own business. I substitute-taught for a year and finally took a position teaching eighth grade English at a middle school only a mile from home. Life seemed to be improving; did this mean that God was no longer angry with us?

Barbra Schaak married Hugh, the love of her life, after her first year at La Sierra College. After their four sons were born she earned her teaching credential at Cal Poly University and spent more than two decades teaching eighth grade English, journalism, and photography and working with writing curricula before spending five years teaching a GED class at a California State men’s prison. Retired now, Barbra and her husband raise African Gray parrots and enjoy their eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

It was then that unthinkable tragedy struck. Our youngest son had attended a New Year’s Eve party when he decided he was not having any fun. So in his typical pattern of acting first and thinking second, he started for home—a walk of about five miles in the middle of the night as his car was safely tucked away at home. About a mile from home he was struck and killed by a drunk driver.

Life as we had known it was over. Survival was unquestionably impossible without this eighteen-year-old ray of sunshine. Devastation settled in upon our entire family.

We cried, our brains numb. I, seemingly alone, shook my fist at God and announced that He had made a BIG mistake. We received sympathy cards from people who had no concept of our pain. We were given plaques with cute sayings—and took another huge step backwards from THE CHURCH, wondering about the reality of a God who could allow this cherished life to be taken, and the validity of our life-long belief system. Our religious armor suffered an even larger breach.

One moment stands out from the mind-numbing pain of the weeks following our son’s death. On my way home in the car, I could not see the road. Tears streaming down my face completely obscured my vision. Pulling to the side of the road, I cut the engine. I don’t remember what I said, whether I spoke aloud or silently, but I questioned my son’s salvation and our eternal life.

The answer came immediately as an audible voice, resonating loud and clear through my anguished brain. “But that is why I died, my silly child.”

It was at once comforting and bewildering but spoke against much of my previous belief. I had always known that if we died with unconfessed sins, we were lost forever. Rob had left the party in anger and couldn’t have had an opportunity to ask forgiveness. This voice from God served to propel me another large step further away from our church of works, opening my mind to new ideas, and widening the gap in the religious armor.

A new message

We soon dropped our church affiliation and became “backsliders.” We were members of no church, and yet we felt the tug of longing to belong. I refused to attend the


CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



protecting the faith given to us

CHRIS BADENHORST





Often former Adventists are asked why they don't just "leave Adventism alone." Everyone is free to believe whatever he or she wants to believe, they say, but no one has the right to criticize that which they don't believe. To which we reply, because Adventism claims to be called of God to proclaim its unique 1844 message to Christendom and the world, it thereby opens its message to criticism from other Christians and non-Christians. After I left Adventism I read enough of other world religions to come to some definite conclusions concerning this matter of religion.

World Religions

Firstly, I will make the following comments with world religions in mind. In my investigations I found that all world beliefs concerning God are divided into two main categories: 1) The first category is based upon man's inquiry into God and his explanation of God. 2) The second is based upon God's revelation of Himself to man. Thus we have rationalization about God versus revelation by God.

Rationalization

In this worldview, man is at the center investigating God so as to understand and explain Him. We may call this paradigm "man-centered inquiry," which has resulted in different concepts about God based on man's speculations about Him. These in turn have resulted in all the different religions in the world. It has been said that "religion" constitutes man's efforts to understand and explain God. These speculations of man about God, however, are like an ant's attempt to understand a human being by speculating about him! It cannot be done. It is even more impossible for finite man to try and comprehend the infinite God by speculating about Him. Yet for thousands of years all kinds of people, particularly sages and philosophers, have done a lot of thinking and speculating about God—yielding nothing more than different theories about God. These theories, however, cannot constitute a firm foundation upon which to base life's decisions for the simple reason they all differ one from the other. So, unless God makes Himself known to man, man's efforts to understand and explain God are all futile.

Revelation

In this paradigm God is at the center making Himself known to man. We may call this phenomenon "God-centered revelation." Whereas man's speculations about God are but human theories and therefore unreliable, God's self-revelation to man alone is trustworthy. Classic Christianity falls into the category of revelation because it is based on God's revelation of Himself to man—a revelation given to His chosen prophets and apostles and recorded by them in the Bible. Christianity, therefore, claims that God has acted to make His mind and will known and that this revelation has authority over human lives. "Know" is therefore a New Testament keyword, and "We know" is a recurring New Testament phrase. So, according to the New Testament writers, Christians know God—His attributes, His work, His will and His ways, because they have received revelation from Him concerning these divine aspects which are recorded in the Bible. Christianity is therefore a revelation-based faith and as such is fundamentally different from all other world religions.

Furthermore, according to the New Testament writers, God has ultimately and finally acted and spoken through what Jesus did and said (Heb. 1:1-3). He has made known to His chosen apostles the secret of His eternal plan "which he purposed in Christ" (Eph. 1:9-11; Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:6-11). These apostles in turn proclaimed this divine revelation "not in words taught...by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). Christians receive this revelation from the writings of the apostles as "the word of God" (1 Thes. 2:13), "the trustworthy message" (Tit. 1:9), "sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1), "the truth" (2 Tim. 4:4; 2 Thes. 2:10, 12, 13). Thus have they gained sure, certain, and trustworthy knowledge of God's mind. They, in turn, proclaim this revelation to the world in obedience to the Great Commission given them by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19, 20). On the other hand, the non-Christian religions can at best only offer man their different speculations about God and some moral rules to live by for the benefit of society.


The Claims of Jesus

This brings us to the unique and explicit claims of the historic Jesus. Because He was the true Creator-God in human form, He made claims concerning His person and His mission that no other founder of a religious system ever did—not Mohammed, not Confucius, not Buddha, not Hare Krishna—except Ellen Gould White, the founder and prophetess of Seventh-day Adventism! We will consider her claim later. What were these claims of Jesus? He claimed to be the bread of life, the light of the world, the giver of eternal life, the forgiver of sins, the Judge of the world, Lord and God! By these claims Jesus has put Himself in a category altogether distinct from all other religious founders. Because of His claims, Jesus has always been the proverbial fly in the ointment to the adherents of other religions and is more so today than ever before. The "offense" of Jesus has resulted in the persecution of His followers by the adherents of these religions from the very beginning. But committed Christians not only proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus as the only true God and Savior, they also refuse to compromise their proclamation for the sake of peaceful co-existence with the adherents of the other world religions.

Concerning the claims of Jesus, C. S. Lewis said: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make a choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (From *Mere Christianity*).

Conclusion

Thus we conclude that Jesus of Nazareth and the Bible that testifies of Him are the two indispensable pillars of the Christian faith. When you take these away, God becomes an insurmountable problem. Hebrews 1:1 states: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers



through the prophets at many times and in various ways. These “speakings” constitute the Old Testament. “But in these last days he (God) has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:2). “Son” in this text refers to Jesus of Nazareth; it excludes Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Hare Krishna, and all other modern prophets or messiahs including Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, Mary Eddy Baker, and Ellen Gould White.

So, according to Hebrews 1:1, 2, those who heard Jesus speak, heard God Himself speak. These words of God incarnate have been recorded for humanity by some of His chosen apostles in the four Gospels which constitute part of the New Testament. These are the words committed Christians proclaim to the world, including the adherents of its different religions.

E. G. White

But what did E. G. White claim for herself? In a statement alluding to Hebrews 1:1, 2 she states: “In ancient times, God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days, He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit... The Lord has seen fit to give me a view of the needs and errors of His people” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 66). By “the testimonies of His Spirit” Mrs. White refers to her own prophetic ministry. This is clear from the context.

To grasp the enormity of her claim we need to look at Hebrews 1:1, 2 again. It states: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” This Scripture declares that God has in these last days spoken to us by His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Mrs. White, however, declares that (since 1844) she has been chosen for this task of speaking for God. The enormity of this claim is staggering; the results far reaching!

This claim of Ellen White’s is the demonic trap in which Adventists are ensnared. Her foundational authority underlying their worldview is the reason they can’t see the clear light of the Gospel shining from the Scriptures. Paul states: “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:3, 4). Because Adventists have been taught to read the Scriptures with understandings derived from E. G. White’s interpretations, they cannot see the glorious gospel. As I was told while still an Adventist, to read the Bible without the insights gleaned from E. G. White is to expose oneself to demonic deception. Even those younger Adventists who are not so steeped in White’s writings are still taught to read Scripture with an “inside interpretation” derived from Ellen White—even though they are not told their theology derives from her. This is deception!

The Bible

Over the years I have come to see the Bible as not merely “infallible”—reliable for primary doctrine yet containing error—but as “inerrant”. I accept the Bible as containing the ultimate revelation of God, His will, and His purpose. In its pages I have come to know Jehovah—the true God. It is therefore the absolute authority for creed and conduct to me. As such it gives me consistency in what to believe and how to live. As a result I observe God-taught standards

and restraints in my living and in my relationships with others. I also implicitly trust God’s promises as given in the Bible. Furthermore, in the clear light of Bible certainties, I live out my days free from uncertainty, doubt, fear and despair. The person who reads his Bible, therefore, knows what God did, what He does, and what He will do as well as what He commands and what He promises. Where else can we go to learn God’s will and purposes? Which other world religion has this much to offer its adherents?

Furthermore, the Bible needs no external commentary except the Holy Spirit to clarify its meaning (1 Jn 2:27). No “lesser light” (EGW) can add anything except confusion to our understanding of God’s clear revelation of Himself in His word. In my own experience I have found that where the Bible is proclaimed as God’s inerrant revelation of truth and where it is accepted as authoritative, believers are fully committed to God, they grow spiritually, and their faith is lived with power. Where the Bible is not so proclaimed, or where it is qualified by interpretations from extra-biblical sources, faith withers and eventually dies.

Thus can we say that Jesus the God-man, His authoritative word—the Bible, and His committed followers—Christians made alive and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14; 2:1-7) constitute a trilogy that is fundamentally distinct from all other religious founders, their religious writings, and followers. All the religions in the world can be grouped together without effecting a radical difference. Not so with Christianity. Only Christianity, unfettered by modern prophets or authoritative extra-biblical commentaries, promulgates a filial relationship with Jehovah God. All other religions only offer man their theories about God and a set of rules to define so-called “holy” living.

To be sure, there are many religions with their moral codes and attractive lifestyles in the world, but there is only one true God and Savior—Jesus Christ the Lord (Acts 4:12; 1 Jn. 4:14). There is only one final word from God revealing Himself to humanity—the Lord Jesus (Heb. 1:2). And all this has been recorded for humanity in the Bible—the one and only written revelation of God and of His will.

Adventism

Having commented in general about religion, I will now do so in particular with Adventism in mind. Because the Bible clearly states that its testimony concerning the Lord Jesus is all we need as God’s revelation to us, I can only conclude that all other prophetic voices and belief systems must be false. For this reason I cannot remain silent on the subject of Adventism. My loved ones within Adventism must have the opportunity to see how their worldview is shaped, not by the Bible but by the rationalization (as opposed to revelation) of their religion based on an extra-biblical “continuing and authoritative source of truth”—Ellen White (Fundamental Belief #18, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd ed., Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 2005, p. 247).

For example, here are two indisputable facts concerning Adventism’s foundational and cardinal doctrine—its unique 1844 sanctuary message (*The Great Controversy*, p. 409): 1) It cannot be substantiated from the Bible alone but only from the writings of EGW. 2) It is not compatible with the New Testament gospel but very much opposed to it.

Regarding the first point, we need to be on our guard when Adventist ministers say they only preach from the Bible. In reality they do preach from the Bible—but only as interpreted by Ellen White. She is the inspired interpreter of God’s Word for the people (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 66). Adventists do not trust the Holy Spirit alone to teach individuals what the Bible means. They believe God has given EGW the correct meaning and that she in turn has passed it on to her followers.

The explanation for this assumption is the same as that given by Roman Catholicism: the Bible is difficult to understand. One needs but look at the Babylonian confusion in Christendom with its many different denominations that are all based on the same Bible! Adventism, however, has the answer for that confusion: God explained the Bible to E. G. White. Without her the Adventist Church would be part of that confusion. Because of her prophetic ministry, however, Adventists, as God’s true Remnant, alone understand the Bible correctly.

Without Mrs. White Adventists cannot prove that Daniel 8:14 means 2300 full days, that these evening-morning sacrifices equal years, that the word to restore and build Jerusalem was the decree of a Persian king, that the 490 years are cut off from the 2300 period, that Daniel 8:14 has anything to do with cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of God’s people or an investigative judgment. There is no biblical proof for the significance of the year 1844 or for the work that traditional Adventism claims happened on October 22, 1844. To therefore determine the date 1844 and the theology associated with it, Adventism must engage in a lengthy chain of reasoning which again and again makes unproved assumptions and leaps across great chasms of nonexistent evidence. All this is so complicated that not one Adventist in a thousand could begin to give a rational biblical explanation for it. Most are content to believe it on the strength of Mrs. White’s assertions.

We emphasize again that Adventism’s cardinal doctrine can only be proved by an extra-biblical authority—that of E. G. White. Many honest Adventist scholars have admitted this fact. Yet, despite this fact, Adventists expect ordinary Christians from other denominations and the unchurched to believe and accept their 1844 doctrine which they cannot prove for themselves from the Bible! Because of this confusion, Adventism has now published its own unique paraphrase of the Bible, *The Clear Word*, in which its unique 1844 doctrine is “explained” and made clear!

Regarding the second point above, Adventism’s 1844 theology is fundamentally different from the New Testament gospel and therefore is not compatible with it. When one reads the early documents by the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, it is clear they did not grasp the New Testament Gospel and its implications. For example, they clearly stated that Christ did not make the atonement on the cross. A statement by Uriah Smith is typical: “Christ did not make the atonement when he shed his blood upon the cross. Let this fact be fixed forever in the mind” (*The Sanctuary and the Twenty-Three Hundred Days of Daniel VIII*, 14, p. 276). They were just as bold in saying that Christ makes the atonement in heaven and that this is an ongoing ministry that began on October 22, 1844 (*The Great Controversy*, p. 420-422).

On the other hand, when one examines the New Testament statements about the gospel, they clearly indicate a historical event that is done and finished. For example, Christ’s last words on the cross triumphantly announced, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). This record states that He has made atonement for sin (Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 2:2; Heb. 1:3b), destroyed death (2 Tim 1:10) and defeated the devil (Heb 2:14). It also states that He has been raised from the dead and has taken His place as Lord of all at God’s right hand (Matt 28:18; Acts 2:34-36; Rom 8:34). It further states that man’s lost dominion has been restored in this one Man who reigns over all principalities and powers (1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-22; 1 Pet 3:22).

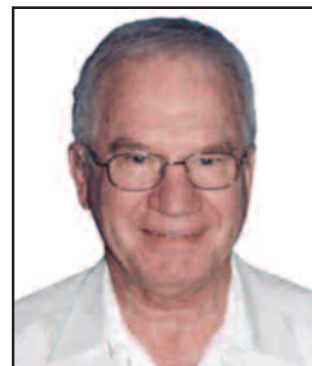
The gospel therefore proclaims Christ’s death and resurrection for our salvation. This good news is clear and certain. There is nothing obscure about the Christ event. Jesus of Nazareth was God’s Son. He lived a sinless life, died on the cross for us, and rose from the dead to represent us at God’s right hand. The man who believes this in his heart is forgiven, is given the Holy Spirit by whom he is born again and adopted into God’s family (Acts 10:45; Rom 10:17; Gal 3:1-3). Thus is he saved to eternal life.

But what can be said about the 1844 “event”? It rests on one solitary Old Testament text of Scripture—Daniel 8:14. There is no New Testament confirmation of either the date 1844 or the “new” phase of Christ’s work that was supposed to have begun on this date. In Adventism the simplicity and clarity of the New Testament Gospel concerning Jesus and His finished work of redemption is concealed in a fog of the vaguest kind of reasoning. Furthermore, the whole idea of Christ beginning His redemptive ministry in heaven on October 22, 1844, by means of the “final” atonement is inimical to the New Testament affirmation of a once for all final atonement by Christ on the cross and once for all committed to the saints.

Is it any wonder that in 160 years, Adventists have never been able to convince a single recognized evangelical Bible scholar that their unique interpretation of Daniel 8:14 is worthy of a second thought? This doctrine is an elaborate apocalyptic conundrum and exegetical monstrosity to which Adventism clings because it is the denomination’s only unique doctrine. It alone justifies the existence of Adventism as an organization with a “special” message and mission. This is why I say that Adventism’s 1844 theology is fundamentally different from the New Testament Gospel and therefore incompatible with it.

For these reasons I must “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude:3). It is a matter of life and death. †

Chris Badenhorst is a retired civil engineering technician who still works part time on one of South Africa’s oil refineries in the city of Durban on the east coast. He is married with three step-children and one grandchild. His wife is also a former Adventist who shares his enthusiasm for the gospel of God’s grace. Although they are not members of a particular denomination, they attend a local Baptist church for worship and fellowship.





False teachings addressed

in **Africa**

PAUL CARDEN

Editor's Note: On September 27, 2008, Paul Carden of the Centers for Apologetics Research (CFAR) introduced the Africa Center for Apologetics Research (ACFAR) at a fundraising dinner held in Santa Ana, California, to help launch the new organization. Paul gave a short speech to open the evening, and we share it below because it vividly shows the international need for Christian apologetics and materials to equip missionaries and church leaders to inform people of the truth and to protect unsuspecting or vulnerable Christians from the ubiquitous lure of false religions and cults. Following his speech, Paul showed a video explaining in greater detail the problems the church faces in Africa, specifically naming Seventh-day Adventism.

Currently, Life Assurance Ministries is working with CFAR to provide both pamphlets and Dale Ratzlaff's books to help local pastors and CFAR missionaries, especially in Africa, to explain Adventism and to help keep people from becoming drawn into it by its deceptive evangelism. We are grateful to be working with Paul Carden and CFAR, combining our efforts to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to all the saints" (Jude 3).

Around the world, and especially in the developing world and the post-communist world, dozens—arguably hundreds—of cultic groups are sending tens of thousands of missionaries and spending millions of dollars to empty our churches, to confound the work of the Great Commission and take people captive. In the New Testament we have an apostolic imperative that does not give us the liberty or the luxury to ignore what is taking place on the mission field. Instead, we are commanded to defend the faith once for all delivered unto the saints, to guard the gospel, to protect the Body of Christ, and, at the same time—almost paradoxically—to reach out in love to the people who have been placed in bondage by these groups.

In 1980 I began working for the late Walter Martin—founder of the Christian Research Institute, author of *The Kingdom of the Cults*. In 1981 he sent me to Africa for three months. What I learned in teaching and speaking in Kenya,

Malawi, and Zimbabwe forever changed my life, because I saw firsthand the desperate need for agencies like the Christian Research Institute in the developing world.

Two years later, Walter Martin sent me to Brazil for nine months—which ultimately became six years! I saw firsthand that such an organization can be put together, by the grace of God, outside the United States, and it can make a tremendous change in the dynamic of dealing with cults and false teachings. After establishing such a center in Brazil, in 1993 I facilitated the establishment of the Center for Apologetics Research in St. Petersburg, Russia; later we launched one in Budapest, Hungary, and still later in Kyiv, Ukraine.

But why Africa?

Some of you know the name Philip Jenkins. Some of you realize that the geographic center of Christianity is shifting

southward. It is no longer in North America; it is no longer in Western Europe; it is now in places like Africa. In his book *The Next Christendom* (Oxford, 2002), Jenkins explains that since 1965, when the number of people who identified themselves as Christians in Africa was about a quarter of the population, that number has grown today to nearly half the continent—a fact which is quite astonishing.

Let me go from the macro to what might relatively be the micro—let me talk about Uganda. By the middle of the 21st century there will be more self-described Christians in Uganda than in nations like Germany or Britain. By some estimates, by mid-century Uganda could have more active church members than the four or five largest countries in Europe combined. This is a country the size of Oregon! And this reality is something that we must address.

Why CFAR? Why Africa? Why now?

In 2006 an American missionary invited me to come to Uganda to investigate the possibility of starting a ministry like CFAR. Now, as indicated by what I just told you, the objective facts have been in front of us for years, but we were missing some key ingredients that would make it possible to begin another Center for Apologetics Research in that part of the world. In addition to an extraordinary depth of need in Uganda—a country that has had the bitterest of experiences with cults and false teachings—I found in meeting not only with cult leaders but also with denominational leaders, ministry leaders—Anglicans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Calvary Chapel—across the board, the nearly unanimous response was: we need this kind of ministry in East Africa now.

Another criterion was met by God's grace. We needed a partner ministry, and God provided the Kampala Evangelical School of Theology: started by Ugandans with the cooperation of John Stott, led by Ugandans, a nondenominational organization that has as one of its fundamental purposes the combating of error, including organized heresies like the cults. This is an extraordinary thing.

And finally: you can have all the other things in place, all the other elements in front of you, but if you do not have someone who is called, someone who is competent, someone who has character to lead the ministry, you will go nowhere. And in John Divito, God has provided the person to start the work of the African Center.

I just want to briefly describe a couple of encounters. One of them was with David Zac Niringiye, who is the assistant bishop of Kampala. [CFAR Africa missionary] John Divito and I met him in his office in All Saints Anglican Cathedral there in the capital. It was very interesting, because we had a very busy schedule, and people were saying, "You have to meet with Bishop Zac!" So we contacted him; his secretary made an appointment for us, and we found ourselves at All Saints, in his office, awaiting his arrival—and marveling, really, at the tremendous collection of books on his walls. This man is at the center of ecclesiastical power in Uganda and seems to lack for nothing. So it was quite

remarkable when he entered the room and said, "I hope you know I'm a very busy man. But when they told me the subject was cults, I knew I had to make time for you."

We explained why we were there, and he explained his perception of the situation with cults. Then he told us a story: "One day a young woman, one of my parishioners, came to my office and said, 'What do you know about the Mormons?'" He replied, "They're a cult!" And she said, "My sister's about to marry one." And then she asked, "What can you give me?"

And he looked us right in the eye and said, "I did not have even a tract to put in her hand." This was his illustration of the absurd level of want in Uganda.



I have to make it clear to you: the majority of pastors in Africa have little or no theological training; in many cases, they do not even own a Bible in their own first language. And if they have a problem with a cult, with an aberrant Christian group, with a false teaching that's sweeping in either from the United States or springing up from their own soil, there's no agency to which they can turn today for information and counsel.

The other encounter I would describe to you is this: after John spoke at the Wednesday night service at Calvary Chapel Kampala, we went to our literature table. Young men and women swarmed that table to get information on the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses in both English and Swahili. And I will not forget the young man who came up to me with tears, pleading, "Please, start this Center as soon as you can."

To hear and see African Christian leaders describe the toll that cults and false teachings are taking on the Body of Christ and on the work of the Great Commission is a life-changing experience. It is our prayer that we will do all we can, by God's grace, to change that equation and equip the Body of Christ to resist the deception of false gospels. †

Paul Carden is the executive director of the Centers for Apologetics Research (CFAR) and has devoted nearly 30 years of his life to cult-related research and outreach. He joined the Christian Research Institute (CRI) in 1980 under its founder, Walter Martin, and worked for CRI for 15 years. For six of those years he served as a missionary in Brazil, and for six years he co-hosted the live, nationwide "Bible Answer Man" broadcast. Paul is also a general editor for Rose Publishing. He and his wife, Lisa, live in Orange County, California, and have four children.



This man receives **sinners**

DALE RATZLAFF

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” So He told them this parable, saying... Luke 15:1–3

One of the easiest sections of Scripture from which a hurried pastor can craft an acceptable sermon is Luke 15. Yet buried within this remarkable story are insights that challenge the most experienced exegete. The truths in this section expand our understanding of the security of the believer, the tireless saving activity of God, and the hilarious joy of the heavenly host for one sinner who repents.

This account is indeed one story, but the three parts—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—must be compared, contrasted, and studied individually to get the weight of the profound truth in this passage. The shepherd loses just one sheep out of the hundred: only a one percent loss. The woman loses one of her ten treasured coins: a ten percent loss. The father is faced with the heart-breaking loss of one of two sons: a 50 percent loss. There is an increasing crescendo of tragedy as the story moves from sheep to coin to son.

When we consider the causes of lostness we gain insight into the breadth of the human condition. The sheep just imperceptibly wandered away. The coin was lost through no fault of its own; rather, it was lost by the carelessness of a sloppy householder. The son was driven by selfish desires, choosing to leave home and going his own merry way. One can almost feel the knife that was thrust through the heart of the father as he watched his rebellious but beloved son disappear down the dusty road of self-will.

Perhaps the overriding truth communicated in this parable is the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. This seems to be the driving thrust of this three-part story, for it answers in the most profound and picturesque way the grumbling comment of the Scribes and Pharisees who, in their disgust, would not even utter the name of Jesus: “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Yes, indeed! “This Man” does receive sinners, and that is the true gospel and our only hope. Further, “This Man”—Jesus Christ—is the exact representation of the Father.¹

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Lk. 5:32).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (Jn. 3:16, 17).

The Lost Sheep

What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!” I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Lk. 15:4–7).

The parable seems deceptively simple. Jesus could have answered the grumbling Jews straightforwardly, but such an answer would not have touched their leathery souls. So, as only the Master of communication could do, he responded by showing the close parallel between what He was doing in seeking a lost soul and what a Jewish shepherd would do in the case of a missing sheep. “What man of you...” Jesus draws both a parallel and a contrast between the way He receives sinners and the way a good Jewish shepherd would search for a lost sheep. As the story continues, however, it becomes evident that the word picture painted by the Master does not fit any Hebrew shepherd of the day. It can only apply to the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.²

Few astute business persons would risk 99% of their capital—the shepherd left 99 of his sheep in the open pasture—to recover the 1% that was lost. The motivation that drove the shepherd to search for the wayward sheep was not so much a selfish concern for capital as the welfare of the sheep. Soon it would be dark, and the hungry coyotes and marauding lions would be prowling for their evening meal.

Consider why the sheep became lost. It was not rebelling against the will of the shepherd. It was not trying to leave the flock. Sheep are mentally “near sighted.” When one tuft of grass is gone, the sheep moves to the next a step or two away. Unconsciously, without considering the consequences of each incremental movement away from the flock, it finds itself lost and unable to discover the way back to the fold.

Without doubt the most assuring sentence in this part of the story is that the Shepherd searched for the sheep *until he found it*. This short declaration continues to provide active hope to many a worried believer who has seen a loved one wander away step by step. This hope, which we see now by faith, is reality founded on the grace, mercy and love of God.³

What does the Shepherd do when He finds His sheep? First, note what he does not do. There is no condemnation,⁴ no threat,⁵ no scolding or beating.⁶ The Shepherd lifts the sheep to his shoulder, rejoicing! If you have wandered away from God, meditate on this story and let the good news of the simple gospel penetrate deeply into your soul. It is not the details of how or when one drifted away or even how far away from God’s flock one may have wandered that counts. Rather, the focus of our attention should be on the loving heart of God who searches until he finds the lost and carries them back rejoicing!

And when the Shepherd comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!”

It becomes obvious that the story of the rejoicing shepherd transcends—perhaps even contrasts—the reality of shepherding. I once worked for my cousin who had a few

sheep that were fenced in an area of lush green grass with a watering trough—an area which, from my perspective, should have provided a comfortable home for the sheep. Many times, however, my first morning assignment was to get the sheep back into the pen, find where they had escaped, and fix the spot. Often they had somehow managed to squeeze under the fence without any visible problem with the fence. This scenario repeated day after day as I rounded up the stray sheep and “fixed” the fence. I must say that my attitude was not one of rejoicing! Rather, I developed a certain disdain for such dumb animals that to this day colors my concept of sheep.

We see, then, that Jesus used the parallels of this story to build a bridge of communication with the Pharisees, who had a manifest disdain for sinners, much as I felt for the wayward sheep under my care. As the story progresses, however, Jesus moves from parallels to contrasts. The shepherd calls for a party—not because he had fixed the fence so the sheep could not get out again; not because he had recaptured the 1% of his capital, but only because He had found His sheep which was lost. He had rescued it from the jaws of the lion that prowls around seeking to devour.⁷ Then, to drive home the truth of how God feels about the sinner who comes to Christ, we read:

I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

In saying this, Jesus is in no way diminishing God’s love for the righteous. We will see this in the last part of the story. Nevertheless, when something or someone is lost, it captures our attention, and its very lostness multiplies its value. Many years ago I had a little pocketknife with many blades that I treasured. There was really nothing unique about it, but I had carried it for many years and hundreds of miles while backpacking. One day it was missing. I searched

for it long and hard. I could have purchased another, but it would not have filled the treasured place in my pocket that the old knife had filled. Some weeks later I found the lost knife with great joy.

The Lost Coin

This little story only provides a hint at the multiplication of the value of a lost person. As this one parable unfolds its three parts, our Lord allows us to peer into the recesses of God’s love—a love that risks for our redemption.

Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!” In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:8–10).

Jesus now broadens the scope and application of the parable. In the first section dealing with the shepherd, He asked, “What man of you...” He now says, “Or, what woman...” Further, the story moves from the animate sheep, which inadvertently wandered away, to the inanimate coin which was lost by the carelessness of the householder. In the parable of the lost sheep we noted a progressive transformation of the identity of shepherd: from a contemporary Hebrew shepherd to the Good Shepherd who only could be the Lord Jesus Christ.⁸ In the same fashion, the careless woman householder who searched until she found the lost coin is a symbol for God who searches diligently for the lost person.

While God has given to each a measure of faith,⁹ opened wide the door of salvation,¹⁰ and desires all persons to be saved,¹¹ some find themselves lost in the home or in the church primarily because of the carelessness of others. Many forms of abuse, hypocrisy, and neglect have distorted the love of God for thousands. The story of the lost coin, however, is one of success and not of failure. The householder searched carefully until she found it!

To emphasize the underlying truth of the parable, however, more space is devoted to the joyous celebration proclaiming the lost is found than to how the coin was lost. The end of the story asserts this cardinal truth: “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.” While it is true that the shepherd and the householder searched for the lost until they found it, the story’s end reveals there is still a personal response of repentance required from the lost sinner. God offers to all the free gift of salvation and eternal life:

Without doubt the most assuring sentence in this part of the story is that the Shepherd searched for the sheep until he found it. This short declaration continues to provide active hope to many a worried believer who has seen a loved one wander away step by step.

“Whoever believes will in Him have eternal life” (Jn. 3:15).
“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst” (Jn. 4:14).
“Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed” (Rom. 10:11).
“Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

The lost son

And He said, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them” (Lk. 15:11, 12).

In this last section the drama, intensity, and pathos of the story is intensified to peak level. In the brief stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin we have gained insight into the fervor of our God who searches for the lost sinner. Now, as the curtain lifts, we behold the pain, the patience, and the joy of the Father who risks His assets and reputation to bring his two sons into family fellowship. The younger son comes on the stage as we discover the three desires that mastered him.

First, he desired his father’s wealth. According to Jewish law, the younger of two sons was to get one-third of the inheritance upon the death of the father. The older son who had the birthright would automatically receive the greater portion. No child, however, had the right to divide the parental inheritance until after the parent’s death.¹² As God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous,¹³ “so the Father divided his wealth between them.” Scripture teaches that

The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim. 6:10).

And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living (Lk. 15:13).

We realize the brilliance of this brief story only by contemplating the picture behind each word. The second desire that mastered the younger son was his passion to be free—free to come and go as he pleased; free to do what he wanted to do; freedom to choose his own friends, freedom to be out from the watchful eye of his father. The story moves speedily. Now that he was wealthy and free we see the third desire to master him was pleasure. “He squandered his estate with loose living.”

“Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him” (Lk. 15:14–16).

It was the desire for wealth that motivated the younger son shamelessly and inappropriately to ask for his share of the estate before his father’s death. Now it was all gone. He wanted freedom and now he was hired out to Gentile pig rancher. He sought pleasure only to find himself alone and improvised. His desires had turned into disaster. Broke, alone in a distant country, the only employment he could find was working for a Gentile pig rancher. He was so destitute that he asked to eat at the pig trough—but was denied. No first century Jew could have imagined a more hopeless and despicable fate—the son of a respectable Jewish family reduced to wanting to eat from the pig trough of a Gentile! Absolutely detestable!

But when he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men...’” (Lk. 15:17–19).

Repentance

Little is said regarding the details of repentance in the story of the lost sheep and coin. When the illustration is extrapolated to its underlying meaning, however, this most important response to God’s grace is clearly there.

I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance

In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:7,10).

Broke, alone in a distant country, the only employment he could find was working for a Gentile pig rancher. He was so destitute that he asked to eat at the pig trough—but was denied. No first century Jew could have imagined a more hopeless and despicable fate—the son of a respectable Jewish family reduced to wanting to eat from the pig trough of a Gentile! Absolutely detestable!

Now, having traced before our eyes the downward path of the lost, human condition to its universal and common core—total depravity,¹⁴ we are ready to understand grace and repentance. In truth, it is only God's grace that gives us the opportunity to repent.¹⁵ First, the younger son "came to his senses." We must not pass over this phrase too fast, for in it we find the viable seed of regeneration. Sin blinds the eye and the mind. At its very core, sin is unreasonable and masquerades behind cleverly worded lies dressed up in Fifth Avenue fashion. God must give us grace before we can hear and respond to God's word of grace.¹⁶

As soon as the young son "comes to his senses"—is enlightened by the grace of God—he has a new revelation of his father and home. Now he can reason correctly. Now he sees the stupidity of his present circumstances. He realizes that there is only one way out of the predicament in which he finds himself.¹⁷ He responds to God's grace, "I will get up and go to my father." Here in rapid succession we see the elements of the changed life. Like the facets of a perfectly cut diamond, God's power to change the life shines through. It is the miracle of rebirth.

- God's grace—"he came to his senses."
- Enlightenment—"how many of my father's hired men have more than enough."
- Recognition of depravity—"I am dying from hunger."
- Decision to respond to God's grace—"I will get up and go to my father."
- Confession—"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight."
- Repentance—"I am no longer worthy to be called your son."
- Trust in God's grace—"Make me as one of your hired men."
- The beginning of the story starts with the son saying, "Give me." Now, the repentant, born again son says, "Make me."

First, the younger son "came to his senses." We must not pass over this phrase too fast, for in it we find the viable seed of regeneration. Sin blinds the eye and the mind. At its very core, sin is unreasonable and masquerades behind cleverly worded lies dressed up in Fifth Avenue fashion. God must give us grace before we can hear and respond to God's word of grace.

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (Lk. 15:20).

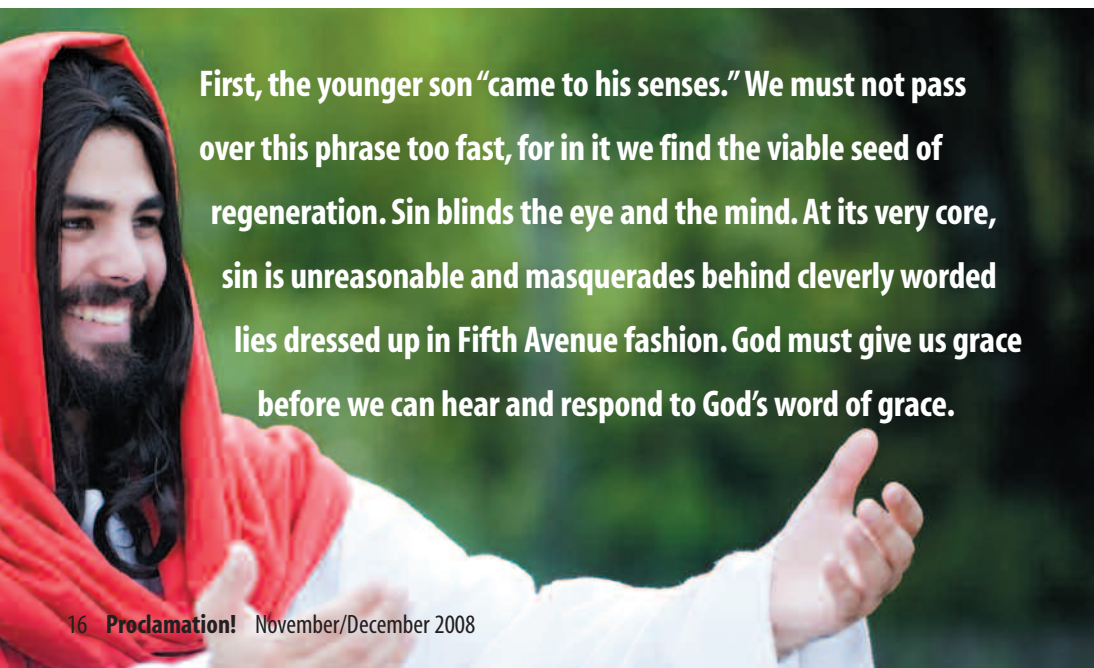
Those listening to the parable are now hanging on each word picture with attentive interest. How will the Jewish father react to the renegade son? By reading between the lines, it appears as soon as the son headed for home, his father saw him. We come now to the heart of the parable, the very heart of God. In awe we behold how "this man receives sinners":

- He felt compassion for him. Over and over again the Gospels record how Jesus was moved with compassion.¹⁸ If you ever feel that God has no compassion for you, that thought and feeling is not from the Holy Spirit.
- He ran. It was considered undignified for an elderly Jewish gentleman to run.¹⁹ Throwing reputation to the wind, he ran to embrace his wayward son. Imagine! The Creator of the universe is more concerned with his retuning son than with His own reputation.²⁰ Those who have wandered away from God are again in His presence the minute they accept God's grace.
- He embraced him. Still smelling like the Gentile pigpen, the father throws his arms around his returning son. The message is one of *complete acceptance!*
- He kissed him. The Greek syntax indicates that he kissed him again and again! The father expresses the deep emotions of love and acceptance. There is no probationary period where the son must prove himself worthy. The younger son in himself is not worthy; his worthiness, love, and acceptance are found only in relation to his father's grace and love.

And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found." And they began to celebrate (Lk. 15:21–24).

The son starts to rehearse his prepared speech, but he only had time to admit his sin before his father interrupted him.

- "Quickly." The transition from sinner to saint takes place quickly—in an instant!
- "Bring out the best robe and put it on him." This robe represents the righteousness of Christ. The very "righteousness of God" is placed over the ragged and smelly cloths from the pigpen.²¹ We come to Christ as we are—the worst of sinners. We are truly righteous only in Christ.



- “Put a ring on his hand.” Doubtless this was a signet ring²² giving the son full authority to participate in the financial affairs of the household. As believers, we too are included in the inheritance in Christ and have access to the family treasures.²³
- “Put sandals on his feet.” Slaves went barefoot, but not this son! We don’t serve Christ in order to be accepted into the heavenly family. We serve as sons and daughters of God because we are now children of God!²⁴
- “Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.” The fattened calf was kept for some special occasion. There is no hesitancy of divine participation in such a joyous celebration.²⁵
- “This son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.” The simple but powerful wording underlines the full acceptance of the son by the father. He declares the good news that his lost boy is found. He was spiritually dead. Now he has been brought to spiritual life in the Spirit. Who can doubt God’s transforming, saving grace!

The older brother

Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.” But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him (Lk. 15:25–28).

As we read the above paragraph, we see the leathered soul of self-righteousness, the end result of legalism, the judgmental heart of those whose focus is on the deeds of the law. More than that, we again see the love of the Father for his legalistic older son. He leaves the celebration, much as the shepherd left the 99, and went out and began pleading with the self-righteous son. It was God’s project to unite both the Jews and the Gentiles into one church family.²⁶ He still wants all his children to be in one family, united in our heavenly relationship.²⁷

But he answered and said to his father, “Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.” And he said to him, “Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.” (Lk. 15:29–32).

The parable is unfinished. The self-righteous Pharisees and scribes were complaining that Christ received and ate with sinners. Jesus pled with them through this three-part parable to enter the good news of the kingdom of God’s grace. Would they come in?

So today, the same Lord looks at us. Will we fellowship together where the simple gospel is proclaimed and sinners are accepted while they are still sinners? Yes, this man does receive sinners:

- Sinners who just wander away from God.
- Sinners who are lost because of the neglect or abuse of others.
- Sinners who choose to leave God.
- Sinners who are self-righteous and reject other repentant sinners.

To begin to comprehend the infinite love, grace and mercy of God will cause a sinner “to get up and go to the Father.” Yes, there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. No wonder that at the birth of our Savior there suddenly appeared a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Joy to the world, how great the joy! In our spirit we hear the good news, “Rejoice with me, the lost has been found!” †

Endnotes

1. Heb. 1:1–3.
2. Jn. 10:15.
3. Heb. 1:1.
4. Rom. 8:1.
5. 1 Pet. 2:23.
6. Isa. 53:5.
7. 1 Pet. 5:8.
8. Jn. 10:11.
9. Rom. 12:3.
10. Jn. 3:16.
11. 1 Tim. 2:4.
12. R.C. H. Lenski, *Commentary of the New Testament, Luke*, p. 808.
13. Mt. 5:44, 45.
14. Total depravity—every part of our being is affected and infected with sin.
15. Acts 5:31; 13:24.
16. Jn. 8:43; 10:16; 10:27.
17. Jn. 14:6.
18. Mt. 9:13, 36; 12:7; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Lk 7:13; 10:33.
19. See William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Luke*, p. 755.
20. Phil. 2:5–8.
21. Rom. 3:21, 22; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9.
22. Gen. 41:42; Est. 3:12; 8:2, 8, 12; Jer. 22:24; Dan. 6:17; Hag. 2:23.
23. Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; Eph. 3:6; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 6:17; Jam. 2:5.
24. Eph. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:2
25. Gen. 18:7, 8
26. Rom. 3:29; 9:24; Eph. 4:12
27. Jn. 17:11

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COLLEEN TINKER

O little town

Richard and I are still processing one of the most significant gifts God has ever given us (apart from saving us and giving us family): a two-week trip to Israel. Through His unique provision, we were able to do what had been only an impossible dream: see and touch many of the places where Jesus ministered and accomplished our salvation.

We left Redlands on October 28 along with 66 other people, mostly from Trinity Church where we attend, and returned on November 11. Pastors Gary and Elizabeth Inrig led the tour, and we had two brilliant and articulate Jewish guides (except for our three days in Jordan) to give us the geographical and historical backgrounds of the sites we visited.

Because this is our December issue of *Proclamation!*, I want to share my memories of visiting Bethlehem. We had just spent three days in Galilee, three days in Jordan, and a day in the Judean desert near the Dead Sea. After we left Masada our busses drove north, bordering the fence between Israel and the Palestinian North Bank, past the region of Jerico, and finally began the ascent into Jerusalem.

The hills, the many olive trees, and the white limestone buildings were stunning. I had never imagined Jerusalem to be so beautiful; my vague mental image of the city had been of primitive buildings in the blazing desert sun with dust settling every-

where. The reality of the many hills and valleys and the higher elevation with the resulting trees and cooler temperatures took me by surprise.

Our first stop was in Bethlehem to visit the Church of the Nativity commissioned in the fourth century A.D. by Helena, the mother of Constantine. Getting to the church, however, was not easy!

Surprises

My first surprise was the proximity of Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Today, with the expansion of Jerusalem, Bethlehem is essentially an outskirts of Jerusalem. Technically, it is three or four miles southwest of Jerusalem—but it is just inside the Palestinian border, and a wall separates the two. We had to leave our Jewish guides outside the wall as we crossed into Palestinian territory, and two Christian guides from Bethlehem came to direct our tour to the spot where Jesus was born.

Inside the church hundreds of people from around the world grouped with their respective tour guides, waiting in line to kiss the silver star on the floor of the shrine that marks what is probably the real spot of Jesus' birth. The silver, marble, candles, and the glassed-in manger bear little resemblance to the stable where Joseph was the only one who helped Mary give birth to their—and our—Savior.



Left: Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity. Above: The star in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem which marks the likely spot of Jesus' birth.

Richard and Colleen Tinker stand at the top water fall of Ein Gedi, the oasis in the Judean hills near the Dead Sea where David hid from King Saul.

of Bethlehem

The reality of Christmas came alive, however, as we sat in the chapel after seeing the shrines built around the historic spots. Gary Inrig recited John 1:1-18: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . "Former Adventist Michael Hicks led us in singing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing", and then he sang "O Lord Most Holy" *a cappella*, the notes reverberating under the vaulted ceiling.

As we left the church to board our busses, the sun was setting as we stood in the historic Manger Square where an annual Christmas Eve service has been a famous attraction for decades. Today the formerly Christian-dominant town of Bethlehem is losing its Christian inhabitants. The city's population now is about 25% Christian and 75% Muslim.

In consummate irony, the pink light of sunset was filled with the sounds of the Muslims' call to prayer being broadcast from the minarets of every mosque in the city. We stood inside the nearly two-millennia-old courtyard of the church built to honor the world's Savior, and the public call to prayer of one of the world's most significant religions which does not recognize the Lord Jesus as the Living God filled the ears of every person for miles around.

This juxtaposition of belief and unbelief is one of the dominant undercurrents of our entire two weeks in Israel. We stood on Mt. Carmel where Elijah egged on the priests of Baal as they

prayed for rain before God sent fire and burned not only Elijah's sacrifice but also his water-drenched altar. We floated on the Sea of Galilee, remembering the One who demonstrated His authority over nature and the laws of physics. We marveled at the very recent archeological finds at Tel Dan in the north of the Israel—the place Jereoboam introduced golden calves into the worship of Yahweh: the city gates dating from the time of King Ahab and an ancient Canaanite gate dating from Mesopotamian times which was built with arches—an archeological feature formerly thought to have originated with Rome.

We stood in front of the pagan shrine to Pan, the god of nature, at Ceasarea Philippi where Jesus declared He would establish His church, and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. We drank from Harod's Spring where God reduced Gideon's army from thousands to a handful of 300 men. We walked to the top of Ein Geadi, an incredibly beautiful series of waterfalls forming an oasis near the Dead Sea, bounded by steep limestone cliffs where David hid from Saul and where he wrote Psalm 57.

We saw the ruins of the first-century Essene Community at Qumran where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. We floated in the Dead Sea by the light of a crescent moon, and we spent a day exploring the amazing monoliths at Petra, a Nabatean city



Richard Tinker with Trinity Church senior pastor Gary Inrig in Hezekiah's Tunnel, built about three thousand years ago.



Above: The hills of Galilee look down over a very calm Sea of Galilee. Right: The Dome of the Rock Muslim shrine dominates the Temple Mount and the city of Jerusalem.



O little town of Bethlehem FROM PAGE 19

built in the late fourth and early third centuries BC in the hills of Jordan in the ancient area of Edom.

He knew we would be here

We spent our last five days in Jerusalem—the ancient and modern city where Muslims dominate the Jews' most sacred site: the Temple Mount. The Dome of the Rock stands over the place that used to be the site of the Holy of Holies in the temple—and the Holy of Holies was built on top of Mt. Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac.

We walked up the recently excavated southern steps of the Temple Mount where Jesus undoubtedly walked when He was there. I was overcome at the thought of Jesus being there, knowing He was the fulfillment of every ritual and ceremony He observed.

I spoke my thoughts to Richard who replied, "And He also knew that we would be here."

The reality of life on earth was condensed in Israel and focused especially in Jerusalem: unbelief and evil are relentless, continually claiming authority that is not legitimate—yet God's will is certain, and nothing can undo the fact that Jesus defeated the powers of evil at the cross (Colossians 2:14-15). We as born-again believers are witnesses of the victory and finished work of Jesus.

We are part of His church for which He declared ultimate victory

from that pagan high place: Caesarea Philippi. He is our Head and our Life and our King and Lord.

This season as we remember the Bethlehem Baby I see everything in a new way. I can literally picture the hills of Bethlehem where the angels sang to the shepherds. I can see where Jesus worshiped and discoursed with the Pharisees. I can picture the general area where He was crucified and from where He rose from death. I have stood on the Mt. of Olives from where He ascended to heaven and to where He will return when He comes to reign over the nations.

Jesus is real; God's promises are certain. He keeps His word not because we are worthy or observant but because His word cannot fail. We serve the triune God, the only true God, who established His name in Jerusalem. We worship the Lord Jesus who fulfilled all that was foreshadowed about Him in the Law and the Prophets. We are made alive by the Holy Spirit who testifies with our spirits that we are children of God (Romans 8:15-16).

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

†

Journey from fear to faith FROM PAGE 5

Seventh-day Adventist church, and my husband refused to attend a church that did not meet on Saturday. That slowed the search considerably.

It wasn't until two years ago, as I was sitting in my son's living room avoiding the ball game on their huge television, that I picked up a book by someone named Dirk Anderson from a stack near the chair. The title *White Out* was intriguing. I began reading, amazed by the message, and felt my life changing as I read. I borrowed it, and as I left, my son quietly handed me two other books by the author Dale Ratzlaff, an old high school religion teacher of his. I could not put these down. The books were filled with amazing truths, and each claim was fully documented. I could not deny the power of these books.

White Out stayed on our coffee table, and ultimately my husband picked it up and began to read. He flew through it and subsequent books, checking Bible documentations. How was it that Bible passages we had read and even memorized previously now took on new and encouraging meanings? We ordered more books and began receiving *Proclamation!* magazine. It was clear God was speaking to us and inviting us into a new worship.

As we studied and read again and again through the New Testament, many old, familiar texts spoke out to us with an entirely

new message. We began slowly finding our way out of the old familiar guilt, experiencing the sunshine of significance in Christ's sacrifice. God had forgotten that long ago pledge. It was we who kept remembering.

Our study proceeds slowly, and we still find it difficult to validate some long-held beliefs—is this idea from White or from the Bible? Understanding comes gradually. We find that God imparts knowledge only as we are ready to accept and understand it.

Our journey continues. We can but wonder what new insights and spiritual blessings await tomorrow. Our faith in God is stronger, as is our absolute trust that He remains in charge of our lives and our future. We are constantly amazed as each day brings new evidence of his love and caring. We find joy in our study of promises to be uncovered in the New Testament, and nourish a bright new image as new covenant Christians. The path still contains stumbling blocks, but now we have a changed vision of the path's end.

God guides our daily walk. The ultimate goal of a faith-based life seems more within our grasp. Back issues of *Proclamation!* magazine are stacked beneath the coffee table, and with each new reading, we find a new strength and faith.

Yes, God speaks—we have only to listen.

†

Answer to my prayers

All I can say is, Wow! I am overwhelmed with how good the Lord Jesus really is! Your magazine came into my hands just recently for the first time. My sister received it and passed it on to me. We are not Adventists but somehow the Lord sent it our way. I want to explain, so let me backtrack a bit.

Twenty years ago, I was employed at a business owned by Seventh-day Adventists. There were many Adventists working there, so I became close friends with them. I was away from the Lord at that time, so I credit these folks for lovingly pointing me back to Jesus. I am grateful for their testimony in my life. But, one time I attended their church, and at the point in the service where it would seem appropriate to have an altar call to accept Jesus, the call was made to accept the Sabbath. Something inside of me just went into "tilt" mode as I realized how wrong this was. As time went by, I also saw the error in their doctrine and the futility of trying to keep absolutely any law. With Jesus, our heart is the issue, and we can no more keep any law than fly to the moon unaided! We need a Savior! Praise God for Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith!

In the years since, I have been involved in different prayer ministries. One of my main prayers has been for the Seventh-day Adventist church—mainly that any error would be exposed by the Holy Spirit and that these lovely people would be set free. When I first saw your magazine, I thought it was just another *Signs of the Times* type. As I began to read, my heart leaped within me, and I rejoiced at what the Lord had done!!! In your testimonies and magazine I am seeing God's answer to my prayers, and I can't even describe how that makes me feel! It is truly a miracle of God.

I dearly love the Seventh-day Adventists that are still in my life, but I have had to set boundaries as to not attending their home Bible studies, etc. I attend a regular Bible church and still pray for my

friends. I have no doubt that God is able to set all men free!! Amen! Jesus' death, burial and resurrection were not in vain.

WHITMORE, CA

Good job

I just wanted to say that I think you all are doing a great job. I am an evangelist from the US but live in New Zealand. Reading Adventists' responses [to your magazine] just reinforces that they have the attitude of a cult. Like so many, they claim their faith is based on the Bible and not Ellen G. White (EGW). I just spoke to a pair of Adventists. They claimed that their belief was in the Bible. I told them that regardless of how they sliced it, EGW was part of their foundation. In

One of my main prayers has been for the Seventh-day Adventist church—mainly that any error would be exposed by the Holy Spirit and that these lovely people would be set free.

explaining this, I told them that she "interpreted" the Bible or, in some cases, "reinterpreted" passages, and that is what their faith rested on. Finally they understood my view about this matter.

When I stated that Adventists believe that Michael the Archangel is Jesus, one said she did not believe that but was surprised when her friend told her that they did believe that. We went on to talk about other topics for about an hour, and it was just sad in listening to the elements of their speech. They said,

1. they had the most truth,
2. all the evangelical churches were wrong,
3. their prophet was used by God.

In short, you keep up the good job and stand firm. Those Adventists who reject what you have to say are just blind to the truth. God bless you all!
NEW ZEALAND

Oversized EGO

Please stop sending the magazine *Proclamation!* to me. As far as I can determine, the only thing that you do is bash the Adventists. I never see anything in the magazine that would draw me to try to live a better Christian life. It would seem that the only thing

that Dale Ratzlaff and his staff are really interested in is trying to draw more Adventists into his fold so he can become richer and feed his oversized EGO. What happened to spirituality and seeking the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life? Or don't you people need the Holy Spirit in your life?

You people are very inconsistent. You preach that we don't need to keep the fourth commandment, but we need to keep all the rest. Why, if God did away with the fourth commandment, do we need to keep the other nine? I know that the biggest reason most of the ex-Adventists join your group and keep Sunday is because you had a guilty conscience when you thought you were doing things on the Sabbath that you shouldn't be doing, and that by believing that Sunday is the correct day to keep, then you can do whatever you want to do on the Sabbath and Sunday and no longer have a guilty conscience. And by persuading as many Adventists as you can to stop keeping Sabbath and join your organization, you somehow clear your conscience even more.

God bless, and I plan to meet you in Heaven if we all live our lives so that in God's plan we are safe to save and will not cause God problems if we are there. Then, if God did away with the keeping of the Sabbath on the seventh day, I will believe it when he explains it to me. Keep the Faith.

ANGWIN, CA

Rightly giving the gospel

I just wanted to encourage you to continue to explore relevant subjects that I find fascinating and challenging. No, I'm not an ex-Adventist, but I'm interested in the topics related to law and grace in the new life of Christ. I cannot believe that there are whole schools of thought that would cling to the Sabbath and all the other feasts and statues of the old covenant. At the same time, each one of us can veer away from the truth of the gospel into error and needless bondage. As I see it, you are rightly giving the simplicity of the gospel in many challenging and enlightening articles. Keep up the good work; or rather, His work through your ministry.

I am praying that the Lord of the Sabbath would pour His revelation into those hearts who are vehemently arguing against your stances of freedom in Christ.

VIA EMAIL

Jehovah's Witness of the mailbox

If you TRULY believe in freedom and liberty for individuals you will IMMEDIATELY remove my name from your mailing list. Your organization has become the Jehovah's Witness of the mailbox.

GRAND TERRACE, CA

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

Sorting through the fog

I can't even put into words what your ministry has meant in my life. Finding the forum (www.formeradventist.com) and resources that you make public helped me to sort through all the fog as the veil was lifted 4+ years ago. Even though I don't post much anymore as it's just hard to keep up now that my toddler keeps me so busy, I still check in and read what's going on. It's comforting to know there's a place to turn where everyone has a similar background and faith in Christ. I treasure each *Proclamation!* as though it were gold. You provide excellent, thoughtful articles each time, and it's yet another way of staying connected. I know that in your public positions, you face a lot of criticism and hate directed your way, and those of us who benefit from your time and dedication don't tell you what you mean to us nearly enough to balance that out. Please know that you are among my heroes of faith! We pray that God will always multiply the blessings to you that you have made available and poured out to us! I treasure "knowing" you—and if you ever have a need that you think I might be able to help with, please know that I'd delight in returning even a small portion of a favor!

EAU CLAIRE, MI

Satan has invaded my home

Please cancel this magazine. I don't know why it ever started coming to my home, but I am not a "former" SDA, I am an ACTIVE Seventh-day Adventist, and I feel as if Satan has invaded my home each time I get one of these magazines. I don't even want it being seen in my trash can, so please do not send another issue. Take my name off your mailing list.

SALLISAW, OK

Devouring *Proclamation!*

Thank-you so much for your ministry and all you do at *Proclamation!* and in the former Adventist forum (www.formeradventist.com)—I'm currently going through the Bible study on Romans [online at www.formeradventist.com].

I was Adventist for 24 years, and I've been saved for 14 years now, and undoing the damage of unbiblical theology is still an ongoing process. *Proclamation!* has helped me so much in the last several months that I've been reading—or should I say devouring each issue that comes out. You folks do an excellent job of explaining the principles of scripture. My prayers are with you. Thank-you.

TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

Saying negative things

Take me off your mailing list. If you feel you're right in your belief, then stop attacking the Adventists. Everyone has a choice in how they

Another Gospel (a song)

They preached to me another gospel
They preached to me another lord
They preached to me a different gospel
One that would kill like a sword

Hey little children, did He not warn us
That the counterfeit would come
Hey little children, did they not fool us
Because we were so young

Hey little children, did He not free us
So that we could be reborn
Hey little children, they won't defeat us
Though their hearts be filled with scorn

For we are the sheep outside his pasture
—That He did call
And we are that one He left the fold for
—To give his all

They preached to me another gospel
They preached to me another lord
They preached to me a different gospel
One that would kill like a sword

—Autumn McMinimy

worship God. I don't like how you say negative things about Adventists. May God help us all to be ready when He comes; life is too short and the Bible is fulfilling before our eyes.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Take me off

I did not order your *Proclamation!* magazine. I have no idea where you got my name. Please take me off your mailing list as I am not interested in receiving it. I don't know where you get some of your ideas or information to write those articles—not from the Bible, God's holy inspired Word. The Bible, by the way, teaches tithing as 10% back to God. Look at texts in the Old Testament as well as the New, and you will see what God tells us to do. I am finding you interpret things as you think, and not as the Bible reads. Again, please do not send any more magazines.

LANSING, MI

Future sins forgiven?

I came across your May/June issue this morning while cleaning my office. I read it carefully last month, and this morning I read it again and studied some of the verses quoted or referred to.

The new covenant promises given to us once in the Old Testament (Jeremiah) and twice in the New (Hebrews) are very clear. The new covenant is the law of God written in our hearts, giving us the willingness and the power through God's grace to keep them. Just so there would be absolutely no misunderstanding, Jesus said, "Think

not that I am come to destroy the law." "Till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall be done away." I realize that I am only 1 person out of six billion plus, but unless I am dreaming and living on another planet, this earth and the heavens are still here.

I have no thought of being unkind towards any of you, but "come now, let us reason together"! How can my future sins be forgiven now? Are you folks selling indulgences? 1 John 1:9 makes it plain God's requirements for forgiveness of sin, i.e. "If we confess..."

So, I confess my sin that I am going to do in the future, accept His forgiveness, then go out and do it? Isn't that called the sin of presumption? I would certainly grant you that God has made provision for future sins as we grow in grace and grow up into Christ. But we must be very careful that we do not teach people that they may sin without experiencing terrible consequences, i.e. David's sin. (See Romans 1:16-18).

The true gospel is the power of God to overcome sin in our lives, Romans 1:16. Sinning (1 John 3:4) while preaching grace and "freedom from the law" will—according to Romans 1:18—bring the wrath of God upon any of us who preach and teach the word.

Please consider the eight promises to those who overcome in the book of Revelation. Their names will not be blotted out of the book of life.

You have made my heart very sad by promising life to those who continue to break God's law. You strengthen those who are doing wrong.

Please consider Ezekiel 13:22.

AN ADVENTIST PASTOR, AZ

Editor's response: I understand your concern. To address your questions, I want to back up to your references to the law not being destroyed or passing away until heaven and earth are destroyed (Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17). Jesus stated He came not to destroy but to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). Fulfilling the terms of a legal agreement—a will or living trust, for example—never means the agreement is abolished. Rather fulfillment means those to whom the document promises certain things, receive them. Jesus fulfilled the law and gave it all its meaning. He took it out of the function of "shadow" (Heb. 10:1; 8:5-6; Col. 2:16-17) and became everything it foreshadowed and demanded.

By receiving Christ and His sacrifice for our sin, we receive the literal Living Law as our authority. We receive God Himself, and when we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) we are no longer under law—under the shadow of good things to come—but under the direct authority and command of God who indwells us Himself. We receive the Fulfilled Law rather than merely the written shadow.

When we are made alive in Christ, God literally transfers us out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:13). This transfer involves our being made alive in Christ by His regeneration of our spirits (Ephesians 2:1-9). This new life is what Jesus referred to when He talked to Nicodemus in John 3:5-6: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

When our spirits are made alive by the indwelling Holy Spirit, we pass out of our natural state of sin (the domain of darkness), and sin no longer has dominion over us. Our bodes are still mortal, and we still will be tempted and sometimes sin (Romans 7), but these sins do not destroy or remove the Holy Spirit indwelling us and uniting our spirits with Him. Our natural condition of "sin" is reversed; we are now spiritually alive instead of dead.

When we have been made alive in Christ by the life of God, we are finally able to trust God instead of giving into temptation. Romans 8 explains that living by the Spirit means there is "now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). It further states that "if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness" (v. 10).

Because we have been transferred out of our natural state of inherent sin in the domain of darkness, our subsequent sins do not cause us to lose the life of God in us. In other words, we do not lose our new birth, our standing as God's own adopted sons and daughters (Romans 8:15-17). Even though our bodies are still dead and we may commit sins, our spiritual life remains. Nothing can separate us from the love of God when we are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37-39).

In no sense do we advocate disobedience to God. Accepting Jesus' sacrifice for our sins does not mean we throw morality to the wind. Quite the opposite! Now, instead of trying to overcome sin in order to gain eternal victory, we are approaching sin from the position of already being victorious.

Jesus is our Substitute, and His righteousness is now covering us. Now, with His Spirit and His victory, we finally have an Advocate. When we are tempted, we can now surrender the moment to Him instead of being overcome by sin.

If I fall into temptation, the indwelling Holy Spirit gives me no rest until I repent and surrender my weakness to Him. None of these episodes removes my new birth! On this side of being born again, dealing with sin is a matter of surrendering the moment to the Lord Jesus rather than struggling with our will power to overcome temptation.

When Jesus saves us, He forgives all our sin; He gives us His Spirit and a new heart; he hides us with Himself in God (Col 3:3). He removes all condemnation (Romans 8:1), and He promises that we have crossed from death into life (John 5:24). Nothing can snatch us from His and His Father's hands (John 10:27-30), and nothing—not even death—can separate us from His love (Romans 8:37-39).

Not on my own

For so long I thought I was on my own. What an amazing thing to find your site and find that I am not on this journey alone after all!

I was a third generation Adventist—on both sides of the family—and when I walked away

I am also frequently amazed at how clear and understandable the Bible is now that I threw away the doctrinal filters I used to use.

years ago, I felt quite alone. And I experienced all of the built-in guilt that goes with "leaving the truth." God worked on me for years, probably longer than I realized, and finally led me to an evangelical church. That started my journey back, and each step of the way has seemed amazing and challenging. But God has never left me and continues to lead me in growth. Growing up in Adventist schools I had a background in Bible training, but it took exposure to loving, praising Christians to show me how to worship. It took a new friend who is new to believing in God to show me how a simple, open, childlike faith is worth more than years of classroom training.

I followed that new friend to a new church and found an even more wonderful, vibrant, living body of Christ who show true love and compassion and a mission spirit. Never again will I smugly believe that I have "the truth" and all others are wrong. God leads us each from where we are and brings us to Him so that we can grow and learn. He wants so much more than outward behavior and adherence to rules. He wants our whole heart and love and worship.

I found your website just after you started putting all the older issues of *Proclamation!* on line. After reading the first one I couldn't wait to get to the others. I went back to the beginning and started printing them all. I went through a lot of printer cartridges, but it was worth it! I have found so much help in reprogramming the mental tapes that are so deeply ingrained after a lifetime of

Adventist indoctrination. Some of those tapes are still running and pop up at the worst times, but I have found that going back to the Scriptures and calling on the name of Jesus in prayer soothes the unrest and brings me back to the truth. I may never be totally free of those warnings and threats, but perhaps that is what faith is all about: believing and clinging to Jesus even when the doubts creep in and try to drown out His voice. There is nothing like taking the Bible at its word to drown out the doubts and fears of not being sure of your salvation!

I am also frequently amazed at how clear and understandable the Bible is now that I threw away the doctrinal filters I used to use. Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and even the great Revelation are now open and understandable. They are full of such love and hope (anticipation, not the cross-your-fingers and hope) that they are a joy to read. When they are read with faith and prayer, instead of trying to plug them into a belief system, God speaks through them and brings them alive.

I am saddened by some of the letters printed in the back of each edition. Those that agree with you are full of love and thanks; those that are from people still trapped in that system are usually negative and almost hateful. Almost none of them use any Scripture to counter anything you say but just fall back on the old "we are right so everyone else must be wrong" mentality.

God bless you and your ministry as you continue to try to lead people out of bondage to human systems and into the freedom of the love of Christ.

VIA EMAIL

Difficult Year

It has been a little over a year since my husband, children, and I left the Seventh-day Adventist Church we grew up in. What a difficult year this has been for us too! This is why we are so grateful for the helpful information and support offered through the Former Adventist Fellowship website. We check in periodically to skim over the articles in the *Proclamation!* magazine as well. It has been a while though since we've last taken a look at the website. This afternoon I visited the site and noticed the cover page of the [July/August] *Proclamation!*—"What happens when we die?" Thank you for writing on this topic. Less than 3 weeks ago, our full term baby girl was stillborn.

GRESHAM, OREGON

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:

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P.O. Box 905
Redlands, CA 92373

OR EMAIL EDITOR: proclamation@gmail.com

4TH ANNUAL FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP WEEKEND

FEBRUARY 13–15, 2009 • TRINITY CHURCH • REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

SUBMITTING TO THE WORD



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PRESENTERS

- **Dale Ratzlaff** FOUNDER, LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES
- **Greg Taylor** SENIOR PASTOR, HEMPFIELD BROTHERS IN CHRIST CHURCH
- **Gary Inrig** SENIOR PASTOR, TRINITY CHURCH, REDLANDS
- **Elizabeth Inrig** PASTOR OF WOMEN OF TRINITY MINISTRIES
- **Bill Born** WORSHIP MINISTRY PASTOR, TRINITY CHURCH, REDLANDS
- **Paul Carden** DIRECTOR, THE CENTERS FOR APOLOGETICS RESEARCH
- **John Rittenhouse** ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, BIOLA UNIVERSITY
- **Richard Tinker** PRESIDENT, LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES
- **Colleen Tinker** EDITOR, *PROCLAMATION!* MAGAZINE
- **Sharon Strum's praise team**

FEATURES

- Christianity EDU: Biblically based classes
- Breakout sessions addressing issues former Adventists face
- Food and fellowship time, and sales area
- Communion, prayer, and testimonies Saturday evening
- Sunday lunch with the afternoon open for fellowship

ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE TIMES

- Begins Friday, February 13, 2009 at 6:00 pm
- Ends Sunday, February 15, 2009 at 4:00 pm

TO REGISTER (SPACE LIMITED TO THE FIRST 150)

- \$65 per person, must register before February 1, 2009
- Sign up online or use coupon below.
- Fee includes meetings, handouts, three meals on Saturday, lunch on Sunday, and snacks. Scholarships are available!
- You must make your own lodging/transportation arrangements. A limited number of local church member's homes are available for those with financial challenges. Call for more information.

TO SIGN-UP ONLINE

Go to www.FormerAdventist.com and follow the links.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Phone toll free (877)-349-6984

YES, I WANT TO REGISTER for the Former Adventist Fellowship weekend at Trinity Church in Redlands, California, February 13–15, 2009. (Does not include transportation or lodging.)

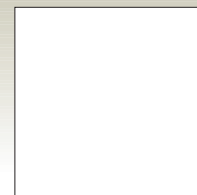
Number attending _____ X \$65 (each person) = Total amount enclosed \$ _____

Vegetarian? YES # _____ NO # _____

Please return (including address label below) with check or money order in included envelope (space limited to 150).

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