

JUDGED BY THE GOSPEL: THE PROGRESSION OF BRINSMEAD'S AWAKENING

LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

Proclamation!

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS

INQUIRING ADVENTISTS

SABBATARIANS

CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

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VOLUME 12, ISSUE 2

The GREAT CONTROVERSY

Living in a worldview of deception



COLLEEN TINKER

Your paradigm makes all the difference

Richard and I were walking through Loma Linda on his lunch break one day early in 1998. We had decided to remove our sons from the Adventist school they had been attending and to enroll them in a local Christian academy, and this decision had stirred up unexpected scrutiny of our reasons for moving away from our past.

As we walked we talked about the great controversy. We had always assumed it explained reality in a clear and accessible way, but we suddenly faced new questions. If Jesus completed His atonement and its application at the cross, disarming and humiliating Satan in the process (Col.

The great controversy view of reality is what makes Adventists—from the most historic to the most liberal—Adventists.

2:14-15), how could He be engaged in an ongoing battle with Satan?

I realized that the notion of Satan and Jesus struggling as more-or-less matched opponents was uncomfortably reminiscent of the Mormon idea that Lucifer and Jesus had been brothers, one of which had “gone bad” and one of which was good. The victorious Jesus we had been discovering in the New Testament had never been exalted to be equal to the Father; He had always been the eternal, omnipotent “I AM”.

We realized with a sense of shock that the great controversy represented a false view of reality. We knew we had to renounce our Adventist worldview and submit our minds and hearts to Scripture alone, allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us what was true and real from God’s own word.

It would take several more years for us to be able to distill the foundational doctrines out of the convoluted tentacles of the great controversy worldview, but as time passed it became increasingly clear that this paradigm is what all Adventists hold in common. The great controversy view of reality is what makes Adventists—from the most historic to the most liberal—Adventists.

Even when individual Adventists hotly and widely disagree over their interpretations of Adventism, they circle the wagons and stand as a united front when “outsiders” question them. Nevertheless, they have trouble articulating, even to themselves, what keeps them together.

The key to understanding Adventism is found in the great controversy paradigm. At the heart of this controversy lies the well-camouflaged belief that makes Adventism different from evangelical Christianity: a different Jesus and a limited God.

In this issue we will take a close look at the great controversy worldview and how it shapes reality for Adventism. I am indebted to a new book published by Pacific Press and compiled by Herbert Douglass, *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen G. White*, for many of the EGW quotations in this article.

Also in this issue Martin Carey shares an in-depth analysis of Robert Brinsmead’s Awakening movement that started in the 1960’s and heavily influenced Adventist thinking for nearly three decades, and Dale Ratzlaff shares the conclusion of his two-part article on “Progressive Sanctification”.

Our faith story is written by “Bethany, A Child of the King”. Bethany tells her story of God rescuing her from the splintered, frightening existence caused by severe abuse within her Adventist family. Carolyn Macomber tells of her discovery of what it means that God is sovereign, and Chris Lee challenges us again to begin living “the life after” by engaging in active Bible study.

Why is this issue so late?

We are sorry that this magazine was delivered several months late.

This ministry has been impacted by the ongoing recession. Some of our supporters have lost their jobs or are facing other difficulties.

If you are being compelled by God to support this work, now is the time. We plan to produce two more issues this year. Most importantly, please continue to pray for *Proclamation!* magazine and Life Assurance Ministries.

New! Email updates, news and articles

We are offering a new service to our subscribers. If you send your email address we will send you our new weekly update, *Proclamation! News*, by email. †

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Proclamation!

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LIFE ASSURANCE
MINISTRIES

Evangelical, heterodox, or cult? **Most don't know**

We just returned from a three-day Conference for Evangelical Free Church pastors in San Diego. Both LAM Publications and Life Assurance Ministries had booths there. We found the comments from many pastors to be insightful in that their evaluations of Adventism ranged from believing it was evangelical to being a dangerous cult. A few said, “Why are you speaking out against the Adventists? They’re evangelical; haven’t you read Walter Martin?”

Others noted that “Adventists have many cultic teachings,” but they knew little about them. Still others recognized the danger of Adventism. Several told us that they were currently losing members to the Adventist church and needed help.

I am sure there are many readers of *Proclamation!* who know Adventist individuals representing both ends of the spectrum. So just how should one respond if asked, “Are Adventists evangelical or a cult?”

The answer should not be based on individual members but upon the teachings of the church. When Adventists say, “We don’t believe or teach that anymore” in response to being asked about a specific historical belief of Adventism, one needs to know the members do not represent the church’s teachings. The best way to determine if the church still believes or teaches a cultic doctrine is to determine if the church (not an individual member) has openly rejected that teaching. For example, do you know of any official renunciation of any of the following documented teachings of Ellen White and Adventism?



Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff, Woody and Cheryl Granger, and Colleen and Richard Tinker spoke to pastors and handed out *Proclamation!* and books at the Evangelical Free Church Leadership Conference in San Diego in June.

The shut-door. Ellen White’s clearly stated that the door of mercy or salvation was closed for all those who did not accept Adventism’s reinterpretation of Millers failed prophecies. Many Adventist writers have denied she ever taught this, but the record is clear.¹ But has the church ever stated, “Yes, Ellen White taught the shut door of mercy in one of her ‘I saw’ statements, but it is error and we reject her statement as error”?

The Daniel 8:14, October 22, 1844 start of the investigative judgment. Some time ago one of our readers offered \$100,000 to anyone who could prove this doctrine from Scripture using sound methods of interpretation. There were no

takers. Many Adventist pastors and church leaders will privately admit that this is an unbiblical doctrine, but has the church ever renounced it as error? Not to our knowledge. In fact, we have a recording of the statement by Angel Rodriguez, chair of the Adventist Biblical Research Committee, that if Adventism’s 1844 Sanctuary teachings is error, the Adventist church has no reason to exist.

The seventh-day Sabbath as the seal of God and Sunday keeping as the mark of the beast. We receive letters and emails confirming that Adventists are still using this argument in many evangelistic meetings around the world. Yet it is completely without any biblical foundation. How can Adventists be considered “evangelical” when evangelicals usually worship on Sunday and Adventists teach that Sunday keepers will receive the mark of the beast—and also hunt and kill Sabbath-keepers? Why doesn’t the Adventist church openly renounce both of these teachings as error and stop using these scare-tactics in Adventist evangelism?

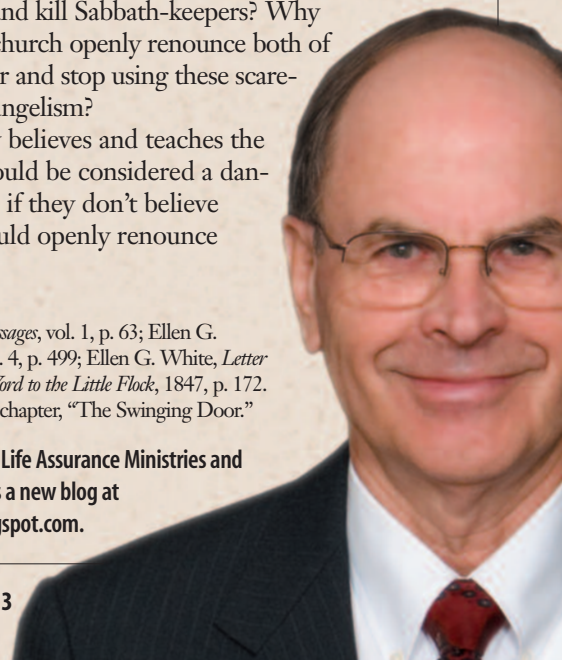
If a church actually believes and teaches the above doctrines, it should be considered a dangerous cult. However, if they don’t believe these things, they should openly renounce them as error.



Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored five books concerning Adventism: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the unique doctrine of a pre-advent judgment that decides eternal destinies, *Truth About Adventist “Truth”*—a little book that’s perfect to give to Christians that need to understand Adventism, *Truth Led Me Out*—in which Dale Ratzlaff tells his own story of following Jesus, no matter the cost, and *My Cup Overflows*—Carolyn’s autobiography. Each of these books is available at www.Ratzlaff.com or by phoning 800-355-7073, or 520-836-9790.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 63; Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 499; Ellen G. White, *Letter to Joseph Bates*, Feb. 1845. *Word to the Little Flock*, 1847, p. 172. See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, chapter, “The Swinging Door.”

Dale Ratzlaff, the founder of Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine, has a new blog at LifeAssuranceMinistries.blogspot.com.



He lifted me out of my darkness

BETHANY, CHILD OF THE KING

Editor's Note: Bethany's story is a bit different from most of our faith stories in that she shares how God rescued her from the internal shattering she experienced as a result of sustained severe abuse within her Adventist family of origin. We are running her story for two reasons. First, the outward cloak of a well-pressed religious garment sometimes doubles as a cover of the oppressive darkness lurking on the inside. This is true in Adventism as well as in other rigid or repressive religious systems. In our years of working with Adventists transitioning to Christianity, we have seen that variations of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse including addictions, shady business dealings, neglect, food obsessions, emotional illness, and incest are all too common. These abuses frequently precipitate forms of dissociation or other self-destructive coping in the children who cannot defend themselves. Second, there is hope, and there is profound healing for the worst trauma when we submit our wounds to the Lord Jesus. He can restore the most shattered person—and Bethany's story demonstrates this reality.

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb... You know me inside and out. You know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day (Ps. 139:13-16).

My recovery from spiritual and sexual abuse has taught me many things about God. First, I have learned that He was there in the beginning, and I know that He will be there in the end.

I grew up in an Adventist home with my mother and three older brothers. When I was five years old my mother remarried, but my new stepfather as well as my two oldest brothers were addicted to both drugs and alcohol.

Those two brothers were a heartache in my mother's life. From very young ages they were in and out of juvenile hall, then in jail, and finally in prison. Throughout my life one of those brothers was a constant assailant to both my third brother and me.

I knew from a young age that I could not speak, that I had been prohibited from talking about the person I wished to become. I was shame. I was the actual secret, hidden away in the depths of my darkened soul, empty and lost. With each touch of my mother's hand and with the heaviness of my brother's leg, the shame only grew.

Being in the grips of Adventism set the stage for a lifetime of horrifying spiritual abuse, bondage, and captivity. The lies I was fed on a regular basis through the readings of Ellen White and her interpretations of the Bible made it impossible for me to see the truth of Jesus.

I believed I was a bad child and that Satan could take control of me if I made a poor decision. I believed that our Father was just waiting to erase my name out of the Book of Life. In fact, when I was baptized into the Adventist church, I came up out of the water

hearing voices—the same voices that constantly told me I was evil, that Jesus was going to leave me, and that I had demons in me. These lies stayed with me for years—until Jesus rescued me and set me free!

Fractured

As a young child I was in the hospital. I was looking out the window, wishing I could jump to the ground—yet knowing I was trapped and could not escape physically. I could only escape emotionally and mentally, and thoughts of suicide were already part of my internal escape.

I developed many other ways to deal with abuse as well, including memory loss, depression, isolation, dissociation, emotional numbing, eating disorders, self-destructiveness, mental illness, and being invisible.

When I was 14 years old, my oldest brother was murdered. Our family was devastated. Time seemed to stop for all of us as we watched my mother sleep her days away with the help of prescription drugs—yet still insist that I keep her company at night.

My memory has failed to remind me of that year in detail, except that I know my soul was numb and dead. I longed to be loved, but I trusted no one. I rebelled at God, and I did not believe He loved me. I felt lost, forgotten, and empty.

Yet I have learned that during those times God's eyes were upon me, always watching me. He was molding me, working out His plan for me. He was protecting me, keeping me alive.

Not one is missing, not one forgotten. God the Father has his eye on each of you (1 Pet. 1:1,2).

I left for an Adventist boarding school at the age of 15 and entered an entirely different world. I had three years in which to do four years of schooling, and I had to work to pay for it. I was confused and scared, and with so many people around me, I became the “dissociation queen”! For me, high school consisted of memory loss, isolation, starvation, suicidal thoughts, fears, emotional numbing, believing I was invisible, and testing authority.

It was at this school that God sent a woman to mother me. Nothing I did would cause her to turn her back on me. I never really talked to her; I just sat on her couch. Yet she loved and talked to me. She knew I was in trouble.

God also sent teachers into my life to nurture and care for me—adults who loved me and did not abandon me. God sent keepers into my life when I needed them.

You were lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you're named and kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls (1 Pet. 2:25).

Desperation

I accomplished my four years of high school in three and headed off to college. It was either go to college or go back home, and I knew I didn't want to go home. My mother was a constant presence in my life. She was the voice that called every day to see what I was doing, wearing, eating. She was someone from whom I believed I would never be free. I could always see her disapproving

face, feel her touch, and hear her voice, even when I wasn't talking to her. I felt responsible for her, yet I wanted to find a way to be free from her.

I continued my downward spiral of isolation, self-destruction, and dissociation, and at the age of 19 I married. Two years later we had our first child, triggering my rapid descent into a world of uncontrollable fears, rebellions, and emotional despair.

I've learned that God hears my prayers. He rescues; He redeems; He saves, and He heals from diseases. Moreover, He does not give me what I deserve.

I spent the next several years in therapy with assorted counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. I sabotaged my relationships with them, confusing them. If I sensed the relationship was developing an emotional bond, I would break it off. I received several diagnoses over the years I was in therapy, including depression, borderline personality disorder, and dissociative identity disorder.

One day I was driving home from therapy, and out of utter desperation I asked God to intervene. I asked Him to take away the voices in my head. For as long as I could remember there had been noise and torment in my head. Dark, destructive voices told me to cut myself, to run. I was split into a puzzle, and I couldn't think anymore. If God was really out there, if He really cared, then I needed Him to fix my brain, and I needed Him to do it quickly. I asked Him to do it within 24 hours, and if He was unable to make me whole, then I was checking out for good.

That night I went to bed, and I had a dream.

I was walking in a dark forest, all alone. I stumbled along, tripping on the thick roots that poked through the forest floor. As I approached the center of the woods, a bright light shone through the trees, and two large, strong hands came down and picked me up out of the darkness into the light.

When I awoke the next morning, I was different. The noise in my head was gone; the voices that once screamed at me were quiet. I felt I could think an entire thought on my own. I felt like I could see the world in color.

I started to believe that God must be real. I began to learn that God calls me, and He wants me to obey Him!

My life was better for me at this point, but not all better. I was still in bondage, still wandering. I was not dealing with my issues of abuse nor living in any trusting relationships. My husband was the only person I dared to trust at any level, and learning to trust him was a slow process.

I became curious to know God's will and desires. I began seeking Him more and more, and I began to question Adventism. We were still attending a small Adventist church, and we were taking our children to Sabbath School. I decided that I would begin testing everything with the Word of God, not with Ellen White. Life took a new turn for me, and I became convicted to leave the Adventist church. As I searched Scripture, truths about the new covenant, true Sabbath rest, and God's gift of eternal life began to open up to me. Even so, I was still unable to voice my deepest needs or to articulate the anguish within me. I told myself I would

never tell anyone the story of my life. The lies in my life had cluttered my brain, and I was not yet willing to surrender my fear or my reputation to God.

I first realized God's intention for me when I was at Women of Faith in Seattle. I went by myself for the weekend and was listening intently to one of the speakers when the thought that I would someday speak of God's deliverance of me interrupted my concentration. Naturally, I argued; I didn't like to be with people, and I had little to say! But the calling never left.

I have learned that God's calling and His gifts to me are irrevocable.

One day while we were on a vacation, several years after that momentous Women of Faith meeting, God finally convicted me that I was still not trusting either Him or His body.

I tried to rationalize away these convictions, but God began to reveal to me how deeply He is a God of mercy and grace. He wanted me to trust His promises and to obey His commands that I trust Him with my life. I needed to let Him show me the reality of my experience and trust that He would redeem it. Moreover, I needed to find someone besides my husband to start trusting. I was not to run, not to go "numb"—just tell my story to someone who would listen with a godly heart while I stayed emotionally present. This level of honesty and vulnerability was a tall order, but I had to stop running from myself and surrender my fear and control to Him.

I've learned that God is my counselor, that God forgives. I've learned that only God can judge me, and God wants me to fear only Him!

God brought a certain woman into my life when I finally decided to trust Him and tell my story to someone. I prayed for His leading, and we developed a relationship over time. Over a period of several weeks she heard my story, and God has taught me to stay emotionally present as I talk. It has been very hard work, but as I trust Him, He gives me courage and relieves my fear.

My battle was learning to look at what happened to me and not to "disappear", pretending there was nothing for me to see and know. God has continually challenged me to draw back the curtains of my past and to speak about as much as I could remember—trusting that as I brought those things into the light, they

would lose their power over me as He assured me that He was redeeming them and not condemning me.

At first when I would speak, my words would come out different from my thoughts. Often, I would

feel paralyzed and would sit in silence. The confusion in my mind would be intense; I was fearful that if I started to tell my story, I might go crazy, or somehow I might die or get hurt. I might be judged and abandoned. I would have to work hard to stay present and not go numb.

God taught me to trust Him. My daily time with Him increased to hours of prayer and Bible study. It was only through committing myself to absorbing His word and trusting what I learned as He taught me His truth that I was able to overcome my paralyzing fear. God brought me comfort. He assured me He would fight for me, but mostly, He encouraged me to keep going and to trust His servant whom He had sent into my life. As His word spoke truth and reality to me, God's faithfulness became real.

I slowly branched out and trusted others as I trusted God to keep me safe and be my strength, and He has blessed me with encouraging friends. He has been faithful.

I have learned that God is trustworthy. He always does what He says He's going to do, and I've learned that I am chosen!

God continues molding me to serve Christ Jesus single-mindedly, revealing my past to me and restoring my memory. He provides strength and courage and helps me reach out to others. He has given me the desire to be part of His body. His Spirit dwells within me, and as I open myself to Him the fruit of his Spirit is replacing a self-centered lifestyle and revealing the idols that have bound me: pride, resentment, bitterness, and deceit.

God has forgiven me and leads me to His mercy seat every day. I can openly confess to Him and know that He has covered me in His blood. I can claim His promises and stand strong in who I am in Him. He is God, and He will keep every promise to me. When the enemy comes against me, I will remain clothed in Jesus Christ, my Armor of Light. He has won the battle!

The truth has uncovered the lies.

Sometimes the memories of the past flash back. Those moments are often confusing at first, but always I can learn from them. God has brought into my life many wise people, and I have learned to seek their counsel.

From my Father I have received the promise that He is the Strong Vine and I am a strong branch; I will not break off from Him.

I have learned that God hears me and cares about how I feel. He wants to restore me, heal me, comfort me. I am His child—loved, blessed, accepted, adopted, and redeemed! I have learned that I was once a sinner, but now I am a saint!

The Son has set me free, and I am free indeed (Gal. 5:1). My heart is pure before Him, and I praise the God of heaven! This is truth: freedom reigns, and even when times are difficult and the road is twisty, I am safe; Jesus is mine! †



Bethany is a passionate lover of God and is free in His Spirit. She is a wife and mother, a forward-marching saint in Jesus, and a truth seeker. She is the facilitator of the Genesis Process Groups at her church, and through His grace and power she speaks into the lives of women. She is the facilitator of the Wounded Heart Class for abused women and is a writer and blogger. Visit her blog at: www.saythat--again.blogspot.com

Filtered by my worldview



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For an Adventist, the battle of good vs. evil includes his standing up for worshiping on Saturday rather than Sunday.

Sovereignty. I kept hearing that word. Everyone in the “Sunday church” I was attending seemed to understand what sovereignty meant—but I didn’t have a clue. The definition, I thought, must be important or I wouldn’t keep hearing that word over and over and over again.

Slowly I began to piece together the biblical meaning of sovereignty, and what I found completely blew apart my Adventist “great controversy worldview”.

As I read Scripture, passages began to jump out at me: Daniel 2:21, Job 38-41, Psalms 139:16, Psalms 139, Acts 17:26, Revelation 1:8, 18, and more. Sovereignty meant having supreme authority and power. A “sovereign” was not subject to anyone or anything.

In my previous Adventist worldview, God was not sovereign but was subject to many things: watching universes, man’s freedom of choice, and men’s ability to keep God’s law so that God could be vindicated. Satan and God were in a wrestling match, and I felt the outcome depended on me.

Every part of my life was filtered through the “great controversy worldview”. I lived in perpetual angst and anxiousness—God’s law and character were counting on me!

My worldview changes

As my worldview began to change, I wrestled with whether I would submit my understanding to Scripture. God wasn’t subject to anyone! I began to wonder: did that make me a chess piece in a cruel game of war? Finally, I had to submit my mind to what Scripture said. God is sovereign and Satan and his powers were subject to our creator God (Col. 1). I couldn’t answer all the questions created by God’s sovereignty, but I could trust Him.

In spite of the whirling “great controversy milieu” in my head, I was beginning to view God as bigger and more powerful than I had ever imagined. No wonder men in the Bible fell to the ground as if dead when they came in contact with Him (Rev. 1:17, Gen. 17:3, Num. 16:22, Ez. 1:28, Acts 9:24)!

What really blew me away, though, was this: a sovereign God stepped into time and space and paid for my life. This God who was subject to no one and nothing loved me to the point of entering His creation and redeeming me (Phil. 2:5-11). God’s sovereignty began to give me a peace and rest in my spirit that I had never known before. Nothing that happened in my life would be a surprise to God (Ps. 139:16, Acts 17: 24-31).

Carolyn Macomber was a doctoral student at Andrews University when she discovered inconsistencies between Adventism and the Bible. She withdrew her membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2009. She is a member of The Chapel Evangelical Free Church in St. Joseph, Michigan, where she is the leader of a Former Adventist Fellowship. She teaches at an inner city private school in Benton Harbor, Michigan, and this next year she will be a small group leader for Bible Study Fellowship in Granger, Indiana.

I recently browsed through my old junior high reading books to see how my worldview had been shaped. In the *Seventh-day Adventist Advanced Reading Program*, Book IV, among classic stories and poems, are excerpts from Ellen G. White’s writings. Here is one from pp. 229–230:

“There is a satanic force propelling the Sunday movement, but it is concealed ... Satan has caused the change of the Sabbath in the hope of carrying out his purpose for the defeat of God’s plans ... The man of sin (Satan), ... will cause laws to be made enforcing the observance of the first day of the week. But God’s people are to stand firm for Him. And the Lord will work in their behalf, showing plainly that He is the God of gods” (excerpted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White comments on Rev. 13:11-17, p. 975).

The next two articles in this reader are by Ellen White. Notice how the thought processes are strung together

from this excerpt on p. 233:

Referring to the last days when voices are heard saying, “here is truth”, “...the burden of many is to unsettle the foundation of our faith which has led us from the churches and from the world to stand as a peculiar people in the world, ... the Holy Ghost has accompanied the presentation of the truth.” To deny this Sabbath/Sunday “truth” is to “place us in that company who have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits” (*Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 387, 388.)

Sunday fear

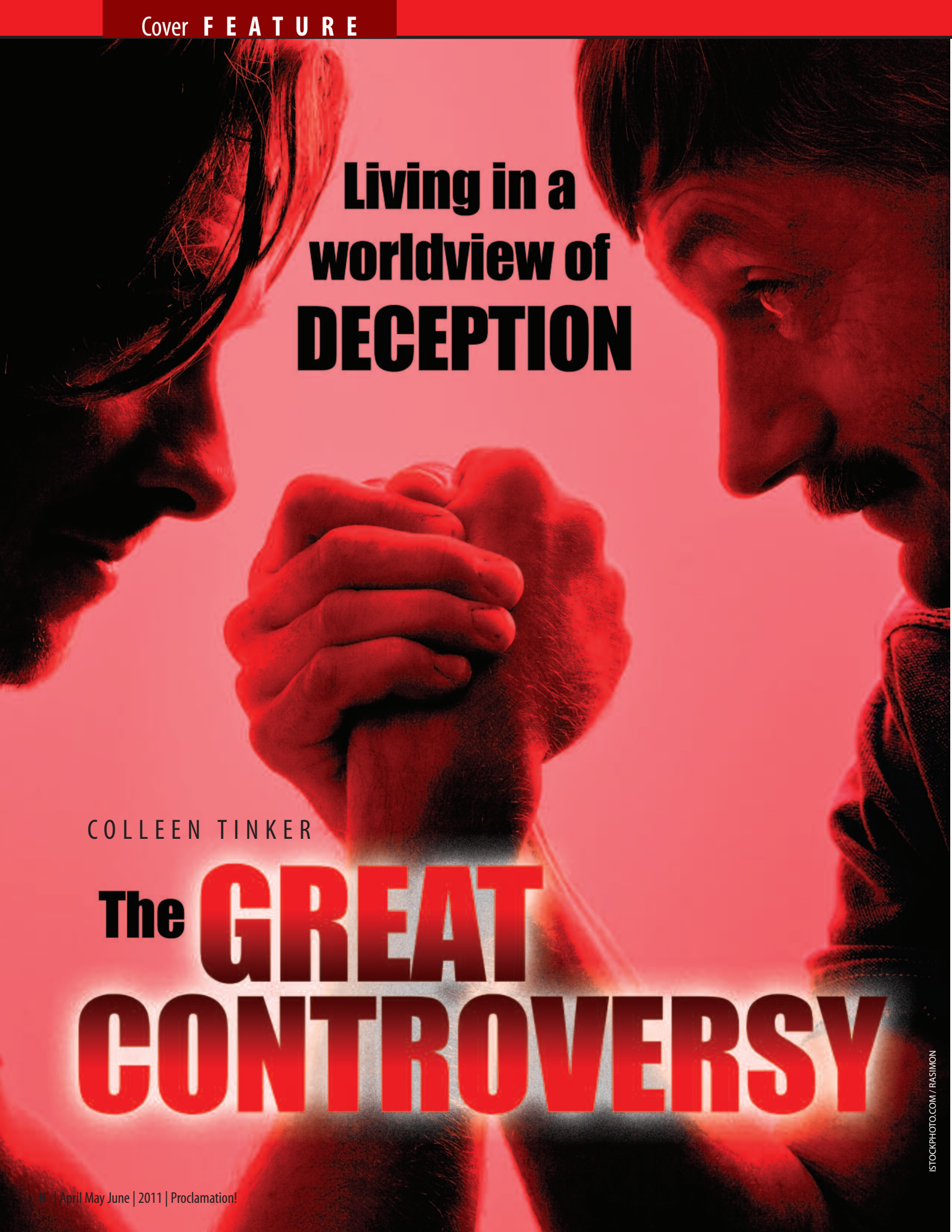
This fear of worshiping on Sunday is part of that “great controversy worldview”. For an Adventist, the battle of good vs. evil includes his standing up for worshiping on Saturday rather than Sunday.

The Adventist worldview is many-tentacled and deep. In brief, however, it separates a person from other Christians. It misuses Scripture; it makes God’s reputation subject to people’s ability to keep the law, and it identifies Saturday worship as the sign of the seal of God.

I am thankful that God is sovereign. The Holy Spirit is His seal on me. Jesus is sovereign over evil and Satan, and he fully paid my debt of sin.

I CAN trust God’s goodness, and I praise Him for my new, biblical worldview. He reigns! †





**Living in a
worldview of
DECEPTION**

COLLEEN TINKER

**The GREAT
CONTROVERSY**

It was a Sabbath in May, 1997. For the last time Richard and I left the room where we had co-led a Sabbath School class for the past several years. We had been studying Scripture systematically for three years, and the pillars of Adventism had been crumbling. We were done.

As we drove home Richard said, “At least there’s one thing we will take with us: the great controversy worldview. It explains everything.”

A year later we realized with a deep sense of horror that even our worldview was incompatible with the gospel. We had to renounce it.

What is the “great controversy”?

Ellen G. White (EGW) had her famous two-hour “great controversy vision” in Lovett’s Grove, Ohio, in mid-March, 1858. This vision is described in her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, and it describes Adventist reality like this (see box below).

When the early Adventists accepted the Lovett’s Grove vision as truth, they cemented their position outside the Christian faith, interpreting Scripture through the lens of this new revelation. The investigative judgment had already gutted Jesus’ completed atonement, and from 1858 on, Adventists had a complete story in which to frame their view of reality. They would use the same words and the same Bible all Christians use, but they would mean different things than Christians mean when discussing the Scriptures.

Today, nothing has changed. Their Fundamental Belief #8 says,

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. ...[Satan] introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam

and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the world-wide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated.⁶

Adventists affirm the centrality of great controversy theme

In this postmodern age, Adventist leaders and authors are finding the great controversy to be an effective way to share Adventism with people who don’t believe in “absolute truth”.

In the November, 2008 issue of *Ministry* magazine, Erman Norman addressed evangelizing a postmodern culture with the great controversy story. In his article entitled “Reaching the Secular World”, Norman refers to an article entitled “Reaching Postmodern Society” which was published in the September, 2006 edition of the *Mid-America Outlook* and was written by *Outlook* editor Martin Weber. Norman wrote:

We do hold, however, a very important key—the great controversy. This God-given narrative...which entails the story of Eden lost to Eden restored in the earth made new, synchronizes well every Adventist belief, characterizing it as uniquely Adventist in both content and scope....[and answers] many of the questions of the postmodern mind (Christ and His high priestly ministry, heaven and hell, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, etc.).⁷

Norm Gulley makes an even more far-reaching statement. In his article “The Cosmic Controversy” published in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Autumn, 1996, Gulley states, “Theology needs to break beyond the man-centered world view

What is the “great controversy”?

- Before time began, God the Father exalted Jesus to be equal to Himself.
- When Adam and Eve sinned, the Father took Jesus into His inner council and allowed Him to become the sacrifice for sin.
- God’s exaltation of Jesus over Lucifer made Lucifer jealous.
- Lucifer rebelled and turned one-third of heaven’s angels against God.
- He accused God of unfairness, of giving a law too difficult to keep, yet demanding obedience.
- God banished Lucifer/Satan and his angels to earth.
- Satan deceived Eve, thus causing humanity to sin.¹
- Ever since, Satan and Jesus have been battling each other for the souls of men.
- God gave the written transcript of His character on Mt. Sinai so we would know how to live.
- Jesus came with sinful flesh like Mary’s to show us we can keep the law as He did.
- Jesus’ death vindicates and exalts God’s law.
- Ultimately God’s people will become free of sin and prove God’s law is fair and attainable.
- When God’s people perfectly reproduce the character of Christ, they will vindicate God’s character, prove Satan to be a liar, and thus help Jesus win the conflict with Satan.²
- Jesus will place all confessed sins on Satan who will carry them into the lake of fire where he, Satan, “will bear the final penalty” for them.³
- Finally, God’s people have the power to “hasten [their] Lord’s return” by throwing themselves into carrying the Adventist message to the world and keeping the law perfectly.⁴
- The mark demarcating the saved from the lost is the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, while worshiping on Sunday is the mark of the beast.⁵

about human salvation to the cosmic world view about the great controversy. Seventh-day Adventists have an opportunity to lead out in this Einsteinian-like breakthrough into the broader world view.”⁸

Gulley develops the idea that not only humans but inhabitants on other planets must vote to vindicate either God’s fairness or Satan’s accusations. He says,

It is necessary that the truth about God, Christ and Satan be made manifest. The real story of all three is involved in the cosmic controversy. The revelation of who they really are must be made so that all created beings, angelic (fallen and unfallen), humans (redeemed and lost) and the unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar, may all vote unanimously on who is right and who is wrong. Only one side can win, yet all from both

how we view God, sin, and salvation, to the cosmic issues that impact our future. It is a volume that ought to be in every school and personal library.¹²

Jim Pedersen, president of the Northern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, says this:

The great controversy theme is one of the special contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, particularly as it is unfolded through the prophetic ministry and writings of Ellen G. White.¹³

The former director of education for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Humberto M. Rasi, writes this:

This metanarrative [the great controversy] provides a comprehensive framework that allows all the major themes of the Bible to fit into an integrated whole...The rapid growth of the

When the early Adventists accepted the Lovett’s Grove vision as truth, they cemented their position outside the Christian faith, interpreting Scripture through the lens of this new revelation.

sides must vote, and vote the same. This is done with complete freedom, and is done purely on the evidence given by both sides.⁹

Importantly, the idea of “unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar” is found in Ellen White’s works, never in the Bible. Moreover, this assumption cannot stand the scrutiny of modern science.¹⁰

In 2010 Adventist publishing house Pacific Press released a new book compiled by Herbert E. Douglass entitled, *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen G. White*. This book, organized into 21 sections plus an index, collects quotations from Ellen White’s writings without Scriptural support and arranges them in themes. Many of the quotations in this article are cited from this book.

The following endorsement on the back cover of the book confirms that the great controversy theme shapes the Adventist worldview. Written by Fernando Canale, professor of theology at Andrews University Theological Seminary, these words summarize the Adventist worldview:

Understanding...the great controversy theme will provide honest seekers with the indispensable big picture from which to frame their quest after truth. Many will find this work to be useful also as a tool to find the real God of Scripture hidden behind the maze of conflicting theological and ministerial traditions accumulated through the history of the Christian church.¹¹

Three more endorsements of Douglass’s book emphasize the great controversy’s necessity for Adventist doctrine, proselytizing, and infiltration into Christian theology. Jack Blanco, professor emeritus of Southern Adventist University and the author of the Adventist “expanded paraphrase” of the Bible, *The Clear Word*, says:

An invaluable resource for...understanding of the great controversy theme that permeates our system of beliefs—from

Adventist Church around the world, the need to strengthen unity and mission focus among its members across different cultures...are all factors that in my view make this...book both compelling and timely.¹⁴

Why is this important?

Within the past few weeks Life Assurance Ministries had a booth at a national leadership conference for a well-known evangelical denomination. We passed out *Proclamation!* magazines and books to the pastors and other leaders there, and while many were eager to learn the truth about Adventism, several let us know they were convinced Adventism was not a serious problem.

That lack of concern is not surprising because Adventists say the “right words” about the Christian faith. Inside Adventism, in fact, members vary widely in what they claim to believe personally. Some say they don’t believe in Ellen White; others say they don’t have to keep the Sabbath to be saved, and many claim that salvation is by grace through faith alone. These words, however, mean something different to Adventists than they mean to Christians who hear them. For example, “salvation is by grace through faith alone” for an Adventist means God saves them by grace which includes giving them the faith in Christ’s power to help them overcome sin and keep the law so they can help prove that God’s law is fair, that God is a good God, that Satan is a liar, and that they themselves are safe to save.

In order to simplify this web of assumptions Adventists understand as “truth”, I will discuss how the great controversy paradigm changes the truth about God, Jesus, man, and the gospel, and then I will summarize the implications of these changed identities and definitions.

God and Satan: who is obligated to whom?

The cornerstone of the great controversy is its limitation of God—His sovereignty, responsibility, and identity. The Bible

teaches that God is One (Deu. 6:4; Mk. 12:29-31; Jas. 2:19). He is all-powerful, sovereign, and has authority over everything, including Satan, who cannot make a move apart from God's sovereign permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), and who must flee when commanded by God's authority (Mt. 8:28-34).

Furthermore, God cursed the serpent in Eden, and from that earliest record of human history, God decreed Satan's defeat through Eve's seed (Gen. 3:15). There is not a hint that Satan has ever accused God of anything. Rather, Scripture identifies Satan as the "accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10), but never of God. In fact, Satan and his demons know full well that they are subject to the One God and have no claim against Him. They know who God is—and they "shudder" because they are in rebellion against Him (Jas. 2:19).

Adventism, on the other hand, limits the power God can exercise over Satan and gives Satan illegitimate power. According to Adventism, God is obligated to protect Satan's "free will" as well as the free will of the supposed inhabitants of other planets and is obligated to prove that Satan's supposed accusations are unfair. In the great controversy, God limits His power so His creatures are free to accuse, question, and scrutinize His dealings and to pass judgment on His character. Furthermore, on the authority of EGW, Adventism teaches that God must allow Satan to inflict suffering, hardships, and death in order to convince humans and other worlds that he is evil:

[A certain] woman had not been possessed in spirit, but the Lord had suffered Satan to exercise his will in bringing disease upon her; for God was demonstrating the character of his kingdom before the whole universe of heaven. This opportunity must be given him to reveal the character of apostasy. The inhabitants of worlds unfallen could view in this case the attributes of Satan and the character of God.¹⁵

Scripture however, says this:

For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you [Cyrus] by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ...I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things...Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, "What are you making?"...I made the earth and created man on it...I have stirred him [Cyrus] up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts (Is. 45:4-13).

Paul says the same things about God's position as sovereign over all creation in Romans 9:17-21. Quoting from the above Isaiah passage and also from Exodus 9:16 Paul says,

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."...

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

Satan is not an independent agent of evil whose freewill God must protect. Evil is not an equal-but-opposite force opposing God's goodness. Rather, Satan is a fallen, sinful creation who is in rebellion toward His sovereign Creator. He has already been disarmed and humiliated at the cross of the Lord Jesus (Col. 2:15) **(See figure below).**

Satan does oppose God's people, and he does inflict suffering, but Scripture tells us that this suffering comes only with God's permission and for His—not Satan's—purposes (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 12:7). God is not on trial, and Satan has already been judged (Jn. 12:31; 16:8-11).

At the heart of the great controversy worldview is a god who must allow Satan to torment humans so they will see that the non-defensive, permissive god who loves his enemies is preferable to the assertive, deceptive Satan. Mankind is expected to see that God's kingdom is kinder and gentler than Satan's and thus choose to be on His side. EGW says this:

And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve.¹⁶

In a nutshell, the great controversy offers salvation on the basis of the knowledge of good and evil—the echo of the original temptation that plunged us into spiritual death.

Scripture, however, says God sent His Son to save us (Jn. 3:16-17) so that He could rescue us from the domain of darkness and transfer us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). We are born dead in sin and objects of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), by nature citizens of the domain of darkness. We have no choice about our natural citizenship. Jesus even said those who do not believe in the

Where is Satan?

GOD

Creation

• Satan

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name of God's only begotten Son are "condemned already" (Jn. 3:18).

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Israelites were not being given a choice between Satan's kingdom and God's. They were already bitten by deadly poison, and God gave them one provision: the bronze serpent. By simply believing God's command and looking they could be saved. Jesus revealed that He was the fulfillment of the bronze serpent's foreshadowing; all who believed in Him when He was lifted up would have eternal life in Him (Jn. 3:14-15).

Satan has not accused God of unfairness, nor must God prove He is superior to Satan. There is no question in the universe about God's sovereignty. All creation is subject to Him and answers to Him—even Satan.

The "transcript of God's character"

The great controversy not only limits God's sovereign authority and power over all suffering and evil, but it also diminishes His character into something that can be summarized in the law. Ellen White said,

"The law of God is a transcript of his character. The rebel leader was in opposition to the law of God, and revealed the fact that his principles were those that actuated one who is lawless, disobedient, unholy, an accuser, a liar, and a murderer."¹⁷

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines "transcript" thus: "A: a written, printed, or typed copy: a usually typed copy of dictated or recorded material; B: an official or legal and often published copy: an official copy of a student's educational record."

A transcript is an exact duplication or replica. It contains all the information found in the original document or experience. The law (and when Ellen White uses the term "law" she usually refers to the Ten Commandments) cannot contain all the information of God's character nor was it intended to do so. Even if we look at the full Torah with the detailed applications of the law included throughout the Books of Moses, the fullness of God's mercy, grace, love, and provision is not and cannot be fully captured.

The only time God's character was fully revealed to humanity in material form was when the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate in a mortal body and lived among men. Only in Jesus do we find a "transcript" of God's character (Heb. 1:1-3).

The choice of the word "transcript" is subtly deceptive. Christians may say that the law was a "revelation of God's character"—and that would be true. Every word God has spoken reveals Himself to mankind, but a revelation is not the same thing as a transcript. The revelation of God on Mt. Sinai in fire, thunder, and earthquakes was only a partial glimpse of God's holiness, a clear sign that men could not approach Him on their own terms without a mediator. The Sinai revelation of God's holiness, however, was completely different from His revelation of Himself to Elijah at the same mountain in a still, small voice. "Revelations" God gives of Himself are only partial glimpses into His eternal, unfathomable greatness.

Adventism, under the authority of EGW who is their "continuing and authoritative source of truth",¹⁸ deceptively establishes the great controversy worldview by equating the law with the character of God rather than acknowledging it is a revelation of Him.

This subtle assumption shifts the identity of God, the purpose of Christ's ministry, and man's duty.

Ellen White narrowed the focus of Satan's rebellion in heaven and of the great controversy itself to the law:

The law of God was the great subject of controversy in heaven. It is the great subject of controversy ever since the fall of Satan and will continue to be the great test question showing the loyal and the transgressors in two parties.¹⁹

By equating the law with the character of God, the great controversy worldview makes law, not the Lord Jesus or the Triune God, the object of humans' and angels' loyalty or rebellion. Adventists believe that the law is the highest authority in the universe and is the necessary factor in avoiding sin and in perfecting their characters. EGW said,

In God's moral government, which is a government based upon a distinction between right and wrong, law is essential to secure right action. God's law is the expression of His character....to require less from His creatures than obedience to His law would be to abandon them to ruin. To fail to punish transgression of His law would be to place the universe in confusion. The moral law is God's barrier between the human agent and sin.²⁰

Yet it is God Himself, not the law, that is the One we must serve. Adventists, because of EGW's claims, say that Adam and Eve's sin was the transgression of God's law. To be sure, they disobeyed God's clear command to them—but it was God against whom they transgressed, not the law.

When Nathan confronted David about his sin against Bathsheba and his arranged murder of her husband Uriah, David responded in Psalm 51 with these words, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Ps. 51:4).

Like David, Adam and Eve sinned by not trusting and obeying God; their sins were not against the inanimate law but against God whom they knew. Scripture is clear, in fact, that the law did not exist until Sinai (Gal. 3:17; Rom. 4:13-14).

Moreover, Scripture states that the righteousness that we need is not perfect law-keeping. What we need—and what God has provided in Jesus—is "the righteousness of God" which is "apart from the law" (Rom. 3:21). It is not "a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9).

In other words, EGW is wrong; the law is not "God's barrier between the human agent and sin," nor is law "essential to secure right action." Jesus is the barrier between us and sin; He is the One essential for righteousness.

By making the law the "transcript of God's character", the great controversy puts it on a par with God. For example, EGW attributes to the law the regenerating power that only belongs to the Holy Spirit and claims it is the pledge of eternal life:

God's law is given to men as a hedge, a shield....To the obedient it is the pledge of eternal life, for it expresses the principles that endure forever. Christ came to demonstrate the value of the divine principles by revealing their power for the

regeneration of humanity. He came to teach how these principles are to be developed and applied.²¹

Moreover, Adventists believe that Jesus died to turn sinners back to honoring the law. Law-keeping is equated with being right with God:

The Majesty of heaven gave His life to make us individually His own by bringing back the transgressor to his loyalty to God's law, by turning away the sinner from his iniquity.²²

In the courtyard beside the Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University, the home of the Seventh-day Adventist theological seminary, a prayer garden depicts the great controversy view of reality. A plaque at the edge of the garden explains the garden's representation of how one experi-

gressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made." The law came in with Moses and lasted until Christ (Gal 3:19; Rom. 7:1-7).

Finally, Jesus stated that it is being born again, not loyalty to the law, that marks those who are fit for heaven. He told Nicodemus in John 3:3, 6, 14-15: "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God; unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."

...EGW is wrong; the law is not "God's barrier between the human agent and sin," nor is law "essential to secure right action." Jesus is the barrier between us and sin; He is the One essential for righteousness.

ences God. The excerpts below are taken from the legend on the plaque:

Walking the garden's edge, searching for a way in, we see the podium, an overlook where one can see across the water, through the arbor, and imagine God the Father represented in the ten commandments....Ever narrowing, the winding path leads to the narrow gate with three crosses. Standing at the gate you are at the moment of decision to approach the foot of the cross. Between the gate and the cross is the Stair of Creation, one step for each day of creation. [Importantly, there are only six days of creation, not seven as found in this garden; God ceased from His work on the seventh.] The steps widen and were made a perfect number that it might seem easy to approach the cross. For once the decision is made for Christ, it is not so difficult....Standing at the foot of the Cross you imagine Christ...and looking up...you read the promise, "I Will Come Again"....The Commandments beckon from across [the garden on the opposite wall]. It seems a long walk, like leaving earth, and entering the universe of the Creator. The path from the Cross leads directly to the Commandments... The Commandments stand at the center of the circle. Once within the circle, up close and intimate, we read what the hand of God wrote in millenniums past. Simple and embraced by the Father's arms, intimate in His presence.

The Bible is clear: the cross does not lead us to the commandments; Jesus' death did not lift "the law of God to its own eternal dignity". Paul said, "...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets" (Rom. 3:20-21). And in Galatians 3:19 he explained, "Why the Law then? It was added because of trans-

gressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made." The law came in with Moses and lasted until Christ (Gal 3:19; Rom. 7:1-7).

Who is Jesus?

The great controversy hangs on EGW's statements that God the Father exalted Jesus to be His equal. This exaltation made Lucifer jealous and reveals that Lucifer had some reasons to believe God could have picked him for this exaltation, but didn't. Here are some of EGW's statements:

Satan's position in heaven had been next to the Son of God. He was first among the angels.²³

Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic.²⁴

The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor.²⁵

When Adam and Eve sinned, this exalted Jesus begged the Father to allow Him to come to earth to die for them. The Father finally acquiesced, and

The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.²⁶

In the great controversy paradigm, Jesus was not the eternal, almighty God. Instead, God exalted him to be His equal at some time in the distant past. When Jesus came to the earth, He "volunteered to take humanity" so that "in His power, humanity can obey God".²⁷ Thus, He came in the fallen condition of sinful man. EGW says,

By taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin.²⁸

Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.²⁹

Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points where-with man would be assailed.³⁰

In the great controversy worldview, Jesus' primary purpose was not to be our Substitute but to be our Example and to vindicate God's character. Importantly, the great controversy worldview assumes that Jesus kept the law as a man with a "fallen" human

For a period of time Christ was on probation. He took humanity on Himself, to stand the test and trial which the first Adam failed to endure. Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost.³⁶

The great controversy further teaches that Jesus died to exonerate God's law and make it possible for us to become perfect:

When Christ gave His life for you, it was that He might place you on vantage ground and impart to you moral power.³⁷

Jesus was bearing the sin of the world; he was enduring the curse of the law; he was vindicating the justice of God. Separation from his Father, the punishment for transgression, was to fall upon him in order to magnify God's law and testify to its immutability. And this was forever to settle the contro-

In the great controversy paradigm, **Jesus was not the eternal, almighty God. Instead, God exalted him to be His equal at some time in the distant past.**

nature. His example, therefore, is to demonstrate that all people can achieve freedom from sin if they pray and self-sacrifice as He did. The normal Christian understanding of Jesus as an example is that He shows those who are born again how they may depend upon God after being born of the Spirit. Adventism, however, sees Jesus as the example for all sinful mankind to follow in order to become right with God. Here are some of EGW's statements:

He came to this world to live the law in humanity, that Satan's charge that man cannot keep the law might be demonstrated as false.³¹

The Majesty of heaven undertook the cause of man, and with the same facilities that man may obtain, withstood the temptations of Satan as man must withstand them. This was the only way in which fallen man could become a partaker of the divine nature.³²

The glory of Christ is his character, and his character is an expression of the law of God. He fulfilled the law in its every specification, and gave to the world in his life a perfect pattern of what it is possible for humanity to attain unto by cooperation with divinity.³³

We could quote many more EGW statements demonstrating that the great controversy model sees Jesus as the example for sinful people. This unbiblical description of Jesus, however, is only part of Adventism's belief about Him. EGW also states that Jesus was on probation while He was on the earth and that He could have sinned. For example:

The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. As a free agent He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan's temptations and work at cross-purposes with God.³⁴

Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.³⁵

versy between Satan and the Prince of heaven in regard to the changeless character of that law.³⁸

In making His infinite sacrifice Christ would exalt and honor the law.³⁹

He died to make an atonement, and to become a pattern for everyone who would be His disciple.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the great controversy states that Jesus' mediation is only for a limited time and His sacrifice for sin will end when the great controversy is over. EGW says this:

To hold the people in darkness and impenitence till the Savior's mediation is ended, and there is no longer a sacrifice for sin, is the object which he [Satan] seeks to accomplish.⁴¹

The Bible teaches, however, that Jesus came to be a sacrifice for sin once for all, and His priesthood is permanent. He lives forever to intercede for His people (Heb. 8:24-25). Furthermore, He cleanses our consciences "from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). He came to fulfill the law, not to establish it as God's measure of our righteousness. Rather, we "have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Moreover, Jesus did not come with a fallen nature, nor was He divested of His full deity and power (Col. 1:19; 2:9). He was never exalted to be equal to God but was eternal, almighty God (Is. 9:6). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). Moreover, Jesus identified Himself with the personal name of God, "I Am" (Jn. 8:58).

Jesus was Satan's creator (Jn. 1:3); He was never in competition or in a battle with Satan. Jesus is God—not Michael the archangel or any lesser being exalted to be equal to God.

Finally, Jesus overturned death. While the resurrection is a central theme of the New Testament, it receives only passing mention in the great controversy paradigm. Yet Scripture tells us His resur-

Biblical Worldview

GOD

- revealed by Jesus
- sovereign over creation including evil
- all-powerful
- does not owe creatures explanations
- gave law to reveal sin
- gave Son to substitute for humans
- gave humans one way to be saved: Jesus



JESUS

- eternal Son, second person of the Trinity
- God incarnate in human flesh but with unfallen nature
- Born with living spirit—never needed to be born again
- once-for-all sacrifice—the propitiation for our sin
- our Substitute, took God's wrath for our sin
- could not sin nor could He have failed in His mission
- eternally our intercessor

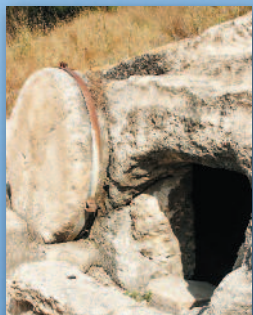


MAN

- made spiritual beings in God's image
- possesses immaterial spirit separate from the mortal body
- born with spirits dead in sin; innately sinners
- unable to resist temptation even by prayer
- saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone
- born of the Spirit and transferred from domain of darkness
- spirit made alive with Jesus' resurrection life

GOSPEL

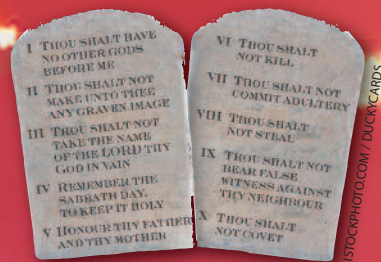
- Jesus died, was buried, and was raised on the third day; mission complete
- Jesus' blood was propitiation for our sin
- Jesus is the scapegoat
- Jesus' resurrection life is what brings our spirits to life
- we are saved by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice
- we are sealed with the indwelling Holy Spirit: born again
- God's Spirit in us guarantees our eternal future



Great Controversy Worldview

GOD

- revealed by law
- accused by Satan of unfairness
- limits power over creatures to protect their free-will
- must answer Satan's accusations
- sent Jesus as example to vindicate the law
- saves those who honor the law and reproduce the character of Christ



JESUS

- exalted to be equal with God making Lucifer jealous
- incarnate in sinful flesh with fallen nature
- possessed inherited tendencies to evil yet resisted sin
- our example; showed us how to overcome sin
- paid the price for our past sins
- could have sinned, did not know He would rise
- mediation and intercession will end

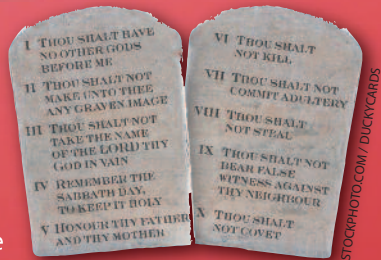


MAN

- made in God's physical image
- does not possess immaterial spirit (like an animal)
- born with inherited tendencies to sin
- must learn to pray like Jesus and resist temptation
- forgiven for past sins, must stay saved by obedience
- dies without knowing if saved
- knowledge of salvation revealed at Jesus' coming

GOSPEL

- Jesus died for sin; applies His blood in heaven since 1844
- Jesus' blood is "down payment" on our sin (breaking the law)
- Satan is scapegoat
- we are saved when we perfectly reflect Christ's character (the law)
- resurrection merely promises we will be re-created
- we are sealed or marked by keeping the Sabbath
- we will stand without a mediator during the tribulation



rection life is what gives us our eternal life when we are born again (Rom. 5:10; 8:10-11). He has already been seated at the right hand of God and forever intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

Man in the great controversy

The great controversy model depends on the belief that humans are physical beings without immaterial spirits. Furthermore, Adventists believe that sin is transmitted genetically. Their Fundamental Belief #7 says in part,

Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit [breath]... When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and ...the image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil.⁴²

Adventists believe that the “breath of life” is the literal breath, or air, that one breathes. They compare it to “streams of electricity that...transform a quiet, gray panel of glass in a box into a pulsating splash of color and action when we flip the switch on a color TV.”⁴³

Moreover, Adventists assume the image of God in man includes a physical resemblance. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* states:

Since the Bible teaches that man comprises an indivisible unity of body, mind, and soul, man’s physical features must also, in some way, reflect God’s image. But isn’t God a spirit? How could a spirit being be associated with any form or shape?

A brief study of the angels reveals that they, like God, are spiritual beings...Yet they always appear in human form...Could it be that a spiritual being may have a “spiritual body” with a form and features...?

The Bible indicates that some people have seen parts of God’s person....Christ is described as “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and “the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3). These passages seem to indicate that God is a personal being and has a personal form. This should come as no surprise, for man was created in the image of God.⁴⁴

The great controversy worldview assumes man is body plus breath, not a body with a spirit that can worship God (Jn 4:24), that can be deeply moved and troubled (Jn. 11:33), or that goes to the Father at death (Lk. 23:46). Without a spirit, humans cannot be spiritually dead in a literal sense. Adventists do not believe that humans are born depraved, unable to obey or please God apart from a divine intervention. Scripture says we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). “No one understand; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Rom. 3:11-12).

Rather, EGW teaches that sin is a choice we make:

It is not in the power of Satan to force anyone to sin. Sin is the sinner’s individual act....Through prayer and the word of God we shall be enabled to overcome temptation.⁴⁵

By faith and prayer all may meet the requirements of the gospel. No man can be forced to transgress.⁴⁶

Because Adventism assumes a false understanding of man’s nature, they also have a false belief about Christ’s nature. Since man is a physical being with “higher powers” in his physical mind, they understand sin to be transmitted through the gene pool. Thus a fallen or sinful nature is defined as inherited weaknesses and tendencies to evil. Therefore, Jesus the man had a “fallen nature” but overcame temptation and showed us how we, too, can conquer sin by prayer and faith.

Without immaterial spirits, humans have no way to be “born of the Spirit”, or “born again” (Jn. 3:3, 5). Instead, the new birth within Adventism is a mental change, the Holy Spirit enlightening the mind, a decision to be baptized. Because they do not believe in a literal human spirit, they have no understanding that Jesus was conceived with spiritual life. He was the Son of God, not the son of Adam. His spirit was alive from the moment He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was the only human born who did not need to be born again.

Since the great controversy assumes that obedient people will demonstrate that God’s law is fair and will thus vindicate God’s character to a watching universe, it is not surprising that salvation and our highest loyalty are defined by Law. EGW said,

Satan had asserted that men could not keep the commandments of God. To prove that they could, Christ became a man, and lived a life of perfect obedience, an evidence to sinful human beings, to the worlds unfallen, and to the heavenly angels, that man could keep God’s law through the divine power that is abundantly provided for all that believe.⁴⁷

Summary statement

In order to see clearly how the great controversy paradigm warps Adventists’ belief about reality, we’ll summarize what we’ve said so far before concluding with a final look at Adventism’s deceptive worldview. The great controversy:

- depends on the extra-biblical writings of Ellen White, their “continuing and authoritative source of truth”.
- teaches a “different Jesus”, one who is not Mighty God, the I AM, but a diminished one who took man’s fallen nature, was on probation, and could have sinned, thus threatening the existence of the cosmos and God Himself.⁴⁸
- falsifies the identity and person of God by equating His character with the law.
- gives Satan illegitimate power and freedom.
- claims God is obligated to answer to Satan.
- says Christ’s atonement was not finished at the cross but continues through the alleged controversy.
- teaches Christ’s mediation will end, and there will no longer be a sacrifice for sin.
- replaces Jesus as our total Substitute with Jesus as our Example.
- replaces Jesus with Satan as the scapegoat who ultimately bears away the sins of the saved.
- falsifies the nature of man by denying the human spirit.
- claims the “the righteousness of God” is obedience to the Ten Commandments.
- substitutes the new birth by the Holy Spirit with conversion to Adventism and law-keeping.

- says salvation depends on our knowledge of good and evil to inform the right choice.
- replaces the Lord Jesus as the test of faith with loyalty to Adventist teachings.

Living in a deceptive worldview

The great controversy worldview is the Adventists' definition of reality. Just as they are taught that grass is green, so they learn that God identifies Himself with Law. Because the law is the transcript of God's character and Satan has said that law is unfair, humans' only hope lies in knowing what is good and what is evil so they can make right choices.

Although Adventists use all the words Christians use when referring to God and salvation, they internally mean the definitions established by the great controversy. They believe their replication of Jesus' obedient character will finally bring this controversy to an end. Thus, they finally have the power to vindicate God's reputation and expose Satan as a fraud. Satan, therefore, is relentless in provoking and deceiving those who desire to serve God, while Jesus stands before them as a continuous example of sinless perfection which they must emulate. In this way each person becomes a player in the controversy as he grows in the knowledge of good and evil, the reputation of God and His law hanging on his shoulders.

Martin Carey has summarized the great controversy worldview like this:

When God's sovereignty is reduced, Satan or nature must fill the vacuum. The great controversy's god can be

accused and put on the defensive with a 'meaningful' trial he can very possibly lose. We are also told, however, that natural and moral laws are sovereign. They cannot be questioned and can never fail. Therefore, the laws represent higher realities than God. The great controversy creates a dualistic cosmos that limits the power and control of God and expands the power of Satan and the laws. God must answer to Satan, and we must answer to the laws. God requires lesser beings, such as Jesus and a human "remnant", to vindicate and rescue His sovereignty. Great controversy theory removes all the sound reasons why we should believe any of its god's prophecies or promises of success because they depend upon human obedience and faithfulness. The doubts that great controversy theory raises help explain why so many Adventists become agnostic. Their god has already been discredited and dethroned.

The great controversy worldview is the unexamined assumption Adventists have accepted as truth. It shapes every aspect of their lives. Instead of this worldview describing the biblical truth of man's sin and Jesus' complete atonement through His death, burial, and resurrection, it puts the burden of being worthy of salvation on their own shoulders. Their belief that they have "the truth" and their failure to measure up to "truth's" standards often results in despair, depression and guilt. They may use the same gospel words evangelicals use, but their worldview equates honoring God with keeping the law. Instead of trusting the finished work of Christ, they are striving to finish the work of Christ.

Somehow they misunderstand Christ's last words: "It is finished." †

Endnotes

- ¹ EGW, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 492-504.
- ² EGW, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.
- ³ EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358. See also *The Great Controversy*, p. 673.
- ⁴ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 633, 634.
- ⁵ EGW, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.
- ⁶ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005 edition, p. 113.
- ⁷ Norman, Erman, "Reaching the Secular World", *Outlook*, September, 2006, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2008/November/reaching-the-secular-world.html>
- ⁸ Gulley, Norman, "The Cosmic Conflict", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Autumn, 2006, p. 83.
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- ¹⁵ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, April 23, 1896.
- ¹⁶ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.
- ¹⁷ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, April 23, 1896.
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- ¹⁹ EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 269.
- ²⁰ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, July 31, 1901.
- ²¹ EGW, *Education*, pp. 76-77.
- ²² EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 85.
- ²³ EGW, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 341.
- ²⁴ EGW, *Early Writings*, p. 145.
- ²⁵ EGW, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.
- ²⁶ EGW, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 07-09-1895, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," Par. 14.
- ²⁷ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.
- ²⁸ EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, pp. 116, 117.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- ³⁰ EGW, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 267, 268.
- ³¹ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, April 7, 1898.
- ³² EGW, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 252.
- ³³ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, Dec. 12, 1895.

- ³⁴ EGW, *Selected Messages*, Bk. 3, p. 131.
- ³⁵ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.
- ³⁶ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.
- ³⁷ EGW, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 74.
- ³⁸ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 13, 1896.
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- ⁴⁰ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1159
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- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.
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Judged

The progression

MARTIN L. CAREY

For three decades, the “Brinsmead Agitation” challenged Adventist leadership on several continents. During the years I was growing up, the conflict over his teachings became so intense that showing any agreement with Brinsmead’s heresy could get one expelled—and this I saw firsthand. Many pastors lost their jobs or left the ministry voluntarily because they espoused Brinsmead’s theology. For his followers, even mentioning the name of Brinsmead could put one’s membership at risk. Moreover, much Adventist literature published in the 1970’s was aimed at correcting Brinsmead’s influence. Then, in the late 70’s, he began not merely “working within” but separating from Adventism, and by 1990, he had moved entirely out of the Christian faith.

Robert Brinsmead had begun his career as a conservative Adventist. As the years passed, however, he morphed, slowly becoming liberal, then radical, and finally moving from devotion to hostile rejection. Along the way, he covered much of the territory of Adventist thought that still flourishes today. Robert Brinsmead’s Awakening movement reveals not only a microcosm of Adventism but also gives insight into its nature.

Some say Brinsmead left Christianity because he abandoned Ellen White’s prophetic authority and the pillars of the Adventist faith. She had, after all, predicted that Adventists who rejected her would abandon God. In this study, I avoid that superficial analysis and will attempt to show that Brinsmead did not abandon the Christian faith because of Ellen White or the “pillars”—or because he was somehow corrupted. Rather, I believe he was unable to submit personally to the true Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the Bible.

Questions at Avondale

Robert Brinsmead was raised in Australia in a family of eight children who helped operate the family farm. In 1955, the 22-year-old Bob entered Avondale College in Cooranbong to earn his theology

degree. As an energetic, earnest student, he was quickly recognized for his intellect and potential. While at Avondale, he also met his wife Valorie.¹ Raised with a thorough knowledge of Ellen White’s writings and the Bible, he had a passion for the Adventist doctrines of the last days. Chief among these doctrines was the investigative judgment, and it became his focus for more than a decade.

While Brinsmead was at Avondale, Adventist leaders produced the book *Questions on Doctrine* [QOD] to answer the common evangelical accusation that Adventism was not a Christian evangelical movement. Conservatives felt that the book compromised or hid the core doctrines of Adventism in order to impress the evangelical world and to avoid the label of “cult.”² Adventists believed they had been entrusted to proclaim the message for the last days—a gospel that apostate Protestantism had rejected. At the foundation of this last-day message were the nature of Christ and the atonement, and these two were points of contention with the evangelicals.³ Did Christ have a sinful or sinless nature, and was the atonement completed at the cross?

When QOD was published in 1957, many historic Adventists felt that the church’s core message had been weakened.⁴ There were evangelical-sounding statements on the nature of Christ: “We emphasize again that in His human nature Christ was perfect and sinless.”⁵ Moreover, some statements on the atonement appeared to support the common Protestant understanding of a completed atonement: “On Calvary, the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice of Christ was offered for our salvation.” However, this “all-sufficient sacrifice” did not include “the application of the benefits of the atonement made on the cross, to the individual sinner.”⁶ Did “all-sufficient” mean the atonement was finished, or merely that the sacrifice was sufficient? The book’s wording seemed to finesse the questions rather than to answer them clearly.



by the Gospel of Brinsmead's Awakening

The investigative judgment, Adventism's unique fundamental belief, shaped the responses to these questions. Adventist pioneers patterned the doctrine after the ancient Jewish sanctuary, said to be a model of the sanctuary in heaven. They taught that on the ancient Jewish Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter God's presence to remove Israel's sins that had accumulated in the sanctuary during the year. (Scripture, incidentally, does not teach that sins accumulated in the sanctuary during the year. See *Proclamation!*, April–June 2010.) Adventists believe this yearly “cleansing of the sanctuary” removed the record of sins and made atonement for Israel. As our high priest, therefore, Christ entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary in heaven in 1844 and began a judgment of all those who profess God.⁷ The records in heaven are now being examined so that all those who have confessed and overcome every sin will have the evidence of their sins removed from the records.⁸ Only then will the atonement for sin be accomplished.

However, if Jesus finished the atonement on the cross, there is no need for this judgment.

Brinsmead felt that judgment readiness was urgent, that God's professed people were not ready. Anyone's name could come up for review at any time, and the standard of readiness was nothing less than perfection of character. Ellen White had made that belief abundantly clear. Yet how were the faithful to be able to attain the spotless characters necessary to stand in judgment today?⁹

Following are the historic Adventist doctrines of salvation that shape Adventists' understanding of how they can achieve judgment readiness.

An Immutable Law of God

A central premise of historic Adventist doctrine is the eternity of “God's Law”, or the Ten Commandments. This law has been

referred to as the “transcript of God's character,” the eternal moral law, and the image of God.¹⁰ To be right with God, one must be in right relationship with the law, to “satisfy,” “please,” and “answer to” this law. Often the language that Adventist authors use for the law is personal, as though it were a divine person.

Original Sin

Adventist literature lacks a consistent doctrine of original sin. Some authors denied the existence of original sin, while others said it is removed at conversion. Still others said our natures are gradually cleansed over our lifetimes.¹¹ The argument over Jesus' sinful nature also continued. Historic Adventist authors, such as M.L. Andreasen, believed Jesus shared our propensities to sin.¹² Ellen White statements can support all sides.¹³ All agreed, however, that Jesus is our example for overcoming. If He shared our sinful desires and could overcome all temptation, with His help we could also.

Righteousness By Faith [RBF]

In Adventism, RBF includes both *justification*, what God has done for us, and *sanctification*, what He does in us. Justification initiates the process of salvation, and it refers to the forgiveness of past sins only.¹⁴ At the moment of justification, Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, meaning that God counts him as righteous as Christ.¹⁵ When the sinner has fully surrendered to Christ and lives a holy life, his sins will remain “pardoned,” and “the blessing of justification is retained.”¹⁶ Pardoned sin, however, is not full forgiveness; forgiveness is only granted on condition of passing the investigative judgment.¹⁷ God eventually grants full forgiveness to those who have cooperated with Him in becoming righteous, not merely counted righteous. Justification is only maintained by continual surrender and obedience. Justification is called the believer's “title for heaven.”

Sanctification was always the most important aspect of Brinsmead's early understanding of RBF. By God's imparting righteousness over the believer's lifetime, he is made righteous. This righteousness is defined as obedience to the Ten Commandments. God will not pronounce us righteous when we are not; that would be only a "legal fiction." Imparted righteousness in the believer's life is called the "robe of Christ's righteousness." Wearing that robe means obeying the law with the Spirit's help, and this obedience is acceptable to God as righteousness.¹⁸ Imputed righteousness makes up the deficit that may exist in an Adventist's personal growth at the time of his or her death.

Christ looks at the spirit, and when He sees us carrying our burden with faith, His perfect holiness atones for our shortcomings. When we do our best, He becomes our righteousness. EGW, *Letter* 22, 1889.

Sanctification is a higher state of salvation that lifts us above the need for forgiveness and imputed righteousness. In other words, sanctification is not only our "fitness" for heaven, it is our robe or "wedding garment" for the judgment. In summary, by justification one becomes merely a candidate for final sealing, but only through sanctification can one achieve true fitness for passing the judgment.¹⁹

Moral Perfection

According to Ellen White, Christ's character must be perfectly reproduced in His people before He can return.²⁰ Therefore, believers must, by God's help and their own "diligent effort," overcome all sin in order to be sealed for eternity. The underlying explanation for this compulsion to attain moral perfection is the investigative judgment. Once Christ's atonement is completed at the end of this judgment, believers are no longer covered by Christ's mediation in the sanctuary. When all the names have come up for judgment, Christ's mediation ends, and He will no longer plead His blood for anyone in the Most Holy Place. Their sins will no longer be covered; thus, those who will be fit for salvation will have overcome all sin so they can stand before God without a mediator.²¹

Many Adventists live in fear of judgment, knowing they have not reached the required character perfection. Perhaps, many have thought, they are better off going to their graves, believing that for dying sinners, the terms are more favorable. Christ's righteousness would somehow make up for their deficiencies if they die before He returns. Even though Christ's second coming should be a joyful event, a deep inner awareness whispers to Adventists, "I am not ready." Even so, they bravely sing these words,

Are you ready to stand in your place? Are you ready to look in His face? Can you look up and say, "This is my Lord!" Are you ready for Jesus to come?²²

Against this backdrop, Brinsmead was troubled by the problem of innate sin and concluded that sinless perfection was "impossible and futile." We are crippled by the "scars of sin," or our "subconscious sin." As long as these sinful propensities remained, one could not be "ready to stand in [one's] place." No amount of overcoming sin could qualify one for judgment.²³

Yet, if the investigative judgment has continued since 1844, our names could come up for review at any time. Our holiness will be

compared to nothing less than the absolute perfection of Jesus Christ. What good is a gradual sanctification if, at that final moment, it is incomplete? Brinsmead found a Protestant answer to this dilemma. In the judgment, Christ must be our righteousness. Only He possesses the infinite purity needed, so He is our substitute. His righteousness justifies us at the end, just as His righteousness justifies us now.²⁴

Moreover, the teaching that Christ will blot out the record of sins at the end of the judgment answered the need to live without a mediator after probation closed. Finally, Brinsmead taught that as a last work of grace to the saints, Christ will perform a "final atonement" by removing their sinful nature. As in the ancient Day of Atonement, believers were to "gather at the sanctuary," afflicting their souls, to be one with Christ in this great and final work. The door to the Most Holy Place was now open, and they could boldly enter into the place of judgment. When their sins are finally blotted out, they will receive the "latter rain," a special outpouring of God's Spirit.

This was the original "Awakening Message." For many Adventists who had lived in dread of God's judgment, this was good news. As Brinsmead later described,

...it was the most sweet and joyful news that many had ever heard. Neither time nor circumstances...can efface the memory of souls weeping for joy at the simple revelation that Christ is our righteousness in judgment (*Review of Awakening*, Pt. 1).²⁵

Brinsmead decided to leave Avondale in 1958 to speak independently and to publish. His following soon became a significant movement in Australia. By 1960, they called themselves the "Sanctuary Awakening Fellowship." Even though the Australian Adventist leadership strenuously opposed the Awakening, the movement spread.²⁶ Inevitably, on December 19, 1960, the Awakening message came to America, and the General Conference had no idea what was about to hit them.

"A Cult Within a Cult"

In 1961, a young mother of three named Iris Carey was among those who heard and "wept for joy." She lived a few blocks from the Review and Herald building in Tacoma Park, and she began excitedly and widely circulating Brinsmead sermon tapes. Some caught that excitement, others strongly resisted. (Indifference was not a typical Adventist reaction to Brinsmead.) Meanwhile, for the three of us who were kids of Iris Carey, tension with our church and the world was a constant reality. In spite of its polarizing message and charismatic leader, the Awakening movement never tried to be a separate denomination. Indeed, Brinsmead's purpose was not to destroy Adventism but to restore it to its original judgment day urgency. In the 1960's, most Awakeners, as we called ourselves, remained members of Adventist churches—that is, as long as they would have us.

Even so, the Adventist leadership's reaction tended to be emotional and oppositional. A vigorous propaganda campaign warned pastors of those fanatical Brinsmead followers who must not be tolerated,²⁷ and we learned to mention the name Brinsmead only to the receptive. Iris was expelled from several churches for giving out Brinsmead literature and for holding unauthorized Bible studies. For her, this persecution confirmed the prophetic status of the

Awakening message, and throughout the movement it unified Awakeners into a distinct Adventist subculture.

Awakening's culture had three characteristics. First, it had a charismatic leader; Brinsmead's energy and personality always carried the movement, powered by his strong mind, exceptional communication skills, and an independent spirit. In addition, his informal persona added to his appeal. Many Awakeners believed that Brinsmead was sent, like William Miller, as a messenger to awaken a sleeping church, and some sent him their tithes. The resulting abundance of literature and tapes galvanized our movement's mission and kept it moving. Additionally, Bob Brinsmead was constantly adjusting his message. Whenever Awakeners would meet they would ask one another, "Have you heard the latest?" We always looked for the next church-shaking new emphasis. Brinsmead had a genius for building elaborate theological structures, getting everyone excited, then tearing them down²⁸ for a "new framework." He often said, "Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I keep moving my tent in faith." There was no resting for the devoted Awakener following Brinsmead's mercurial leading.

The second cultural feature was our movement's elite remnant identity. We were to awaken Laodicean Adventism by our teaching and example. In fact, we felt we were the most Adventist of all Adventists in our knowledge and zeal. Though we believed perfection would be a gift of grace, we strove hard for it. We learned to quote Ellen White extensively, especially her statements about getting ready, and we zealously perfected our remnant diet. We gathered in homes, and frequently we made pilgrimages to Brinsmead's summer institutes. In 1968 we had our own song book, *Awake and Sing*, with titles such as, "Jesus Stands for Me in Judgment", and "The Truth is Marching On".²⁹ Adventism never had more loyal agitators.

A third feature of the Awakening culture was its intellectual system-building. We loved our speculations about the nature of Christ and the end times, projecting our notions in lurid, apocalyptic detail. I remember our Sabbath afternoon potlucks, heavy with rich vegetarian food, followed by arguments in which we tossed "Sister White hand grenades" at one another. Hidden under our smug intellectualizing, however, we also had breaking families and abused children. By 1968, Iris had become a most on-fire Awakener, but she had seen divorce, poverty, and severe depression. The Awakeners desperately needed the living person of Christ, but instead we received one clever "framework" after



**Brinsmead had a genius
for building elaborate
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another. We gloried in charisma and brilliance, but we ached for the confidence and rest found in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:2-5).

Half a Reformation

In 1971, Brinsmead scheduled a flurry of summer institutes to bring us his latest emphasis. There was more excitement than usual; the latest round of tapes had prepared us for something big. Bob had been studying the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, comparing it to Roman Catholic doctrines. Reading Luther, he saw that justification is not just a means to the end of perfect sanctification. When we are justified by faith, not only does God impute Christ's righteousness to us but we also possess Christ Himself—all His righteousness and all His perfection.³⁰ Eternity flows from that fact. The apostle said,

"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

The same ones he justified he also glorified. We began to realize we had inserted extra steps into Paul's chain of salvation: sanctification and a final atonement

brought about by blotting out sins. Those added steps, in fact, were the heart of the Awakening message—but we had ignored the heart of the real gospel: being justified by faith, we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."³¹ Our righteousness is in heaven, said Brinsmead:

"The righteousness by which we become just in God's sight, remain just in His sight and will one day be sealed as forever just in His sight, is an outside righteousness. It is not on earth, but only in heaven...only in Jesus Christ."³²

This Reformation truth was truly good news for afflicted souls, but we still loved our elite remnant identity. We collectively dismissed the "old" perfection baggage as "subjective clutter" and congratulated ourselves that these new discoveries confirmed we were still following "present truth". There was no talk of repentance for having believed a false gospel, but instead, we swam in a flood of re-explanations for the past. Repentance didn't cross our minds; that was for the Adventist leaders and fallen Protestantism,

not for us. The truth was marching on, so again we fell in line behind our leader.

Brinsmead tried to show that this new Reformation emphasis was a continuation of the Awakening's mission, and during the early 70's, he worked hard to reconcile the Reformation gospel with the pillars of Adventism, especially the pre-advent judgment.³³ There was, in fact, even talk of reconciliation with the Adventist church.³⁴ The Adventist pioneers had clearly grasped justification, Brinsmead said, but the church had fallen into legalism. As loyal Adventists, however, we Awakeners still clung to the investigative judgment as a protection against heresies we feared in the Protestant churches—while concurrently trying to attach the Reformation doctrine of righteousness by faith on top of it.

The Awakeners now saw how Adventist righteousness by faith resembled Catholic teachings. *Present Truth*, Brinsmead's new magazine, summarized historic Catholic doctrine this way:

1. Justification is a process of inner renewal in us. 2. Justification is given to us by an infusion of God's grace. God looks at what the Holy Spirit has done in us, and justifies us. 3. Justification is how man becomes just and pleasing to God in his person.³⁵

Both Rome and the reformers said that salvation was all of grace. However, for Rome, the work of grace was in man's experience, a subjective work. Conversely, the reformers said the grace that saves us is outside man's experience in the person of Christ, an objective work. Struggling sinners are not to look to their own experience for hope and acceptance with God. Everything Christ did as our representative is now counted as ours by faith. Luther said,

"Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did."³⁶

Many rejoiced at this clear proclamation of Christ's finished work for us. So this is what a completed atonement looked like! But critics asked, "What about holiness?" The reformers were unanimous; only because of Christ's virtue is the Spirit given to the justified sinner to regenerate him for good works. True sanctification looks away from self and flows from the finished, objective work of Christ. In those who hear and believe, Christ's Spirit reproduces His life. Paul told the Ephesians,

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit..." (Eph. 1:13).

Growing Antipathy

Sadly, Brinsmead's antipathy against the Christian church would only intensify from this point forward. Though a student of the Reformers, he still believed that Protestantism was lost in a fog of man-centered gospels. Still an Adventist at heart, he maintained that Protestantism was joining with Rome to bring the mark of the beast and assailed Protestants' Greek paganism, their Calvinism, and worst of all, their subjectivism.

Paganism: Brinsmead always held to the Adventist view that man is a unified being who becomes only dust at death. He attributed an immaterial human spirit to Greek influences in the medieval church. If our life is only in Christ, we cannot have any life intrinsic to us. Otherwise, he asked, why have a resurrection?³⁷

Calvinism: For Brinsmead, eternal security here and now was "Calvin's error," even though eventually he saw that justification was an eschatological verdict given by God. If we are justified today, we have the verdict of the final judgment today. Brinsmead, however, kept Adventism's doctrine of a radical free will which can nullify God's adoption and new birth. Eternal security was a dangerous doctrine that led to antinomianism, he said, because the believer would lose his fear of judgment. To protect the doctrine of man's free will, he rejected the security and reality of Christ's completed work of atonement on our behalf.³⁸

Subjectivism: For many Christians, the glory of the crucified Christ is not their focus; instead they seek internal experiences that eclipse the cross. The Awakening rightly opposed the subjective, human-centered emphasis found among some groups within Christianity. Wrongly, they reacted with a cerebral, spiritless gospel. Brinsmead strongly opposed the charismatic movement's emphasis on experiences as a return to the theology of Rome. However, going to another extreme, *Present Truth* magazine decried "the false gospel of the new birth," and offered a new birth that was merely a corporate, objective blessing, not an individual experience.³⁹ The concept of the indwelling Spirit was interpreted as a cerebral enhancement. As Awakeners, we learned to recoil from anything that felt subjective or "touchy-feely," and we avoided any talk of the Spirit in us.

The Awakening's Jesus was also "objective," not personal and powerful in everyday life. We resisted saying "Jesus is in my heart," and we resented simple, childlike questions about our "personal relationship" with Jesus. To our amusement, Brinsmead recounted meeting an enthusiastic Christian man who patted his very large belly and said, "I've got Jesus right in here!" Increasingly, Jesus was depersonalized and the Spirit was weakened; we thought of them as external entities and did not relate to them as real Persons with authority in our lives.

Adventist leadership was not delighted with Brinsmead's new theology. Even though he now agreed with some of their scholars, he was also a greater threat. They believed his justification-centered gospel encouraged spiritual laziness. *The Review and Herald* began publishing articles on Christ's sinful human nature, victory life piety, and "sinless demonstration" people who would, in the last days, finally achieve perfection.

They objected to Brinsmead's fine theological distinctions between sanctification and justification. In 1974, George Vandeman wrote that RBF is "...more than a doctrine, it is a relationship with a purpose. And if we...let Christ live His life within us, it doesn't matter what we call the process." A justification-centered gospel encouraged a lax attitude towards sin, he explained.⁴⁰ As C. Mervyn Maxwell said, justification is "...much more than forgiveness of sin; it is also victory over sin."⁴¹ Again, Adventism reaffirmed its historic roots: we are justified initially by faith, but ultimately saved by our good works and moral fitness.

Falling Pillars

In the late 1970's, Brinsmead began publishing a barrage against the Adventist doctrinal pillars. In 1979, *1844 Reexamined* struck the main pillar, the investigative judgment. Jesus the Messiah fulfills all the law and the prophets, he explained. Therefore, the pre-advent

judgment occurs when the believer hears and believes the Messiah's gospel, and justification is the verdict of that judgment.⁴² Shortly after, in 1980, his *Judged By the Gospel* surveyed Adventist history and theology, questioning Ellen White's authority and citing her literary dependency and theological errors such as the "shut door." Even more pointedly, Brinsmead criticized the Adventist leadership for their "cult of Ellen White."⁴³

Then he shocked us; Brinsmead came out against seventh-day Sabbath observance. His magazine, now called *Verdict*, stated that the Sabbath was given for Israel as a shadow of things to come, but it was fulfilled by Christ, the substance.⁴⁴ Stabilizing ourselves after the disorientation of these sudden revisions, Iris Carey and most of us Awakeners finally followed Brinsmead in leaving the Adventist pillars. We enjoyed a giddy feeling of freedom, casting off regulations about food, drink, and holy days and "joining the human race." Preoccupied with our new freedom, we barely noticed Brinsmead's hints of his growing doubts about the Bible. We did not see the ominous signs of Bob's next "framework".

Being Truly Human

In 1987, Brinsmead was still the editor and chief writer for *Verdict* magazine. For some years his views had become increasingly liberal. First, he accepted the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation which assumes that the Bible is only written by man with man's words, and is subject to man's rational criticism. His doubts about Scripture were now on the surface, but those cracks had been laid deep in his Adventist foundation.

Secondly, Brinsmead now had a new gospel with a new Jesus. The gospel is not a legal transaction but a story, he said. God did not require Jesus' death to pay a legal penalty for sin; He isn't like that. Moreover, he explained that the legal gospel of Christianity, "Christian nomism," derives from the Roman justice system. It is designed, he claimed, to maintain church power by members' guilt.⁴⁵ Brinsmead railed against the "barbaric" doctrine of the blood-atonement in which God required His son to die for our sins. Humane ethics, he claimed, were about being "truly human" and celebrating what is best in man without religion, especially Christianity. His 1987 essay, "Farewell to Religion—A Manifesto of Christian Atheism," invited us all to the bonfire of our old faith.⁴⁶ "Christianity is the Antichrist," he said; "we" needed a new beginning.⁴⁷ Brinsmead's god would now become a distant, benevolent evolutionary influence that said, "Fear not."⁴⁸ This faceless god is of little comfort to the losers in



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Darwin's survival lottery. This god does not sacrifice himself to save the lost. Where is the comfort in a faceless god who has not borne our griefs or carried our sorrows?

By 1990, Brinsmead had stopped writing and publishing *Verdict*, instead pursuing business and political interests back in Australia. His Awakening movement had scattered; some returned to Adventism, others became agnostics, and for a very few, Jesus Christ came and found them.

Iris the Awakener now lived alone in a mobile home with her cats and her Brinsmead collection. She had obediently followed her leader for nearly 30 years, and now he had abandoned both Jesus and her. She wrote long letters to him, urging him to defend the original gospel, but it was for naught. In 1984, Brinsmead had said this to all of us:

Yes, some want security... I say fine; but if you want that, read some other publication. We are involved in something that will continually disturb you and perhaps even make you feel angry with us. I don't know how we continue to exist, because we continually operate on a program of doing ourselves in. But we continue to fly.⁴⁹

The movement had finally ended; Brinsmead was done with his Awakening. He had burnt down the whole house to "get the Sabbath mouse."⁵⁰

This is the Judgment!

Now looking back, what shall we say of our Awakening experience?

1. We bowed before a graven image, a faceless deity called the Law, which aroused our elitist cultic pride. Because we believed the Law defined what God is like, we couldn't see the real transcript of God's character, Jesus the Word.
2. We rejoiced in the truth that Christ is our Righteousness, that His work for us was complete, that He has blotted out our sins. Yet we denied we had immaterial spirits separated from God that rendered us dead in sin and needed to be born of the Spirit.
3. By resisting the Spirit's power, we denied Christ's sovereignty in our personal lives. We embraced the gifts but not the Giver, and we refused to submit our mind and hearts to Him. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9).

While condemning the blindness of others, we were perishing. We needed the Person of Jesus Christ to break us, own us, and live in us through His Spirit.

There was a certain blind beggar whom Jesus found by the road one day, and He put mud in his eyes. When the light came blazing

in, the man suddenly saw the face of Jesus, who then disappeared. That day hostile Pharisees arrested the man, and after losing a debate with him, they expelled him.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him” (Jn. 9:35-38).

We beggars will never see the Son of Man until He comes to us and opens our eyes. We may know all about Daniel 7, where the Son of Man appeared before the Ancient of Days and was given dominion and glory. Yet, we need to ask, “Who is he sir, that I may believe in him?” When you see that bloody, disfigured man lifted up for your sin, you can look on Him and believe—or you can hide your face in fear and disgust. Seeing the Son of Man is the moment of judgment: look upon Him and believe, or hide in the dark. Believing, you are not condemned, for you have already passed from death to life. Jesus told Nicodemus,

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world” (Jn. 3:18,19).

After decades of feverish preparation, we Awakeners had missed the first meaning of the judgment. Eternal life turns on one thing: how we respond to the crucified Jesus. Submitting to Him makes us judgment-ready, but as a group we had resisted His dominion over our doctrines, our minds, and our personal lives. Our movement ended with a whimper; now without Brinsmead, most of us drifted into self-protective, prideful despair.

Where can abandoned cult members go? Iris was one of the few who fled to the one reliable Source: Jesus and His word where she could see Him. At last my mom, the old Awakener, was ready to be with her Lord. This note, handwritten in her raggedy old Bible, revealed that she had looked on the real transcript of God’s character and found the anchor for her soul:

“It is only by looking in the face of Jesus that we can rightly appreciate the character of God—always and forever!” †

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PART 2

PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

WHAT'S ITS PURPOSE IF WE'RE ALREADY SAVED?

DALE RATZLAFF

In the last issue of *Proclamation!*, we dealt with various meanings of sanctification. If you did not read part one of this study, you may find it online at www.ProclamationMagazine.com.

Let's review a few key points that relate to progressive sanctification:

- We are not saved partly by our own disposition and effort plus Christ's merit. We are saved 100% by Christ's divine merit. It is the righteousness that is in Christ that saves us—a passive righteousness that is alien to us. We do not become personally righteous in order to be saved.
- The law is not on our side when it comes to holy living. It works against us by arousing in us our sinful passions.
- True sanctification cannot take place until we are born again by the Holy Spirit.

- Progressive sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in born-again believers.
- Progressive sanctification is not meritorious. This is another way of saying that it has nothing to do with securing our salvation. Rather, it is a result of our being saved.

The goal of this study

Our goal in this study is to answer two very important questions that elbow their way into our thinking.

- If all my good deeds don't count for my salvation, then why be concerned about them? Why not go out and enjoy a life of sin?
- If obedience is important, even though I am not saved by that obedience, how can I obey more fully; how can I become more holy?

Most of us have grappled with both of these questions. Let us seek a few answers from the word of God that will help answer them.

Obedience now brings eternal rewards.

We are saved by faith without works.¹ Yet good works will be rewarded, not only in this life, but in the life to come. Those of us who have come from a legalistic background often unconsciously read the many "reward texts" in the light

Grace always precedes peace. This was not only a common greeting in the New Testament church, but it remains a theological necessity. Not until we cast ourselves on the mercy of God and experience His saving grace can we have peace. How do we do this? When we know the character and love of God and the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, receiving it as full payment for our sin, then we can experience this grace and peace. These gifts will be multiplied to us in proportion to our understanding.

of earning or deserving salvation. However, when we fully understand the simple gospel—that we are saved by faith in Christ plus nothing—then these “reward texts” have a new, even exciting meaning. We can enjoy learning to be obedient without any accompanying guilt or condemnation even if we have not yet fully achieved because now we are working from victory instead of toward victory.

For example, after church on Easter Sunday, Carolyn and I drove up to Mt. Lemon near Tucson. We took several short hikes in the thin air above 8,000 feet of elevation. True, we are not in the shape we used to be when we went on a number of 50 mile hikes in the Sierras. But we were encouraged that even at our age we can still enjoy a short hike without feeling guilty for not measuring up to our old speed and endurance. We did not have to prove that we could hike, nor was our reward that we were acknowledged as worthy hikers; rather, we could hike for the sheer pleasure of enjoying the mountains God has made.

Most “reward texts” in the Bible do not refer to salvation. Rather, rewards are generally referred to as being given for the work we do for the Lord Jesus after we are saved. These works do not contribute either to our being saved or to our staying saved.

Following are several “reward texts”:

For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward (Mk. 9:41).

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men (Lk. 6:35).

Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor (1 Cor. 3:8).

If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

Can you imagine the exciting reward in store for the Apostle Paul in the next life as millions of Christians come up to him and say, “Thank you, Thank you, Paul, for enduring the hardship of suffering, imprisonment, misunderstanding, and martyrdom so that I could understand the simple gospel of justification by faith!”

As Paul spent many a lonely day in prison, I imagine the thought of future reward was often on his mind. Here are some of his final words to Timothy, his son in the faith:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

The thought of future rewards should be a contributing factor in our striving for holiness. It was a motivating factor even for Jesus. Thus the writer of Hebrews states, “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Our good works bring glory to God

Good works are those we do when we are submitting to the Lord Jesus for His purpose and glory. For example,

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Mat. 5:16).

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Even life teaches this lesson. What parents do not beam with pride when they see their child excelling by winning the spelling bee or playing in the band? I think that is how God feels when His kids honor Him by their integrity, love, and commitment to Him.

Even though Job doubted God’s justice in allowing Satan to test him beyond measure, He never cursed God, and we have the record that God was, to paraphrase, so proud of him that He had to show him off. To Job’s miserable comforters, God said that they had “not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has” (Job 42:7). Of Jesus who always did His Father’s will, we hear the Father speak from heaven—a rare

occasion indeed—"...a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Mt. 17:5).

Moreover, our obedient living not only brings personal pleasure to God, but it also serves as a witness to others.

Obedience to God's word brings intimacy with God

Several verses from the latter chapters of John bring us to the door of the most holy place—the presence of God. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him" (Jn. 14:2). Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23).

It's important to remember that the "commandments" in these verses are the Greek *entole* which, in the context of John's writings, refers not to the law (*nomos* or *torah*) but to the teachings of Jesus. The primary commandment is to believe in Jesus and thus be saved. Once we are saved, born of the Spirit, it then becomes possible to obey God's Word which includes all of Jesus' teachings and commands for holy living. This obedience, as we stated at the beginning, is not meritorious: it does not "keep us saved". Rather, this obedience is how we experience spiritual growth and maturity. It is the result of having God's spirit in us, not the cause of His indwelling.

How easy it is, however, for us to get so caught up in the rush of daily activities that we don't experience what these verses proclaim. That the eternal, holy God can say, "We will come and live with you" is a promise of intimacy and is a huge promise to those who love and obey Jesus. Intimacy with God should be at the top of our list as to why we submit to His word and obey His eternal principles for holy living when we have been born again.

Obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings sorrow and pain

Obedience to God's word brings blessings, and when we disobey we can expect chastening.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal 6:7).

Sometimes the pull of our flesh toward sin seems of greater value than living by the Spirit in obedience. But be sure our sins will find us out.² The blessings of a clear conscience cannot be diminished by hardships that may come from obedience.

Obedience brings joy to our parents, our mentors, and thus to us

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (Jn. 15:10-11).

In the shortest letter of the Bible, the apostle John wrote, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 Jn. 1:4).

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Listing all the reasons for obedient living would be like counting the rocks in Arizona. Inventorying each individual blessing—a task beyond the scope of this article—would be like counting the grains of sand in Casa Grande. We now turn our attention to the next pressing question. How can we be more holy?

How can we become more holy?

One of the most insightful passages relating to personal holiness is 2 Peter 1:2-10. Peter ends this section by stating, "For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble." For Peter to say these words is significant. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels reveals that Peter was far from perfect and needed a lot more personal holiness. Most of us can relate to Peter; I have certainly made more than my share of mistakes and foolish statements. Let's read the whole passage in context and then go back and uncover the deeper meaning verse by verse.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

To fully grasp the intended meaning of the above verses requires that we understand each statement in its isolation and also see each statement in its contextual setting. Like putting the individual parts of a 500 piece puzzle together, the Greek language here adds idea to idea, meaning to meaning³ until at last the whole picture of God's amazing grace is seen.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Grace always precedes peace.⁴ This was not only a common greeting in the New Testament church, but it remains a theological necessity. Not until we cast ourselves on the

The law in its totality was a shadow pointing forward to Christ. It was a revelation of truth, but that revelation was fragmentary and incomplete. Now, from our new covenant perspective, we look back to the completed atonement. The righteousness that the Israelites strove for, never fully realizing, we have been given as a free gift when we believe. Meditating on the law was good for the Israelites as the law was the word of God to them... Now, however, like Abraham, we are to see ourselves in the light of God's declaration.

mercy of God and experience His saving grace can we have peace. How do we do this? When we know the character and love of God and the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, receiving it as full payment for our sin, then we can experience this grace and peace. These gifts will be multiplied to us in proportion to our understanding.

...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Here is another one of the astonishing promises of God's grace. God's divine power has granted (or given, perfect tense—it is a done deal!) us everything pertaining to life and godliness (or virtue). According to this text, we should not wistfully look to some future time when we will be suddenly filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to make us holy. No, God's divine power has given us everything we need, including life (present and future) and godliness.

This text again directs us to the “true knowledge” of God. Legalism presents a false knowledge of God. It says that God can't save us as we are. It says we must demonstrate a measurable desire (who knows how to measure desire?) and effort (who knows how much effort is required?) before God's grace is given. This verse, however, says that God has given us (in the

past but reaching to the present) everything we need provided we have a “true knowledge” of God. Moreover, God's calling is a high calling; we are for “His own glory and excellence”.

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

“By these” include grace, peace, the true knowledge of God, and His divine power which all have been given to us. These are the vehicles by which we receive “His precious and magnificent promises”.

Before we discover the deeper meaning of this verse, though, let us consider the many places the Old Testament invites us to meditate on the law.⁵ We must remember that “the law” included moral principles, ritual laws that in some way pointed forward to the gospel of Christ, and civil regulations for the nation of Israel. The law in its totality was a shadow⁶ pointing forward to Christ.⁷ It was a revelation of truth, but that revelation was fragmentary and incomplete.⁸ Now, from our new covenant perspective, we look back to the completed atonement.⁹ The righteousness that the Israelites strove for, never fully realizing, we have been given as a free gift when we believe. Meditating on the law was good for the Israelites as the law was the word of God to them and showed them their duty plus glimpses of forgiveness in Christ. Now, however, like Abraham,¹⁰ we are to see ourselves in the light of God's declaration. The completed atonement for sin has changed everything!

Peter is saying that we now have what the law foreshadowed: “His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” It is by focusing on these promises that we develop holiness and intimacy with God.

What are these promises? They are all the promises of the New Testament where God makes declarations about the believing Christian. Peter admonishes us to focus on these. Personalize them. Read them every day and see what happens. We will become like the kind of person God has already declared us to be in Christ! By beholding we become changed.¹¹ Following are a few on which to begin meditating:

I am certain¹² that I now have eternal life in Christ.¹³ I am now at peace with God¹⁴ because I have been reconciled to God through the death of Christ.¹⁵ My old sinful self was crucified with Christ,¹⁶ so now I consider myself to be dead to sin.¹⁷ I am now freed from sin.¹⁸ I am now dead to the law¹⁹ and have been released from the law!²⁰ I no longer serve God according to the letter of the old law because now I serve God in the newness of the Spirit.²¹ I am no longer under any condemnation because I am in Christ Jesus!²² I have now received the spirit of adoption,²³ and I am fully qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.²⁴ I now overwhelmingly conquer through Christ!²⁵ I have now been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise²⁶ and saved by faith!²⁷ I am now the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ I have been cho-

sen in Christ²⁹ and predestined to be like Him.³⁰ I now have redemption through his blood.³¹ God is now at work in me to will and to do His good pleasure.³² I have now been transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son.³³ I have received a spiritual gift,³⁴ and the Spirit now helps my weaknesses.³⁵

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

The truths outlined here by Peter echo Paul's listing of the fruit of the Spirit,³⁶ for it is the Holy Spirit who develops in us progressive sanctification. Peter's listing is set forth as a method. We are to focus on one aspect at a time. Remember, in progressive sanctification there is cooperation between the person and the Holy Spirit. Why not make a list of these spiritual virtues and focus on one each week? Using a concordance or computer Bible program, look up the passages dealing with the virtue you are working on. Claim the promise, believe God's declaration. Then, move to the next and do the same.

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble (2 Pet. 1:9-10).

We can feel the passion in Peter's heart. If we aren't developing these virtues in our lives, there is a problem—we have forgotten that we have been forgiven. We must live in these

truths: Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He rose from the grave. He now sits triumphant over the forces of evil—and we by faith share His victory. He took all our sin and credits us with all his righteousness. He did it for us—and we did it in Him!

The last part of verse 10 listed above has often been misinterpreted. How does one "make certain about His calling and choosing [of] you"? It is not by trying to live a better life. It is not by seeking to obey every law you can find. No, it is by accepting the gift of God's grace!³⁷ We all come to Christ as sinners.³⁸ He accepts sinners while they are still sinners,³⁹ and whoever comes to Him He will not cast out!⁴⁰

Peter ends this section with a promise. "As long as you practice these things, you will never stumble."

Summary

Progressive sanctification is important. It brings us eternal rewards, intimacy with God, joy, and blessings. It glorifies God. To the disobedient, however, there come sorrow and pain.

According to Peter, we can progress in personal sanctification by focusing on God's abundant promises, not forgetting that Christ has won the battle for us, and we have won the battle in Him.

If anyone loves Me he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him (Jn. 14:23).

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete (1 Jn. 1:4). †

Endnotes

¹ Rom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16, 18.

² Num. 32:23.

³ See R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament*, Peter, p. 256, 257.

⁴ Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:4; Phm. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Jn. 1:3; Rev. 1:4.

⁵ "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Josh. 1:8). See also Psalm 119.

⁶ Heb. 10:1.

⁷ Gal. 3:24.

⁸ Heb. 1:1-3.

⁹ Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18.

¹⁰ See study, "The Faith of Abraham", in the first issue of *Proclamation!*.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 3:18.

¹² 1 Jn. 5:13.

¹³ Jn. 6:47.

¹⁴ Rom. 5:1.

¹⁵ Rom. 5:10.

¹⁶ Rom. 6:6.

¹⁷ Rom. 6:11.

¹⁸ Rom. 6:18,22; 1 Jn. 3:8,9.

¹⁹ Rom. 7:4.

²⁰ Rom. 7:6.

²¹ Rom. 7:6.

²² Rom. 8:1.

²³ Rom. 8:15.

²⁴ Col. 1:12.

²⁵ Rom. 8:37.

²⁶ Eph. 1:13.

²⁷ Eph. 2:8.

²⁸ Eph. 2:22.

²⁹ Eph. 1:4.

³⁰ Rom. 8:29.

³¹ Eph. 1:7.

³² Phil. 2:13.

³³ Col. 1:13.

³⁴ Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4.

³⁵ Rom. 8:26.

³⁶ Gal. 5:22, 23.

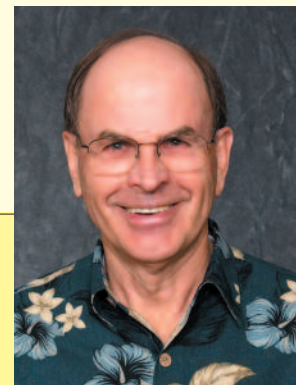
³⁷ Eph. 2:8.

³⁸ Lk. 15:2.

³⁹ Lk. 19:7.

⁴⁰ Jn. 6:37.

Dale Ratzlaff is the founder of Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., and owns LAM Publications, LLC. He served as an Adventist pastor for 13 years, seven at Monterey Bay Academy where he taught Bible. He and his wife Carolyn left the Adventist church in 1981 when he realized he could no longer teach the investigative judgment in clear conscience. He has authored *Sabbath in Christ*, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, *The Truth About Adventist "Truth"*, and *Truth Led Me Out*. These are available through his website, LifeAssuranceMinistries.com. The Ratzlaffs reside in Casa Grande, Arizona.





Didn't know

I really enjoyed the last edition of *Proclamation!* I didn't realize the Adventists' view of the resurrection...wow.

GLIDE, OR

Ben and Delina McPhaul's story

I really enjoyed that article. It was moving and powerful and a blessing to me. I wish [Ben and Delina] the best, and I know that God will continue to lead them into all truth, even if it's a truth they never expected.

I am an Adventist, not because I believe everything but because, as I have studied other denominations, Adventists are closest to biblical truths. However, God is awesome, and He meets us where he knows

he will be most likely to get our attention. Sometimes that attention comes in ways that are different from what we could have imagined or expected. As the Bible says, We will find Him, if we search for Him with all our heart.

Again, thanks for the article. It is certainly thought provoking.
VIA EMAIL

On Lucifer's path

Please remove me from your mailing list. While your magazine is well put together, the arguments presented always fall well short of presenting new light. Usually just a variation or rehash of the same arguments the Catholic church used when it transferred the sacredness of Saturday to Sunday, or even worse, the argument of if everyone else is doing it, maybe I should too.

As for your Easter articles, the disciples preached the importance of the resurrection, not the worship of it. It's always difficult for people to turn their backs on that which they know to be true, and so we look for the assurance that we are right in our ability to convince others to follow our thinking. Really the same path Lucifer took all those years ago.

SPANGLE, WA

Editor of *Adventist Today* magazine asks, "Am I working for God or for the devil?"

I have just read the report of the "sixth annual former Adventist conference the best ever." And I rejoiced when I saw that several people gave their lives to God at those meetings. I always rejoice when people come into a saving relationship with Jesus.

However, as I read your magazine I get the impression that you think there is nothing good in the Adventist Church, that grace is not to be found there, and people cannot be saved there and continue in a saving relationship with Jesus there.

I am reminded of what Jesus said to the disciples when they came to him and said, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him

because he is not one of us" (Lk. 9:49). And Jesus replied "Do not stop him. For whoever is not against you is for you" (v. 50).

It seems to me that you have a decision to make about the Adventist church which you have never clearly set out. Is it for Jesus or against Jesus? Is it of God or of the Devil? There is no third option. Jesus said "He who is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). To put it bluntly: Am I working for God or for the Devil?

I can testify of changed lives in my congregation. I can testify that grace and the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, lived, and practiced at New Hope Adventist

qualify as proof of an organization's biblical legitimacy. Mormons, for example, have similar stories. Only being spiritually made alive, born again by the Spirit of God, qualifies a person to see and enter into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:4-6).

I believe that once we have realized our helpless sinfulness and repented before God, accepting the blood of Jesus as the eternal sacrifice for all our sin and have been born of the Spirit, He will not let us rest until we face the ways we live deceptively, rationalizing to retain what feels familiar. Allowing Him to remove my Adventist identity was terrifying and humiliating; trusting Him alone to be my identi-

Is it of God or of the Devil? There is no third option. Jesus said "He who is not with me is against me". To put it bluntly: Am I working for God or for the Devil?

Church. Doctrine does not save us. Jesus does. Doctrines are humans' imperfect way of trying to understand God. There will never be perfect doctrine. So I would like to know from your perspective who I am working for.

J. DAVID NEWMAN
ADVENTIST PASTOR; EDITOR,
ADVENTIST TODAY MAGAZINE
FULTON, MD

ty, my provider, my healer, and my security has surprised me with mental peace, contentment, meaning, and love.

I do not have to decide for whom you work. In a post-modern world, Scripture still stands as God's revelation to us, and Jesus is His final word (Heb. 1:1-3). God's word judges us all.

Amazing work

I eagerly devour each copy of *Proclamation!* when it comes to my office. I am not a former Adventist, having rather grown up in a mainline Protestant denomination in the 60's. I find, however, many, many remnant traces in my own experience of a legalistic "grace + something" perspective that developed in much of mainline protestantism...when the mainline churches lost hold of (in large part) a properly focused understanding of the true significance of Jesus' atoning death, burial and resurrection. Your magazine helps me identify—so that I can deal with—that latent legalism in my own perspective. Keep up the amazing work!

Concord, NC

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

Proclamation! News

Send your email address to receive our weekly email of news and new content on the web at LifeAssuranceMinistries.org.

Status

Please remove my name from your list. We enjoy being God's Chosen People.
ALMA, AR

Talbot article helpful to me

I went to Adventist schools since my senior year of academy, and later I graduated from Loma Linda University School of Dentistry. Now I am retired from my professional career and continue to study my Bible daily.

The latest edition of *Proclamation!* with "Why Seventh-day Adventism is Not Evangelical", part three [by Louis Talbot], is very effective for exposing the wrong doctrines of Adventism.

I appreciate the many good works which the Seventh-day Adventist people do, but their belief based on their church doctrines is not correct. That is the reason I do not associate with their institutions or churches.

Your magazine is really helpful and beneficial to my Bible study and daily devotions. God bless you continuously.

REDLANDS, CA

Important and unenviable

You are in an important, unenviable ministry. I'm sure it's often a thankless job filled with haters and fiery arrows from the devil himself. Thank you for all that you do in spite of it all. I pray that in the coming months and years you continue to be blessed by your front row seat watching captives set free.
CLEBURNE, TX

Praying for God's strength

Thanks for the back issues of *Proclamation!* This is such an encouragement, and the historical context around the QOD and Martin/Barnhouse is so useful. Praying that God will lead and bless you, your work and the min-

istry of LAM in strengthening those of us who are "detoxifying" after Adventism.

VIA EMAIL

No love or concern

I have read myriads of "anti-SDA" literature, and all of it is more of the same, just like Ratzlaff's allegations. What I visibly noticed about these former Adventist pastors who now are bent on destroying the church is they only concentrate on the negative side of the coin, but have never once mentioned the many spiritual/godly admonitions of Ellen G. White, etc. They never mention to the readers all the good things the church is doing the world over, how they help people quit smoking, how for 100 years now the church has been helping the blind, how they encourage their members to become not only spiritually healthy but also physically healthy by eating more veggies and fruits and eating meat sparingly. These are only a few of the good things I can mention that the SDA church does for its members and for the world.

Surely you can find something true, noble, right, lovely and admirable about the SDA church, right?

ACCOKEEK, MD

Uplifting and Christ-centered

We simply can't put into words how much we look forward to every issue of *Proclamation!* It is one of the most uplifting, faith-and-Christ-centered magazines ever. It always points us to Christ in a wonderful, refreshing way and cements us more firmly in Christ, who is our Life.

Keep up the Christ-centered work you are doing, and we will do all we can to support you.

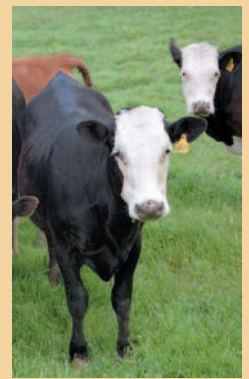
We just finished the latest magazine; [the magazines] are always so good that we can't choose a favorite article!

SAN MANUEL, AZ

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:

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Proclamation! and the cattle on a thousand hills



About three months ago one of the elders at our church deeply moved us by asking if he and his wife could come to our home and pray for us and for Life Assurance Ministries.

They asked how they could pray for us, and we told them we have an ongoing struggle with funding the production of *Proclamation!*. God has been faithful to provide what we have needed for the past eleven years, and we thank Him. At the same time, the economy has affected Life Assurance Ministries.

Our elder prayed that God would provide the funds we need for the continued production of *Proclamation!*, and in his prayer he said, "We know that You own the cattle on a thousand hills [Ps. 50:10]; could You please sell a couple of them for us?"

Money is not a problem for God, and He provides it by means of human generosity. We thank Him for those who already support this ministry, both long-time supporters and new ones. We also pray that He will impress those whom He knows need to give.

Should we keep printing quarterly issues?

We are at a point of decision regarding the future means of publishing the magazine. We will continue to publish it online, of course, but we may have to limit the printed version to one or two issues per year if funds do not come in to maintain our quarterly printing.

Ironically, this crisis in funding coincides with increasing requests for new subscriptions. More people are asking to receive the magazine than ever before, and we know the printed version is useful in many ways the online version cannot be.

We are appealing to you, our readers, to become partners with us in this ministry if you are not already. Ask God to show you His will regarding your support of *Proclamation!* And please pray that He will protect and provide for all of us and all of those whom He is calling out of deception.

We are trusting God with this ministry. Those cattle are His—and so are we, and the harvest is plentiful. This is His word to us:

"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor. 9:10-11). †

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

The life **A F T E R** with Chris Lee

It was painful to watch news reports of the Harold Camping fiasco on May 21. One couldn't help but see the parallels to the Millerites. Using wild leaps of logic, allegorical readings of scripture, and mind bending numerology, Camping predicted that the end would occur in 1988, then 1994, and most recently 2011. One instantly thinks of Miller's convoluted 15 proofs that Jesus would come in 1843, later recalculated as October 22, 1844.

After the failed 1994 prediction, Camping decided he had the right date, but the wrong event. The real significance of the date was the closing of the Church age, putting those who stayed in the "nominal" churches in danger of being lost for rejecting his message. The similarity to Ellen White's "Shut Door" doctrine is eerie.

Parallels to Adventism

Even more disturbing are the parallels with Camping's latest reinterpretation. Camping now admits he was incorrect about Jesus coming on May 21, 2011, but insists that a judgment in Heaven took place on that date. The Adventist doctrine of an 1844 Investigative Judgment is a similar face-saving invention.

Of course, those of us who have left Adventism are now far too savvy to be tripped up by such ridiculousness, right? Don't be so sure. Satan packs a one-two punch in the old false-prophecy-becomes-deceptive-doctrine ploy. I suspect that getting people to accept the false teaching is just the jab setting up the big right hand. The knock-out punch is when those people become so disillusioned by the deception that they no longer believe much of anything anymore. Kind of like a lot of us former Adventists.

I see it more than I would like—former Adventists declaring the Bible to be untrustworthy and questioning Christian fundamentals. Or sometimes the disillusion simply manifests itself in an unwillingness to join with any body of believers or an inability



Chris Lee lives in Lincoln, Nebraska with his wife, Carmen, and daughters, Ashlyn and Alyssa. They attend the Lincoln Berean Church. Chris is a self-described "theology junkie" whose mission is to proclaim the unfathomable grace of Christ in a clear, understandable, and Biblical way. He leads a Life Group Bible study for former Adventists at Lincoln Berean. You may contact Chris by email at ambulator@gmail.com.

Live the life after with a
Bible

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to accept any new ideas. In some cases, it seems like spiritual development gets arrested at the "Adventism is wrong" stage, but no one at *Proclamation!* wants you to be stuck there.

The opposite of being trapped in a false belief system is not skepticism, liberalism, or stagnation. It's discovering what Francis Shaffer referred to as "True Truth", that which corresponds to reality. We who write for *Proclamation!* are committed to discovering what is true about God and knowing the real Jesus. Given the mission of this magazine, it's necessary to explain why long held beliefs don't stand up

to biblical scrutiny. However, we are also committed to expounding scriptural truth as we develop a biblical worldview rather than one shaped by "the great controversy."

While *Proclamation!* is here to offer support on the journey of knowing and living Truth, the best place for all of us to start is by learning to read and study the Bible properly so we don't repeat the errors of Miller, White, and Camping.

Need to study the Bible

Basically, we need to learn to understand and apply passages in their own context. When we do this we find that the Bible is not so difficult to understand. The main and plain truths of the Christian faith are clear, and the view of the world presented by the Bible corresponds to observable reality. It's an amazing revelation if, like I did, one has grown up believing that the Bible is a cryptic book that can only be understood by following tenuously linked threads from verse to verse.

To get started, check with a couple of good local Bible teaching churches; most have classes on Bible study. Or try some online studies like those at Back to the Bible's website. It gets easier with practice, and it's infinitely rewarding. It's time to start living the life after. †