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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS

INQUIRING ADVENTISTS

SABBATARIANS

CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

WINTER 2012

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 4

Spiritual abuse among religions

To the world, from Matthew

**The Sabbath obscured in
The Clear Word**

DOWNWARD MOBILITY

UNPRECEDENTED MOVE FOR GAIN



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COLLEEN TINKER

Copy God or Trust God?

I was sitting in my junior high Bible class at Hoodview Junior Academy in Boring, Oregon. I was an earnest 13-year-old who frequently begged God to “make me good”—to no avail. I wanted to understand “the truth”, and I wanted to be obedient. Jesus, I knew, had come to show me how to obey, and I knew that if I figured out how to pray as well as He prayed, I should be able to resist temptation.

That year, as per our General Conference-designed Bible curriculum, we were learning Adventist beliefs. Because I wanted to understand, I listened carefully as the teacher

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explained that after Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus begged the Father to let him come to earth and save us poor fallen humans. I absorbed the teaching that He came as a man exactly like us, with Mary’s sinful tendencies in his flesh. As a man, therefore, Jesus had to fight temptation with all the same struggles we have.

In fact, I have an indelible memory of the teacher proclaiming, “If Jesus had not been able to sin, He could not have been our Savior.”

That teaching made sense to me, given my carefully-taught Adventist worldview. If Jesus had been “super human” and somehow not able to sin and fail, He couldn’t have been our Example. He wouldn’t have been able to uphold the Law and demonstrate that we also could avoid sin and keep the commandments exactly as He did.

He was our Savior, I learned, because He emptied Himself of His “God-power” and demonstrated that God’s law could be kept by sinners such as I. In fact, He did such a good job of His demonstration that He managed to allow wicked men to crucify Him—and “He never said a mumblin’ word.”

Jesus’ example taunted me as I lay awake at night, terrified and hopeless as I continued to beg God to forgive me and to make me good.

But they were wrong! My textbooks, my Bible teachers—in spite of their utter sincerity—were wrong. Jesus never begged the Father to allow Him to come to earth; that plan was in place before creation, and Jesus did not come on His own authority: the Father sent Him (Jn.

8:42)! Jesus did not come with a fallen nature; He came sinless and spotless. He did not demonstrate how to overcome sin; rather, He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29).

Jesus did not give us an example of how to have eternal life; Jesus, the Son of Man, has life in Himself, and unless we eat His flesh, drink His blood, and abide in Him, we have no life in ourselves (Jn. 6:53-57).

Jesus did not give up His “God-power” to become a man. Rather, from the moment of His conception, all the fullness of Deity dwelt in Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Every attribute of God—including omnipresence and omnipotence—was in the Man Christ Jesus. Even when He was in the tomb all things were being held together in Him (Col. 1:20).

In this issue Gary Inrig teaches the truth about Jesus’ emptying Himself in an act of downward mobility that opened eternity to us. Joanie Yorba-Gray and I write about how the teachings and practices of Adventism mark its members with the wounds of spiritual abuse, and Stephen Pitcher illustrates the subtle ways Adventist doctrines are used to confuse the words of Scripture in *The Clear Word*. Dan Burton shares his experience of beginning to understand His wife’s journey out of Adventism, and Dale Ratzlaff delivers a Christmas gift from the gospel of Matthew. Rick Barker explores Adventism’s Fundamental Belief #4 on the nature of Jesus; Carolyn Macomber shares her reflections on Jesus’ advantage over us, and Chris Lee challenges us to celebrate Christmas every day.

This Christmas, let the Baby of Bethlehem become your Lord and King! †

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Wasting time on doctrine and theology?

Why do you spend so much time examining doctrine and theology?

Doctrine and theology are important. However, neither one is an end in itself. Doctrine and theology serve much like a map pointing us toward our desired destination, but it is easy to get so involved in reading the details of the map that we get our eyes off the goal of the gospel journey. If, on the other hand, we carefully observe both ends of the map—the birth of Christ and the cross—we may more clearly define our desired destination and find the best route to it.

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, ‘God with us’” (Mt. 1:23).

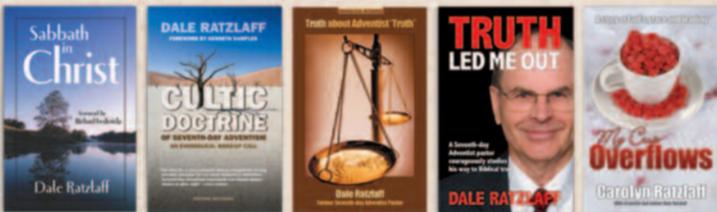
Adam and Eve lost the dominion over the earth because of their sin of unbelief. They trusted the lies of Satan and distrusted the word of God. But God, out of His great love for His crowning act of creation, humbled Himself, took real humanity, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.

He was “God with us”.

Christ regained the dominion when He refused to trust the lies of Satan in the wilderness, but depended on the Word of God. Moreover, when Christ died on the cross, He became our substitute in that He took the full penalty for our sin and imputed to us who believe His perfect righteousness.

In Christ’s last discourse before the cross, He gave His disciples a clear description of His destination and theirs—the most profound teaching on the mutual indwelling of the Father, Christ, and grace believers.

Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works (Jn. 14:9-10).



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 Ratzlaf.com or by phoning 800-355-7073, or 520-836-9790.



I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me (Jn. 17:20-23).

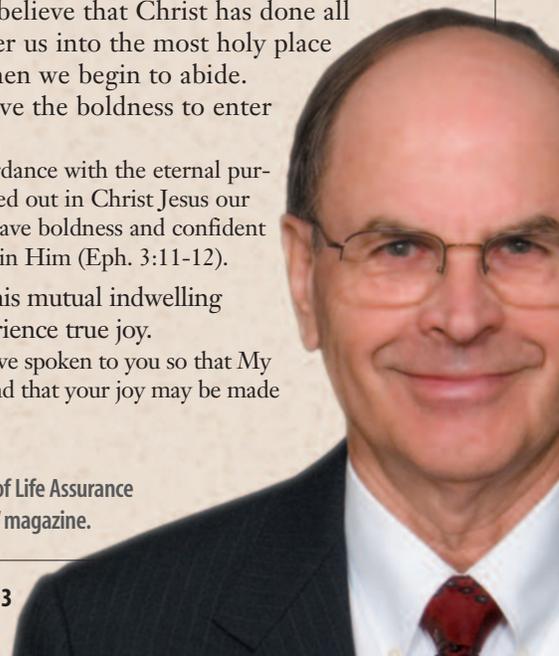
The goal of doctrine and theology is to point us to this relationship, this mutual indwelling, this abiding. “Abiding” means “to feel at home in the presence of”. Doctrine and theology serve to give us the gospel facts so that we may feel comfortable to settle down in the presence of God without fear. When we fully believe that Christ has done all there is to do to usher us into the most holy place of God’s presence, then we begin to abide. Only then can we have the boldness to enter that most holy place.

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him (Eph. 3:11-12).

It is this abiding, this mutual indwelling that allows us to experience true joy.

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full (Jn. 15:11). †

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



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Looking from the outside

This is the story of a Baptist man who married a former Adventist woman almost 40 years ago and is beginning to understand her journey.

DAN BURTON

It was our regular Sunday morning service at our local Baptist church in Winnipeg, Manitoba (in the middle of Canada), and I, the president of our newly minted College and Career (C & C) group, was standing at the back of the church with our pastor greeting people as they left the service. While the pastor was focused on everyone coming through the door, my objective was to find new recruits for our C & C group—and, if possible, good-looking female ones. And there she was—a striking young woman with a sense of purpose in her step who greeted us by saying, “Hello, my name is Shirley Bilyk, and I am a Seventh-day Adventist”.

The pastor said, “That’s nice—and what brings you to a Baptist church?”

She answered by saying, “I’m exploring other churches.” And thus began a journey that I will never forget since it ended in our getting married almost 40 years ago—but I am getting ahead of myself.

Shirley was raised a strict Seventh-day Adventist and was faithful to all the rules—but only because she had to be. She hated being different from all her friends and wondered why she couldn’t listen to popular music or go out on Friday nights. It seemed as if everything desirable in life was met with “No”. She questioned the teachings of Ellen White, and just before she was baptized, she told her pastor that she didn’t believe in the prophetess. He said her doubt was not a problem; she would come to believe eventually.

Shirley attended an Adventist school from grades five through nine. When she failed grade nine, her father insisted that she transfer to public school. Ironically, it was at that public school that she met a girl who was a born-again believer. This new friend lived out grace, and she made a lasting impact on Shirley. Eventually, when Shirley lost her first serious boyfriend because no one in her world would accept him because he was not an Adventist, she started thinking hard about where she stood. One day, when she was 18 years old, she found herself telling her mother that she was

leaving the Adventist church. Shirley had not premeditated that conversation, but she suddenly realized that she had to articulate the conviction that was growing in her heart. This declaration was a huge step for her because she knew she would face anger and rejection from her staunch Adventist mother, rejection from her father who was not Adventist but didn’t want anyone rocking the boat, and rejection from her sister and only sibling because Shirley had upset their mother.

That courageous young woman was the person who boldly proclaimed her position to us on the steps of the church that Sunday morning. Little did we know the cost of what she was doing.

Believer—or not?

Shirley was welcomed into the church, and because she answered all the pastor’s questions the way we expected a Christian would answer, she was accepted as a believer. To be sure, she had some strange beliefs, but we were confident that we would straighten them out in due course. An accomplished pianist, Shirley was soon playing for Sunday School and then for church services. She joined our C & C group, and because of her organizational skills (among other things), I got her involved in many of our social activities.

Shirley started coming to our church in April, 1969, but it wasn’t until Christmas of that year that the full impact of the gospel and the meaning of grace broke through her well-camouflaged spiritual veil. It was the evening of our annual Christmas concert, and the pastor was presenting the gospel to the visiting parents of children who were attending our Sunday School. As he told them how much God loved them and accepted them just as they were because of what Jesus had done, suddenly Shirley realized, for the first time, that God loved her and accepted her just as she was. She didn’t have to do anything to earn His favor, and her sins were forgiven

because of what Christ had done, not because of all the things she did. She was transformed in that moment, and we all saw the difference.

New Journey

And so began another journey. For Shirley it was learning about God and His love as she studied the Bible and understood its meaning more clearly. For me, the guy who was interested in Shirley personally, the journey was trying to understand what she had believed prior to her salvation. How could it look so much like what we Christians believed while lacking the power to bring her to a personal relationship with Christ?

Shirley suggested that, as part of our journey, some of our College and Career group have Bible studies with a number of Adventists with whom she had grown up, to find out what they believed so we could then compare and contrast Adventism with biblical Christianity. It wasn't easy to get anyone to meet with us, but she found a few including the man who was then principal of the academy she had attended who agreed to study together. We had a number of meetings, and the principal especially sounded very evangelical. I felt confused because what Shirley said Adventists believed and what he said were very different. I decided that Shirley must have had a bad experience with a very legalistic pastor like many of us had growing up.

A few years later, after we were married, however, my eyes began to be opened. There was an Adventist school reunion, and attendees were urged to invite all their friends who had stopped going to the Adventist church. This meeting would bring them back into the flock. The same academy principal, now a returned missionary, with whom we had studied the Bible was the main speaker. Shirley and I decided to go, and I couldn't believe what I heard.

All the conversations among the young people were about keeping the Sabbath or about what they couldn't do because they were Adventist. Surprisingly to me, the real hot button was food. The burning question was: are you still a vegetarian, or are you sneaking off to McDonalds?

I had stumbled into a whole new world. It was like some strange sub-culture where one's life was governed by a totally different set of rules than those in normal society. When I heard those conversations, the things that Shirley had been saying about Adventism started to make sense.

Then the speaker gave his message. What a message! There was no gospel; there was no call to return to Christ. Rather, the talk was a call to return to "the truth".

"Wait a minute—who said you have a corner on the truth?" I silently demanded of the speaker. Furthermore, there was no reference to Scripture to validate "the truth". Instead, the talk was all about a set of rules someone had made up that looked more like Old Testament Judaism than the claims of Christ. To stop eating at McDonalds seemed far more important than to submit one's life to the Lordship of Christ.

These things were confusing, but they weren't what upset me the most. What particularly annoyed me was the contrast between what the speaker had said during his Bible studies with us and what he said to his own flock. He had two different messages for two different audiences. I couldn't figure out the purpose of the apparent cover up. If a person believes something, then why not tell the world and be proud of it? He may face some push-back, but if one can't be true to what he believes with those who are not a part of him, then what is the point in having the belief in the first place? I thought the Christian's goal was to win over those who didn't believe either by the example of one's life or by a compelling explanation of one's faith. This duplicity seemed confusing at best and manipulative at worst.

The other notable experience I had in that early journey to understand Adventism was attending Revelation seminars. By this time Shirley and I had been married a couple of years, and she wanted me to understand how she had grown up. Revelation seminars had been an integral part of her childhood, so we decided to attend a local series. I had never seen anything like it in my life. I had just finished a year of Bible College training and had taken classes in eschatology, so I was aware of the various views of end-times theology. This one, however, was brand new to me. I must say that I can no longer remember much of what I heard, but I was left with a lasting impression.

The sense of fear and hopelessness the messages conveyed was palpable. The remnant was going to face incredible persecution, but in the end they still didn't know for sure if they were going to make it to heaven. I wondered to myself who in their right mind would embrace this kind of teaching. To be honest, after those meetings I dismissed Adventism as a fringe group that lacked credibility and was not worthy of further consideration.

Not Adventist but not “unpacked”

After we married, Shirley and I started our life together as active Christians in our local Baptist church. Then, in 1973, we launched into an adventure: we helped to start a satellite church plant in the part of our city where we lived, and I served as a deacon for most of our married life. Shirley has always been active in music, and in those early days with the new church, she was all the music we had. Her Adventist past became a distant memory for me, and it was only when she would speak up in Bible study about an interpretation of Scripture that originated with Ellen White that I would remember her unfortunate past.

Shirley, however, was not able to forget Adventism and move on. To be sure, she immersed herself in Christianity and church life. Nevertheless, Adventism still colored her thinking and her feelings. She often wondered if there was anyone else out there who had left Adventism and had become a born-again Christian. She knew that many of her childhood friends had left Adventism in complete disillusionment and anger and had no interest in attending any kind of church. She was very lonely as she worked to become integrated into the Christian community because she had

As I think back, I wish I had been more attentive to her feelings, but I really didn't understand that she was not merely struggling to let go of a past memory but of an entire worldview that shaped all her perceptions.

no one who understood her past and her theological confusion who could share her journey. She and I would talk often about her past, and I was sympathetic, but I really didn't understand. In reality, I was quite quick to dismiss her past Adventism as irrelevant now. As I think back, I wish I had been more attentive to her feelings, but I really didn't understand that she was not merely struggling to let go of a past memory but of an entire worldview that shaped all her perceptions.

In 1994 I started my own business in commercial real estate, and in those early years it was tough going. Shirley had been a stay-at-home mom when we had children and loved raising our three kids. They were all in school, so I asked her if she would be willing to go to work for a period of time while I got on my feet. Her greatest asset has always been her music, and she heard of an opportunity playing for a funeral home. It is a testament to her creativity that she made a thriving business out of customizing music for funerals!

It was while she was playing for a particular funeral home that she met a soloist who was particularly gifted. They struck up a relationship that lasts to this day, but in the process Shirley found out that the soloist was an Adventist. Shirley wanted to tell her

about the change that Christ had made in her life, but she knew that Adventists were hard to change. She wished she had something to give her to read, but she could find nothing. Over the years they talked about their respective faiths, but as expected, neither of them made any changes. In 2000 Shirley started surfing the web to find a book by Richard DeHaan entitled, *Who Changed the Sabbath?* In the process of searching, she found the Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF) website. Suddenly, a whole new world opened to her. There were other people out there who had been Adventists but now were Christians! She had found the family she never knew she had.

From 2000 to 2006 Shirley frequented the FAF website as well as others she found, and she finally contacted Colleen Tinker and talked with her about what FAF did and how they helped other former Adventists. Shirley found out there was a Former Adventist Fellowship Conference being held in Redlands, California; she talked to me about it, saying she would love to go. I wasn't sure where Redlands was, so I Googled it and found it was not too far from Palm Springs, one of my favorite winter getaways. I thought to myself that this could be a win-win situation: Shirley could to go to a conference, and I could bask in the sun!

That year we were too late to attend the conference, but we did agree to meet the Tinkers at Trinity Church in Redlands. In addition, they told Shirley that every Sunday they have a number of former Adventists over to their house after church, so she could meet some of them if she came.

The day we were to go to Redlands I woke up feeling dizzy and disoriented. I had no interest in going anywhere and was concerned about my ability to drive. I knew that this visit was very important to Shirley, so I braced myself and told her that she might have to drive if I couldn't handle it. We made it without incident, but throughout the service I continued to feel dizzy. By the time we were ready to go home that afternoon it had all left.

I didn't think much of it, but we started to notice a pattern each year as we went to the FAF conference. Something, whether it was a travel mix-up, health issues, or family crisis would conspire to nearly stop us from attending the conference. It was as if someone didn't want us there. We have now come to expect something unexpected to arise each year as we prepare to go to FAF conference.

For Shirley the annual FAF conference is like a pilgrimage to be with family, and she treasures each moment. For me it is more of a time to observe. We have met many fascinating people whose stories are varied but always compelling. I have learned much about Adventism but more about God's work in the lives He has changed.

The leadership of the former Adventist group is passionately committed to helping those who are struggling with their Adventist backgrounds and experiences to find a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ and make Him the center of their lives. While many say that one can be committed exclusively to Jesus while maintaining the Adventist faith, most former Adventists maintain that such a commitment is impossible if one is still Adventist. The theological differences are so substantial that Adventism and biblical Christianity cannot thrive together in a person's heart. I have listened as leadership has talked about trying

for years to reconcile Adventism with a vibrant personal walk with Christ. They really wanted to unite the two and tried desperately to do so, but in the end they found it just wouldn't work. I resonate with this thinking for I, too, try to work out problems in my church when I find something is going astray. The longer one has been in a church, the more one loves it and wants to preserve it. It takes tremendous courage to admit, not only to oneself but also to others, that there is terminal error in the camp.

Like most people not familiar with Adventism, I had no idea how different their theology is from mainline evangelicalism. I have never read much of Ellen White, although I did take a run at *The Great Controversy* when I first met Shirley. I found it so convoluted in style, however, that I quickly gave up. I was truly amazed to find out about the Adventist doctrines of the Trinity, hell, the investigative judgement, the remnant church, and the importance of the Sabbath. Additionally, it was equally important to me to learn the implications of holding these beliefs. It became very evident why one cannot be an Adventist and hold to a Christ-centered evangelical faith.

It is heart-breaking to me to hear of former Adventists who loved their Adventist church and its people and have tried to show them the error of their ways in as loving a way as possible, and then have those same people turn on them, having nothing to do with them because they left "the truth". The "formers" end up becoming enemies of the very ones to whom they reached out because they cared for them.

Family dynamics play a significant role in peoples' responses to Adventism and in how they leave it. Those who grew up in highly legalistic and unloving environments find themselves bitter and very resentful toward the church, and they often blame the church for most of the dysfunction in their lives. After talking with a number of former Adventists and hearing how they grew up, it is hard to tell if the church caused the bad family, or if the bad family chose the church that fit with their dysfunction. When one hears of good family environments, much of that resentment is not present. I think it is really important to try and separate the two factors.

Adventism, as do many cults, uses social rejection as a tool to manipulate and control its people. Over and over I have heard people talk of how their parents and family would have nothing to do with them if they left "the truth". Since they grew up in the church and had few other friends outside Adventism, what were they to do? The pressure to conform is immense. The approach is not unique to Adventism, but it is certainly not grace-based and does nothing to encourage unconditional loving relationships.

The more individuals have invested in a religion, the harder it is for them to accept the fact that they made a mistake and to turn

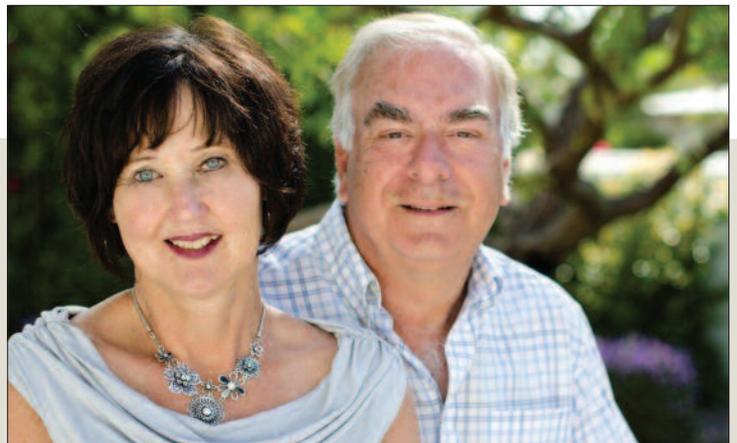
from it. This phenomenon is true in all of life, but it is poignantly illustrated in Adventism. The book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions and Hurtful Acts* (Carol Tavris and Eliot Aronson) is an excellent account of research done to prove this point. The opening account reminded me of Adventism and the William Miller story.

When people give themselves to a religion like Adventism for much of their lives and then find out that the tenets of their faith are flawed, having no basis in Scripture, they find it very hard to trust any kind of spiritual authority. That broken trust leaves people in a real quandary. It is human nature to want and need to trust others, but when trust is broken, the tendency is to put up walls.

These observations all point to one reality: only Christ can overcome these obstacles. Their reliance on this truth is what is so evident to me about the former Adventists. I get goose bumps when I listen to them sing at conferences. The song that does me in is "In Christ Alone". The passion with which they sing that song is overpowering because it is so real for them. Only Christ could have freed them from the bondage of Adventism. Only Christ could put a new song in their heart. Only Christ could set their hearts on fire. These people are the real deal. They get excited about learning Scripture, and it is a joy to see them dig into the Word. They soak up good teaching like a thirsty dog slurps up its water. It can be noisy, but it is really good!

In conclusion, I want to address former Adventists directly. As an outsider I have a great deal of respect for you. You are overcoming huge obstacles. You are not perfect, and many of you may have a long way to go to become healthy—but then, don't we all? You are part of a wonderful family of former Adventists, and it is great to have fellowship and commiserate together. Don't forget, however, that God has called you out of your past; you are also now part of a much larger family—the family of God. There is a time to put the former things behind you and to move on in your Christian walk. Your stories are unique, and not many understand what you have gone through, so it is easy to stay where it is comfortable. As you "unpack" your worldview, however, you'll realize that there is a big world out there, and God has some really important things for you to do. He will redeem your past confusion for His glory. Use the passion and the insights He has given you and the reality of Christ in your life to carry out His plans for you. Trust Jesus, and make a difference in your world. †

Dan Burton grew up in a Christian family that worshiped at a Baptist church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Business degree and worked for an international Insurance company for 17 years before starting his own business as a commercial real estate portfolio manager for Canadian pension funds. Dan helped launch a church plant in 1977 and has served on the church board for over 30 years as well as serving on a number of other non-profit boards. Dan and his wife Shirley have three grown children and three grandchildren.



UNPRECEDENTED MOVE FOR GAIN

DOWNWARD



GARY INRIG

MOBILITY



The bitterly fought election of 2012 is over, and the consequences remain to be seen. It seemed at times that the two parties inhabited two different countries, so different were their understandings of the problems and the necessary solutions. On one thing they agreed, however: the middle class had been hammered by the Great Recession. The standard of living of millions of people is heading in the wrong direction, and downward mobility is a nightmare, not a dream. Reality has deviated from the American dream of upward mobility, of climbing the ladder of success and going from rags to riches. Life is like the old game Chutes and Ladders: no one wants to land on a chute; our goal is to find a quick way to the top. We don't want to have a downfall or to be downsized or downgraded. We'd rather be upgraded and upscaled than downcast or downhearted. Success is up, not down.

Our way of thinking about success is the reason the trajectory taken by the Lord Jesus is so remarkable and so challenging. He chose fully and freely to live a life of downward mobility, not in financial terms, but in terms of His attitude to His rights and privileges. And His choice is not only remarkable in itself, it is given as a pattern for us to follow. As Paul exhorts his friends in Philippi: "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27), he points to Jesus as their supreme example: "Have this mind among yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." The Lord Jesus is, of course, far more than an example—He is our Lord and Savior. We come in faith to Him as our sinless Substitute to receive the free gift of salvation and eternal life. We do not imitate Him to receive the gift of eternal life—that comes by faith alone. But, as our Lord and Savior, He becomes the perfect model of a life worthy of the gospel.

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the great mountain peaks of Scripture, a glorious display of the glory and grace of our Lord Jesus. It is full of great, mind-stretching theology that drives us to worship. At the same time it is written to be a life-transforming model for our relationships with others, to show us what it means for a person to "look out not merely to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." By pointing us to the Lord Jesus, Paul wants us to realize that in order to grow in Christian character and conduct, specifically in humility and mutual love, we need to grow in our understanding of our Lord and Savior.

Paul's great discourse on Christ, often described as the Christ-hymn, falls into two parts. In the first half, verses 6 to 8, the Lord Jesus is the actor, as He freely chooses the path of downward mobility and humbles Himself all the way to the cross. In the second half, verses 9 to 11, God the Father is the actor, as He responds to the self-emptying of the Son by giving Him the highest name and exalting Him to the highest place.

Downward mobility

...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

First, Paul begins our journey by pulling back the veil and giving us insight into the eternal mystery of our triune God. As

the starting point, we must realize that the Lord Jesus is eternally and fully God. So Paul tells us that He was "in the form of God." This is a description rich in significance. The word "form" in Greek describes an outward form that is in perfect harmony with the essence or nature of something. Since God is spirit and doesn't have a physical form, this phrase is a declaration that the Lord Jesus possessed the exact nature and essence of God and eternally lived in the glory that surrounds God. All that God is, He eternally is. As John 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." To reinforce this idea, Paul makes it clear that the Lord Jesus possessed "equality with God". He was not a second category being. All that God is, He is.

Here we glimpse the central Christian truth about God: He is triune. The mystery of the Trinity is that the one eternal God has eternally existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus did not become God, as if that were possible. He eternally is God, and all that God had, He had.

Next, in verse six, Paul points us to what the Lord chose to do with what was rightly His. "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." Here is the wonder of our God: He chose to give and not get. The key statement in this clause involves a rare idiom that has proven hard to render into English and has caused scholars to write pages. What does it mean that "He did not consider equality a thing to be grasped"? There are two main ideas. First, the expression indicates that "equality with God" was already in His possession. He did not need to grasp for equality, since He already possessed it. Second, He chose not to use what was fully and rightfully His for His own advantage, making the most of His opportunity. In other words, Jesus' response to His equality with God was very different from that of political leaders, ancient and modern, who leverage their positions to enrich themselves or to promote their own interests, or when we see business people gain the power to get their own way and quickly move to exploit all the perks that they can.

Someone has observed that one of the most revealing tests of a person is what he does with privileges. Will he use them or abuse them?

The Lord Jesus would have been perfectly righteous in doing anything he desired. He is Lord of all, the Creator, and all things were created for his glory. Nevertheless, He rejected the idea that his position was for His advantage and well-being. He could have

For those who have not confessed Jesus as Lord, there is a profound warning. One day you will see Jesus as He truly is and confess Him as Lord and God. But that declaration will condemn you, not save you. Now it is the time to “confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead” so that you may receive God’s salvation (Rom. 10:9).

used what was rightfully His to do anything He wanted; He could have acted as he pleased with no one to resist or contradict. Instead, He responded in exactly the opposite way, revealing the heart of God in an unforgettable way: He gives and does not grasp; he gives and does not seek to gain.

The third step in this biography of our Lord Jesus is expressed in verse 8: He emptied himself by choosing to become a slave. We need to listen carefully to what Paul says here. When the word “empty” is used of a person, it means “to make one’s self nothing, to pour oneself out.” A human being can’t empty himself of his “humanness”, but he can “pour himself out.” Paul writes very carefully: Jesus emptied himself “by taking the form of a slave”. He emptied himself by adding!

He did not cease to be who He eternally was; He became what he was not. This statement bears careful thought. Just as certainly as He was “in the form of God”, He came to be in “the form of a slave”. The sovereign God divested Himself, not of His deity, but of His autonomy. He gave up the right to do as He pleased when He pleased. He became subject to the Father, surrendering the independent exercise of His attributes.

Paul explains this surrender further by telling us that taking this form of a slave meant that He was being born in the likeness of men. This mystery is the incarnation, the great truth we celebrate every Christmas that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). As Paul describes this remarkable event, however, he makes an important but subtle shift. While he said Jesus took the “form of a slave”, he uses a different word to explain Jesus’ birth and writes that He was born in the “likeness” of men, not in their “form”. Paul chooses this different Greek word to make a point: “likeness” is a word that looks at the outward appearance of something, but it may not tell you all there is to know about that thing. It describes similarity but not identity.

For example, several years ago, my wife and I were on a tour of Greece that took us to a small Greek island. As we walked we noticed two men sitting having coffee at a dockside café. They seemed strangely familiar, and Elizabeth told me who she thought one of them was, but I insisted that it couldn’t be—there were none of the trappings that would surround such a person. As we were looking, they signaled to invite us over. I politely waved back and declined the offer. After all, we had places to go and things to see. That night, watching television, we realized that we had declined coffee with the president of Greece and the prime minister of Australia! As you can imagine, as much as possible I avoid recalling that moment in the presence of my wife. At the time, it

had seemed impossible that she could have been right; both men had seemed so ordinary! They had successfully assumed the likeness of ordinary tourists.

In a far more profound way, Jesus was “in the likeness of men”. He was truly and fully human, but he was not merely human. He was always the God-man. The One born to Mary is “Immanuel”, God with us.

Still the downward journey continues as Paul describes a fourth step in Jesus’ “emptying”. It is beyond imagining that the eternal God became human, yet Paul wants us to understand that He also experienced ultimate humiliation, death on a cross. The Lord Jesus did not merely “empty” himself to become human, but being found in human form, he humbled himself. This humbling of the Lord Jesus was a personal choice, not an imposed one. He humbled Himself. The very act of becoming human was a tremendous act of self-giving, but even as a human, He humbled Himself. He didn’t come as a “king’s kid” but lived as a peasant among peasants, in an occupied, second-class country.

His humbling, however, was far from the end: he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. It is important to observe that He chose death. For us, death is a normal part of life in a fallen world—the wages of the sin we have committed. We do not obey to the point of death; we die whether we like it or not. Jesus, however, chose death: “I lay down my life for the sheep... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (Jn. 10:15, 17). He was the sinless One, dying in place of sinful ones: “The Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for the many” (Matt. 20:28).

We have not finished yet. Not only did he humble himself to a death he did not deserve, but He humbled himself to even death on a cross. We are so familiar with the fact that Jesus was crucified that we have lost the sense of horror that those words would convey to anyone living at the time. It was virtually forbidden even to speak of a cross or crucifixion in polite society. A “cross-death” was an unspeakably cruel death, full of pain and suffering, the epitome of terror and torture. Further, it was a criminal’s death, utterly shameful and degrading, as one was impaled naked before mocking, jeering spectators. Worst of all, crucifixion was considered a cursed death, as a person came under the judgment of God. And that cursed death is precisely the death Jesus died as He bore the wrath of the righteous God for our sins, not His. He is our Substitute and Savior.

At this point we can only bow in wonder and adoration, amazed at the extent of the self-giving love of the Lord Jesus in our place.

As the old hymn puts it, “Hallelujah, what a Savior!” We have reached the lowest point of Jesus’ self-giving love, but this is far from the end of the story!

Divine exaltation

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

As we have already noted, God the Father now becomes the central actor in the story. The Lord Jesus has humbled himself, but He does not exalt Himself. It is the Father’s response to affirm and vindicate the crucified One. Paul first tells us what the Father has done (verse 9) and then what he will do (verses 10, 11).

First, the Father has exalted the Lord Jesus. This exaltation involves two things. Because of Jesus’ self-giving, self-emptying love, the Father has given his Son the highest place. Therefore God has highly exalted him. This exaltation doesn’t mean that Jesus has been given a higher place than before—you cannot be higher than fully equal with God. It does mean, however, that He now occupies the supreme, unrivaled place of supremacy and glory. Paul does not take the time to detail the means by which this occurred—His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, His enthronement in majesty as Lord and King. He simply wants us to recognize that nothing and no one is higher than Jesus, and this fact reflects a fundamental spiritual principle: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12).

The Father has also given His Son the highest name, “the name above all names”. In biblical terms, to give someone a name means to recognize someone’s nature and to honor their achievements. It is far more than a label. The Father has given His Son the highest name because, as the Lord said, the Father’s purpose is that all people honor Him as they honor the Father (Jn. 5:23).

What name is this “name above all names”? At first glance it appears to be Jesus. After all, the next verse says that it is “at the name of Jesus” that every knee will bow. But, wonderful as that name is in that it reminds us of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus, it is more likely that the name above all names is “Lord,” the name that every tongue will confess. The word “LORD” is the way the New Testament renders the name of God in the Old Testament, Yahweh, which is God’s personal name. This understanding of the “name above all names” is likely because in verse 10, Paul is referring to Isaiah 45:21-23: “Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For

I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance” (Is. 45:21-23). Jesus is properly addressed with the name of God himself, in full recognition of his equality with the Father.

Finally, what verse 9 describes has already transpired. Verses 10 and 11, however, point forward to the fact that God the Father has purposed universal acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord. Paul shifts his focus to the future day when the Lord returns in power and glory to establish His kingdom. Then all intelligent created beings from all time and all places—those beings in heaven (presumably angels and perhaps the believing dead), on earth (living humans) and “under the earth” (apparently demons and the unbelieving dead) will find themselves in the presence of the Lord Jesus. On that day, without exception, every knee will bow and every tongue confess, “Jesus Christ is Lord”. For some, this event will be a time of joyful celebration delighting in the acclamation of the One who is their Savior and Lord. For others, it will be the terrifying recognition that the One whom they had ignored, opposed, or rejected is both God and Lord. No being that has ever existed will be exempt from this moment: all will declare that Jesus is exactly who He is, and in that declaration God the Father will be glorified.

In the presence of such truth, we cannot and must not be indifferent. For those who have not confessed Jesus as Lord, there is a profound warning. One day you will see Jesus as He truly is and confess Him as Lord and God. But that declaration will condemn you, not save you. Now it is the time to “confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead” so that you may receive God’s salvation (Rom. 10:9).

For a Christ-follower, the only proper response to such truths about our Lord Jesus is worship, praise and thanksgiving. We have the privilege not only of anticipating that great day when all will confess Jesus as Lord, but also of bowing the knee to Him today with a grateful heart that declares with wonder: “Christ Jesus my Lord”.

Today in a very practical way we need to remember the reason the Holy Spirit led Paul to write these words. As individuals and as Christ-followers we are to imitate our Lord: “in humility, consider others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). After all, He did not consider equality with God something to be used for His own advantage, but He emptied Himself, humbling Himself not only to become a man, but “to death on a cross” for our sakes and in our place. So we ask the Lord for His grace so that we may “Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus.” †



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DALE RATZLAFF

Every Christmas season we are directed back to the biblical accounts of Christ's birth in Matthew and Luke. When we review these records, both new and old insights jump out at us with meaning and present day applications. Let us look at several from the first two chapters of Matthew.

The human genealogy of Christ

Matthew, writing to the Jewish people, starts his genealogy with Abraham, the father of the Jews. He makes no attempt to whitewash the record but includes even wicked people like Rehoboam “who forsook the law of the Lord and all Israel with him.”¹ He includes the unsavory women who could have been left out such as Tamar who played the harlot;² Rahab, the harlot who hid the spies;³ and Ruth, the Moabitess⁴ with an ancestry of incest.⁵ Remember, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD,”⁶ yet, here she is in the ancestry of Christ! The insight for us

today is that God's grace and purpose are greater than our sin and the condemnation written in the law.

The sinless nature of Christ

Matthew, after listing the shadowy ancestry of Joseph, “the husband of Mary,” immediately shows that Joseph was not the father of Jesus. Rather, as the angel made clear, “the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit”. The sinless nature of Christ is critical for a correct understanding of the gospel. We are to see Christ primarily as our sinless Substitute⁷ and not as one who had the same fallen nature of Adam that we do. We are saved by His perfect holiness imputed to us and not by any feeble attempt by us to perfectly follow His example.

Jesus, Savior; Immanuel, God with us—worthy of worship—deserving worship

At the birth of Jesus Matthew records in summary fashion the theme of the Christmas story. Jesus is to save His people from their sins. He is “God with us”, worthy of our worship. That this truth would be patently clear, Matthew records the visit of the Magi who came “to worship Him.” “When they saw the child they fell down to the ground and worshiped him.” Every Jew knew well the passage from the law:



“You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.”⁸ Therefore, here at the very beginning of the Gospel record there is no question regarding the identity of this child: He is YHWH of the Old Testament; He is the eternal God who has taken on humanity for us. These facts are enormous truths. Jesus is not just another son of Adam. He is the eternal God in the flesh. If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus, for “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”⁹ As we read through the gospel records, we will see the compassion Jesus had for the poor and the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd; we see His love expressed to the unlovable: lepers, lame, blind, deaf and even dead! We witness His anger over meaningless religious rules, focalized tradition and hypocritical religious leaders who pervert the gospel of God’s grace. We see His power over sin, sickness, demons, nature and death! When we look at the cross we understand that the love and justice of God have kissed each other. Then, when we read the epistles we realize that this Jesus not only did all this for us, but somehow we did it in him! We were crucified with Him.¹⁰ We were buried with Him.¹¹ We were raised with Him.¹² Now we who are “in Christ” are seated with Him at the Father’s right hand.¹³ The future has come into the now.

The reach of God’s grace is beyond Israel

That God would communicate to a few rich people from the East and supernaturally direct them to Bethlehem to worship the Christ child is worthy of note. The Jews of Christ’s day considered all other peoples inferior and outside of God’s love. Perhaps we, too, often fall into the same mode of thinking: that other races, denominations, or religions are outside of God’s love. They are not. In fact, we have been given the commission to take that Love to every nation and tongue and people.

God’s provision

Many believe that the gifts of the Magi of gold, frankincense, and myrrh may have provided the necessary funds for Joseph to take the Christ child and Mary to Egypt. This teaches us that God’s provision may come from unexpected sources at just the right time. We have seen this time and again at Life Assurance Ministries. It seems that God does not want us to get financially comfortable. Rather, it appears we are to pray as Christ taught His disciples, “Give us this day our daily bread.”¹⁴

God’s supernatural guidance

God can communicate His will to us whenever He feels it necessary. Through dreams God revealed to Joseph that Mary’s child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that he should flee to Egypt, that he should return to Israel, and that he should settle in the regions of Galilee. Joseph cooperated with God in this. He

obeyed instantly when he knew God’s will. When he did not have specific guidance, he used wisdom. So for us today, we can rest assured that God will guide us. Our part is to (1) find His will in Scripture, (2) immediately do His will when revealed, (3) and trust God to give us His wisdom. “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.”¹⁵

Worshipping Christ brings the wrath of Satan and God’s deliverance

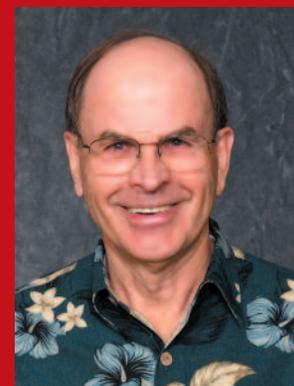
Worshipping the true God often brings the wrath of political leaders. It was true with Herod; it is true today. Many innocent children were killed in Herod’s mad attempt to destroy any rival. Today, there are thousands of innocent Christians being killed by political leaders who cannot stand to see the worship of Christ. In our own country, we see the outright hatred expressed for conservative Christians who believe that infanticide in the form of abortion is evil. If our culture continues its rapid moral degeneration, it may not be long before we may be the targets of wrath simply because we believe in Christ and support biblical values. But even in those times, whether we live or die, we know that we have eternal life. Just as God delivered Christ from the wrath of King Herod, He can, if He wills, deliver us out of any danger.

So as we read the Christmas stories again, let us read slowly, looking for insights from God’s word. See how many you can find. †

Endnotes

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| ¹ 2 Chron. 12:1. | ⁹ Jn. 14:9. |
| ² See Gen. 38. | ¹⁰ Gal. 2:20. |
| ³ See Josh. 2. | ¹¹ Rom. 6:2,3. |
| ⁴ Ru. 1:4. | ¹² Rom. 6:4-7. |
| ⁵ See Gen. 19. | ¹³ Eph. 2:5,6. |
| ⁶ Deut. 23:3. | ¹⁴ Mt. 6:11. |
| ⁷ Rom. 5:18, 19; 2 Cor. 5:21. | ¹⁵ Jn. 16:13. |
| ⁸ Deut. 6:13. | |

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SPIRITUAL ABUSE



JOANIE YORBA-GRAY, MSW, WITH COLLEEN TINKER

For many of us, church represents God. Whether it is right or wrong to have this expectation, church is supposed to be a safe place where we can worship God and study His word—and the important word here is “safe”.

AMONG RELIGIONS

For many of us Christians, church represents God. Whether it is right or wrong to have this expectation, church is supposed to be a safe place where we can worship God and study His word—and the important word here is “safe”. We expect our pastors and leaders to have integrity and to be faithful to the doctrines of the Bible. We expect our churches to be protected sanctuaries where we are free from harm. Moreover, we may rely on pastors for counseling when we go through difficulties in our lives. Our home congregation typically brings us a sense of comfort, solace, and love.

But what happens when that love is betrayed by an abuse of the “power of the pulpit”, either because leaders within that body stray, or because the denomination as a whole has gone off course? What happens to the followers of these leaders? This breakdown of trust and the exploitation of the faithful amounts to spiritual abuse.

Definition of spiritual abuse

A very basic description of this phenomenon says: “Spiritual abuse occurs when someone uses their power within a framework of spiritual belief or practice to satisfy their own needs at the expense of others.”¹

Additionally: “Spiritual abuse is a type of abuse that damages the central core of the victim. It leaves them spiritually discouraged and emotionally cut off from the healing love of God... It consists of the mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining, or decreasing that person’s spiritual empowerment.”²

In his book *Churches that Abuse*, evangelical sociologist Ronald M. Enroth points out that:

Abusive churches...are first and foremost characterized by strong, control-oriented leadership. These leaders use guilt, fear, and intimidation to manipulate members and keep them in line. Followers are led to think that there is no other church quite like theirs and that God has singled them out for special purposes. Other more traditional evangelical churches are put down. Subjective experience is emphasized and dissent is discouraged. Many areas of members’ lives are subject to scrutiny. Rules and legalism abound. For those who leave, the road back to normalcy is difficult.³

From these descriptions we can see that abuse can be perpetrated either by a church organization that has strayed from biblical teaching, thereby damaging its followers, or by an individual who has a leadership position in the church. The characteristics of either the abusive systems or of the abusive leaders that are described below are primarily distilled from writings by Major Scott Nicloy from the Salvation Army and Steve Cadman-Neu, MSW, who quotes from *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* by VanVonderen & Johnson⁴ in his article.

While these descriptions may apply to any spiritually abusive system or leader, some of them have special significance for those who have spent time in the Seventh-day Adventist organization. Where applicable, therefore, we will show the connection between the characteristics that are listed and the practices or traditions of Adventism.

The abusive leaders seek power and control with manipulation, domination and intimidation. Their words have great weight, as if they are personal emissaries of God. Where a true Christian leader can encourage fellowship and growth, the religious dictator coerces people to be completely subordinate to him/her. The leader promotes dominant-submissive relationships with those around him. Rod Smith explains that the abusive leader claims to hear from God and that God apparently “goes through him/her to speak to the faithful.”⁵

Within Adventism there is no single leader who directly controls all members, although the general conference president does set the tone and expectations for the denomination worldwide. The voice of God within Adventism, however, is the late Ellen G. White (EGW) whose writings are a “continuing and authoritative source of truth”, as stated in the organizations’ Fundamental Belief #18. Her “counsels” and her hermeneutic for understanding Scripture continue to be considered God-given and are treated as revelations from God that are binding on the members’ consciences.

The abuser is narcissistic, using him/herself as the primary point of reference. The dominating leader believes that only “his thoughts, his feelings, his perceptions are fully real...he assumes that what he thinks God thinks, and what he believes is Bible-based...They take it for granted that any idea that jumps into their heads is from the Holy Spirit and that they are only following the promptings of the Holy Spirit whenever they decide to do anything.” “When you (the narcissistic leader) believe that you are right and righteous, then all that you say and do is right and righteous. Any thought to the contrary never enters the picture.”⁶

Even though individual Adventists may disclaim believing in EGW as a prophet, nevertheless she is officially acknowledged as a “source of truth” and is considered God’s messenger to the Seventh-day Adventist movement. She wrote the following about her writings, which have determined the “shape” of the Adventist worldview:

“God was speaking through clay. You might say that this communication was only a letter. Yes, it was a letter, but prompted by the Spirit of God, to bring before your minds things that had been shown me. In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.”⁷

“The abusive church/leader thinks in black and white terms, “either-or” and “we vs. them.” These leaders use terms like “we are the (only) true Christians,” and they are the judge and jury on who is spiritual and who isn’t.⁸

Seventh-day Adventism teaches exclusivity by declaring itself the “remnant church” of Bible prophecy. It believes only Adventism has the two marks that identify God’s remnant people: it keeps all the commandments of God, including the fourth commandment, the seventh-day Sabbath, and it has the “testimony of Jesus” which is the spirit of prophecy (see Rev. 19:10). They identify the writings of EGW as the spirit of prophecy. They believe, based on EGW’s revelations, that in the last days, the seventh-day Sabbath will be the mark that separates the saved from the lost. Moreover, they believe that those who worship on Sunday will have the mark of the beast and will be legally permitted to hunt and kill the Sabbath-keepers.⁹

The spiritual abusers promote “legalistic perfectionism” and “perfectionistic legalism.” In reality, these expectations are about power and control, not about holiness. This focus “is a form of religious perfectionism that focuses on careful performance & avoidance of certain behaviors.”¹⁰

Adventism illustrates this principle by requiring the keeping of the Ten Commandments, especially the fourth, as the evidence of honoring God. It further officially forbids the use of tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine. Adventism encourages vegetarianism and veganism, and these prohibitions and recommendations are for the purpose of prolonging life, suppressing one’s “animal passions” (sexual desires), and enhancing mental clarity and physical health so one can better perceive the Holy Spirit.

Many abusive church leaders tend towards being isolationist, choosing not to have fellowship with people whom they consider to be in error, including other Christians and even family members. This withdrawal from Christian acquaintances can also lead to paranoia when the congregation “assumes they are more enlightened and that (others) won’t understand unless they become one of us. Paranoia prevents people from getting the help they need... Leaders cover up child abuse because of distrusting the evil, secular social service system.”¹¹

Adventism sees itself as separate from the “world” although in the world. It strongly encourages the young people to attend their private academies and colleges so they will be more likely to marry within the organization and become established as adults within the system. Their Sabbath-keeping is a natural barrier separating them from the Christian community, and they tend to limit their close friendships to Adventists who will understand their diet, their worship, and their worldview.

There is an obsession with discipline in abusive churches, and questioning the leader is tantamount to questioning God Himself. They may be extremely punitive if not obeyed, including shunning those who run afoul of their “laws”. The absolutist leader expects blind obedience because he/she has “the mind of Christ”.

Adventism is less overt than many other false religious systems in its rejection of those who break its rules or leave altogether. Nevertheless, when someone leaves Adventism for the sake of the gospel, a subtle-at-first but increasingly rigid rejection takes shape. It is not uncommon for families to experience unresolved breaks in

Boundaries are often broken within Adventism between staff members, and also between pastors and parishioners among members in general, especially between those who have less financial and social “clout” than others. Personal secrets can effect social and political limitations within the system.

relationships that worsen rather than repair over time when one member becomes born again and leaves Adventism for the Christian community.

Sometimes “pastoral care” in cultic groups ends up being a type of surveillance system to control people’s behavior. The boundaries of the individual are violated, and the abuser uses personal information for control and manipulation.

Within Adventism, violations of boundaries are not necessarily problems linked to pastoral care. The problems of control and manipulation are strong but less easy to isolate than in many other groups. Because the organization is worldwide and because it has developed large medical and educational systems, the control within the local churches is not always centered on the pastor. Often the physicians are the ones who wield the most power within congregations. Furthermore, there is an unspoken but powerful pecking order, and families of physicians have social status that other families do not. Boundaries are often broken within Adventism between professors and students, doctors and staff members, and also between pastors and parishioners. There is further guardedness among members in general, especially between those who have less financial and social “clout” than others. Personal secrets can effect social and political limitations within the system.

The church that is spiritually abusive encourages a Pied Piper mentality, and this effect is often especially noted with young people. A youth leader who has all the young people from the congregation following him everywhere can be problematic; a healthy youth leader would encourage the youth to form positive and healthy relationships with a variety of people in the fellowship. No “personality cults” should be allowed.¹²

Adventism has at least partially avoided personality cults by moving its pastors every few years. Some larger churches within the organization have retained their senior pastors for ten years or longer, but in general Adventist pastors move every few years. This lack of long-term stability, however, perpetuates guardedness and lack of trust.

Spiritually abusive churches claim absolute truth for themselves. Obviously the claim that “Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life” is a fundamental, absolute biblical truth. The abusive church, however, has numerous extra-biblical claims that have more to do with the personal views and opinions of the leader or the organization’s traditions than they do with the Bible.

For example, Adventism believes that the seventh-day Sabbath will be the last great “test” of loyalty to God. It believes that all those who are alive when Jesus returns will be keeping the Sabbath if they are saved, and they believe that worshiping on Sunday will be the mark of the beast during the last days. The Sabbath is considered sacred and mandatory. In fact, when people leave

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and political limitations within the system.

Adventism to join the Christian community, the first question people have is not, “What will do you with Jesus?” Rather, the question is always, “But what about the Sabbath?”

Eschatology is often a major interest in churches that are abusive, not because that topic is problematic intrinsically, but because many abusive leaders are obsessed with time lines and end-time preaching. This fascination feeds fears and uncertainties among the congregation. If the people can be kept in a state of anxiety and fear, they can be dominated and controlled by others.

Interestingly, while Adventism publicly claims it does not set dates, it was born from the fallout of a failed prophecy that Jesus would return in 1844. Instead of repenting of date-setting, the founding Adventists developed the doctrine of the investigative judgment to explain what they believe really happened on the date Jesus failed to return. That initial refusal to admit that they had not trusted God’s word, insisting instead that a spurious date had eternal significance, has yielded an organization shaped by extra-biblical authority and traditions built on a lack of trust in the sufficiency of Scripture. Additionally, Adventism continuously urges members to “get ready” for Jesus to come, warning He may come at any moment, and they may be caught indulging in sin and rebellion and thus be left to face the second resurrection and eternal annihilation.

In abusive churches, the end justifies any means. Clergy and members are often unethical and dishonest in their evangelistic tactics. They sponsor community events without saying who they are as a cover for a hard-sell campaign to get proselytes, in spite of the fact that false advertising is morally and ethically wrong. In some abusive churches, criminal conduct or other immoral behavior in the leadership is covered up for the sake of “the mission”. There is a secretive methodology, hiding what the leaders don’t want to reveal.

Adventist evangelism is well-known to be deceptive. Adventists advertise Revelation Seminars, playing on the public’s fears of world events, without saying they are Adventists. They often begin their meetings in venues that are not Adventist and move the audience to an Adventist church several nights into the series—often right before they present the “Sabbath truth” in the meetings. Additionally, Adventists sponsor health screenings, cooking schools, radio broadcasts, and Bible studies without stating they are Adventists. They rationalize that the public will be more receptive to their programs if they do not know at first that they are Adventist.

“It is a closed system with rigid boundaries. There will be a perception of a lot of evil on the outside, to keep people in. There will be power posturing on the inside, to compel people to conform. There will be tired, wounded people who feel they are either unspiritual or crazy, and they will have major problems relating to God from the heart. They can wind up totally ill-equipped for life.

When they leave they may be blown around like dry leaves, or easily drawn into other abusive systems.”¹³

This effect is all too common among those who leave Adventism. There are large numbers of people who quietly disappear from Adventist congregations because Adventism is just too difficult to “do” properly. Agnosticism is built into Adventist dogma; members are taught that if they leave the Sabbath and the “spirit of prophecy” (EGW’s writings), they will then lose faith in the Bible and faith in God. Since they believe that Adventism is the only true church, they cannot go to a “Sunday church” when they leave because that would be choosing to join Satan’s side. Unless they hear the gospel and meet the Lord Jesus and receive His forgiveness and salvation, they remain spiritually broken, filled with unbelief and vulnerable to the next attractive false gospel.

Effects of spiritual abuse on victims

When people are spiritually abused, long term damage is done. In order to heal, it is important for the victim to be aware of some of the effects they will experience. Some may want to seek professional help from a Christian counselor who is well-grounded in biblical truth to assist them in the recovery process. Here are some effects:

1. Feelings of inadequacy. When the abusive system is perfectionistic, the victim suffers from never being able to do enough to achieve the desired perfection and often becomes anxious and depressed.

2. Hidden physical or sexual abuse. A secretive system allows abuse to be unreported and untreated, thus giving the perpetrator freedom to continue to abuse. The pressure to keep the secret is destructive to the victim. “The perpetrator will never be held accountable; the victim will have to freeze up the pain and anger. It is impossible for wounds to be healed and abuse will one day escalate.”¹⁴ People remain wounded in this type of system, often for many, many years.

3. Dissociation. “One of the reasons why we have a major problem with abuse in Christian churches is because we have Christian people who are dissociated. They do not know what they feel, what motivates them, who they are or what they are about. They are divorced from their sexuality, divorced from their feelings, divorced from their real needs, divorced from their authentic selves. They are strangers unto themselves. Jesus said from the Cross, ‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.’ Dissociated Christians are people who do not know what they are doing. Abraham Maslow wrote, ‘The great cause of much psychological illness is the fear of knowing of oneself—of one’s emotions, impulses, memories, capacities, potentialities, of one’s destiny.’ Dissociated Christians are people who do not know themselves and are afraid to know themselves.”¹⁵

4. Inappropriate behaviors and addictions. Eating disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as obsessive/compulsive behaviors arise out of the anxiety created by a lifestyle that is impossible to

Contrasts between a spiritually abusive system and a healthy Christian system

Abusive religion/religious leader	Healthy religion/religious leader
Coerces obedience with power, manipulation, domination and fear. Adventism teaches one will be lost if he leaves the Sabbath, and Satan will answer the prayers of those who refuse Adventist truth.	Leads the flock in his care with a servant's heart and seeks cooperation and fellowship (Mk. 9:35).
Uses the Bible for his own purposes, i.e., to control and dominate the flock. Adds his own "theology." Adventism teaches the Bible using EGW's hermeneutic.	Uses biblical doctrines in teachings and encourages the flock to do their own personal Bible study and study in groups.
Has rigid or overly-enmeshed boundaries, and the members of the church are closed off from other groups. Adventism teaches members to guard against being seduced by "Sunday worship." They can have safe close relationships only with other Adventists.	Has appropriate boundaries with members of the church. Doesn't try to become enmeshed in their lives or cut them off from other Christians.
May be narcissistic and believe that he knows what God thinks and may even see himself as "God's mouthpiece." Authority goes from the top down. Adventism teaches that members who question their doctrines have refused to believe the light God gave them through EGW.	Knows that God works through the Holy Spirit in each believer to give us discernment; accountability goes both ways.
Sees itself as the only "true" church; has black and white thinking—us vs. them, right vs. wrong (the others are wrong). Adventism teaches it has God's truth for the last days of earth's history; they are the only true church.	All those who have accepted the finished work of Christ on the cross, without need for personal performance, are brothers and sisters in the Lord. There are not "superior" believers; all believers are equally loved by God (Romans 8:1).
Promotes legalism and perfectionism. This gives the leader ability to control people by their fears of not being saved and going to hell. Adventism teaches members must be continually gaining victory over sin and must confess every sin or they will not be saved.	Knows that the Christian is saved by grace through faith and salvation cannot be earned by one's behavior (Eph. 2:8-9).
Has obsession with discipline in which those who disagree are shunned, censured or expelled from the church. Leader expects to be obeyed because he has "the mind of Christ." Adventism's discipline is subtler; pastors are fired if they preach against the Sabbath or Ellen White. Many sins are tolerated if a person is a loyal tithe-paying member.	If the individual has erred, he confesses the sin and receives forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9). Believers are not shunned or expelled for disagreements on non essential matters of faith.
Encourages "group think" by using rules and regulations that are constantly repeated, taught and reinforced by church literature, classes and teaching from the pulpit. Adventism publishes Sabbath School lessons with daily study guides. These are used concurrently by every Adventist church around the world. Adventism also publishes the monthly <i>Adventist World</i> news/devotional magazine in all the major languages of the organization around the world.	Encourages the Bible as truth, does not obsess about rules and regulations, but focuses on helping individuals grow in their relationship with the Lord.
Believes the end justifies any means. The denomination sponsors community events and public activities without saying who they are in order to gain proselytes. Immoral or criminal conduct on the part of a leader may be covered up for the sake of "the mission" (Nicloy). Adventism says it's OK not to reveal their identity when advertising evangelistic meetings because people won't want it if they think it's Adventist before they hear it. If they hear before they know it's Adventist, however, they will like it and embrace it.	If the end that is desired is not consistent with God's Word, then no means will be acceptable.
Uses end-time events to promote its own eschatology. Eschatology itself isn't wrong, but when the leaders use end time teaching to control the flock by promoting fear and anxiety, isolation from other Christians, perfectionistic behavior, uncertainty about salvation and "extra-biblical" teachings, they are in error. There may be an obsession with calculating the dates, situations or events that predict Jesus' return (Nicloy). Adventism publicly distances itself from its inception in the aftermath of a failed prophecy that Jesus would return in 1844. Its central doctrine was developed to justify the date-setting.	Teaches that no one knows the time of Jesus' second coming (Mk. 13:32).
Uses insider double-talk with a confusing doctrine. The group encourages blind acceptance of its opposing teachings and rejection of logic through complex presentations on incomprehensible doctrines. Adventists, for example, believe they are different from other Christians, and Sunday-Christians will persecute them in the end. Simultaneously they believe they and other Christians are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. (These two statements cannot co-exist in reality).	The Bible is the doctrine upon which teachings are based; other ancillary teaching texts must be consistent with biblical truth.

live successfully. Members of such groups find themselves in a double bind because they eventually see that the group's requirements for holiness are impossible, and they become depressed and discouraged.

5. Free will is broken.¹⁶ In order to fit in and have status in the group, members must unquestioningly submit to the group's teachings and directions, and their own free will is broken. Their "will" actually becomes the group's "will" without their realizing it. This is done either by coercive methods or is accomplished over a period of time through intimidation. Both methods make heavy use of guilt.

6. Personality changes. After immersion into an abusive organization, the otherwise happy person may become sullen, hateful, depressed, anxious, or paranoid.

7. Social disorientation. "The victim loses his/her ability to socialize outside the group. This can go so far as to not being able to structure their time or to make simple decisions for themselves when they leave. Their worldview alters and they perceive the world through their leaders' eyes. They become very naive about life in general."¹⁷

8. Severe guilt complexes. "They are made to feel guilty of everything they did before entering the group, and are to strive to be 'good' and 'worthy' for 'eternal life'. Misdemeanors are made into 'mountains' so that members are in a constant state of guilt for infringing even the most minor rules. Guilt comes because they aren't doing enough; entertaining doubts or questions; even thinking rationally for oneself. This guilt is piled upon pile with new rules constantly being laid down about what is sinful and what is not. Illness may be seen as lack of faith—more guilt. Emotional illness may be seen as proof of sin in your life—more guilt."¹⁸

9. Mystification. When a leader is assumed to have more knowledge than the church member, then the victim gets the message that it is unacceptable to question the authority of this leader. This leads to the process of mystification. Mystification is defined as: "to perplex (a person) by playing on the person's credulity; to bewilder purposely (Merriam-Webster online).

A violation by a spiritual authority, whether the authority is a denomination or a leader, is a type of abuse that is unique in itself. When someone in a position of authority, especially of

spiritual authority, abuses someone in a dependent or vulnerable position and uses their position to justify the abuse, the victim gets a double blow. On one hand, the victim is harmed by the abuser, and on the other hand, the betrayal by the abuser affects the victim's relationship with God, often horribly marring his or her ability to trust God.

If this author can emphasize one thing above all, it is that the abuser does not represent God, and the victim is not disqualified from becoming a child of the Kingdom of God. God loves those who have been victimized by churches and wants to redeem their years of abuse.

Abusive leaders have a higher level of accountability. What does God's word say about the abuse of position by a church leader? "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea" (Mk. 9:42). God does not approve of any type of abuse, especially that perpetrated by church leadership. The victims of spiritual abuse deserve a safe place to heal where they can slowly mend their lives and restore their relationships with God and the church. †

Endnotes

- ¹ Steve Cadman-Neu MSW, "Spiritual Abuse: What it is, Signs & Components" (Part 4), <http://website.lineone.net/~vex/Spiritual%20Abuse.htm>.
- ² Major Scott Nicloy, "Spiritual Abuse," <http://www.micsem.org/pubs/counselor/frames/spiritabuse.htm>.
- ³ Enroth, Ronald M. *Churches that Abuse*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, p. 32.
- ⁴ Adapted from *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* by VanVonderen & Johnson by Steve Cadman-Neu MSW, September 2003, at Christian Counseling website: http://www.christiancounseling.on.ca/articles_spiritual_abuse_definition_signs_&_components.htm.
- ⁵ Smith, Rod, "Difficult Relationships", p. 1. <http://www.difficultrelationships.com/2009/02/09/ten-signs-of-spiritual-abuse/>.
- ⁶ <http://www.micsem.org/pubs/counselor/frames/spiritabuse.htm>
- ⁷ White, Ellen G., *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, 67.2.
- ⁸ <http://www.micsem.org/pubs/counselor/frames/spiritabuse.htm>
- ⁹ White, Ellen G., *The Great Controversy*, pp. 605, 635, 640.
- ¹⁰ http://www.christiancounseling.on.ca/articles_spiritual_abuse_definition_signs_&_components.htm.
- ¹¹ Smith, Rod, "Difficult Relationships", p. 1.
- ¹² Nicloy.
- ¹³ Smith, Rod, "Difficult Relationships".
- ¹⁴ Jan Groenveld, "The Cult Next Door: How to Determine if a Group is a Destructive Cult," <http://www.votisalive.com/content/spiritual-abuse-signs-1>
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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THE SABBATH OBSCURED IN THE CLEAR WORD

STEPHEN PITCHER

Editor's note: This article is adapted from a soon-to-be-released book by Stephen Pitcher exploring the Adventist paraphrase of the Bible, *The Clear Word* (TCW). Steve demonstrates how TCW changes the meaning of Scripture by incorporating Adventist doctrine into the wording of the biblical text. While TCW is not an “official” Adventist Bible, it is a paraphrase written by Jack Blanco when he was the chairman of the department of religion at Southern Adventist University. It is published by the Adventist publishing house Review and Herald Publishing Association, and it is distributed by the Adventist Book Centers and marketed both online and in their stores as a Bible. This article illustrates the contradiction between Adventist teaching and biblical truth by comparing “Sabbath texts” from various versions of TCW (including *The Easy English Clear Word* (TEECW) and *The Clear Word for Kids* (TCWfK) with the same passages from the *English Standard Version* (ESV) of Scripture.

The seventh-day Sabbath is one of the distinguishing marks of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In fact, Sabbath-keeping has been at the heart of the “Adventist message” since the 1840’s after Ellen White received a vision confirming that seventh-day Sabbath observance is a continuing mandate. Consequently, Adventism teaches that the Sabbath was given first to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and subsequently to all mankind.

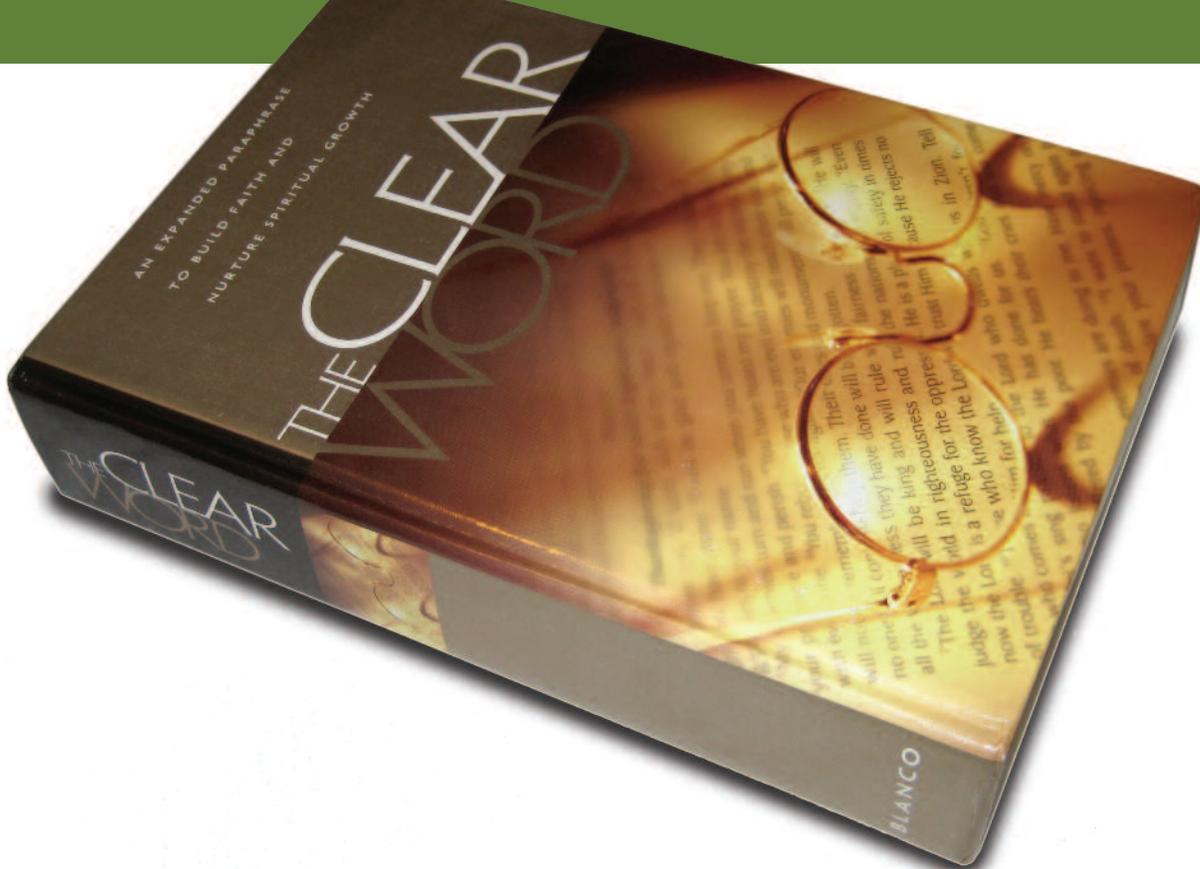
Fundamental belief number 20 tells us the Adventist position on the keeping of the Sabbath day:

The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God’s unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God’s kingdom. The Sabbath is God’s perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God’s creative and redemptive acts.¹

This fundamental belief is derived from Ellen White’s great controversy motif which she developed in her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*. In this book she explains the Adventists’ visceral tie to the seventh-day Sabbath:

The enemies of God’s law [those who worship on Sunday], from the ministers down to the least among them, have a new conception of truth and duty. Too late they see that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God. Too late they see the true nature of their spurious sabbath and the sandy foundation upon which they have been building. They find that they have been fighting against God.²

The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall



be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God.³

Not only did Ellen White say Sabbath must be kept, but she also taught that there was a “spurious” Sabbath that had been established by man. She denounces this “Sabbath” as the work of Satan in this *Bible Echo* article:

By thus disregarding the claim of God, ministers who claim to preach the gospel are echoing the words told to Adam and Eve in Eden, that if they transgressed the law they would not die, but would be as gods, knowing good and evil. By their influence and example, these false shepherds have caused a lie to be received as a truth. With persevering energy they have labored (sic) to establish a spurious sabbath, and this man-made institution has received the homage of the greater part of the world.⁴

These are strong and divisive words. E. G. White is claiming that modern ministers are repeating Satan's lie and seductive promise to Adam and Eve by endorsing worshiping on Sunday.

Sabbath history

With such a strong message regarding the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath within Adventism, one would expect *The Clear Word* to skew “Sabbath passages” to make them appear to teach Sabbath-keeping as an eternal command. Before we compare texts, however, let's look at the Bible to see the first place Scripture refers to resting on the seventh day, Genesis 2:2-3:

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

No command is given to Adam and Eve regarding the keeping of the seventh day as a holy day. (In fact, the first command for Israel to keep the Sabbath day holy occurs in Exodus 16 and accompanies God's giving them manna just after their exodus from Egypt.) In Genesis 2, however, the word “rested” can be translated *ceased*, *finished* or *completed*: God finished the work he had set out to do. God did not need rest as we think of rest; rather, He had completed his creative work, and that creating is what God “ceased” from doing. Notice also that the seventh day is not bounded by the framework of “evening and morning, the seventh day” as were the six days of creation. God's rest from His work of creation began after creation was completed, and that cessation continues to this day.

Adventists tie the fourth commandment to the Genesis 2 passage and argue that the Sabbath was created on the seventh day. The Sabbath, therefore, is a “sacred day” for all time and is a “memorial of creation”. In fact, Scripture says creation ended with day six, not day seven. In other words, God did not create the Sabbath on the seventh day. It was His ceasing—His rest—that was holy. The fourth commandment refers to creation to remind Israel of God's finished work and to give them a shadow of entering His rest. Contrary to Adventist teaching, the Sabbath has never been about “creation”. It has always been about entering God's finished creative work.

Old Testament Distortions

In the light of these biblical facts, let's compare Exodus 20:11 from *The Clear Word* with the same passage from Scripture:

...God did not create the Sabbath on the seventh day. It was His ceasing—His rest—that was holy. The fourth commandment refers to creation to remind Israel of God’s finished work and to give them a shadow of entering His rest. Contrary to Adventist teaching, the Sabbath has never been about “creation”. It has always been about entering God’s finished work.

Exodus 20:11

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

I made the sky, the earth, and the seas in six days and rested the seventh day. I blessed the Sabbath and made it special.

The Clear Word

Because in six days, I, the Lord your God, created the earth, the sky, the seas and everything in them, and on the seventh day I rested in the joy of having made it all. That’s why I blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy, so you can rest and rejoice with me.

English Standard Version

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“...so you can rest and rejoice with me” is an addition to the text that is not implied in the Bible. According to Ellen White’s great controversy theme, the paradigm that shapes Adventist theology, Satan has accused God of giving an unfair law to his created beings. Thus, according to the great controversy motif, by giving people the seventh-day Sabbath, God is giving humanity “holy time” as a test of their loyalty to God. If they keep it holy, they will vindicate God and His form of government through their honoring of the seventh day.

By the time Jesus returns, therefore, God’s people will have become perfectly obedient to the law, and their keeping of the seventh day will be the mark that identifies the saved, while worshipping on Sunday will be the mark of the beast identifying the lost. In full agreement with this Adventist paradigm, Blanco makes breaking the Sabbath an issue of “treason” in Exodus 31:14:

Exodus 31:14

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

The Sabbath is holy, and anyone who breaks it by working on that day doesn’t really love Me.

The Clear Word

The Sabbath is holy, and anyone who desecrates it by working on that day will be put to death, since that would be an act of treason against God’s government.

English Standard Version

You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

This passage explained to Israel how an Israelite was to treat the Sabbath—their sign of accepting God’s covenant with them at Sinai. Further, it clarified that Sabbath was holy for them, and Israelites who profaned the Sabbath would be killed and cut off from the nation. Blanco, however, interprets the passage to say that the seventh day is intrinsically holy and states that not keeping the seventh day is treason against “God’s government”. Moreover, TEECW and TCWfK specifically teach that anyone who works on the Sabbath day does not love God. Blanco’s implications are not found in the scriptural passage.

The Sabbath was specifically for Israel and was their ongoing sign of being loyal to God’s Sinai covenant with them; it was not for the pagan nations that surrounded Israel. Yet, according to Adventist doctrine, the seventh-day Sabbath is perpetual for all time, for all people, and for all eternity when the redeemed will congregate on the Sabbath day in heaven and on the new Earth. In keeping with this Adventist understanding, therefore, Blanco further distorts the meaning and purpose of “Sabbath” by changing “Israel” to “my people” and altering the reason for observing the day:

Exodus 31:16

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

The Sabbath is a day for everyone to be happy because they are part of My family.

The Clear Word

My people are to keep the Sabbath, celebrating it as a sign that they belong to me.

English Standard Version

Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.

The Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant that God made with Israel and is not part of the New Covenant which God makes unconditionally with those who believe in His Son. The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the mediator of a completely new covenant which is not based on law or human obedience but on the death of a Perfect Sacrifice for human sin.

Jesus—not the angels, not Moses, and not the people—keeps and mediates this new covenant, and He, not a day, is our Rest.

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death [the death of Christ] has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15).

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Mat. 11:28-29).

Moreover, in Exodus 35 Blanco adds to Moses' description of the Sabbath. In the Bible, the Sabbath is described as a day of rest. It is not a day of congregational worship, yet we find this idea inserted into Exodus 35:2:

Exodus 35:2

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

He said to them, "You have six days to do all your work, but the Sabbath belongs to the Lord. It's a time for rest and worship."

The Clear Word

You have six days to do all your work, but the seventh day is mine. It is a holy day, a Sabbath of rest and worship. Whoever rebels and does unnecessary work that day is to be put to death.

English Standard Version

Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.

Blanco's description in TCW of the Sabbath as not only a day of rest but also of worship supports the Adventist practice of Sabbath church attendance. Additionally, Blanco has substantively changed the meaning of God's original command that Israel was not to work on Sabbath. In this same verse he changed the word "any" to "unnecessary". This rendering allows for work which Adventists identify as "necessary" as well as allowing Adventists to determine what work is not "necessary". Within Adventist tradition, "helping the sick" is necessary; therefore doctors and nurses are permitted to work their regular hospital shifts on the Sabbath because they are carrying on the "healing ministry of Christ". Other public service jobs such as law enforcement or equipment maintenance at the power plant, for example, are not permitted on Sabbath. People who become Adventists who have held jobs that required Sabbath work (besides directly serving the sick as a nurse or doctor), however, are required to change their schedules or give up their jobs in order to keep the Sabbath holy.

In the next verse, Exodus 35:3, Blanco further interprets the biblical command:

Exodus 35:3

The Clear Word

Do not go out to gather wood to make a fire to cook for yourselves that day.

English Standard Version

You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.

Blanco changes the command from a prohibition against lighting a fire to a prohibition against gathering wood and cooking. Within Adventism, it is not the making of a fire that is prohibited but the work of gathering wood with which to make that fire. Furthermore, Adventists also have a tradition of not preparing food on the Sabbath except to warm food which has been previously cooked. Adventists readily light fires in their fireplaces or light campfires at their youth camps on Sabbath, but they gather the wood for those fires before sundown on Friday night.

Leviticus 24:8 is another verse Blanco has distorted significantly:

Leviticus 24:8

The Clear Word

Every Friday evening, at the beginning of the Sabbath, set out fresh bread before me. This is to be done for generations to come.

English Standard Version

Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever.

The Bible explicitly states that Aaron was to set out the bread on the Sabbath day, not on Friday evening. Moreover, this Sabbath ritual was to be "a covenant forever." This ritual, however, ended with the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in 70 AD. In other words, it was a "covenant forever" as long as the Old Covenant and the temple were in place. Adventists, though, find Scripture verses that refer to the Sabbath as being a sign "forever," and they use those verses to argue that seventh-day Sabbath-keeping is an eternal moral requirement.

In this verse Blanco has eliminated the troublesome phrase "covenant forever" that clearly applies to an old covenant ritual, and he has also suggested that Aaron merely "set out" food previously prepared as the Sabbath began—a practice Adventists follow for their Sabbath meals—instead of allowing the text to say Aaron did the work of "arranging" the bread on the Sabbath day. He has thus changed this text to support Adventist practices instead of allowing it to state what God commanded Aaron to do.

New Testament Distortions

In Romans 14:1-9 we find the well-known passage about not causing our brother to stumble by what we eat or which days we do or do not keep holy. Blanco, however, completely changes the meaning of the passage. Here is his rendering of verse 5:

Romans 14:5

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

The same rule applies to special days. One person thinks he has to keep all the Jewish festivals, and another doesn't. People need to make up their own minds.

The Clear Word

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

English Standard Version

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

Scripture allows a person to make up his own mind about holy days including whether or not to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Blanco, however, changes the text to refer only to Jewish feast days and specifically calls them “nonessential”. He is careful not to allow the text to suggest that a person has the option to make up his own mind about the seventh-day Sabbath since that day is a non-negotiable requirement within Adventism.

In the book of Galatians, Paul takes the Galatian believers to task for adopting the practice of observing days as the result of pressure from the Judaizers, otherwise known as the party of the circumcision. Interestingly, Blanco's paraphrase of Galatians 4:10-11 became more cultic as he moved from his first New Testament paraphrase (1990) to the latest *Clear Word* version (2003):

Galatians 4:10-11

The New Testament: A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth

Right now you're giving a saving significance to all kinds of special days, months, seasons, and years. I'm really worried about you. And I'm wondering whether all my work for you has been for nothing.

The Clear Word

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

English Standard Version

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

At first, Blanco refers to “days” as “special days”, but in the current edition of *The Clear Word* he uses the phrase “all kinds of religious holidays” which avoids the issue of “days” completely, thus eliminating the likelihood that the reader will understand the text to refer to the seventh-day Sabbath.

Next we examine Colossians 2:16-17. Paul specifically used the word “Sabbath” in this passage, but Blanco does away with the weekly Sabbath day with the stroke of his pen.

Colossians 2:16-17

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

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

The Clear Word

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

English Standard Version

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Blanco makes a false distinction between ceremonial days and the weekly Sabbath. In this passage Paul is referring to the three categories of holy days given to Israel in the law: festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths. “Festivals” refer to the annual feast days such as Passover and Pentecost. Monthly celebrations of the new moon and the weekly celebration of the Sabbath complete the three-part sequence which defines the categories of holy days found in both the Old and New Testaments.

Moreover, Blanco's rendering in the TEECW and TCWfK uses the phrase “observe extra sabbaths to be saved.” This wording implies there are basic sabbaths that must be observed in order for one to be saved, that “extra sabbaths” are not required and are not the “essential” weekly seventh-day Sabbath. In other words, Blanco's wording allows for a seventh-day Sabbath requirement and subtly but profoundly reinforces Adventist dogma.

Sabbatismos

In order to understand Blanco's tampering with Hebrews 3:7-4:11, we first look at Jesus' declaration in Matthew 11:28 where He says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus here identifies Himself as the actual Source of “rest” for His people. In Hebrews 3 and 4 the author tells of the stubbornness of Israel who did not enter into the rest that God offered them because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:7-4:11 not only tells their story but also shows that we, today, can miss entering this sabbath-like rest of God's finished work that is available through faith in Christ.

Hebrews 4:9 is the verse where the author uses the Greek word *sabbatismos* which means a “sabbath-like rest”. This verse is the only place this word occurs in all of Scripture, and it does not mean “Sabbath-keeping”. It refers in context to the rest in God's finished work that we enter through Christ “Today” when we believe. Blanco, however, changes the meaning of this verse and inserts that the seventh-day Sabbath is intended for each generation to have as a sign.

Hebrews 4:9

The Clear Word

So there still remains the offer of Sabbath rest in God that He intends for each generation to have, of which the seventh day is a sign.

English Standard Version

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Another passage which Blanco has completely changed is Revelation 22:14. Since Adventist theology demands observance of the Sabbath and the Ten Commandments in order to be saved, Blanco has added keeping the commandments (a phrase which always refers to the Decalogue inside Adventism) to the washing of the robes in verse 14:

Revelation 22:14

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

Those who love Me and have lived by My commandments will be blessed. They have a right to eat of the tree of life, so they will enter the gates of the city.

The Clear Word

Blessed are those who have washed their robes in my blood and lived by my commandments. This is what gives them the right to the Tree of Life and to enter through the gates into the city.

English Standard Version

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

In the King James and the New King James versions of the Bible, this verse says, “Blessed are they that do His commandments.” In almost all other major translations, however, this passage reads, “Blessed are those who wash their robes.” The difference between these two renderings derives from the underlying manuscript “family” from which the passage was translated. Since the 17th century, earlier and more accurate manuscripts have been discovered. Blanco illegitimately combines the two phrases. No manuscript ever suggested that salvation depended upon keeping the law, and certainly none combines commandment-keeping and washing robes in this verse. Blanco has given readers “another gospel” instead of the new covenant gospel of faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Revelation 1:10 is another text from which Blanco has removed the meaning God gave. This verse is where John describes receiving his vision of Christ. Blanco has added the Sabbath to the verse and has removed the words “the Lord’s day”.

Stephen Pitcher became a Christian at age 17 through the ministry of Young Life and was baptized in a Baptist church. He later converted to Adventism which he left after 18 years. He currently attends Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California, where he is a member. He continues a 37-year study of cults, world religions, and the occult from his home in Yucaipa, California.

Revelation 1:10

The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids

One Sabbath, the day belonging to the Lord, I went to worship by the ocean. Suddenly the Holy Spirit came on me. I heard a voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet.

The Clear Word

On the Sabbath of the Lord I went to the island’s rocky shore to worship. Suddenly the Spirit took control of me, and I heard a voice behind me that sounded as loud as a trumpet.

English Standard Version

I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.

The term “the Lord’s day” has consistently been used since the earliest of the church Fathers as a reference to Sunday, the first day of the week, as distinct from the Sabbath. Ignatius and other early church authors used this phrase to refer to the first day of the week as demonstrated in this quotation:

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, ...⁵

John, a Jew who became an apostle of the risen Christ, would not have confused “Sabbath” with “the Lord’s day”. Had he meant the seventh day, he would have written “Sabbath” as he did in his gospel when he wrote about Jesus’ sign of healing which He performed on the Sabbath (Jn. 5:1-17). Revelation 1:10 is certainly not referring to the seventh day.

Conclusion

These are only a few of the passages that reveal how *The Clear Word* is guilty of twisting Scripture to make sure that the seventh-day Sabbath is presented as mandatory for all people in order for them to be saved. For Adventists, the seventh-day Sabbath is a moral, not a ceremonial law, and therefore it is binding on all believers throughout the ages. Blanco has unabashedly twisted those passages dealing with the Sabbath day so that they agree with Adventist theology.

Endnotes

¹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2nd Ed., Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005, p. 281.

² White, Ellen G., *The Great Controversy*, p. 640.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

⁴ White, Ellen G., *Bible Echo*, July 27, 1896, para. 1.

⁵ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, Ch. 9, Let Us Live With Christ, p. 131.



Truth or Fables now a part of Life Assurance Ministries

Robert K. Sanders, the founder of the much-frequented website TruthOrFables.com, has transferred the ownership and management of the site to Life Assurance Ministries (LAM). Below is Robert Sanders' letter announcing this change.

The board of directors for Life Assurance Ministries is honored to continue caring for this legacy of research and informa-

tion and is grateful to Mr. Sanders for his years of dedication and for his gift of trust in transferring the site to LAM. Richard Tinker has redesigned the format of the site while retaining all the vital material and all the online links between the pages.

You can see the new look of this much-loved site at **TruthOrFables.com**. †

Truth or Fables

November 26, 2012

To the readers of Truth or Fables:

I have transferred ownership of Truth or Fables.com to the capable hands of the officers of Life Assurance Ministries (LAM). I am now 81 years old and married for 60 years to my dear wife Floria. When I considered my age, I was impressed to start looking for someone to be willing to accept the responsibility that comes with this world wide ministry. Kerry Wynne, one of the men that assist me in replying to e-mail, suggested that I contact Life Assurance Ministries with an offer to take over the ownership. Truth or Fables site was instrumental in leading Kerry out of the Adventist church.

The Life Assurance Ministries board met and voted to accept ownership of Truth or Fables website. The board members are listed at the close of this newsletter. Many of you know Life Assurance Ministries as the publishers of the beautiful, provocative, and informative *Proclamation!* Magazine.

The new look of Truth or Fables was done by Richard Tinker, president of LAM. He has spent many days and weeks reformatting the articles. Thank you, Richard, for your dedication and hard work that you have done to get this massive work completed so soon with your daily busy schedule.

I have appreciated the loyal readers and their e-mails of encouragement and their stories of how they used these articles to minister to their SDA family and friends. For many, Truth or Fables was a factor in their leaving the Adventist Church. In the 15 years that this site has been on the Internet there have been thousands of stories that have been mailed to me. This site has been translated into many foreign languages and some months there have been 80,000 hits (people accessing this site).

It is my prayer that you will continue using Truth or Fables along with the Bible to teach the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Life Assurance Ministries Board: Dale Ratzlaff, founder; Richard Tinker, president; Cheryl Granger, Martin Carey, and Carel Stevenson.

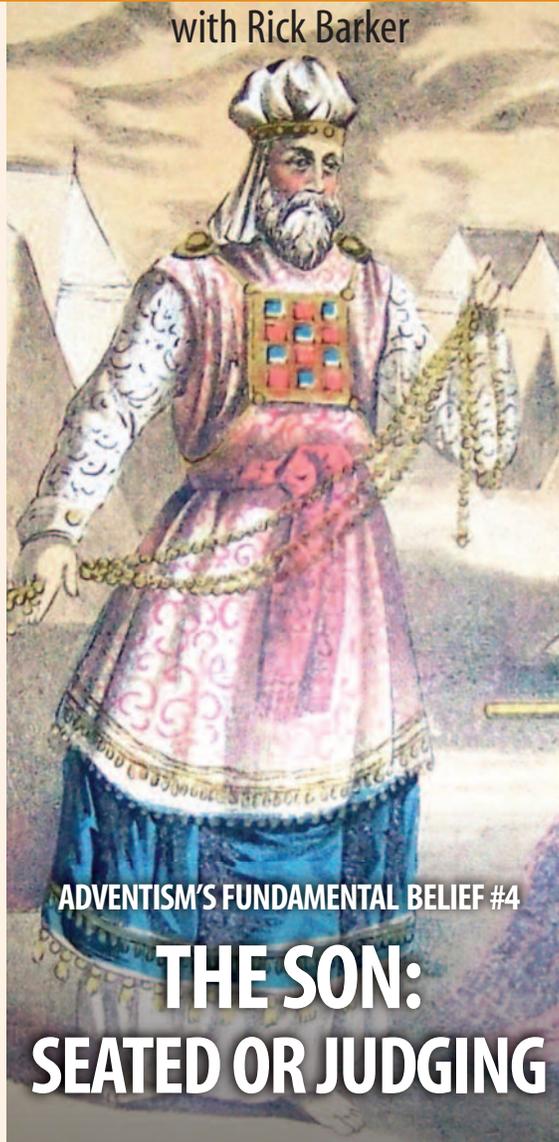
God bless,

Robert K. Sanders
Truth or Fables: Exposing Seventh-day Adventist Fables



Robert and Floria Sanders

John 17:17 (NIV) "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."



Fundamental Belief #4. The Son:

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.

Careful reading is required to spot the deception, but the language of this fundamental belief reveals some of the Adventist heresies regarding Christ. Perhaps the most visible problem with this fundamental belief is that it omits the biblically accurate and routine Christian description of Christ being seated at the right hand of the Father. Adventists avoid discussing this position because it raises questions about their sanctuary/investigative judgment doctrine. In Adventist theology, Christ did not enter the Most Holy Place, where the throne of God is located according to Old Testament typology, until more than 1800 years after His ascension to heaven. Christ could not have been both seated at the right hand of the Father and also waiting to enter the Most Holy Place until October 22, 1844.

The next window into Adventist beliefs is the tense used in describing salvation. According to Scripture, Jesus Christ accomplished (past tense) the salvation of humanity. Within Adventism, however, salvation isn't fully accomplished yet, so they can't use past tense. Therefore they say, "Through Him all things were created [past tense]...[and] the salvation of

humanity is accomplished [present tense]." This wording allows for their investigative judgment theology which has Jesus still completing the work of atonement.

Moreover, this belief statement does not even allude to many of the greatest Seventh-day Adventist heresies regarding Christ. Many Adventists deny that Jesus and the Father are One in substance. Furthermore, Adventism actively teaches that Christ could have failed. The Adventist Church, moreover, cannot decide whether Jesus has a sinful nature or the nature of Adam before sin, so both teachings are present within the organization. In Adventism, the primary reason for Christ's incarnation was to prove that God's law can be kept by a human, and His main role is to be an example, not a substitute. Moreover, Adventism teaches that Jesus is the archangel Michael, and this teaching is a critical component of their other doctrines and of their eschatology. Finally, Adventism teaches that Satan, not Jesus, is the scapegoat who bears the sins of the saved into the lake of fire and is thus their final sin-bearer.

The Seventh-day Adventist teaching about Jesus is quite different from that of historic Christianity. The denomination was founded by leaders who held Arian views, and these distortions of Christ's nature still taint the writings, hymns, and doctrines of the organization to this day. Christ's role as our substitute is minimized and at times is completely absent, and most of Adventism's heretical beliefs about Jesus are not articulated in their public statement of belief. †

The Seventh-day Adventist teaching about Jesus is quite different from that of historic Christianity.

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



“You should keep your cell phone in one hand and your keys in the other.

And park your car facing the nearest outlet to a main street,” my colleague warned me as she repeated the instructions from a safety officer. Two weeks later the elementary school that was part of my work assignment was in lockdown; a murderer was being apprehended two blocks away, and the police didn’t want him slipping into an elementary school.

This danger was not what I expected when I chose to follow Jesus. My plans had been to teach in a university setting discussing intellectual concepts. Now I was discussing temper tantrums and potty training with at-risk parents and children. I had left everything for this!

I needed an attitude adjustment, and it came through writing this column. As I have compared what I have left to what Jesus left, I have been brought to my knees.

As an Adventist I learned that Jesus put on human flesh with all its propensities to sin (a sinful nature) and left His omnipotence behind. I had believed He came to earth and put on a body with several thousand years of sin ingrained in its DNA. It had been drilled into me that Jesus had no advantage over us in regards to resisting sin. Therefore, I, too, could live a perfect life by following Jesus’ example.

Jesus, however, was born alive to God, while I had been born dead to God and in transgressions (Eph. 2:1-8). Jesus did have a body that felt pain, hunger, and thirst, but His nature was completely divine and alive

LEAVING THE ADVANTAGE

© ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/PIDAH

The Adventist teaching that because Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, so can we is heresy. This teaching demolishes the sacredness of the cross and destroys the gospel because it means we really have no need for Jesus.

to His Father. Our nature is not. Jesus had every advantage over us; He was born in human flesh alive to God, and while He walked among us He was fully God, Immanuel (God with us). He was the perfect sacrifice which was required for sin.

In the twisted teachings of Adventism, Jesus, an angel,¹ came in sinful flesh² (i.e. sinful nature), lived a perfect life, developed a perfect character,³ and so can we.⁴ We can help to save ourselves just like Jesus saved Himself by living a sinless life.

In contrast, Scripture teaches that Jesus had every advantage over us to live without sin. We are born in sin (Rom. 3). Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit minus sin (Mt. 1:20). That is why He, not Enoch, Moses, or Elijah, is our Savior.

Here is the crux. Even though Jesus had every advantage over us, His advantages made it worse for Him. He Who knew no sin became sin so that we could have His righteousness (Is. 53:4-10; 1 Cor. 5:21). Look at the verbs of Scripture: He was pierced, stricken, crushed, oppressed. We hold only our own sin until our rebirth in Christ (Jn. 3); He has born the griefs, sorrows, and sins of the world (1 Jn. 2:2).

The Adventist teaching that because Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, so can we is heresy. This teaching demolishes the sacredness of the cross and destroys the gospel because it means we really have no need for Jesus’ death.

It is heartbreaking that some Christians are deceived into believing Adventism is within the bounds of orthodox Christianity. Meanwhile, Adventists continue to die in false

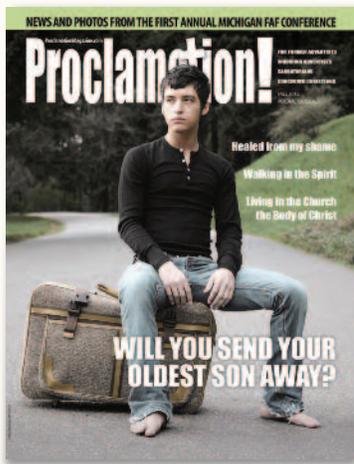
teaching and a different gospel. Will you take the risk of offending and minister to an Adventist? Will you leave your life for His? †



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 works helping families prepare their children for school readiness, and she is a small group leader for Bible Study Fellowship in Granger, Indiana.

Endnotes

- 1 Review and Herald, May 6, 1875, par. 12: “Moses of himself framed no law. Christ, the angel whom God had appointed to go before his chosen people, gave to Moses statutes and requirements necessary to a living religion and to govern the people of God.”
- 2 White, Ellen G., *Review and Herald*, July 1, 1890.
- 3 White, Ellen G., *Desire of Ages*, pg. 762.
- 4 White, Ellen G., *Review and Herald*, Oct. 23, 1894. “As the Son of God in human form was perfect in his life, so he requires that his followers shall be perfect in their lives.”



One of the best

Thanks so much, Martin Carey, for “Will you send your oldest son away?” in *Proclamation!*, which arrived today. I always read the magazine, but your article was one of the best ever! I thought it was going to be a testimony by an ex-Adventist who was “sent away” for rejecting his Adventist upbringing. But your exposition of Galatians 3-4 is one of the best I’ve ever read! Maybe it’s because today is my 57th birthday, and Galatians was the first book I preached through about 35 years ago; but your contrast and graphics on pages 12-13 caused my eyes to well up with tears.

I’ve been pastoring a small town church in southern Oregon for 10 years. The only other church in town is Adventist. They are nice folks, but the legalism, spiritual darkness, and rejection of the Christ of the Bible is painful. Some of my folks are good friends with some of them. I have not made any “good” friends among them but have several acquaintances. The few in our church who care about how we differ from the Adventists have been reading *Proclamation!* almost as long as I have. If you’re

ever up in our area, I hope you’ll stop by. If not, I’ll find you in heaven and give you the tearful hug you deserve.

Also, please tell everyone there at Life Assurance Ministries to not be discouraged by those who oppose your proclaiming the truth. You are in good company!

WILLIAMS, OR

Jesus was a Seventh-day Adventist

The staff of *Proclamation!* must believe they are doing God’s work to call Adventists out of their church to go into the Sunday churches, and after reading the letters of people loving their new fellowships that promote immortal souls burning forever in hell and no day for Christ except an hour or two on Sunday morning, I may agree with you.

I was raised a Catholic, and the doctrine of people being tortured now and for eternity turned me from God. My wife and I are very soft-hearted people, and when we learned of the terrible cruelty to the animals we were eating, we signed up for vegetarian living from the local Adventist church where we also learned of a God who is not the tyrant the popular churches teach Him to be—One we would gladly follow.

Also, we learned the Bible teaching about jewelry, so we sold our engagement and wedding rings to help the church’s ministry to the blind. It gives me pleasure to think of some blind child being taken care of and having Bible tapes to listen to as opposed to the foolish and worldly adornment we were taught as being good.

I can picture the meat-eating, coffee-loving, jewelry-wearing Adventists just loving your maga-

zine, as would the Pope and also Joseph Smith were he alive.

Jesus was different, though. He was a Seventh-day Adventist, and as His follower I must also be one, for He says, “My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow me” (Jn. 10:27).

SANDPOINT, ID

Giving out truth

I saw your magazine at a friend’s house—I believe it was the December issue (Oct-Dec, 2011)—with such an excellent article on why keeping the Sabbath is not for today [“Enjoy Sabbath Rest Today” by Sheryl Barker]. We had just visited a Reformed Baptist Church when visiting Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the sermon was

much greater advantage. Is this magazine still being published in Spanish? Are print copies of the editions shown on your website available? If so, what is the cost?

We are located in the Highlands of Jalisco, the least-reached region of Spanish-speaking Mexico. The percentage of people who identify themselves as evangelicals is 0.3%. Recently the Adventists invaded the region, establishing a center in the city of Arandas, pop. 78,000. There are two small Christian churches in Arandas, a Baptist church and an independent Bible church, plus a newly initiated church-planting effort by the Assemblies of God. The Adventists have especially targeted the Baptist church, a group of about 60, and have drawn off some

I can picture the meat-eating, coffee-loving, jewelry-wearing Adventists just loving your magazine, as would the Pope...

on keeping the Sabbath, and it was just awful.

The same magazine of yours had an equally excellent article by a “cowboy” who was a psychologist ... [“Never Without Blood” by Martin Carey]. Anyway, I’ve never heard of you all and have never been an Adventist nor a Worldwide Church of God member, but you are giving out truth which is sadly rare today.

So I want to send a gift, and I would appreciate being placed on your mailing list. And if you can tell what issue I saw, and if you have a copy you could send me, I would be grateful.

WINNETKA, IL

Adventists invading Jalisco, Mexico

On your website in Spanish you provide digital copies of your magazine, *¡Proclamación!*, through April-June of 2010. Though the complete magazines are available there, we would be able to use the actual print copies of the magazine to

families, split some families, and pulled away many contacts. The group is looking for easy-to-consume materials to put into the hands of Adventists and those being drawn toward the cult. Your magazine would appear to be a great resource.

Thank you for your work making these materials available on your website.

VIA EMAIL

Editor’s response

¡Proclamación! is not available in printed format because of the cost of printing. It is, however, available online in PDF format which can be printed on a laser or ink jet printer. There is no limit to the number of copies one may print, and it may be freely distributed.

I’ve had enough

Please remove my name from your mailing list. Reading your magazine is, for me, a sad and toxic experience. I became a born-again Christian on February 21, 1971, when I was a second year Master of

As this year ends we pray for God’s provision

We thank you for your support, and we ask that you continue to pray with us and to give as God directs you.

You may also make a gift for *Proclamation!* in your will or trust by designating Life Assurance Ministries, Inc. as a beneficiary.

We pray you will experience joy and the peace that passes all understanding this Christmas as you rest in the Baby who became your Sacrifice and now sits at the right hand of the Father!

Divinity student at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts before enrolling at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In 1974, I met a man who...explained to me why he went to church on Saturday. The texts included Genesis 2:2; Exodus 20:8-11; Luke 4:16, and Matthew 5:17-20.

The simple truth that Saturday is the Sabbath was inescapable....

I encourage you to look at the ideas/doctrines/Bible truths we hold as Adventists with an open mind and a teachable heart...Meanwhile, take me off your mailing list.

NAPLES, FL

Editor's response

What the Adventist evangelist and, apparently, the writer's formal classwork failed to teach him was the New Testament teaching of the new covenant. The holy days, including the seventh-day Sabbath, were shadows of Christ; the substance of those shadows is found in Christ (Col. 2:16-17). Moreover, the law has "only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things" (Heb. 10:1). It serves to increase sin, not to stop it (Rom. 5:20; 3:20; 4:15). Moreover, laws regulating worship and behavior cannot change the heart or stop

us from acting out sin (Col. 2:20-23). We need Jesus: the new birth, the finished work of atonement on the cross, and the resurrection life. When we have Jesus, we must trust Him with all the props we used to hedge our bets and to improve our spirituality. We must trust Him alone. He is all we need!

Live by Jesus' message

Thanks for thinking of me, but I have no interest in ex-Adventists or the SDA church. Neither do I find warring apolo-

being adopted into God's family (Rom. 8:15-17) and transferred out of the domain of darkness (Col 1:13). Trusting Jesus brings a sword between the closest relationships when one trusts and the other does not (Mt. 10:34-37). Nevertheless, trusting Jesus means we immediately receive eternal life; we do not come into judgment but have passed out of death into life (Jn. 5:24). Jesus' teaching was not an inclusive social gospel; it was exclusive and leads to a new life of joy and peace with suffering.

All my neighbors are Adventist...the Adventist doctrine is definitely wrong and extremely harmful...

genics of any value in the real world where I dwell. I would be fascinated to know why I am getting *Proclamation!* and who felt I needed it. I live by Jesus' message of love your neighbor and be a keeper of the planet—or at least your place on it. What else is there?

Imagine a church that lived only by what Jesus said: no creed, no dogma and all inclusive. Now there's a worthy mission!

No doubt there are expenses incurred in your 'zine and its distribution. So please remove my name from your mailing list.

VIA EMAIL

Editor's response

Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (Jn. 6:29). "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in yourselves" (Jn. 6:53). "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn. 3:18). "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6).

What Jesus said is exclusive and divisive; trusting Him results in our

Trusting Jesus gives us a new identity as a son or a daughter of God!

Quality magazine

We enjoy the quality of your magazine, both intellectually and materially. Thank you one and all. YUBA CITY, CA

Adventist doctrine harmful

All my neighbors are Adventist. I read from your magazine in a library. Sometimes one of your issues is there...the Adventist doctrine is definitely wrong and extremely harmful to a walk with God. They make a god out of keeping the law. Please send me your current issue and sign me up for receiving them in the future. May the Lord bless you.

LOMA LINDA, CA

Marvelous ministry

Hello! I would like to be a subscriber of your magazine in print form. Is it possible?

I live in Ukraine, Europe. I am a 38-year-old man and am a teacher of English language. I am interested in Christian life material and views.

Thank you for your web page ministry. I have found it marvelous. LVIV, UKRAINE

Show a little love

I don't know why you send me your magazine every so often, but I appreciate reading other viewpoints. For the most part, I enjoy the mag, but I've been tempted at times to write. From reading your responses, I rather doubt any letters actually make you think twice about your viewpoint, and so I have hesitated to write until now. I really don't mind people disagreeing with me, as I recognize my humanity, and realize I may have more growing to do. I just have this one suggestion, or maybe two. Why not change the name of the magazine to "I Hate Adventists!!!"?

Somehow the message seems to get through in almost every article. Now, I'm not suggesting you actually do, but I'm not saying you don't either. I really don't know. Were you hurt really that bad by them? Shame on them! I guess my only other suggestion is, lighten up. You, too, are human. I'm not suggesting you're wrong. In the end, in Paradise, I really do believe our Father will sit us all down and teach us all where we've been wrong. Show a little more love, for the Gospel's sake. Just a thought.

VIA EMAIL

Editor's response

We were not hurt by Adventists, and we do not hate them. On the contrary, we love them; we were once Adventists! We desire that Adventists who are where we once were will also come to know Jesus as Lord, the One who completed once for all the atonement for human sin and has already reconciled to God every person who places his or her faith in Him. He alone is all we need, and the joy and peace He puts in our hearts far exceeds any Sabbath happiness we used to seek.

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

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S. California

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE 2013

HOLY Living by the Spirit

FEBRUARY 15-17, 2013

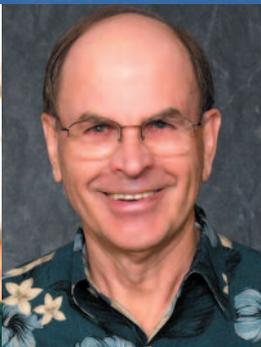
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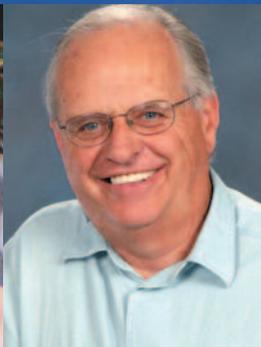
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**SPECIAL
FEATURES
FOR TEENS!**

"THE TEEN PLACE!" TEEN-AGED CHILDREN OF CONFERENCE ATTENDEES ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND AT A SPECIAL REDUCED RATE. CAREL AND NIKKI STEVENSON ARE LEADING "THE TEEN PLACE" AGAIN THIS YEAR.

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

The snow fell softly in fat flakes, illuminated against the night sky by thousands of golden Christmas lights. I nibbled on a minced meat pie at a cafe table under a striped awning. It was cold, but the scarf from Harrods and the hot mulled drink in my hand staved off the worst of the chill. In fact, I barely felt the temperature. What I felt was a sense of wonder. Earlier in the day I had bought roasted chestnuts from a street vendor in Trafalgar Square; now I was ending the day in Covent Garden watching the hustle and bustle of holiday shoppers. Christmas time in London felt like stepping into a Dickens story. There was a sense of past and present colliding. I remember feeling joy at just being there and also a sense of peace and contentment. Everything seemed just right.

That will always be one of my favorite memories of the holiday season, but upon reflection, it's emblematic of what Christmas has come to mean to me. I was enthralled by the historic nature of London and the way in which ancient buildings were still in use in the present. In the U.S., history had seemed interesting, but "distant", for lack of a better word. There, history was continually before me, behind me, and under my feet. It was imminently relevant. Isn't that the case with Christmas? Christmas spans all the way back to the Garden of Eden, to the promise of a seed who would come and set things right. The theme of Christmas runs through the story of Abraham as the promise made in the Garden becomes a promise to Abraham that his seed would bless the nations of the earth. The promise is renewed to Isaac and Jacob. The promise is illustrated in symbols and shadows to Israel. The promise travels through David and Solomon and is proclaimed by all the prophets. Finally, the promise culminates in a lowly birth in a stable under a miraculous star.



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



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The past meets the present and is oh, so relevant, because the one who made the promise in the Garden came two thousand years ago and lives today.

That baby, born two thousand years ago, lived a perfect life and credited His righteousness to our account as if it were our own. He died upon a cross as a propitiation for our sins, removing our debt. If we stopped there, perhaps this would all sound like distant history, but that's not the end of the story. He rose again and ascended into Heaven where he sits in the place of greatest power and honor. When we believe, we are with Him in the heavenlies even now. Through him, we enter into the very presence of the Father; we become adopted children of God and heirs to the kingdom. We are sealed with His Spirit. We possess salvation and eternal security in the present and always. The past meets the present and is oh, so relevant, because the one who made the promise in the Garden came two thousand years ago and lives today.

The sense of wonder, joy, and peace I felt that winter in London doesn't even come close to what I experience in Jesus. In London I had the situational contentment that comes when everything seems to be just perfect in that moment. It's a feeling I sometimes refer to as "the warm fuzzies". Unfortunately, warm fuzzies are transient, and the feeling goes away. What I experience in Jesus is so much deeper because it's a peace and joy that is present even at some of my lowest moments. That sounds like a contradiction, and yet it's a reality that surpasses comprehension. It's true, because Jesus lives in me even during those dark times.

Christmas is the time of year when we celebrate God coming as a man to dwell among us. It's a wonderful celebration, but let's never forget that He dwells every single day in us who have been born again. Because of His life, death, and resurrection, every day is Christmas. †