

CONTEXTUALIZATION: WHAT FORMER ADVENTISTS DON'T NEED

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Proclamation!

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS
SABBATARIANS
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

FALL 2013
VOLUME 14, ISSUE 3

**SIGNS IN THE STARS:
GOD'S WORD CANNOT FAIL**

MY HEART IS FREE!

**THE RED FLAGS THAT TURNED
ME TOWARDS HOME**

IT'S A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

FROM SISTERS-IN-LAW TO SISTERS IN FREEDOM

SPECIAL FAITH STORY ISSUE:

THEY TRUSTED GOD'S WORD



COLLEEN TINKER

Gospel "contextualization"

I first encountered "gospel contextualization" in the mid-1990s when I interviewed Jerald Whitehouse, director of the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations, for an article I wrote for *Adventist Today* magazine. At the time I didn't realize that the contextualization Whitehouse described wasn't actually about the gospel at all, but the process he described opened my eyes to post-modern efforts to find common ground in order to reconcile opposing religions and philosophies.

In brief, Whitehouse explained that Adventists had begun "evangelizing" Muslims by integrating into their culture, adopting their traditions and dress and building trust. He explained that

I understand clearly why one cannot combine the gospel with the practices and beliefs of a false religion.

Muslims respect Adventists' observance of Old Testament food laws and abstinence from alcohol. Moreover, he claimed, they share a respect for the Torah and for the patriarch Abraham, and both religions worship the same God. Allah, Whitehouse assured me, is the same Creator in whom the Adventists believe. Thus, as the Adventists built trust with the Muslims, they gradually introduced Jesus to them, and as the Muslims learned to believe in Jesus, they could become "Christians" without ever forsaking Islam. Jesus, he said, integrated well with Allah; Muslim "believers" didn't have to leave their tradition.

It was startling to be told that Allah of Islam and the God of the Bible were really the same, yet his explanation seemed logical. I left the interview with unanswered questions, but the concept of somehow contextualizing the Christian idea of Jesus within the Muslim monotheism was intriguing.

Just a few years later, I sat in Trinity Church one Sunday and listened to our women's pastor, Elizabeth Inrig, who had just returned from a mission trip to a Muslim country. She was dressed in a black burqa, and she told us about meeting with Muslim women. Then she uttered the words that struck me with the force of a blow: "Allah is a false god. Any god that is not a Trinity is a false god."

Of course! Allah never had a son named Jesus! Suddenly my lingering cognitive dissonance over Jerald Whitehouse's words was resolved. As urbane and smart as his methods sounded, they were wrong. Allah is not the same Creator God revealed in Scripture. Moreover, I was beginning to realize

with horrifying clarity that the Trinity described in Scripture—One God in three Persons—was not the same "trinity" I had understood as an Adventist. That trinity was not one Being; it was a "heavenly trio," as Ellen White described it.

Now when I encounter Christians who want to evangelize through this kind of "gospel contextualization," I understand clearly why one cannot reconcile or combine the biblical gospel with the beliefs and practices of a false religion that pointedly denies it. Such attempts at syncretism destroy the true gospel and divide the intended convert's heart between opposing loyalties.

Adventism itself is a distortion of Christianity that tries to add the works of the law and another Jesus. It creates confusion in its members and breeds a distrust of Scripture and of God Himself. The biblical doctrines of the new covenant, an infallible Jesus, and penal substitutionary atonement are all incompatible with the fabric of Adventism. And while Adventist vocabulary sounds authentically Christian, its underlying assumptions and definitions are not.

In this issue we share the faith stories of Aarika Shewmake, Stephen Pitcher, Dondra Cuff, Winona Miller, and Eunice Sellers. Martin Carey reflects on the difference knowing Jesus makes when one faces life and death, and he also shows us how God has connected the faithfulness of His promises to the fixed order of the cosmos.

Carolyn Macomber explores the Bible's permission to mourn, and I take a closer look at what we really need (and need to avoid) as we exit our former religion. Also in this issue, Dale Ratzlaff explains why we have to separate ourselves from false beliefs in order to draw near to Jesus; Rick Barker unpacks the seventh Adventist Fundamental Belief; and Chris Lee challenges us to listen carefully to the stories of former Adventists who are awed to be living in intimate relationships with Jesus. †

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Back issues of *Proclamation!* and the blog site ProclamationMagazine.com
- Books and other materials by Dale Ratzlaff Ratzlaf.com
- Day by day commentary on the Sabbath School lessons BibleStudiesForAdventists.com
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SEPARATING IN ORDER TO DRAW NEAR

If a person professes Jesus' incarnation, His death, and His resurrection, why does it matter what "secondary practices" we might espouse?

Separation is a repeated theme throughout Scripture. God separated the light which He called "day" from the darkness which He called "night".¹ Near the end of Revelation there is the final separation: the wicked are cast into the lake of fire, and the righteous receive their eternal reward to live forever with God. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly encouraged Israel to draw near to God and separate themselves from their idols.²

The Gospels persuade the Jews to look past the shadows of the Old Testament and embrace the reality of the presence of the Messiah in their midst.

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17).

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life (Jn., 5:39-40).

On the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter wanted to build tabernacles for Moses (Law), Elijah (Prophets) and Jesus, the voice of the Father boomed "This is My beloved Son, Listen to Him." Suddenly, the disciples saw no one but Jesus only.³

The overriding theme of the epistles is to clarify and proclaim the true gospel. They carefully separate out the elements some wanted to include that would weaken the message of grace. The believing Pharisees wanted to include in the gospel circumcision and the rituals of the old covenant.⁴ The Galatians wanted to add to the simple gospel by observing the

law.⁵ They did not like the "cheap grace" Paul was proclaiming. They wanted their obedience to law to be a demonstration that they were worthy. They wanted a gospel that included the observance of the rituals of days, months, seasons and years.⁶ The Colossians evaluated one another on the basis of food, drink, festivals, new moons and Sabbaths.⁷ Some in Rome promoted eating vegetables only, others the observance of certain days.⁸ In Corinth the believers did not even care that gross immorality was being practiced in their church fellowship.⁹ All the perversions to the gospel mentioned above were renounced: in love to the weak and judgmental, in direct public confrontation when the purity of the gospel was at stake.¹⁰

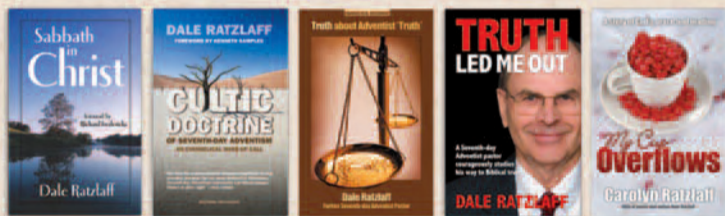
It would be good for us each to inventory our own lives. It is so easy just to go along, unconcerned about compromises to the gospel. We may want to consider statements of belief, sources of authority, and accepted practices that may add to or take away from the gospel. In our drawing near to God, perhaps some of us need also to separate ourselves from organiza-

tions, fellowships, and even some of our reading material. Here are some questions we might ask ourselves. Is Jesus alone the focus of my attention? Is Scripture alone the only authority and primary object of my study? Do I believe that salvation is in Christ alone, or am I trying

DO I BELIEVE THAT SALVATION IS IN CHRIST ALONE, OR AM I TRYING TO ADD TO THE SIMPLE GOSPEL, UNDERMINING IT BY CALLING IT "CHEAP GRACE"?

to add to the simple gospel, undermining it by calling it "cheap grace"? Is faith the only condition for receiving salvation, or am I adding my obedience of the law, a vegetarian diet and the observance of days—just to be safe? Am I trying to settle the issues of God's justice by my obedience to the law, not realizing that Christ settled the question once and for all at the cross?¹¹

Yes, it is true: drawing near to God requires separating from beliefs and practices that take our eyes off Jesus and His word. †

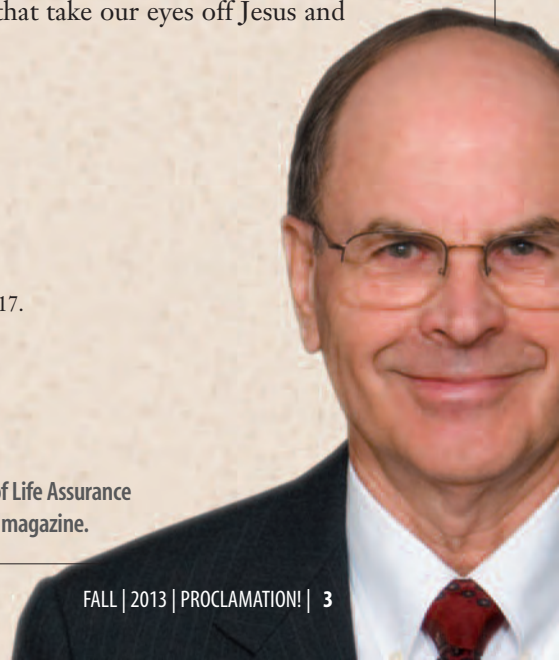


Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored five books concerning Adventism: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the unique doctrine of a pre-advent judgment that decides eternal destinies, *Truth About Adventist "Truth"*—a 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.

Endnotes

- ¹ Gen. 1:14.
- ² Jer. 8:18; 1 ki. 18.
- ³ Mt. 17:5-8; Mk. 9:7, 8.
- ⁴ Acts 15:5.
- ⁵ Gal. 4:21 ff.
- ⁶ Gal. 4:10, 11.
- ⁷ Col. 2:16, 17. Cf. Ex. 45:17.
- ⁸ Rom. 14.
- ⁹ 1 Cor. 5.
- ¹⁰ Gal. 2:11, 14.
- ¹¹ Rom. 3:21-26.

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



MY HEART IS

Free!

AARIKA SHEWMAKE

I am seventeen and the youngest of four siblings. I grew up attending a Seventh-day Adventist church since I was born and for years never questioned anything I had been taught. I always felt privileged to be part of “the only true religion” and pitied anyone I met who was not an Adventist.

I went to church, attended Pathfinders, and even led the congregation in prayer some Sabbaths. The adults would always come to me after I did something publicly and tell me I was “an inspiration”.

“I wish all young people would be as dedicated to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as you are,” they would say.

When I was nine years old I took the step I thought was necessary: I was baptized into the Adventist Church. It was exciting; my grandpa, who was nearly 80 years old and a retired Adventist pastor, performed my baptism. When I came out of the water, however—I felt nothing; the only thing that had changed was that I was soaking wet—and my youth leaders and family were prouder than ever of me.

I wanted to serve God, but something never seemed right. Furthermore, from the time I was very young I would have a recurring nightmare. Something was being calculated, and that something (which I could never define) was getting bigger and bigger. In my dreams, that thing would crush me until I couldn’t breathe anymore, and I would wake up gasping for air and panicking. I never knew the meaning of that terrifying dream.

By the time I was twelve, a feeling of sadness and shame would come over me when I entered the sanctuary for church. I would sit with my friends, giggling at the pastor’s attempts to engage us, as on the day he went up front wearing a Superman suit and urged us to tithe and to be more generous with offerings so we would be blessed more.

One Sabbath he announced that an evangelist was coming to our church for a series of meetings. My heart raced. I would go to this series; I wanted to learn whatever I was missing so I could finally feel content!

The first day of the meetings I gathered my notebook and binder and pencils and sat down in the church well before the meeting started. I would be there every day, and I would learn how to please God! The evangelist began to speak, but the more he talked, the farther I felt from God. His series was on Daniel and Revelation, and it didn’t feel good to hear him say my non-Adventist friends would one day hunt me down because of my Sabbath-keeping. His sermons sounded critical, and instead of teaching me how to please God, I found them tedious and boring.

The Shumake family:
(L to R) Tommy, Tim,
Judy, Tom, Melissa,
and faith story writer
Aarika.



LABEL © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ANZEK

After the first three nights I gave up. It would be better to sit and home and read my *Clear Word Bible* and pray by myself than to feel that guilty and bored! I helped prepare and serve the refreshments after that and sneaked out with friends to talk in the parking lot to get away from listening to the evangelist's evening preaching. Nevertheless, I couldn't escape him completely; as he preached his sermons each Sabbath during the series, I felt empty and unworthy.

Shock

One Sunday—March 14, 2009, to be exact—my mom shocked me with a statement I never thought I would hear coming out of her mouth: “Let’s try that community church down the road today!”

“Oh, no, no, no!” I pleaded. “I don’t want to sit in another pew while another pastor tells us we haven’t done enough! I can’t stand more hymns; we did that yesterday! Please, not today!”

I had done my part for the week, and I was not happy with this turn of events. Nevertheless, my mother’s idea prevailed. I packed my bag with great care: mp3 player, books, and a notebook all went into my tote. I was not going to be bored that day!

We arrived at Green Valley Community Church (GVCC), and the first person who greeted me was an older, short, friendly Hispanic man with one arm.

“Welcome, little sister!” He smiled warmly and handed me a bulletin.

We walked into the auditorium—and I was startled to find bright orange chairs filling the room. “Well, at least I won’t have to sit on a pew,” I thought. We sat down, wide-eyed, overcome by the surprise of seeing everyone around us smiling, laughing, and acting—well—happy!

The praise band started, and although I cannot remember all the songs they sang, it was perfect. There were drums! And gui-

tars! They played for half an hour—more good music than I had ever heard at our other church.

When the pastor got up, to my shock he was wearing jeans, a short-sleeved plaid shirt, and Converse sneakers. He welcomed us warmly and asked everyone to give a round of applause for the first-time guests. Everyone was clapping—all 600 of them—for us! The title of the teaching that day was “A New Kind of Rest”. I didn’t realize it until later, but that was the very thing I needed to hear.

“You have never looked into the eyes of someone Jesus didn’t die to save,” the pastor said. That and other words he spoke kept me interested, and to my surprise, they kept me away from my activities bag and touched my heart in a way I didn’t know anything could. When I finally walked out of the hour-long service (which seemed infinitely short in comparison to the one-hour-and-forty-minute services at the Adventist church), I felt as refreshed as if someone had poured cool water over me after a long walk in a desert. I toyed rebelliously with the idea of leaving the Adventist church, but I wrote it off as “ridiculous”.

The next Sabbath we went to the Adventist church in the morning—but that evening we attended GVCC’s Saturday night service. I could work with this, I thought—striving for salvation in the morning, living in joy in the evening. I felt content; I couldn’t wait for Saturdays to come!

We continued in this pattern for six months for the sake of my still-Adventist grandparents, and to give us a chance to finish our church commitments. As the weeks passed, we were praying to get through those duties so we could go to GVCC. During that time the worship leader at GVCC returned from his honeymoon, and for me the deal was sealed. I had never heard such a voice or such joy and love for Jesus in my life.

By the end of six months we decided enough was enough. We began attending GVCC on Sundays, and we enjoyed going to

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church in the morning again and carrying that blessing with us all day long—and all week long.

There was one thing at the Adventist church, however, that still had me connected to it: Pathfinders. I had one more speech to give—one I didn’t want to give. I was to talk about how we should make sure the foods we ate would please God instead of drawing us away from Him.

“But I drink milk; I’m in trouble!” I joked as I decided to rewrite the speech. I changed the talk from focussing on food to being excited to go to heaven. I wrote that it didn’t matter what we had done because Jesus loved us and wanted to take us home!

The Pathfinder leaders trusted me; no one read the speech before I stood up to deliver it. Taking my place at the podium, I held my head high and watched as the people squirmed nervously in their seats as I read my new words. I smiled; the last piece of work I had in this church was done.

Leaving

My nightmares were becoming fewer and fewer, but they tended to recur when I let myself think of what we had just left. Nobody asked where we had gone when we stopped attending, not the proud Sabbath School leaders or the friendly pastors—not even my friends. Nobody. The grape vine said we had apostatized.

Eventually I came to learn that if I wasn’t perfect, my sins did not remove me from salvation and from being God’s child. Once for all Jesus had taken away my sins, past, present, and future! I cried for joy when I found out this truth, and I cried even harder when I learned about how much He loved me. As time passed, I smiled more often, and I had fewer fears. I started going to the junior high class on Sundays and to the midweek service on Wednesdays.

That next January my parents, brother, and I sent our letter requesting that our names be removed from the membership rolls of the Adventist church. The pastor asked to meet with us and talked about how he wanted this to be like “a good divorce”. I was unnerved when I learned that they had to vote us out; did we really need their permission to leave? What if they said “No”?

In spite of my fears, the vote passed without further word, and we were finally free.

Baptized into Christ

August 29, 2010, was the date of the river baptism conducted by GVCC. Our family discussed it and excitedly signed up to be baptized.

The night before the baptism, I got a fever, and my nightmare returned in full force, longer and worse than ever. Meanwhile, my parents and my brother were experiencing similar battles. It wasn’t easy working through discouragements, nightmares, and doubts, but I prayed to Jesus and asked Him to let me do this thing the next day. I wanted to be baptized in His name, not in the name of and into membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I awoke the next morning well and completely ready to go.

When the two pastors dunked the four of us into the freezing river water, my heart immediately changed. As I like to say, “We went from drowning in religion to being immersed in love.” My sins were already nailed to the cross, and my old life was left there at the bottom of the river as were my troubles—and, as I would later discover, my nightmares were buried there as well.

Since that day my life has changed. I’m joyful, more content, and far more thankful. I’ve long since stopped worrying about my salvation or the number of sins I have. I attend the high school group before church on Sundays and have never been happier in my life!

The man who called me “little sister” that first day is named Chuck. I see him at church from time to time, and I always give him a great big hug. If he hadn’t welcomed me, I don’t know if I would have felt so at home. We have a new life now. My sister has started attending with us, and although my grandparents are in despair that we are “no longer saved”, it doesn’t pain us as much as it did in the past.

A few months ago, I was praying to understand what that old recurring nightmare was about. I realized that the dream represented my Adventist understanding that my sins were being added up, and the pile of my sins was getting bigger and bigger until it would crush me. Jesus also helped me understand that when I was baptized in His name, I publicly acknowledged leaving all my sins behind, past, present, and future. I had declared that I was His.

I haven’t had that nightmare in the three and a half years since that day we went down to the river.

Now, every morning when I wake up, the words of my favorite song go through my head:

“Through You I’m not afraid/Through You the price is paid/through You there’s victory/Because of You my heart screams, I am free!”

And I know I am truly free! †



Aarika Shewmake, 17, graduated from home school this year and will be attending The Art Institute for Baking and Pastry Arts–Sacramento in January. She enjoys vintage movies and music. Her parents are Tom and Judy Shewmake, and she is the youngest of four siblings: Melissa, Thomas and Timothy. Aarika and her parents still attend Green Valley Community Church in Placerville, California. You may read her parent’s story at <http://formeradventist.com/stories/shewmake.html>. PHOTO © KARLY V PHOTOGRAPHY, USED BY PERMISSION.

I was born into an agnostic, spiritualistic family. In spite of our ambivalence about the existence of God, though, I knew the spiritual world was as real as the physical world; it was just intangible.

I became a Christian at the age of 17 through the ministry of Young Life. As I studied with Young Life, I pondered the things they were teaching me, but my agnostic roots kept me questioning everything that claimed to be true. I was attracted to Jesus, but I just couldn't be sure. One day Jesus came to me as I sat under a tree, and He told me all that I had read about Him in His book was true. All I had to do was to accept him as my Lord. I did, and he entered into my heart that moment and filled me with His Holy Spirit and has never left me.

I was completely new spiritually, but doctrinally I was totally ignorant, and I was not prepared for what was about to happen.

Five cults in two months

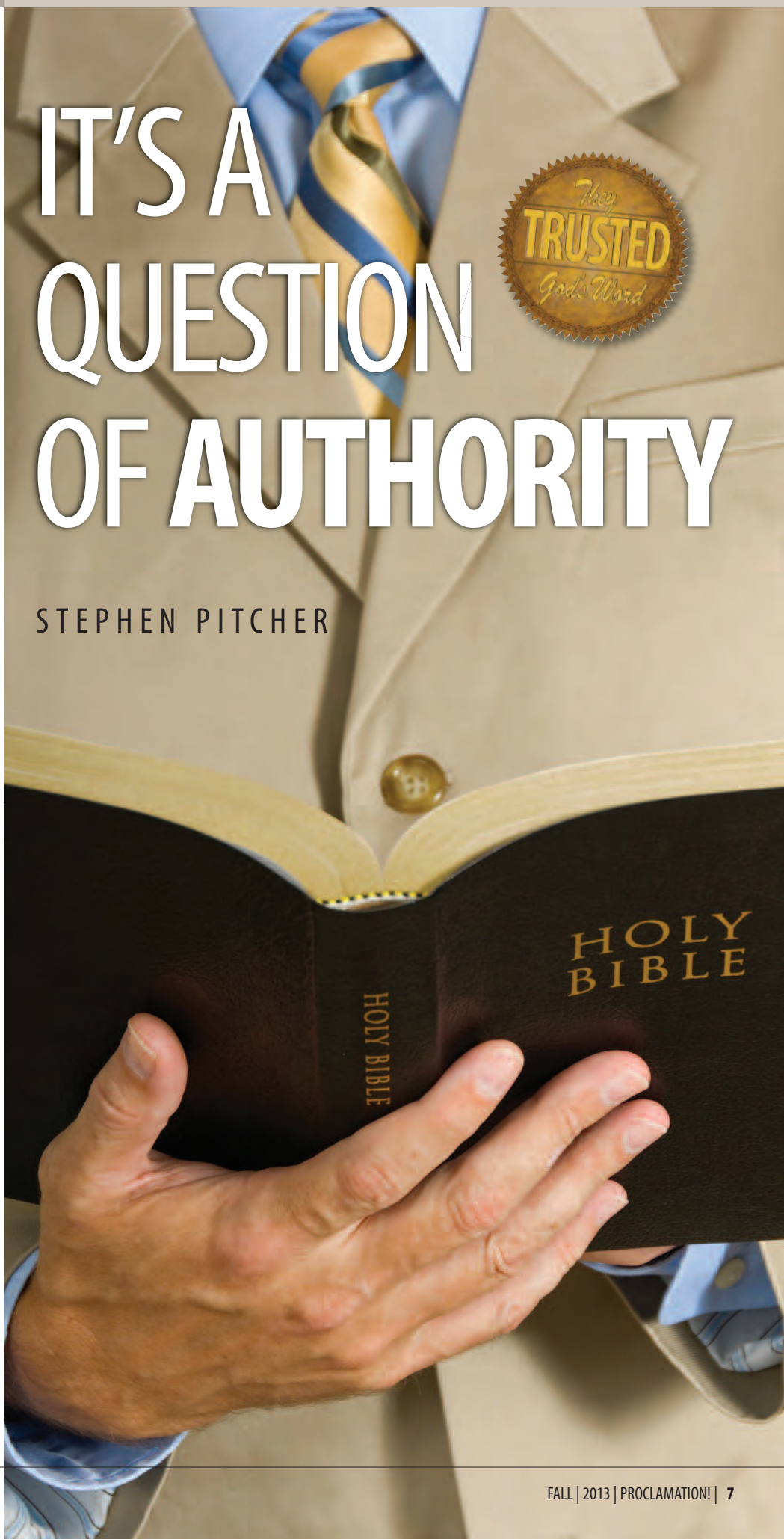
Within two months I had been approached by five groups; I had never even heard the names of these organizations before. Soon I was studying with Jehovah's Witnesses using their *New World Translation* of the Bible. Concurrently, I was studying the *Book of Mormon* and learning how the gospel had been restored to earth through the prophet Joseph Smith. I was also studying the book *Jesus Christ is Not God!* by Victor Paul Wierwille, founder of The Way International. At the same time I was reading the pornographic *Mo Letters* from the Children of God, and I was also reading *The Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*, attempting to learn the message of Krishna. The Hare Krishna proselytizers explained to me that their message was like what Jesus had taught.

Within two months of accepting Christ, I went from being a blazing Christian to being a blazing mess. I ignorantly thought all these groups were trying to help me in my new relationship with Christ.

Meanwhile, I met a young woman, and we began to study the *Book of Mormon* verse-by-verse. Before long I was attending the Baptist church on Sunday mornings and the Latter Day Saints Ward in the afternoons. I kept up that crazy-making theological syncretism for two years, but I didn't realize

IT'S A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

STEPHEN PITCHER



exactly what I was studying until God arranged for an intervention.

One morning my Baptist Sunday School teacher asked if I had heard of Walter Martin. I hadn't. That morning the teacher loaned me some Martin tapes on Mormonism, and I was shocked at what I heard.

I approached my friend and said, "You believe in more than one God!" She immediately replied, "No we don't! I don't know who you've been listening to, but that is not true."

I was dumbfounded. Whom do you trust when it seems there's no one you can trust?

had stated publicly that they are an evangelical Christian church and should not be treated like the numerous cults with whom he had dealt.

The trust I placed in Walter Martin was soon to be my undoing.

Discovering true Adventism

In 1987 my wife and I moved from the Silicon Valley in California to New Mexico. That was where I finally received my first true lesson on Adventism. I had told Norma that there was a good Seventh-day Baptist church nearby, but she refused to con-

Walter Martin had investigated Seventh-day Adventists and had stated publicly that they are an evangelical Christian church and should not be treated like the numerous cults with whom he had dealt. The trust I placed in Walter Martin was soon to be my undoing.

A few days later she came to me and said, "I owe you an apology. We do believe in more than one God. I asked my father, and he explained it to me."

Authority

Her sudden change in belief concerning God impacted me. She didn't study source material for herself; instead, she consulted her authority figure, a person in whom she placed implicit trust. When her father taught her something she had not previously believed, she accepted this new information because it came from her authority figure.

As a result of this startling exchange, two things happened. First, I began to distrust completely anyone's opinions regarding religious matters until I checked the source material myself. Second, as I read and listened to Walter Martin, I looked up large amounts of the source material he cited. As I read his sources, I began to trust him as an authority figure.

My trust in Walter Martin shaped my response a few years later when an Adventist woman walked into my mom's house as the caretaker for a family member. Between my poor Spanish and her poor English, we managed to understand each other when I asked her on a date to San Francisco. We attended each other's churches. I was impressed with the passion of the Adventists and was invited to attend an upcoming Revelation Seminar.

Deception was the farthest thing from my mind. "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made" (Gen. 3:1a).

I was impressed with the speaker; he answered every question straight out of the Bible. In fact, I was so impressed that, after Norma and I became engaged, I joined the Adventist church because I believed that a family should attend church together. I felt completely confident that I was making a sound decision; after all, Walter Martin had investigated Seventh-day Adventists and

consider attending. That refusal was the first real hint I had that my marriage might have been based on something other than Christ and our mutual love.

The first Adventist church I attended in New Mexico began to open my eyes. The Sabbath School lesson was on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, but I was puzzled by the fact that everyone in the class seemed terrified.

After listening to a despairing litany of worry and fear, I spoke up. "1 John 2:1 says, 'My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'" The instant response was an attack: "That was present truth for John's day, but we have present truth for today. We must be prepared to stand before God without Jesus as our mediator."

The elder leading the class sat and watched his students turn on me, much like Saul watching the stoning of Stephen, and my shock gave way to anger.

Nevertheless, I was committed to worshiping with my wife, and I still believed Walter Martin could not have been wrong. Consequently, in spite of my confusion as I learned what Adventists truly believed, we finally settled in the Albuquerque Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I became very active there for ten years. During those years I allowed myself to become indoctrinated.

After ten years we returned to California, and I was looking forward to finding an evangelical Adventist church—something I couldn't find in Albuquerque. We finally settled at the La Sierra University Church, and as I listened to Sabbath School and the sermons each week, I realized I was hearing the same things I had heard in New Mexico, only they were dressed up in better language. I became depressed.

I looked for a website with Walter Martin's teachings and found one, but I didn't hear him say anything new or different about Adventism.

Within a few months I took an internet Bible Challenge. For the next few months I read only the New Testament: Matthew, John, Acts, and the epistles. In fact, I read Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians over and over for a few weeks. I was blown away. It was as though I had never read these things before. I did not, however, read Revelation. I became nauseous just thinking about that book; the effects of Adventist eschatology had completely shut down my interest in Revelation.

Nevertheless, the profound truths of the new covenant began to penetrate my Adventist mind and heart. I began to identify with 2 Corinthians 3:15: “Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.” I realized there had been a spiritual—and a quite literal—veil over my heart.

Understanding

Desperate for answers, I began looking online, and soon I found the Former Adventist Fellowship and the Trinity Church websites. One day, depressed and near despair, I got into my car and drove toward Redlands with no conscious destination in mind. As God directed my car into the parking lot of Trinity Church, I realized where I was.

I walked into the church and asked for a pastor. Within minutes the receptionist returned with the senior pastor, Gary Inrig, who invited me into his office.

We talked for an hour before we prayed. One thing he said surprised me: “We can thank God for heresies. Every time a heresy has arisen in the Christian church, the people of God have risen up and defended the faith by pointing out the truths contained in God’s word.”

Before I left, Gary introduced me to Kurt, a former Adventist on staff, and we spoke and prayed together. He brought me back to the front office just as another man, Richard Tinker, happened to walk in the door on an errand. Kurt introduced us, and Richard invited me to his home on Friday, New Year’s Eve, 1999. That was my first New Year’s Eve with other former Adventists, and it was the first time I rang in the new year with communion and prayer.

I began attending Former Adventist Fellowship Bible study on Friday and Trinity Church on Sunday—and my marriage began falling apart. My wife claimed that I now had the mark of the beast and said, both privately and in the presence of one of the Adventist pastors, that I was worshiping Satan. During the next three months, the tension at home mounted, and finally my home became so unstable that I stopped attending services at Trinity. I was rewarded by my life returning to normal for a while.

I wasn’t the same, though. At Trinity Church I had heard the same gospel, recognized the same Holy Spirit, and communed with the same Jesus with whom I fell in love 25 years earlier, and now I couldn’t get enough. I returned to the Bible study and to church on Sunday, but this time I also attended the Adventist

church with my wife. This compromise, however, did not work. My marriage fell apart.

About this time someone gave me a video copy of the five-part *John Ankerberg Show*, “Who Is Telling the Truth About Seventh Day Adventism?”, which aired in 1985. In this series of programs, Walter Martin, my hero of Christian apologetics, appeared with William Johnsson, then editor of the *Adventist Review*. What I heard shocked me.

On the second program, Martin referred to the *27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists* when he said to Johnsson, “I don’t care what the statement of faith in your hand says if the practice isn’t there.”

On the fifth program Ankerberg asked, “What would you have to change, Walter, to call them a cult? And we might go on to the next step, do you think it’s headed in that direction?”

Martin said, “I think that they are moving [in that direction] because of their view of Mrs. White, which is not changing, or not changed, or never changed—I shudder to think about that...” Then he said “...they [Evangelicals and Fundamentalists] will begin to re-evaluate and say, ‘... there never really was any change and that they have not told you the truth and they didn’t tell Barnhouse the truth, and that you were misled and you’ve got to set the record straight.’”

And finally, Martin said, “I fear that if they continue to progress at this rate, that the classification of a cult can’t possibly miss being reapplied to Seventh-day Adventism.”

I was shocked and overwhelmed. This admission that he might have made a mistake, that Adventism really was revealing itself to be cultic and not Christian, came right out of the mouth of the man who had the label “cult” removed from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1950’s.

Walter Martin had been my trusted authority. He was the expert on Christian apologetics and cults, but he had been wrong about Adventism. When he met with the Adventists in 1955 and 1956 to try and ascertain exactly what they believed, he had unwittingly been meeting with the most subtle of all the beasts of the field, and he had been deceived.

I realized that because I had trusted Martin instead of comparing Adventism to Scripture myself, I had allowed myself to be seduced by a false gospel that stole my joy in Jesus for over 15 years.

My membership in Adventism ended in 2003, and I joined Trinity Church in January, 2007. My church membership, however, is no longer my identity. Today, I claim only one label: Christian. I now put my trust only in Jesus Christ and in His verbally inspired written word.

I was blind, but now I see. I stand on the Rock, and I shall not be moved. †



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.

DONDRA CUFF AND WINONA MILLER

FROM SISTERS-IN-LAW

Dondra and Winona are sisters-in-law who have co-written their faith stories because their journeys out of Adventism and into trusting the Lord Jesus were journeys they took together with their families.

Dondra's story

I was raised as a third generation Adventist. We moved frequently around the western states because of my father's work, and I went to several different Adventist elementary schools, many of which were near San Francisco. My memories of those schools are mostly positive.

Our moving, however, made it hard for me to enjoy high school. In 1949 I enrolled for my freshman year at the newly-opened San Pasqual Academy, but we moved again—this time to Albuquerque, New Mexico, just in time for me to attend Sandoval Academy for my sophomore year. That year I learned what it meant to be a minority; I was one of only six non-Hispanic students. We moved back to California in time for me to spend my junior year at San Diego Academy, and then we moved to the little desert town of Twenty Nine Palms, California. I spent my senior year in a public high school—my first venture outside the Adventist educational cocoon.

That was the year I began questioning my very stringent faith; it was not at all compatible with the new and interesting things that I wanted to do in school that year. I talked to my mother about my dilemma, and she said, "You are old enough to decide; it's a choice of faith that only you can make". It didn't take long for me to decide what my choice would be; I deeply believed that the teachings of E.G. White were not relevant to my time.

I stopped going to church and stayed away for several years. I felt guilty, of course. I didn't feel like an Adventist, exactly, but I didn't feel like a non-Adventist, either. I was a quasi-Adventist, and all I knew was the worldview Adventism had taught me.

It was in Twenty Nine Palms that I met and married my first husband, and we soon had two little girls. We thought it was important to raise our daughters with religious values, so we started taking the girls to church, but I was not too enthused about returning to the Adventist church.

After just seven short years of marriage, however, my husband was killed in a private airplane crash. The happy life we had planned was gone forever. I was devastated—but I was also grateful for the friends and family who helped me through the next difficult months.

I thought I should return to an Adventist environment—go back to my roots—so I sold everything and moved to La Sierra, California. I lived there alone for over a year, and then I married again. We lived in the La Sierra area for several years before moving to Auburn, California—a move that brought about change that I could not have foreseen!

As my husband and I were preparing to move to Auburn, California, my sister-in-law Winona was helping me pack. Before she said goodbye, she said, "I know you believe in the Adventist doctrines, but I'm wondering: do you have the assurance of your salvation? When you get settled would you do me a favor? Please read 1 John and Romans 3, and tell me what you think."

After getting settled in Auburn, I began to read the New Testament. Inevitably, I compared the things I had always been taught with what I was finding in my Bible. Slowly but surely my reading opened to me the miracle of freedom in Christ. I was becoming very secure in what I was learning, and then one day I had a huge moment of clarity. I compared the investigative judgment to the Bible, and I realized the Adventist teachings on this subject were not at all compatible with the Scriptures.

I knew that the time had come for me to act on what I believed. I wanted to find a non-denominational church with strong biblical teaching. Truth, after all, is not an organization. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life," and I wanted to find a church that taught about Jesus directly from His word.

I have learned to search Scripture and to listen to God's language of love and freedom. The reality of the gospel had been like a beautifully wrapped gift sitting on my table, a gift which I was never curious enough to open. Then one day, I untied the bow and looked inside, and to my amazement, there was the freedom and life I had always needed. Through the years that gift has become very special to me.

Eventually I shared my discovery of the gospel and my reactions to Adventism with my mother, and she responded, "If you are leaving the Adventist church, so am I, because I feel so discouraged with my spiritual life." Not all of my family, however,



TO SISTERS IN FREEDOM

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were that accommodating with our choices of leaving “the church”. In fact, their responses varied from disappointment to overt hostility.

Since my journey out of Adventism into freedom in Christ has been a family journey, my daughters and my husband’s daughters also share their reactions to leaving Adventism. Even though they have “landed” in somewhat different places, they all demonstrate that Adventism robbed them of truth and reality.

The daughters’ stories

Debi says, “Throughout my education in Adventist schools, I felt there was too much emphasis on the negative. When I was at Monterey Bay Academy, it seemed there were so many rules to keep and so little of the love of God shown. I felt there was no way I could ever measure up to that life. I tried it and for me it didn’t work, so I left it behind.”

“I, too, was educated in Adventist schools,” says Jennifer. “I conformed to the church’s rules, but I enjoyed school, my friends, and the school activities. I didn’t pay much attention to the theology, so I didn’t question my life. I have no bitterness toward the church in which I once believed. When I left as an adult and learned about God’s grace and His love, I was in awe at the freedom I felt. There is so much beyond Adventism. What a change in my life!”

Lori reflects, “I know that to this day I carry many beliefs from Adventism. As a girl, I loved the pastor at the La Sierra Church, and I went to the nearby school and then attended the academy. It wasn’t a conscious decision when I left the church; I was just tired of the rules. I do remember the overwhelming peer pressure I felt as a teenager. Later I learned that E. G. White was in error in some of her teachings. That was mind boggling, because churches don’t lie—do they? Do I believe in God today after leaving Adventism? Absolutely.”

Finally, Nicole shares, “I realized, after going through the Adventist educational system, that the church never allowed an understanding of grace and mercy and all that the cross of Jesus had accomplished for me. I view this lack as something very sad because of my wasted years, years of not knowing what I now know. In my first year of college I met the man I was to marry. In conversation one day, he asked if I was a Christian, and I honest-

ly didn’t know what to say. My title was ‘ex-Adventist’. He invited me to attend his church, and it changed my life. For the first time I began to understand that God was not a God that was about writing my sins in a book, but, He is a God of love.”

As I reflect on how Jesus has brought me to know Him, I don’t try to understand all the negatives that happened to me. If I couldn’t find joy and blessings in my life and have the assurance that there is a life beyond this one, I truly couldn’t keep on going.

I thank Him for using Winona to direct me to God’s message of assurance. He has given us life!

Winona’s story

I was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home. I didn’t call myself a Christian, but rather an “Adventist”. In fact, I found the word “Christianity” a bit hard to define. I didn’t hear the true gospel of the Bible until I was 37 years old. I was taught to keep the Ten Commandments, especially the fourth, as a prerequisite for salvation.

The Sabbath restrictions were endless. Much of Friday was spent getting ready for the Sabbath; in fact, the preparation days were so intense they made me forget who it was I was worshipping. Sabbath, by contrast, was stifling. There was little we could do during the hours of the Sabbath—except we were told to take nature walks and think of God’s creation.

As I look back on my Adventist years, I see so many mixed messages. I can now see why I became so confused and felt hopeless in my faith. What is the required level of compliance? How can anyone know when they have been obedient enough? When it came down to deciding right or wrong, Mrs. White always had the final say. For someone not raised and educated in “the church”, the reality of Adventism would be terribly confusing. It would be very difficult for them to understand what we went through, trying desperately to comply with the rules of our faith, but in the end realizing that we had been deceived.

In recalling how we were immersed in the seemingly endless rules and doctrines that we were to apply to our lives, I now understand why we were frustrated. Adventism’s requirements were taught in our homes, our schools, and our churches. The rules were embedded in our minds. We were taught never to question our beliefs, only to accept them.

I was living in La Sierra, California, and going to school at La Sierra University. I met and married my husband there, and we had two boys. I was still in “the church”, and I took my boys to Sabbath school and tried to live the Adventist life.

My husband and I had been married six years when things began to fall apart. We were young and didn’t understand that through some effort, we could have kept our marriage intact for the sake of our boys. Neither of us thought then about having a God-centered marriage; Adventism did not show us how to do that.

Searching and alone

After our divorce, I went off the deep end. It was a fearful thing to me, but I realized I wasn’t bound for heaven; I would never be good enough to live as an Adventist. I was already breaking almost all the rules, and I thought, “I might as well enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” For a few years my life was on the wild side. I’ll just say I moved beyond the sins of drinking coffee and wearing make-up and jewelry!

A number of years later, when I was working in the Board of Realtors, I met an influential man who was associated with the board, and we became friends. Eventually we married, and we had two girls just a year apart.

Then, suddenly, my life changed in a single day. Our family was at our mountain home in Twin Peaks, California, when my husband had a massive coronary and died instantly. I was shocked, devastated, and terribly frightened. My boys were almost finished with high school, and my babies were one and two years old. That awful day I knew that I would be raising them alone.

My sons went into the military, and I was trying to cope with my new life. I really wanted to raise my girls differently than I had raised my boys. I thought it was important to find an acceptable church for my new, young family, but where should I begin?

I had a friend in very similar circumstances who was a Catholic, and she seemed content in her faith. I liked the idea of not having as many rules as Adventism had, but I had too many residual Adventist feelings about being a Catholic to seriously consider that religion. I talked to some of my family who were Christian Scientists. They shared with me some of their beliefs; for example, sin, sickness, and death will only exist if one gives them a place in one’s thoughts. They were telling that to the wrong person; I knew

my husband had just died. Thinking away his death couldn’t fill my lonely heart or create a new reality for me.

My search continued. One of my close friends was a Mormon; I thought it might be worth studying with the Mormon missionaries. I was giving Mormonism some consideration, but soon I developed some misgivings about their teachings.

I finally came full circle. The Adventists were having local evangelistic meetings, and I knew my mother wanted me to attend them and, of course, come back to her church. Not knowing where else to look, I decided to go. Remarkably, the night I went the sermon was on the investigative judgment, a doctrine of many requirements with no biblical basis. This judgment is to be a time when one’s destiny is set and is forever thereafter unchangeable. I was so discouraged with the topic that I cried all the way home. That night I knew with great assurance that I had reached the end of Adventism in my life.

Assurance of salvation

By this time my son Larry had met the girl he would marry, and he had been going to church with her. He told me about this church—a Sunday church—that taught the assurance of salvation. Assurance of salvation? How presumptuous! Certainly none of the churches I had been exploring had ever mentioned such a remarkable thing! Nevertheless, I visited this new church. One day I found this verse in the Bible:

“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (1Jn. 5:11-13).

This is my salvation passage, and I absolutely stand on it. In March, 1969, I totally accepted the gospel that I had learned in the new church, and I finally understood that I was truly a child of God.

Today I look back and remember when I shared 1 John 5:11-13 with Dondra. When the truth of that passage finally sank in for her, I was so happy that she, along with me, finally understood the truth about God’s grace. Now more than forty years later, being saved and knowing I am saved still almost seems new to me. It seems surprising that there are still so many people in denominations that learn just parts of Scripture, or they learn theologies based on a “prophet” and then build a religion around it. They are good and sincere people, but they miss the point of what Christ did for us. The Scriptures are full of texts that prove His work on our behalf. Those verses have always been there, and I am one of the many who overlooked them for half of my life. I praise God He revealed Himself to me. †



Dondra Christman Cuff and her husband Ernest live in Auburn, California, and are both retired. She attends the Gold Country Church in Auburn. Their daughters are: Debi Smith of Oceanside, California; Jennifer Smelser of Medford, Oregon; Lori Philips of Springfield, Missouri, and Nicole Baker of Mt. Shasta, California. **Winona Cuff Miller** lives in the San Bernardino mountain community of Twin Peaks and attends Twin Peaks Community Church.



To Sharon for her birthday

MARTIN L. CAREY

It was just another car that we passed in the night, but you looked over and noticed the driver—and her car. You said something like, “That girl looks just like Meg Ryan, really cute, and she’s driving a really cute BMW. It’s not fair!” We both laughed. We were almost home, both feeling good from a nice night out. I never did see the driver that looks like Meg Ryan. It was four days until your birthday.

This morning you got up and went upstairs to let your cat Charity out of the bathroom. She was too old and sick to walk down the stairs, but you were glad to see her still alive. You carried her in your t-shirt to the kitchen and tried to feed her, but she wouldn’t eat. Through tears you told me that we should go ahead and do the thing we said we would do. Charity was almost 17 years old and all skin and bones. She couldn’t eat or drink and was in constant pain. You had nursed her through many illnesses for longer than you have known me. But it was time.

The drive to the animal hospital was quiet, and once there, we didn’t have to wait long before the doctor came, bearing his syringe. He was reassuring and efficient, and in a minute, Charity’s pain was no more.

I dug a grave for her by the apricot tree, just where we said we would. When I was finished, you came out with our son Matthew, and you were carrying your Bible. We gathered by the apricot tree, and you set down the little bundle wrapped in your t-shirt. You read this Psalm to us:

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you” (Ps. 63:1-3).

We thanked God for giving you that scrawny kitten to love when you were single. Surely that was His act of loving kindness

during some hard times. Remembering His kindness made it easier to pull the dirt back over the grave. We didn’t say much else, and I went off to work.

“His love is better than life.”

Those are deep words, really far beyond me. Now, while sitting at my desk, the sweet sadness of our morning and the profound words of David keep playing in my head. Facing death, even the death of our littlest friends, stirs up deep longings. We know what it is to wander in a thirsty land, wanting and getting but never having. We spent years working and playing, spending money, pushing along our little ball of worldly goods, like dung beetles. Then in August of 2006, our thirst drove us to God’s word. Like David, we looked on Him and saw His glory. He spoke, and we were alive together. After that, life was much more than just living—it was no longer merely vulgar survival.

On this day you could read Psalm 63 because you are filled with His life. That text was His new mercy for just this morning. And today I was able to hear His word because, again, He showed me mercy. Not long ago, I was an unloving agnostic therapist from a broken family. I received grace upon grace, and so I married you and learned to share our griefs. Our family’s existence is a miracle; it is nothing like what I deserve.

Looking like movie stars and driving sexy cars can’t ever compare with what we are given, freely, every day. Blond hair and BMWs can’t purchase grace. Even so, you are cute in your saucy haircut and your little Rav-4. I don’t need a Meg Ryan or a BMW; my dung-beetling days are over. As I get older, I have someone to laugh and hurt with as we walk towards that dark valley. Even in death, we fear no evil.

Lord, thank you for Sharon. You let us see your glory, and we will never die. Your steadfast love really is better than life.

—Martin Carey

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The red flags that turned me towa

EUNICE SELLERS

My journey out of Adventism began in the mid 1980's in Loma Linda, a few years after my Adventist marriage ended in divorce. To be sure, over the years I had experienced little “red flags” about Adventism that bothered me, but from my childhood to adulthood I had tucked these little red flags away for another day. They had never seemed serious enough to cause me to consider leaving.

I was a first generation Adventist. When I was born my parents were Christians and members of the United Brethren Church in central Pennsylvania. Then one fateful Sunday after church, Dad listened to the Voice Of Prophecy radio program and sent for the Bible Correspondence Course for the whole family including my four older siblings. (I was only two years old.) Within weeks the whole family embraced the Sabbath and were all baptized into the Adventist church.

This sudden conversion to Adventism was upsetting to my Christian grandparents and to my aunts and uncles. Nevertheless, convinced about the “truth” of the Sabbath, my parents stood firm. In those early days, however, Dad did not know much about Ellen G. White (EGW), so I grew up in a loving Adventist home without some of the rigid restrictions that come with deeper indoctrination into EGW's writings. Moreover, I had the Christian influence of my grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

Early red flags

The influence of my Christian extended family, in fact, contributed to my early cognitive dissonance. One of the first red flags that caught my attention was the doctrine of the state of the dead. Through the years when I attended Christian funerals I heard that the deceased person's spirit went to be with the Lord immediately. Spirit? What was the living spirit? Did people not sleep in the ground as the Adventists taught in their doctrine of soul sleep?

My second red flag was my understanding that Adventists were the only ones going to heaven because they were God's remnant

people. The people who worshiped on Sunday, I learned, would be unsaved because they were of the “world” and “wicked”, refusing to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. I learned this distinctive doctrine in the Adventist elementary school I attended.

What do you think a young child who loved her grandparents thought about this horrifying belief?

The “true” prophet

In grade school, I heard all the usual stories about Ellen Harmon. I learned that when she was nine years old, she was struck in the head by a rock and was in a coma for three weeks. We were told, “Wasn't it wonderful that although Ellen was in poor health, she was chosen to be God's special messenger?” In another story, I learned how, at the age of 17, she held a big family Bible weighing more than 18 pounds on her outstretched arm for 20 to 30 minutes.

To me as a young child in grade school, these stories were impressive. I found out much later, however, that there are questions about the accuracy of the reports of Ellen White ever holding a heavy Bible or doing many of the things she allegedly did.

Later, as an adult, I visited the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah. The tour was very interesting, and I heard the story about their prophet Joseph Smith. I thought to myself at the time, “Wow! How was I so lucky as to be a member of the true church with the true prophet?”

But—wait—how did we know for sure that Ellen White was the true prophet?

In the early 1970's I experienced another discouraging encounter with the prophet. As a young mother I was trying so hard to be a good mom. The Loma Linda University Church offered a class using the book *Child Guidance* by EGW as a textbook for helping moms learn to raise their children properly. I signed up.

You guessed it: the class was a huge disappointment and made me feel unworthy to be a mother. It offered no love or hope, and

rd home



FLAGS: © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/BLACKRED

most of it was completely negative. I do not remember the Bible being used at all in that class, only EGW.

Three more red flags

Living in the Adventist “ghetto” of Loma Linda, the home of the Adventist health sciences university and the heart of the “health message”, one heard the current gossip about what was happening in the church, especially since many of the significant issues were discussed in our area. Three more red flags emerged that I tucked away into the back of my mind.

These three red flags were the discovery that EGW had borrowed most of her health reform ideas, the research reported by Desmond Ford showing the investigative judgment doctrine was unscriptural, and new questions about the Sabbath doctrine.

In 1986, I started a new job at the Faculty Medical Offices (FMO) in Loma Linda. My marriage had ended, and I was trying to get my bearings as a divorcee in a town where everyone had known me as the wife of a local professional man. Most of the doctors at the FMO were Adventist; however, most of the employees were not. This situation of working with non-Adventists was a new, positive experience for me.

One young Christian girl befriended me, and we formed a bond which I treasure to this day. She made a huge, positive impression on me and was always happy to discuss any biblical questions I had. Also, about this time, I became reacquainted with Edgar, a Christian man whom I had known when I was a girl and he was a young boy in my hometown in central Pennsylvania. We started writing back and forth, and his love for the Lord was very obvious.

Finally, answers

Meeting these two people at this time in my life when I needed biblical answers was the Lord’s perfect timing. Jeremiah 29:11-13 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,

‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give hope to the future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”

In the very first letter Edgar wrote to me, he quoted this verse, “I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:1). These words were just what I needed to hear! I had struggled for years and realized I couldn’t help myself, but I needed Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

After corresponding for three years and visiting back and forth several times, we fell in love and decided to get married. Suddenly my life changed again. I had a new husband—one who was not embedded in the Adventist professional culture, and I moved from California back to my home state, Pennsylvania. I had stopped attending the Adventist church and was not attending any other. Edgar, however, knew I had decided to leave the church of my childhood. He understood that I needed time to study God’s word to discover what I really believed, not just what my parents or a church had told me to believe. It’s a blessing that I love to read, because I spent the decade of the 1990’s reading more than I ever had before. My husband introduced me to Christian authors and their books—what a blessing! *Eternal Security* by Arthur W. Pink and *Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll were especially wonderful for me. For the first time I understood grace is a free gift. I did not have to work for my salvation. Jesus did everything necessary through His blood on the cross. What a blessing to know for sure I was saved!

The Adventist veil fully lifted for me in 1992 while I studied the covenants with the guidance of my faithful, patient husband. As I looked up passages, he encouraged me to read whole chapters so I would understand the correct context of the verses. He was a smart man. Slowly but surely the word of God was beginning to knock down the false doctrines of Adventism for me. I read page after page discovering more truth that answered the questions raised by



Edgar and Eunice pose on their Pennsylvania farm in the late 1980's.

my red flags, questions I had ignored because I had known of no way to answer them. It was so refreshing to study the Bible without the Adventist veil distorting my understanding of God's word. Truly, God meets our deepest needs when we trust in Him.

Finally ready

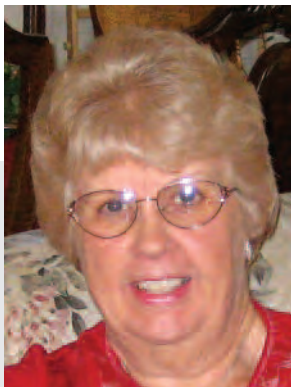
Later in the 1990's I was visiting the Damascus Road Adventist church in Damascus, Maryland, and the pastor, Richard Fredricks, told me about Dale Ratzlaff and Life Assurance Ministries. I called Dale; he was very gracious and suggested I read two of his books, *Sabbath in Crisis* (now called *Sabbath in Christ*) and *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*. I agreed, and he mailed them to me. These books were a huge help to me in understanding what the Adventists believe and what the Bible really teaches.

The LAM Publications website was a gold mine of information. Three more books I ordered from that website helped me resolve some of the earlier red flags that had begun to disturb me in the 1980's when I was in Loma Linda: *Prophetess of Health* by Ronald Numbers, *The White Lie* by Walter Rae, and Desmond Ford's book about the investigative judgment.

Finally, I told my husband I was ready to find a Sunday church to attend. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! He was jubilant.

Finding a church took some time. We visited different churches each week until we went to a Calvary Bible Church. This was the one! The pastor was preaching on end time prophecies—just what I needed to hear. I was like a sponge

soaking up all these wonderful Christian teachings from the Bible. There I first heard a teaching on the rapture, a new concept for me.



Eunice Sellers left Adventism in the mid 1980's while living in Loma Linda. Although she did not attend any church for a few years, she loved the Lord and was praying He would guide her in seeking the truth in His written word. In 1989 she married a Christian man and moved to Pennsylvania. The Adventist veil lifted for her in 1992 when she was studying the covenants, the investigative judgement and end-time prophecies. Six years ago she moved back to Redlands, California, to be near her daughter and two grandchildren. She also has two sons and four grandchildren who still live in the East. Today Eunice is a member of Trinity Church and holds onto these verses: "For I know the plans I have for you" (Jer. 29:11), and "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom.5:8).

Calvary Bible became our home church; the people were friendly, and we liked the service and the pastor's teachings. It was a perfect match.

In 2002 I requested that my name be added to the *Proclamation!* magazine mailing list. What a gold mine of information to help transitioning Adventists! Of course, it was through this publication that I first met Colleen and Richard Tinker. Little did I know these two precious people would become so important to me in my future.

Unfortunately, in 2006, my husband, who taught me so much, went to be with his Lord and Savior. While the months following his death were very sad for me, I was comforted in knowing that someday I would see him again and be with the Lord, too.

The Lord still had a lot to teach me. I moved back to California a year later to be near my daughter and two grandchildren. This move back to Redlands, California, was perfect—except that I left two sons and four grandchildren behind in the East. When I arrived, however, I already knew I wanted to go to Trinity Church because I had visited there several times when I had come to visit my daughter.

I have been so blessed at Trinity. Over the next six years I soaked up Pastor Gary Inrig's weekly expository preaching from God's holy word, and I dived into the inductive Bible studies written and taught by his wife, Elizabeth, for the women of Trinity. I have met wonderful Christian ladies in my women's Bible study small groups, and I have learned so much from all these dear people. I praise the Lord for Richard and Colleen Tinker and their leadership of the Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF). The Friday night Bible Studies and the Sunday lunches are special times with people of all ages who have become my family in Christ, giving me lots of love and support. I truly treasure this family as well as my Trinity family.

Truth that defines my life

I like Jesus's announcement of who He is: I AM (Jn. 8:58). That says it all.

Another Scripture passage I hold dear is, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

This gift can never be earned by doing good works. It is free to us, but it was costly to God, who gave His beloved Son. Jesus has already paid the penalty for our sins!

If there is anyone reading who has not received this free gift of eternal life, I encourage you to ask Him for it right now. He will gladly give it to you.

It's very simple: believe, receive (Acts 16:31). Do it! †

Fundamental Belief #7. Nature of Man

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under God. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment.

Orthodox Christians would all agree that man and woman are created in the image of God, created for the glory of God, and are called to love Him and to love one another. Orthodox Christians would also agree that God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself.

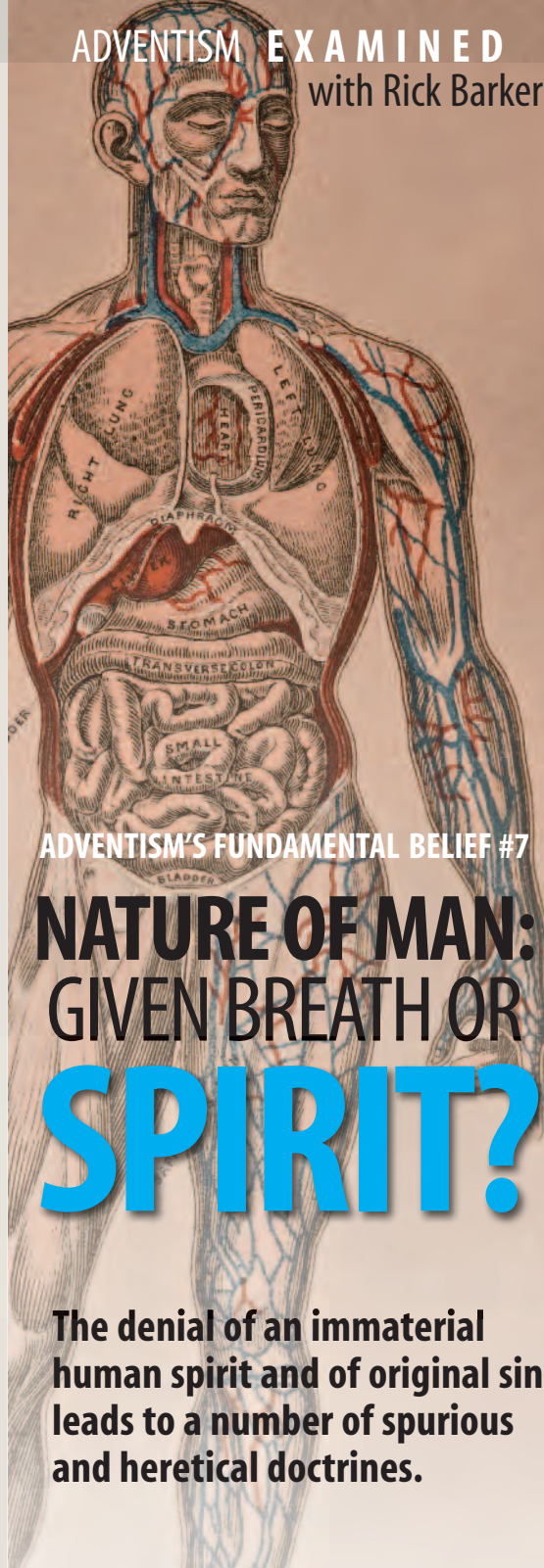
There will be some difference of opinion within Christianity, however, regarding the emphasis on free will in the first two statements of this passage. Nevertheless, these statements are not outside of the range of beliefs found within orthodox Christianity.

This fundamental belief, however, claims that each person is an indivisible unity of body, mind and spirit. This claim is strongly countered in Scripture in passages stating that the spirit returns to God or is being commended to God.

Psalm 104:29: “You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire and return to their dust.”

Ecclesiastes 12:7: “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

Luke 8:54-55: “He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Child, arise!’ And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat.”



ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #7

NATURE OF MAN: GIVEN BREATH OR SPIRIT?

The denial of an immaterial
human spirit and of original sin
leads to a number of spurious
and heretical doctrines.

Adventists claim the spirit is one's “breath” or “life force”, but Scripture denies this interpretation as well: “He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’” (Jn. 11:33b-34).

Moreover, this belief statement distorts the result of the fall. Notice carefully what the section says and, even more importantly, what it doesn't say. It says that we are born with weakness and tendency toward sin; it does not say that we are born in sin (Isa 51:5), that we are dead in our sin (Eph. 2:1), that we are fully condemned as a result of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:18).

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” (Is. 51:5).

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

“So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom. 5:18).

The denial of an immaterial human spirit and of original sin leads to a number of spurious and heretical doctrines. First is the idea that Jesus was born with a sinful (or fallen) nature but did not sin. The corollary to this teaching is that man can also learn to live without sinning. This doctrine also denies any real change in us as a result of the new birth; if we were the same as Jesus before our new birth, there is no reason for a literal change in us as a result of that birth. There is no understanding that we are actually born dead spiritually before we are made alive through rebirth in Jesus. †

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CONTEXT

COLLEEN TINKER

A couple of months ago I read an article entitled “Walter Martin Was Wrong: A Critique and Alternative to the Counter-Cult Approach to Cults” by John Morehead. Now, I believe Walter Martin was wrong about Adventism (see Stephen Pitcher’s story in this issue of *Proclamation!*), but I reacted strongly against Morehead’s article.

I acknowledge that Morehead is a prominent figure in his field; he is the director of the Western Institute for Intercultural Studies and Custodian of the Evangelical Chapter of the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy. Nevertheless, I believe he misses the true need and the desperation of those who are bound in false gospels.

In a nutshell, Morehead disagrees with Walter Martin’s “counter-cult” method of summarizing a cult’s aberrant beliefs and contrasting them with what the Bible says about the same doctrines. This method is sometimes called the “heresy-rationalist” approach, and Morehead rejects it as unnecessarily “hostile and confrontational.”

Morehead acknowledges that former cult members often validate Martin’s method. Nevertheless, Morehead dismisses such testimonies as “anecdotal” and thus unreliable, and he argues for a different way to engage with “new religious movements” (the term now replacing the old “cult” label because it is less marginalizing). Instead of “counter-cult” strategies of theological comparison, Morehead advocates what he calls “cross-cultural missiological approaches.”

In a cross-cultural model, new religions are not seen primarily through a “lens of theological heresy”; instead, they are viewed as “dynamic religious cultures.” Therefore, instead of contrasting the truth of the gospel with a cult’s destructive beliefs, Christians are encouraged to attempt “to contextualize the gospel within the subculture of the new religions.”

Truth or syncretism?

I believe that Morehead is wrong. I understand his concern that the doctrinal, rationalist approach may sometimes be abrasive and offensive, and I agree that some people do exhibit a

counter-productive arrogance when they confront the cults. Arguments alone do not change minds. His cross-cultural solution, however, misses the point. There actually is absolute truth; God has given us His Word, and it is living and relevant for all people in all generations. Morehead, on the other hand, seems to elevate cultural sensitivity and gospel contextualization above preaching Christ and Him crucified.

To be fair, I believe that some gospel contextualization is necessary when introducing Jesus to people who have no prior knowledge of Christianity or Scripture. For those caught in cults that grow up on the fringes of Christianity, however, only the completed work of Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection offers them freedom. Contextualizing the gospel inside a false religion too easily creates a kind of syncretism, and its prisoners can remain as bound as if they had never heard the gospel.

Morehead appeals to “the neglected example of Jesus” to build his case for a more culturally sensitive approach. Using John 4:40-42 as his reference, he describes Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well as perhaps the most powerful example of Jesus’ demonstration of “mutual exchange, patience and respect, and a willingness to listen as well as speak.” He notes that the Samaritans and the Jews disagreed on the proper place to worship as well as on what constituted Scripture. Yet Jesus, Morehead says, “does not denigrate either Samaritans or the religious doctrines of the Samaritans,” and he suggests that evangelicals employ this culturally sensitive model themselves when they talk to people of other faiths.

In fact, Morehead’s citation of John 4:40-42 is only a fragment of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman. These verses say, “So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”

Jesus’ actual conversation with the Samaritan woman is recorded in John 4:7-26. Morehead is wrong that Jesus took a

REALIZATION

WHAT FORMER ADVENTISTS DON'T NEED

non-critical approach to the woman at the well. He quickly revealed her sin—in an amazingly compelling way and without shaming her—but He clearly declared she had had five husbands and was living with one who was not. He did expose her religion as false and cast doubt on her own behaviors and beliefs by telling her that salvation was from the Jews (a pretty culturally insensitive and divisive statement by Morehead's standards), and declaring that, unlike the Jews, the Samaritans worshiped what they did not know.

Moreover, Jesus was doing far more than arguing the Samaritan woman into the right religion; He was declaring Himself to be God. She realized that in order to know what He knew about her He had to be the Messiah (v. 29). Moreover, He was revealing Himself and preparing the Samaritans for their not-too-distant role in forming the church in Acts 8. The story of Jesus with this woman is not an exercise in non-judgmental cultural sensitivity at all.

What we need

As a former member of a new religion, I say the rational approach is both scriptural and mandatory. If we who were shaped by false gospels don't have a way to understand why we feel such dissonance and craziness, we can't find a good reason to go through the loss, pain, shame, and blame we experience when we leave. There is a subjective component that we need, however, and Morehead completely misses it. People who have been shaped by a false gospel are often victims of abuse, and we need Christians to understand this fact. I realize that this statement is really strong, but I have come to believe deeply that it is true.

The spiritual abuse that almost inevitably accompanies a false gospel and a false god warps one's entire approach to life. Because false religions are not based on truth and reality, they breed manipulative enmeshment; they permit interpersonal transgressions because there is no accountability and no ground of truth to teach a person that, for example, being molested or physically traumatized does not equal honoring one's parents.

They create fears and aversions from earliest childhood because the prophet's pronouncement that meat eating will prevent people from being taken to heaven without dying, for instance, trumps the Bible's statements that Jesus declared all foods clean (Mk. 7:19) and that it is a doctrine of demons to forbid the eating of foods (1 Tim. 4:1-4). False religions establish cycles of co-dependence and hostility. Families' existence and success within the group depend upon looking good. Over-achieving, shame, guilt, fear—all these things drive parents who need their children to make them "look good," and they in turn end up creating traumatized offspring who perpetrate the same sorts of manipulation on their own children.

In our 15 years of working with people exiting Adventism, Richard and I have found the prevalence of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse on top of the obvious spiritual abuse to be shocking—if only it weren't so "normal."

So, what do we need?

First, we need to know Scripture. We need Christians to be able to engage with us in Bible study and to give us rational, biblical explanations showing that our cultic beliefs are wrong, and why. Cognitive knowledge of truth is necessary in order for us to be able to know we aren't crazy and to know how and why we can and should leave our religion and its entire subculture.

Second, we don't need to be offered a rationale for staying in a false religion. Leaving is hard because we have been both deceived and traumatized by the real fear of permanent loss and isolation from all we have loved. The divisions that develop between those who leave for the sake of Jesus and their loved ones who remain in the religion usually don't resolve but grow worse with time. Former cultists are trauma victims who lose all that was familiar to them, including their emotional support, their family members still in the cult, and sometimes their employment.

Third, we need Christians to understand that cults do two things: they both attract and create trauma victims. People ministering to cult members need to understand that they can't accommodate the cultist's attachments and cultural entrenchment. People in false religions need reality, not respectful cau-

tion. They need the sort of direct, truthful exposure Jesus gave the woman at the well—without anger or shaming. And evangelicals ministering to people caught in cults need to understand that they need Jesus. Pure and simple—people in new religions need to know Jesus and the gospel. Furthermore, they need to know that the “unpacking” only starts there. Once a person learns the truth about Jesus, He shows them the truth about their lives. The process of examining and healing from one’s past is just beginning. Yet knowing Jesus is worth it all.

Where do we go when we leave?

Because I have experienced the loss, grief, and trauma of leaving Adventism and of discovering that what I once believed about God, salvation, and myself was untrue, I know that the postmodern emphasis on cross-cultural sensitivity does not offer true hope to people caught in cults.

So, what do we do when we begin to see how painful and confusing our lives really were?

Being made spiritually alive finally gives us the clarity to acknowledge what shaped us. In fact, the pain of reality sometimes becomes overwhelming; it is only because we have Jesus’ life and forgiveness and His indwelling Spirit that we can address our sin and the sins done against us.

When we leave Adventism as newly born Christians, we don’t yet have a biblical worldview. We have begun to know Jesus, but we have no internal compass by which to gauge which new ideas or practices are “safe” and which are not. At this point, many of us fall prey to the first compelling Christian teacher we encounter. If people quote Scripture to support doctrines, formulas, ways to pray, or methods of increasing our spiritual maturity, we think they are “safe.” After all, the teacher presents himself as an authority and underscores his points with proof texts.

How can we know what—and whom—to trust?

Ultimately, we have to rely on the Lord Jesus to teach us what His Word means and how we apply it to our lives. God sends teachers as one of His gifts to the body of Christ, but we as His children must test every teacher against His Word. We have to be like the Berean Jews described in Acts 17:10-11. They received the Word eagerly as Paul taught them, but they didn’t just take his word at face value. They searched the Scriptures (for them, that meant the Old Testament) to be sure that what Paul was telling them was right (also see 1 Thess. 5:21-22).

A faithful teacher of God’s Word will never ask us to believe his teaching or explanations without encouraging us to go to Scripture ourselves and check out what he (or she) says. We who have come out of false teaching have only one way to know what is true: we have to immerse ourselves in Scripture and ask our Father to teach us what is real.

We can trust the Holy Spirit who has indwelt us to teach us. Sometimes a passage or a subject seems unclear to us, but that lack of complete understanding does not mean God’s Word has failed us or is in error. What we must do in those situations is to trust God and wrestle with the Word. We have to know that

every word Scripture says is accurate, and the words convey their normal meanings according to the established rules of grammar. We must pray and ask God to show us what He wants us to know, and sometimes we have to trust God without completely resolving every question. As we trust Him and trust every word He says, He shows us how to apply His truth to our lives.

Watch out for these

There are several categories of teaching that those transitioning out of Adventism must question. I want to briefly examine four of them, with an overall caveat: proof-texting is the stuff of cultic indoctrination. Without exception, false teaching that masquerades as Christian will bolster itself with proof texts, and we can never assume that because someone gives us a text, we can trust his agenda. Before we believe any preacher or teacher, we must examine the context of the entire chapter, if not the entire book, from which the cited passage comes. A proof-text is invalid if it’s used to teach something different than the original passage was meant to convey to its first readers.

One category of false teaching—which has the potential to derail us subtly but profoundly—is a return to works disguised as spiritual growth. Within Christianity, this agenda is not generally taught as a means of being saved (or justified); instead, it is taught as a means of sanctification. Proponents of this type of teaching will appeal to passages such as James 2:14-20, saying, “Faith without works is dead,” or to verses such as Psalm 46:10, which asks us to “be still, and know that I am God.” Using these texts, they will suggest “formulas” for good works designed to discipline one’s mind and desire to be selfless, compassionate, meditative, internally quiet, and persistent in seeking to experience and to practice the presence of God.

In context, however, James is discussing the result of God working inside a believer to produce His fruit; he is not advocating doing good works in order to develop faith. If the good works spring from us, they are not the works God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10). If, on the other hand, we trust Him and surrender our desires and temptations and dreams to Him, He will produce good works that demonstrate true faith. James is saying simply that when we believe God, as did Abraham, we will do God’s will as He has revealed it. If we are not submitting to God’s will and Word, our professed faith is suspect.

Even more surprising is the context of Psalm 46:10. This is the next-to-the-last verse in a psalm extolling God as our refuge, fortress, and strength. The psalmist is not asking us to practice silence and hear God in the inner stillness. In context, he is reminding us that God is the one who desolates the earth, who causes wars to cease, who breaks chariots and shatters spears. It is God who protects us and destroys the enemy; we are simply to be still while He fights for us. This psalm emphasizes what Moses said to Israel as they stood on the shores of the Red Sea: “The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent” (Ex. 14:14).

We are sanctified exactly the same way we are saved: by trusting Jesus and submitting to Him. We give up our right to manage our own spiritual growth. Instead, we submit our struggles to Him and surrender our desired outcomes to His will and Word. We trust Him with the big picture, and we submit to His Word so we can take the next right step. Our sanctification, like our justification, is God's work; He does this work as we trust Him and surrender our control to Him.

Commanding God's power

Another false teaching is the Word-Faith movement in its various manifestations. This misunderstanding of how to exer-

God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

The belief that we can command God's power on our behalf, moreover, is not taught anywhere in Scripture. We submit to God's power; He does not submit to our demands. Isaiah said, "You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, 'He did not make me'; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding?'" (Is. 29:16). Paul quotes part of this passage in Romans 9:20 after he asks, "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" Job also learned this important lesson. At the end of the book of Job, after God has turned the tables and asked Job where he was when God made everything on the

Closely related to the Word-Faith movement is the "spiritual warfare" approach. In this case, however, the practitioner takes the position that whatever our persistent temptations and struggles are, a demon is probably behind them. Spiritual-warfare prayer addresses a demon that's identified as the source of the problem and commands it to leave. Unfortunately, such interventions tend to leave people in a worse condition, long term, than at first.

cise God's power in one's life assumes that God wants our happiness and will give us all our dreams if we just believe. Psalm 37:4 is one of the texts this movement misunderstands: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." Another text they use outside its context is Mathew 21:21-22 where Jesus says "whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Faith, however, is not just believing something will happen. Biblical faith is trusting Jesus, being alive in Him, and being submitted to His will. This passage is about trusting God, not about deciding one wants something and commanding God's power to make it happen.

Jesus never promised us that we would prosper materially or be healed of every disease, nor did He promise that our lives would be happy and we would be safe from all harm. Jesus said, rather, that those who leave parents, families, and property for His sake would receive a hundredfold in "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands"—but here's the rest of His promise—"with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mk. 10:30).

Paul, moreover, was thankful that for the sake of Christ he was content "with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Furthermore, in this very passage Paul says that God gave him "a messenger from Satan" (v. 7) to harass him so he would not be conceited because he had been taken to the third heaven and had seen things he was not permitted to tell. He begged God three times for Him to remove this torment, but

earth, Job the righteous repented and admitted he had spoken of things he did not understand. "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:1-6).

God is holy and omnipotent; we are His creatures. He is sovereign, and He glorifies Himself through us as we submit to Him. We never command God.

Directing demons

Closely related to the Word-Faith movement is the "spiritual warfare" approach. In this case, however, the practitioner takes the position that whatever our persistent temptations and struggles are, a demon is probably behind them. Spiritual-warfare prayer addresses a demon that's identified as the source of the problem and commands it to leave.

Unfortunately, such interventions tend to leave people in a worse condition, long term, than at first. To be sure, demonic harassment is real; nevertheless, when people who have suffered trauma are "exorcised" instead of having their trauma addressed, they are only re-abused. The biblical examples of casting out demons occurred not in cases of persistent sin or emotional distress; they occurred in cases of actual possession by a demon—and a demon cannot ultimately control a believer who has submitted himself to the Lord Jesus in trust and faith.

Jesus Himself explained that if a person who is delivered from a demon but whose "house" is left empty will find that the demon will return with "seven other spirits more wicked than

itself.” Being delivered of a demon leaves a person vulnerable to far greater torment if he is not filled with the Holy Spirit. That demon could not re-enter the house and take up residence if the Holy Spirit were there (Mt. 12:43-45).

Believers, on the other hand, must be willing to repent and own their own sin. If a person has persistent temptation and sin, blaming demons transfers the guilt from the person to a non-human party. Instead, repentance and submission to the discipline and comfort of our Father and to His will as revealed in His Word is our proper response to sin. If a believer was involved with demonic influence before trusting Jesus, his proper response is to acknowledge that he was involved with evil and to repent of it, giving himself to the Lord Jesus and surrendering the attachment to Him, asking God to deliver him from it.

To be sure, Satan and his demons are real, and we are commanded to resist him (Jas. 4:7). Jesus also gave us a spiritual warfare prayer to pray to our Father: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:13). The Bible never instructs nor gives an example of a believer assessing what spirits might cling to him from his or her family, nor does it even suggest that we resolve our sin or emotional issues by commanding demons to leave. We are to confess our sin, and He is faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us from our unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9). We, not demons, are responsible for our sin.

Finally, Jesus’ promise to those who are broken and hurting is His fulfillment of Isaiah 42:3 as recorded in Matthew 12:18-21: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Free grace

There is one more heretical teaching that has grown in popularity among former Adventists. This teaching comes under the category of “free grace,” although specific teachers vary in how they teach it. One of the variations circulating among many former Adventists today is that when we are born again, we are completely “new,” and no sin remains in us. We not only have imputed but imparted righteousness. This teaching insists that God does not just see us as righteous, but we actually are intrinsically righteous. The sin in the flesh described in Romans 7, then, is an external power that tempts our flesh. It is not actually still in our mortal flesh as Paul declares.

Moreover, this theology insists that the new covenant is completely new and different from the old covenant. It does not explain that the Lord Jesus actually lived out

and fulfilled every single shadow of the old covenant and has become the embodiment of all sacrifice, righteousness, and salvation that God promised to Israel. This heresy teaches that if we are merely hidden in Christ and God sees Jesus’ perfection when He sees us, then our righteousness is a “legal fiction”.

This teaching sounds good on the surface because it insists we are completely secure in our salvation. Under the surface, however, it denies the biblical truth that our flesh is sinful and at war with our new hearts. Moreover, because this teaching denies Jesus’ intimate connection to the Old Covenant as the embodiment of all its shadows, it fails to see Him as our complete Substitute. Moreover, it denies that Jesus’ own words apply to us as post-cross Christians.

Yet the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the gospels to record Jesus’ words for the church. They were not books written as part of the Old Testament but as part of the New. Christians, to be sure, do not obey the Pharisees and perform the works of the law now that He has fulfilled it. Rather, Jesus’ teachings show how He became the fulcrum in all history, the one in whom all the righteous requirements of the law were fulfilled. Even more, they reveal Jesus’ true identity as the Messiah and explain that He is the Life and the Light of the world, the One in whom we have life and forgiveness of sins. He is our righteousness.

Conclusion

As people who have been rescued by the Lord Jesus from a lethal false gospel, we know that cross-cultural attempts to contextualize the true gospel within our old worldview would not have given us life. Only God’s gospel, as lived out in the Lord Jesus and as revealed in His Word, has the power to free us.

Even though we are bombarded with attractive deceptions and proof texts luring us into new interpretations and practices after we find Jesus, we are not helpless against them. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, giving us His wisdom and discernment and teaching us God’s Word. We have the finished work of Jesus that has broken the curse of death, forgiven our sin, and seated us with Him at the Father’s right hand (Eph. 2:4-7).

We have absolute truth revealed in Scripture, and only God’s Word has the power to pierce the veil of deception and reveal Jesus. Only God’s Word can show us how to trust Jesus, to grow, and to honor Him.

It is God’s Word, not social relevance, that releases us from hopeless despair.

It is Jesus who saves us and reveals the truth about our lives as He teaches us how to live according to His Word.

It is objective reality, not a contextualized gospel, that offers the only hope of rescue from the stranglehold of a cult. †



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I sat in church wondering, “Can God use a broken, grieving woman for His glory?”

Just minutes before, someone had stood on the church platform and had shared how he had come to Christ. He spoke of seeing the joy in a Christian brother and sister that had led him to desire the joy they knew. The new believer said, “They were so happy, and I wanted that, too.”

Internally, I groaned, “Lord, I’m sad, I’m hurting, and days are spent in tears. Can I not be used to bring others to You, even in the midst of my tears?” I feared my mourning would render me ineffective for God.

Psalm 42:3a described my life, “My tears have been my food day and night.” Mourning had become like breathing to me, and I felt isolated and guilty for my tears. My mourning was over things others couldn’t even imagine.

Several weeks went by after that Sunday, and one day I read a quote on the Former Adventist Forum (FormerAdventist.com) written by Ellen White, the prophetess of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen was reprimanding a woman for grieving the recent death of her husband. In fact, Ellen White used her own experience of losing her husband to give the widow some advice.

The quote was reprehensible. She wrote, “It is sometimes hard for me to preserve a cheerful countenance when my heart is rent with anguish. But I would not permit my sorrow to cast a gloom upon all around me. Seasons of affliction and bereavement are often rendered more sorrowful and distressing than they should be, because it is customary to give ourselves up to mourning without restraint. By the help of Jesus, I determined to shun this evil; but my resolution has been severely tested. My husband’s death was a heavy blow to me, more keenly felt because so sudden. As I saw the seal of death upon his countenance, my feelings were almost insupportable. I longed to cry out in my anguish. But I knew that this could not save the life of my loved one, and I felt that it would be unchristian to give myself up to sorrow. I sought help and comfort from above, and the promises of God were verified to me. The Lord’s hand sustained me. It is a sin to indulge, without restraint, in mourning and lamentation. By the grace of Christ, we may be composed and even cheerful under sore trial” (*Selected Messages 2*, p. 267).

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

I sat in church wondering, “Can God use a broken, grieving woman for His glory?”

I was horrified. In fact, in the context of the book, the letters published both before and after the one quoted above were disturbing. In one letter she tells a man who lost his wife that she sought God in prayer about his loss, and she knew from God that the deceased wife was a part of the 144,000. I wondered how Ellen White could know who was a part of the 144,000. Furthermore, how could she know for sure this woman would be in heaven? Had she read her heart? Only God can do that!

On another page of this collection of writings, Ellen White does say that it is not a sin to weep. Two pages later, however, she calls unrestrained mourning and lamentation a sin. These statements appear to be in contradiction!

As I thought about what I was reading, I remembered a Christian woman telling me of a similar experience. She had a friend who had just lost her husband, and someone told her that her tears meant she wasn’t fully trusting in Jesus. The Christian woman vehemently told me, “That advise was straight from the pit of hell!”

I began to wonder how Ellen White’s influence and my Adventist upbringing had contributed to my feelings of guilt when I would cry or grieve.

Other former Seventh-day Adventists have reported a similar reaction of guilt to feeling negative emotions. One person writes, “My mother taught me it was a sin to be angry.” Another said candidly, “Even today, after many years of knowing better, I still have a struggle showing my real emotions. Others have trou-

Continued on next page

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ble knowing whether I'm experiencing great joy or undergoing sorrow or feeling pain of any kind. While it is likely a part of my own personality, it is obviously also related to how I was raised as an Adventist" (Former Adventist forum).

Ellen White's quotes above clearly teach that Christians are to restrain sad or negative emotions and purposefully display positive ones, even if one's heart is breaking. This advice, however, is dishonest and unbiblical.

Another former Adventist shares her childhood experience with feeling sad: "If I was crying and sad over something, I could only cry for a short time before I was told to 'put on a happy face' and move on. I was also told that Ellen White said that some things were 'for Jesus' ears only.'"

Grief a sin?

In preparation for this article I watched an interview with Steven Curtis and Mary Beth Chapman. They tragically lost their little adopted girl when their biological son accidentally ran over the child when she ran out to meet her big brother as he drove up their driveway. In the taped interview, Steven and Mary Beth portrayed their grief in real and honoring ways. There was nothing contrived or put on as these dear parents shared their loss and their hope in Christ. Openly they admit-

**Mourning will
someday turn
to dancing for
those who have
placed their
faith in Jesus.**



ted that some days were good and some days were not good. In their grief they had yelled and questioned God. They were mourning, and yet they were still trusting Jesus. They grieved with hope. Tears trickled down my cheeks as I watched the interview. It reminded me of righteous Job's grief. He questioned God; he railed in his grief, but he was found to be without sin. It was Job's friends God reprimanded.

Then Steven Curtis Chapman mentioned a Scripture passage I had been pondering: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

This Scripture provokes much thought. Christ is acquainted with grief. Before He went to the cross He said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mt. 26:38). Scripture records that Christ fell with his face to the ground (Mt. 26:39) as he crumpled under the weight of his sorrow. Three times Christ asked for "this cup" to be taken from Him. He lamented, and in anguish He prayed so earnestly that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Lk. 22:44). Christ understands deep sorrow. He mourned without restraint. If anyone knows what a person needs in deep sorrow, it is Christ.

Ellen White's statement that experiencing unrestrained grief is a sin contradicts the Scriptures that portray Christ's grief. Jesus, the Son of Man, was sinless. Ellen White's calling unrestrained grief a sin, therefore, is heretical. Jesus never sinned, but He felt sorrow so deeply that Scripture records He was close to the point of death.

I need to be very clear because the implications of this contradiction affect how I have been taught to understand my own life. Either Ellen White is lying, or the Son of God was a sinner. There cannot be a middle ground. Trying to find a way to harmonize Ellen White's condemnation of expressing grief with what Scripture records our sinless Savior experienced is like throwing dynamite at the very foundation of the gospel. If Ellen White is right, then Jesus sinned. Jesus, however, had to be without sin; otherwise, we have no hope. Jesus, though, was a man of sorrows (Is. 53:3). Ellen White is wrong.

To be fair, Ellen White describes Jesus' suffering in other of her writings, and she does not imply His suffering was sin. Nevertheless, her own writing contradicts itself. Expressing extreme grief cannot be a sin for herself and others but not a sin for Jesus.

Mourning in the Bible

In the Bible mourning and sadness were displayed, not hidden. During times of mourning people often wore sackcloth, an uncomfortable fabric which was made of goat's hair and caused skin irritation (Gen. 37:34; Ps. 35:13). Moreover, in Biblical times clothing was very expensive and valued. "So important were clothes that it was a sign of intense grief or mourning to tear them into pieces (Gen. 37:29; Job 1:20)" (Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, p. 17, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987).

Wailing was often an announcement to the neighborhood that someone had died (p. 71). Micah describes this wailing like the howl of a jackal and like the moan of an owl (Mic. 1:8). Often there was a specific time for mourning (Gen. 50:3; Numb. 20:29) when people wore the scratchy sackcloth and fasted. There were times when people cut themselves or shaved their heads as a sign for grief (Job 1:20; Jer. 41:5; 47:5; 48:37), although cutting oneself was forbidden by the law (Deut. 14:1). Putting ashes on a person's head was also a sign of grief (2 Sam. 13:19; Jer. 6:26; Job 2:12). In short, mourning was public in Biblical times and was never condemned as a sin.

There were, however, a few special times God did tell some people not to weep or mourn. These times are recorded in Nehemiah 8:9; Jeremiah 16:5; 22:10,18; 25:33; and Ezekiel

24:17, 23. Jeremiah, a prophet of God, was told not to mourn, marry or raise a family as a demonstration of the break in relationships which would come at the demise of Jerusalem. So great would the devastation of Jerusalem be that Jeremiah was told not to display normal emotion or grief. Jeremiah was to be a living example of the utter destruction and death that was coming to Judah's capital city. There would not be enough people to bury the dead.

Similarly, God told Ezekiel not to mourn the death of his wife as a demonstration of the prophesy of destruction on the Israelite people. Since Ezekiel did not display the normal grieving process, the people took note and asked Ezekiel to explain his prophesy.

These were special incidents, however, when God's message for the people was given through a prophet's acting out the judgment God was bringing on the land. These unique instructions not to mourn were exceptions, not the norm.

In Christ's Sermon on the Mount He specifically said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." "Blessed" in Greek is *makarios* and can depict someone who receives divine favor. "Mourn" in this verse is *pentheo* and can be translated "to lament, to bewail one's self".

The beatitudes seem to describe the internal attitude of a person, not one's external life. In other words, Christ was speaking of the heart. Many Biblical commentators, in fact, believe that this verse refers to people who are aware of their neediness. They are poor in spirit (unable to do right); they mourn (understand their inability to do right and are sad). They are meek (forgiving, for they themselves understand what it means to be forgiven), and they are merciful (for they understand what it means to receive mercy).

Hope for those who mourn

When we mourn we feel the pain that sin has brought. Sometimes we mourn our own inability to do right, and sometimes we mourn another's actions that hurt us. Still other times we mourn the effect of sin—death. To feel the reality of these things is to be grounded in the reality of the world we live in

and in our own neediness of a Savior. Those who have chosen to believe in the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, however, will not mourn forever (Rev. 21:4), but those who depend on themselves will mourn eternally (Matt. 25:46).

There is only one difference between those who will cease to mourn and those who will mourn forever. 1 John 5:11-13 tells us that those who have believed "in the name of the Son of God" have eternal life: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."

Revelation 22:15 tells us that those outside the city "are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." Every human in the history of the world has participated in at least one of the things practiced by those outside the city. Those who will be inside the city with the Lord are those who have mourned over their sin, have repented, and have been washed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus. They have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Have you mourned over sin? Do you see your utter need for a Sin Bearer? Have you received the cleansing of Jesus' blood? If you have never received Christ as your Savior, don't waste another minute, but repent of your independence from God and admit your desperate neediness for His saving mercy.

Mourning will someday turn to dancing for those who have placed their faith in Jesus. Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4:18-19 what was written in Isaiah. It reads, "The Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor" (Is. 61:1-3).

Blessed are those who mourn. He is faithful! †

Thank you for your help

Thank you so much for your wonderful response to Nicole Stevenson's appeal for financial support in the last issue of *Proclamation!* While we are still not completely out of the red, our financial situation is greatly improved, thanks to your generosity and to God's faithfulness. We thank Him for you and pray He will bless you and provide all you need in Jesus. We are privileged to partner with you in proclaiming the new covenant to those who are bound in a false gospel. Please continue to pray with us for God's provision and blessing for Life Assurance Ministries, and if He impresses you to give, we will gratefully thank Him for your gift.

New Bible study started in Loma Linda

If you are in the Loma Linda, California area, please join us on Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 8:30 for the new evangelical Bible

study, Loma Linda Word Search. Sponsored by Selah Christian Store and Life Assurance Ministries, this is an independent Bible study taught by Dr. Gary Inrig, the recent senior pastor of Trinity Church in Redlands, near Loma Linda.

Gary is leading an inductive study of the book of Colossians and is spending some time after each study answering questions from those attending. The studies are currently meeting at Suite V behind Selah Christian Store at 415 Tennessee St, Redlands, California, 92373.

For location updates and other information, visit LomaLindaWordSearch.com.



SIGNS IN THE STARS: GOD

MARTIN L. CAREY

The night was warm, and our group gathered expectantly, watching the desert sky. We looked past the dust and the distant light pollution, waiting to see something far beyond—and at that hour, the horizon began to glow with an unworldly splendor. This was not the harsh glow of civilization or the glimmer of dawn; it was the milky light of our home galaxy's 200 billion stars. At that moment we were surrounded with light, for our horizon was perfectly aligned with the plane of the galaxy. We could imagine ourselves standing on our tiny island of earth in a vast ocean of stars one quintillion miles across.

Our Milky Way galaxy is a flat disc 100,000 light years wide and one thousand light years thick. Every day, our earth rotates around to show us the entire Milky Way. Under a dark sky we might see its wide band, broken into foggy clumps, curving over our heads. Those glowing masses of light contain billions of separate stars so distant they appear as mist. In fact, even the clearest views of the Milky Way show only a fraction of what is there. Most of our galaxy's stars are obscured by clouds of gas and dust, hidden from even the greatest telescopes. To view a complete galaxy, we must go deeper.

For a few of us, galaxy hunting is a passion that drives us out into the wilderness where the wild things are. There the starry magnificence is accessible to everyone, and on a remote site with a large telescope, those “faint fuzzies” begin to reveal themselves as friends. We give them names such as “The Whale” and “The Silver Coin,” or even “The Mice.” Touring that distant but familiar galactic neighborhood was our travel plan that night in Joshua Tree as we gathered around the clunky 20” telescope.

We finally saw the Milky Way rise in the east, its cloudy arms stretching over the low mountains. They appeared motionless in the sky, as if long ago, great ocean waves were suddenly frozen. Astronomers say those foamy clouds are galaxy arms that act as “density waves,” clumping the stars together while they pass through.¹ Every moment, we in our solar system glide by the Orion Arm along with our neighborhood stars.

What would we find if we could visit those stars? We know they have planets of all types, but most of those planets and their stars are extremely hostile for life. Stars often have lethal levels of radiation and are either too cool or hot to support living things, while nearly all planets have the wrong kinds of orbits, the wrong composition, and no liquid water. If there is any sort of life out there, it is probably very rare, as shown in the movie *Privileged Planet*.²

Our planet is always moving, taking part in many celestial cycles all at once. Right now, our earth rotates once every 24 hours; our moon circles us every 29 days, and we orbit our star every 365 days. However, one galaxy rotation takes a bit longer. Our solar system family orbits the Milky Way's center at 515,000 mph. If that seems fast, consider how far those stars must travel for one galactic orbit. One complete lap around the galaxy's nucleus requires 200,000,000 years³—and remember, our great Milky Way is but one galaxy among billions.

Scripture and the stars

All this talk of time and distance can make one feel dizzy and insignificant, and the more many people learn about the stars, the more irrelevant Scripture seems. Where is the need for a Creator—or especially, for a Savior? Many look at the Bible writers as ignorant, primitive men who had nothing realistic to say about the universe. Ironically, for many people, these feelings of insignificance go hand-in-hand with an arrogant fatalism. Most people accept this crude logic: the universe is great; therefore human existence is meaningless. Even the brightest secular minds can only spout the conventional wisdom about our supposed “mediocrity”:

The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies. We are so insignificant that I can't believe the whole universe exists for our benefit.⁴

GOD'S WORD CANNOT FAIL

The conventional secular mind looks at the heavens and sees only the slow grind of celestial mechanics that, caring nothing for human suffering, will eventually carry us all into frozen oblivion. If we have ears to hear, however, we will heed Scripture's wisdom that warns us about taking our fragile lives for granted. This great surrounding ocean of stars constantly speaks to us; their wordless voices reach all the earth (Ps. 19:1-3). They confirm our place in the cosmos, not as chemical scum, but as beings privileged to know the eternal attributes of our Maker. A true knowledge of the stars replaces our arrogant "insignificance" with humble assurance. They speak of a Mind that is infinite, personal, and not indifferent to our sorrows. Let us abandon our pride and revel in the overwhelming vastness of the universe. We have been given a sign.

Just a little while ago in galactic time, an ignorant, primitive man of southeastern Mesopotamia stood out under the stars one night, and a voice suddenly spoke to him: "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them...so shall your offspring be" (Gen. 15:5). The voice promised to be that man's shield and great reward. That covenant was to be a never-ending, cosmic-sized blessing. Abraham believed, and his tiny faith was counted as cosmic-sized righteousness.

The fixed order

Long before men pondered the meaning of the stars, their deep purposes were fixed. "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years...'" (Gen. 1:14, 15). Since the beginning the cycles of light and shadow and the seasons of cold and heat have given us signs and numbered our days. Later, at Mt. Sinai, Abraham's children received an entire system of life built around new moons, sunrises, and sunsets to regulate their worship and to govern their nation.

Even though Israel broke their Sinai covenant with God and suffered many painful exiles and tears, the God of Abraham was

speaking to their suffering even before their Babylonian invasions and ultimate exile: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord" (Jer. 31:20).

How does the Lawgiver remember with mercy? He declares an unbreakable, permanent covenant, stronger even than the heavens, not like the weak Sinai covenant that Israel could break (vs. 32). Jeremiah 31 shows the new covenant's power:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33-34).

This covenant relies on God's choices and activities. For example, throughout Jeremiah 31 and 32 the phrase "I will" occurs over and over. It is God's willing and doing that drives the new covenant, so it cannot fail.

He will remember His people by forgetting their sins "after those days." None of their failures can end His original covenant to them, nor can men's decrees against Abraham's children terminate God's original promise. Over the past two millennia, men carrying the name of Christ have persecuted the Jews, attempting to nullify God's irrevocable calling (Rom. 11:29), but "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Rom. 11:2).

The strength of God's promise to Abraham, however, does not require us to make sharp distinctions between the promises to the Jews and those given to the church. We can join Paul in affirming that, "As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:28, 29).

ASTRONOMY IS A WONDERFUL SCIENCE, AND
EXPLORING BENEATH THE EARTH'S SURFACE YIELDS
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HOWEVER, IS THE GREATER SPLENDOR.

Currently, Abraham's physical descendants as well as the nations are in a general state of rebellion. This fact demonstrates that "God has consigned all to disobedience so that He may have mercy on all." Furthermore, God's mercy includes the fact that He will have "a remnant, chosen by grace" (11:6), and He will give them a "spirit of grace and pleas for mercy" (Zech. 12:10). Moreover, God has used the unchangeable "fixed order" of the heavenly bodies as the sign to show us how certain His promises are:

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord of hosts is his name: if this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever (Jer. 31:35-37).

The fixed order of the earth and all the galaxies testifies not only that God's word to Abraham and Israel is still in effect, but it also speaks to us Gentiles, those "afar off" who also are chosen by grace. God's promised Servant is for all people:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth (Is. 49:6).

Six hundred years later, Paul took the Servant's salvation message far and wide and confidently tells the Ephesians: "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

Here is hope for the despairing and alienated. We have been brought near by the blood of Christ, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14). Our lives don't dangle on the frayed ropes of our promises; they rest on the faithful life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. He has guaranteed the following: He will remember our sins no more (Jer. 31:34); He will cause us to know him personally (Jer. 24:7; 31:34), and "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever" (32:39). As a pledge, He has attached His faithfulness to the most dependable demonstrations imaginable—the motions of the entire cosmos.

We tend to think of divine signs as miracles that violate the laws of nature. Unless we see God interfering with His own nat-

ural order, we think we are not seeing Him at work. God, however, has purposefully embedded signs into nature that testify of His everlasting covenant that comes with a glory that never fades (2 Cor. 3:10,11).

The natural order is fixed, not because it is a perfect physical system, but because it is upheld by a covenant-keeping God. The fine tuning of gravity, the speed of light, and the various atomic forces allow life to continue and are kept by His word: "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). From the tiniest subatomic particle to the largest galaxy clusters, the fixed order of the heavens display His supremacy. God's divine decrees stabilize the whole creation, and God intends that we observe His glory and character in what He has made (Rom. 1:20). The continuity of nature testifies that God's new covenant is bound tightly to the power of His word and name. As Alexander MacLaren said,

God descends to ratify a bond with man. By it He binds Himself to give all possible good for the soul. And to confirm it, heaven and earth are called in. He points us to all that is august, stable, immense, inscrutable in the works of His hands, and bids us to see there His pledge that He will be a faithful God.⁵

The heights and the depths

The heavens declare yet another wonderful aspect of the new covenant. Not only does God guarantee His covenant will not fail, but His forgiveness is unbreakable also. Again, He swears an oath by Himself and declares its eternal certainty by comparing it to the unknowable breadth of creation:

Thus says the Lord: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the Lord (Jer. 31:37).

We will never know the limits of the cosmos, nor will God ever reach the limits of His mercy to those He forgives. Man's inability to know the limits of creation is a comforting sign for all those who put their trust in Him. Moreover, this unbreakable promise of God means that there can be no place in the entire cosmos where He is hoarding our sins. Anyone who teaches that God keeps a record of the believers' sins as "evidence," or that He will ever use forgiven sins against His own, makes God a liar.

Astronomy is a wonderful science, and exploring beneath the earth's surface yields useful knowledge of our planet. Knowing what God has done to show mercy to us, however, is the greater splendor. His covenant, underwritten by His own blood and sovereign grace, keeps we who are forgiven sinners from ever losing any promised blessing. The One who swore by Himself says:

...I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me (Jer. 32:40).

Which is easier to say?

The man lay still as he looked up through the falling chunks of dirt and dust where his four friends still held onto his ropes. As his rickety bed descended slowly into the darkened room, he heard

voices from shadowy figures crowding around. He didn't want their attention; people always said that his paralysis was caused by either his parents' sin or by his own. He knew he was not a righteous man, so this filthy bed might be exactly what he deserved. Then one day, when his friends told him stories of how this teacher wielded the power to help the desperate, he believed.

He saw the plain-faced man looking at him intently, as if he knew everything about him. The teacher said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (Lk. 5:20). The people in the room now became offended. "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Lk. 5:21). The desperate man felt a stab of joy and wondered, "Can I be healed?" But the teacher said to the men,

Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Rise and walk"? (Vs. 23).

This Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man, the Messiah in Daniel 7 who boldly approaches the Ancient of Days, receiving an eternal kingdom (Dan. 7:13, 14). And now He claimed the authority to forgive sin! Anyone can say to someone who hurts him, "I forgive you," but only God can truly forgive sins. All sins are ultimately against Him (Ps. 51:4). But now Jesus' critics hear Him speak the unthinkable:

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home" (Vs. 24).

The command surged through the man's body, and he leapt to his feet. The crowd drew back amazed, and a man shouted, "Glory to God!" Now people came all around to touch him, and together they were leaping and shouting and praising God. The shadowy men had disappeared.

The new covenant is not for the strong and capable or for those who can add their spiritual muscles to God's power. The new covenant kingdom is made up of the helpless and poor in spirit:

In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant... (Mic. 4:6, 7).

All the new covenant promises are summed up this way: "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Jer. 32:38). He made that promise to Abraham's children (Gen. 17:7, 8), and He gave it to us. What does it mean for God to be your God? It means that with all of His heart and soul (Jer. 32:41), He will draw you to Himself (Jn. 6:44), bring you to life (Eph. 2:1-5), and keep you following Him forever (Jn. 10:27-30). He will spare nothing to finish what He started, not even Himself (Rom. 8:32). Once our sins are forgiven, we will never lack for anything.

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Martin L. Carey grew up as an Adventist in many different places, including Tacoma Park, Maryland, Missouri, and Guam, USA. During daylight hours he works as a psychologist for a high school in San Bernardino, California. He is also a licensed family therapist. He is married to Sharon and has two sons, Matthew, 11, and Nick, 25. He continues to pine for clear, dark skies with eight different telescopes up to 20". Biblical research and classical piano take up his remaining energy. You may contact him at martincarey@sbcglobal.net.

Do not lose heart

Even so, as citizens of a broken world, we are subject to the bleak laws of nature. Sometimes we are even victims of natural or human evil, and we can be tempted to despair. Paul understood this temptation. After he met Jesus, he spent his days being pursued by mobs, only to survive floggings, stonings and shipwrecks. Yet he could say, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16).

Paul was not being renewed by health and prosperity secrets, but from God's power outside his battered body. His true, inner self, born of the Spirit, drank daily from the living drafts of God's promises. Like a fragile clay jar, Paul carried the treasure of the new covenant gospel not as a spiritual dynamo, but in personal weakness (vs. 7). Because Paul carried about in his body the dying of Jesus, he manifested His life (vs. 10), showing us by example that although our bodies crumble away, the strength we desperately need comes faithfully from God morning by morning, just for today.

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (vv. 4:17,18).

That night as our group stood in the Joshua Tree desert gazing at our own galaxy and into the deep space beyond, we saw God's signs to us. His word is absolute and cannot fail, and He has given us the fixed order of His creation as a sign to us that what He promises, He will do.

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:33). †

Endnotes

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Best in the millennium

I continue to be amazed that you are out there—in this day when even those who claim Scripture to be their guide are a jumbled mess of Buddhist passivity with endless boasting of their good works.

I've had no connection with Adventists in all my 70 years of life, but your obvious desire to know and proclaim the Way, the Truth, and the Life makes you the best Christian magazine published in this millennium!

WINNETKA, IL

Faultfinding lies

Your summer issue of *Proclamation!* was full of faultfinding lies. It is sickening!

Jesus is extremely angry with you lying devils. Hear what he says, “whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt.18:6).

Elaina Matthews has been led astray from one legalistic extreme to another totally un-Christian extreme. Her finding fault with Charles Wesley’s “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” illustrates the kind of fault finding your editors search for—faults that are built on lies!

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

It is a lie to accuse Adventists of changing the Charles Wesley poem.

The Adventist hymnal version is the original....

Your pictures of the clock watching man might be amusing to some, but it is a contemptuous lying illustration. Let me warn you with two Bible verses:

“Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous” (Ps. 31:18).

“I hate and abhor lying: [but] thy law do I love” (Ps.119:163).

LAKE ELSINORE, CALIFORNIA

True salvation only through the Word

The salient point in the article by Elaina Matthews is the power of

...your obvious desire to know and proclaim the Way, the Truth, and the Life makes you the best Christian magazine published in this millennium!

Scripture. For years, as I would explain to my wife what Scripture said and the freedom it gave us, she would nod her head in agreement, but she told me later that she would be thinking, “Sorry, Dear, it’s not as simple as that.” The teaching of the Adventist church and the false prophet who wrote the books by which they abide had reached so far down in her being that only her own reading of Scripture could drive it out.

When she was saved, she helped save her brother also. Her brother lives near their parents, and upon hearing the good news, he went to their house to testify to them. My mother-in-law went so far as to cover her ears as he shared the teachings of the Bible with them.

It is extremely difficult to reach people who have been brought up in such a spirit. The only solution, as your magazine states time and again, is self-study. We as Christians can help them along the

way, but true salvation seems to come only through the same source that saved you and me: the Word of God.

CHATTANOOGA, TN

Crazy

Send you money? You must think I’m crazy.

EVANSVILLE, IN

Happy to find you

Greetings from Buenos Aires, Argentina. I am very happy to have found you on the web. I read all the magazines and articles, both in Spanish and in English. I am an Evangelical Christian, and my girlfriend is Adventist. It is very difficult to talk about religion, and her family does not

accept our relationship. That is why *Proclamation!* magazines are of great help to me.

VIA EMAIL

Your idea of preaching

Is convincing Seventh-day Adventists that they are wrong your idea of preaching the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people? And in view of the fact that Christ said that this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to all the world and then the end would come, do you feel that He will return when you have convinced all 17,000,000-plus Adventist that they are wrong?

VIA EMAIL

Great issue

Just finished reading the summer issue of *Proclamation!* It was another great one with many thought-provoking articles....

The article “Are you led by the lesser light or *sola scriptura*?” could also have been titled “Are you led

by a flashlight or by the Son light?” Stephen Pitcher wrote, “In practice, Adventism uses her writings as if they are on a par with Scripture.” Many times her writings are quoted above Scripture.

I worked in evangelism for eight months before going to college, and when the topic of Ellen White came up in the evangelistic meetings, the evangelist would hold up the Bible high over his head and place his other hand lower down to show that her writings were not on par with Scripture. In our class the next day, someone asked why he had done this. The evangelist’s response was that EGW’s writings should be perceived that way at first, but this understanding would change once they became members of the church.

ONTARIO, CANADA

Satanic mail

[Name] died in April, 2013, remaining true to the truth of God’s remnant church, the Seventh-day Adventists, despite your deceptive teachings. Remove her name and this address from your mailing list. Your satanic mail is not wanted.

CAMDENTON, MO

Wonderful, liberating ministry

Thank you for the two books you sent me; I cannot begin to tell you how fascinating I found them. I have been an evangelical Christian all my life and just assumed Adventism was also—they just had the Sabbath and the diet rules. Your books, which I will keep for reference, have opened up an entire world to me of another cult...

Thank you all for this wonderful ministry of reaching these people as they exit; that would, of course, be a difficult thing to do.

LANDFALL, MN

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:

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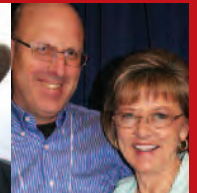
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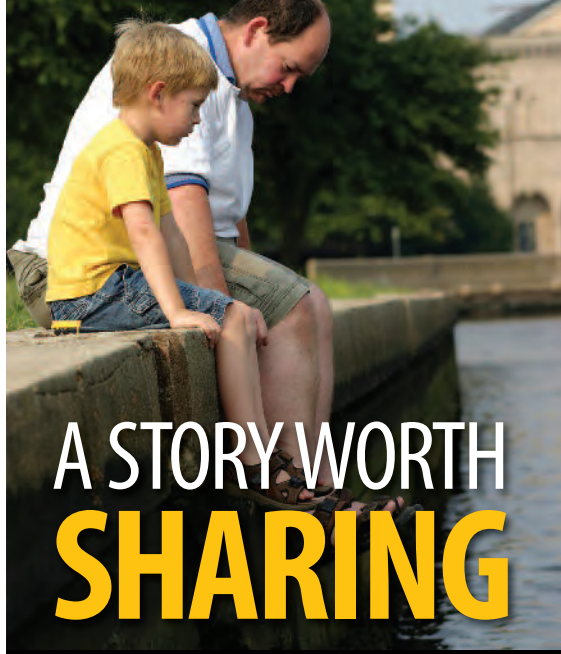
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THE LIFE AFTER WITH CHRIS LEE



A STORY WORTH
SHARING

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Today, witnessing to my faith means sharing the joy I've found in Jesus and the rest I've discovered in Him. It means relating why I am secure in the assurance of salvation.

Adventist schools I had attended, and so on.

Today, witnessing to my faith means sharing the joy I've found in Jesus and the rest I've discovered in Him. It means relating why I am secure in the assurance of salvation. Now, telling my story is narrating the events by which Jesus took me from darkness to light, taking my dead spirit and bringing it to regenerate life. It's telling about a life changed. It's telling about a life once steeped in legalism, fear, doubt, and shame, now transformed to a life of peace and contentment. It's telling about a renewing of the mind that causes me to grow ever closer in my thinking to the mind of Christ.

Let's face it, my old "faith story" really wasn't appealing to anyone. It was dead, lifeless, and devoid of hope. The authentic faith story that Jesus has given me today is the Good News made specific to one life.

It's all about how I was sovereignly gifted salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. It's about passing out of death and into life. It's about being given something wonderful and completely undeserved through absolutely no merit or action of my own. Now that's something appealing to get excited about. That's a story I can't help but want to tell to anyone who will listen.

So if you've always assumed that former Adventists are bitter people, stop for a moment and really listen to what they're saying. I think you'll find that, in most cases, they're people with incredibly sweet stories. They're simply awed to be living life in intimate relationship with Jesus. They're experiencing the joy of the life after. †

My wife and I recently helped our 17 year-old daughter move out of our home. It was a bittersweet experience. It was bitter because we've had to come to terms with the fact that our little girl isn't so little anymore. She's a few weeks away from being 18, a full-fledged adult in most states. She's ready, but it's still hard to see your child leave the nest. However, it would be just plain bitter if she were leaving because she hated our home, hated her family, and just wanted to go somewhere else, anywhere else. But that's not the case. Helping her move was also sweet because we knew that she was leaving for something wonderful. She's been given the gift of a free-ride university scholarship for a program into which she dearly desired admission. She left for something good. She left to pursue a great opportunity and a promising future.

So what does that have to do with the life after Adventism? Well, I'm often accused of being bitter. That might be a valid criticism if I had left simply because I disliked Adventist people or the Adventist culture and wanted to leave, but that's not the case. I left for something wonderful. I left because I had been given the free gift of a new life in Jesus. Leaving was bittersweet. I love the Adventist people and was at home in the culture, but I left for something good. Knowing and walking with Jesus is sweet. I think that fact comes through in the faith stories in this issue.

The term "faith stories" meant something very different to me as an Adventist. At that time in my life, witnessing to my "faith" meant telling others about Adventist beliefs, especially the Sabbath. Telling my story was about telling my Adventist story: why I was an Adventist, how long I had been an Adventist, how many generations before me were Adventists, which



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 ambulator@gmail.com.