

ADVENTISM'S GREAT CONTROVERSY: GOD NEEDS TO BE VINDICATED?

ProclamationMagazine.com

# Proclamation!

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS  
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS  
SABBATARIANS  
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

WINTER 2013  
VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4

ARE YOU FORMED BY DISCIPLINES?

AMAZED BY GRACE

ARE YOU BEING FORMED BY LAW?

RELATIONSHIP RESTORED

YOU ARE FORMED BY JESUS

THE TREASURES OF UN-WRAPPABLE GIFTS

WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

FOCUS ON GROWING IN CHRIST:

# WHO FORMS YOU?



COLLEEN TINKER

## Trusting the Potter

One of my meaningful possessions is a pottery vase one of my colleagues made for me around 1980 when I was teaching at Gem State Academy in Idaho. Frank was the choral director at the school, but he was also an expert potter. Watching Frank work his potter's wheel was my first experience seeing clay turned into vessels of art.

Dressed in a clay-colored smock, Frank would take lumps of wet mud and set them on his wheel. As his foot controlled the speed of the turning, his hands expertly shaped pots of all shapes and sizes



The potter then prepared mixtures of minerals and, with expert strokes, brushed color over the sides of the vases and delicately painted unique designs that characterized the individual pieces. These now-lovely creations, however, were still not complete. They went back into the

kiln for their glaze firing, this time to be transformed in temperatures ranging from about 2000°–2530 °F. In this intense heat, the clay became fused together—vitrified—and the glaze was cured.

When the heat-stressed pots finally cooled from this final firing, the potter's work was done. The finished pieces were perfected into enduring ceramic vessels that would withstand water, heat, cold, and hard knocks without losing any of their unique beauty. Their natures had been transformed below the visible surface.

When I look at the vase Frank fashioned for me, I realize that he designed, formed, and finished it himself. It bears his creative mark, and his signature is engraved in its base. Significantly, the vessel did nothing to help Frank perfect it into a mature pot. It simply yielded to the potter's hands.

In this issue we examine how the Lord Jesus not only brings us to new life but also sanctifies us—all without any help from us. To be sure, He prepares us for serving Him, but our response to Him is the result of His work in us, not the cause of it.

In our featured articles, Martin Carey discusses the role of spiritual disciplines, Rick Barker explains that we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and not works of law, and Dale Ratzlaff describes what it means to live as new covenant born-again believers. Lisa Winn shares her faith story, and Carolyn Macomber, Rick Barker, and Chris Lee contribute their regular columns.

We pray that you will grow to trust the Potter's hands as he holds and shapes you for His glory. †

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from the unformed earth: vases with tall, thin necks and perfectly formed lips; wide jars scribed with lines carved by Frank's fingernail as the pots spun on the wheel; small flowerpots and cups. Sometimes the emerging vessel warped; when that happened, Frank would squeeze the clay back into a shapeless lump and begin again.

When Frank finished shaping a pot, however, he was not done with it. To me, the vases seemed almost miraculous as they came off the wheel; where there had been only mud, suddenly there were art pieces of perfect symmetry and grace. To the potter, however, they were new pots that still needed maturing. Left alone, those vessels would eventually disintegrate back into dust, and their beauty would be lost.

At this point Frank began the process of perfecting his pots. He gently transferred the dried vases to a kiln where he subjected them to heat that rose gradually to over 1700 °F. During this process the clay changed. Organic materials trapped in it burned out; any trace of moisture evaporated, and the clay itself was sintered—its molecules began to stick together. Surprisingly, the vessels were still far from complete. Although their clay had become much harder, they were still not vitrified, or heated to the stage where the molecules began to melt together and harden into an enduring stone-like substance, impervious to water and resistant to breakage. Nevertheless, the sintered pots were ready for a transformation that would uniquely mark them; they were matured enough to receive a glaze.

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# WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

What is significant about the story of the magi?

**O**n the back window of a pickup I recently saw a decal which said, “Wise men still seek Him.” As I contemplated this excellent advice, I decided to do a little more study into the fascinating story of the magi recorded in Matthew 2:1-12.

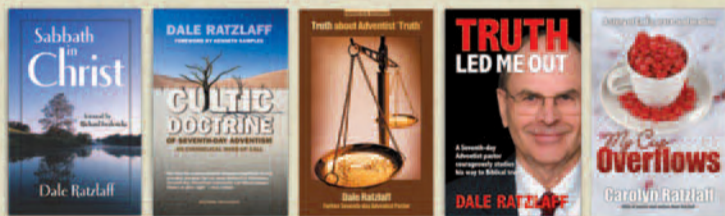
Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him” (Mt. 2:1-2).

“Magi” is a Persian word that referred to a special class of priests in the Persian empire. They were highly educated in all aspects of learning including astrology. In their day astrology was connected with man’s search for God. The ancients studied the skies in order to find the answers to the great questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Today, astrophysics is still searching for answers. Is there any evidence of life on Mars or somewhere else “out there”?

Most scientists today, however, are seeking to prove there is no God. In contrast, the ancient magi were seeking God. No one knows for sure what the mysterious star was that they obediently followed, but some believe the magi could have traveled a thousand miles on their quest to find this baby king.

How did they know the star would lead them to the recently born King of the Jews? These wise men may have had the writings of Daniel which he received from God during Judah’s exile in Babylon which extended into the first years of the Persian empire. One writer put it like this:

We know that the Jews were looking for a Messiah. We know that the Magi looked to the stars for guidance. We know that the Jews and the Magi had intermingled for at least 500 years. We know that the Magi would notice any new sign in the sky. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the Magi would travel to Jerusalem to greet this new Jewish king.



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 Adventism “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](http://Ratzlaf.com) or by phoning (928) 554-1001.

In answer to their question, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” the magi discovered that the birthplace of the Messiah was to be Bethlehem and not Jerusalem. As they went their way,

**Lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh (Mt. 2:9-11).** So what can we learn from the account of the magi?

- They studied to find the truth about God.
- They recognized the star was not usual. Like Moses at the bush that did not burn, it was outside their normal paradigm.
- They searched available records (perhaps the writings of Daniel) and inquired outside their religious traditions.
- They searched diligently, perhaps traveling about 1000 miles to Jerusalem.
- They asked questions of the religious leaders and discovered that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem as they had supposed.
- They continued to follow the star to their destination.
- They rejoiced at finding the Baby Jesus, and they poured out their treasures in worship.

Think of how many barriers they had to cross to get to Jesus. There was a culture barrier, a distance barrier, a language barrier, a racial barrier, and a religious barrier, not to speak of a hostile king and indifferent religious leaders. It wasn’t easy for them to find Jesus, but they did. If they found him, then so can you.

**And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jer. 29:13).**

Not only are we to seek God, but He is seeking us. That is what the Christmas story is all about!

**For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10).**

**Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11).**

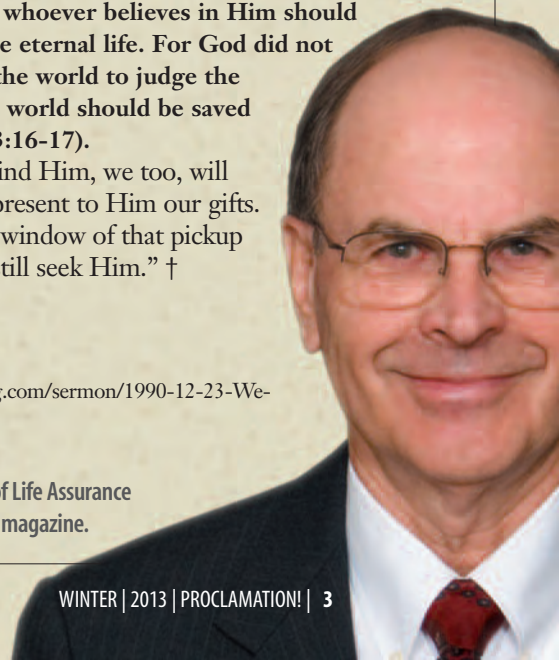
**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him (Jn. 3:16-17).**

Yes, and when we find Him, we too, will rejoice, worship, and present to Him our gifts. The decal in the back window of that pickup was true: “Wise men still seek Him.” †

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See Daniel 6.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1990-12-23-We-Three-Kings/>

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





# AMAZED BY GRACE

LISA WINN

**A**s a child, whenever I heard the hymn “Amazing Grace,” I wondered who Grace was and why she was so amazing. You may laugh, but even as a teenager, while singing this same hymn, I’d usually point to one of my friends and jokingly change the lyrics to, “...that saved a wretch like you!” I always believed in God, and I knew Jesus died for me; I just didn’t realize how much I needed saving. I thought that I was a pretty “good” person—I didn’t lie, steal, murder, or commit any other major sin. I thought sin was just something one did occasionally...not a chronic human condition.

My parents enrolled me in the Seventh-day Adventist school system, even though they didn’t fully believe the teachings of Ellen White. They had read many of the books and historical documents exposing her plagiarism and criticizing the doctrines of the early Adventist movement (such as the investigative judgment). Even so, my parents were uncomfortable letting go of their Adventist heritage and the concept of Sabbath-keeping, which seemed to them to be the one thing that Adventism had gotten right. I was taught many Adventist beliefs at school, but my family rarely went to church together. The end result was that I felt I had all the right doctrines and that I was lucky to be in the “remnant church”, yet I could not have told you what Ephesians was about, or whether the book of Hebrews was in the Old or New Testament! I would tell others that I believed the Sabbath was the correct day of worship, but I never truly kept it. I was no better than the whitewashed tombs in Matthew 23:27, “...which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.”

After college, I moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in the film industry. I began attending a nearby Adventist church for the sake of making friends, even though I knew through what my parents had shared with me that the Adventist church had some incorrect teachings. Initially I became quite involved, but because I did not believe Ellen White was a true prophetess, one of the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church, I couldn't be baptized; hence, I hit a glass ceiling in my ability to participate in ministry. After a while I became frustrated and drifted away from church. I was too afraid to go to a non-Adventist church that worshiped on Sunday and thought it would be better not to go at all! Without realizing it, I gradually put God out of my mind, an attitude which opened the door for me to pursue my own selfish desires.

### **Holy Spirit at work**

It didn't take long in the amoral, materialistic world of Hollywood for me to hit a low point and realize I was broken, lost, alone, and spiritually dead. It was then, when I was 26, that the Holy Spirit revealed to me my wicked, selfish, and prideful nature—not a nature that had developed because I had left church, or because I had committed any certain sin, but the nature that was always and is always there. I better understood what Jesus meant in Luke 7:47 when He said, "...he who is forgiven little, loves little." I saw that I had easily slipped away from loving God and Jesus because I had not realized how much I needed forgiving. For the first time, I found myself completely humbled before God. I realized my need for a Savior. I repented and prayed that God would help me learn more about him. I didn't yet understand exactly how forgiveness and salvation worked, or just exactly how I was supposed to follow Jesus, but I wanted to learn.

I knew from my past experience that I couldn't fully commit to the Adventist church. I didn't want anything holding me back in my faith, so even though it felt wrong to go to church on Sunday, I desperately wanted to hear what other Christians believed. My roommate at the time invited me to Grace Community Church in Sun Valley. I felt comfortable there because, culturally, this church reminded me of my conservative upbringing. They sang traditional hymns and everyone dressed up on Sunday. However, the doctrines that John MacArthur and the other pastors taught each week at first unnerved me...and rightly so! Even though I knew in my heart that I was sinful, I didn't want to be reminded of it every week. If what I was being taught at this new church was true, that "all our righteousness is as filthy rags" (Is. 64:6), I would not be able to correct my sinful nature on my own. The seemingly paradoxical relationship between faith and works still eluded me. The Bible calls us to "sin no more" (Jn. 5:14) and to do good works (Jas. 2:14). I didn't understand what it meant to live a life of faith filled with the fruit of the Spirit, with complete dependence on and trust in God. Surely for God to forgive my wicked heart—I needed to do something extraordinary for Him, something way above and beyond all comprehension, a task which seemed impossible.

Accompanying all of this inner turmoil, I was struggling as the only "ex-Adventist" I could find at this church (though there were

a couple former members of the Worldwide Church of God to whom I could relate). Pork seemed to be the primary dish at every event. Even the salads had meat in them, leaving me quite hungry. I would proudly tell my new friends that I was a vegetarian and had never eaten meat in my entire life, while ravenously scarfing down breadsticks. They would gawk at me wide-eyed and slack-jawed, as if it was a miracle I had not wasted away from malnourishment. No one understood where I was coming from or why I was struggling with certain doctrines. I was not used to expository preaching and was surprised to realize that I didn't know the Bible as well as I thought I did. In any given sermon it was not uncommon for the pastor to reference a dozen different passages of Scripture. Everyone brought their Bibles and quickly flipped to the verses. I could not keep up and was embarrassed to admit that aside from the Pentateuch, the four gospels, and Revelation, I had a poor understanding of how the Bible was structured! I quickly memorized the canon of Scripture from the table of contents just so I wouldn't appear ignorant. This accomplishment made me feel good for a while until one Sunday morning a girl asked me if my Bible was new. It wasn't. I realized later she must have thought this because not a page was ruffled nor a verse underlined, and I probably hadn't taken it out of its box more than ten times in ten years!

After a few months I learned what "other Christians" believed, and I was shocked that there were far more differences than I had initially imagined between mainstream Christianity and Adventism. I became involved with theological debates, after which I would read the Bible for myself, attempting to prove them wrong. During this time, I was learning more about how to study the Bible than I realized.

### **Every day for the Lord**

Over several months I came to understand and believe these new doctrines, but I couldn't figure out why such a zealous group of Christians didn't keep the fourth commandment. How could they be deluded on this one important doctrine? Eventually I began to notice that they were not "Sunday keepers" but devoted every day to the Lord. No matter when I visited the church campus, the parking lot was filled with cars. There were small groups, ministry opportunities, and Bible studies happening all week long. These people spent Saturday afternoons doing street evangelism, visiting shut-ins or nursing homes, studying their Bibles and cleaning the church's missionary houses. Sunday was filled with Sunday school, the main church service, and fellowship over lunch followed by going back to church in the evening to hear an entirely different sermon. These Christians were eagerly feeding themselves with fellowship and the word of God as often as possible. A better way of stating it would be to say that they didn't simply give one day to the Lord—they gave their whole lives. Suddenly the idea of keeping the Sabbath just one day a week seemed painfully inferior.

Even though I was making new friends and learning tons about the Bible, it was tough realizing that I was stepping farther and farther from my Adventist roots. If I could no longer be Adventist, I felt that I would no longer be "special". I decided to go back and study every Adventist doctrine in hopes of salvaging some part of

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my cultural and religious heritage. I wanted to understand thoroughly what Adventists believed and the historical basis of those beliefs. Because I had been reading the New Testament epistles and had learned how to study Bible verses contextually, I was shocked at how incorrect Adventist teachings now seemed. Many Bible verses the Adventist church uses to support its doctrines I now realized mean the exact opposite when read in context.

For me, the final blow to Adventism came upon finding a book in my parents' library entitled *Sabbath in Crisis*, by Dale Ratzlaff (now *Sabbath in Christ*). There was an illustration in the book that looked like a bulls-eye. In the center was the 5th commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”, representing the written commands of the Old Covenant, and in the outermost circle were the words “Love your enemies,” representing God's true standard, which encompasses a much broader spectrum of moral behavior. Jesus outlines this new, far more demanding covenant in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7). I suddenly realized that the Decalogue was not God's ultimate moral law, but just a bare-bones civil code. As G.K. Chesterton puts it in *Orthodoxy*, “The Ten Commandments which have been found substantially common to mankind were merely military commands; a code of regimental orders, issued to protect a certain ark across a certain desert.”

In other words, “Don't kill each other!” is something a mother might yell at her hooligan sons as they run into the back yard to play, or in the Bible's case, something God commands a group of unruly, stiff-necked people just freed from the bondage of Egypt.

When I was Adventist, so much of the teaching I heard was about what set Adventists apart from other Christians—Sabbath-keeping, annihilationism, Revelation seminars, the state of the dead—it was easy for talk of these doctrines to overshadow the gospel. I finally realized that it wasn't assenting to the “right” set of beliefs that saves, but having faith in Jesus! It is true that the fruit of this faith is good works, but the works are just a product of our faith. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). As an Adventist I had put the Ten Commandments on a pedestal, practically idolizing them. Now I can see plainly how all of the Old Covenant laws and rituals foreshadow Christ (Col. 2). Our Sabbath rest truly is in him (Mt. 11:28).

### **Wretched, repentant—saved!**

After six months at Grace Community church and coming to the above realizations about Adventism, it happened one evening that I was reading the Bible (which up until that point had been nothing but a static, ancient text from which I had derived a system of beliefs) when suddenly it was as if the words leapt off the page. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). I can't help but think that is when I was sealed by the Holy Spirit. I called a friend and cried on the phone for over an hour. I cried for the time I had wasted, for my wretchedness. I repented for my pride and stubbornness. I believe that this was the precise moment of my salvation. Even though I have considered myself a Christian my whole life—this is the moment I finally let go and felt the total freedom in and gratitude for what Christ fulfilled on the cross for me. I have been humbled upon realizing my true sinful nature and helplessness; I have broken God's law and cannot save myself, even if I try my utmost. Thankfully, however, I now can proclaim, along with Paul in Romans 7:24-25, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Christ died on the cross for my sins and is my Lord and Savior. Galatians 6:14 says, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” I now can live like Abraham, with complete faith in, obedience towards, and dependence upon God. I am still growing and, of course, making mistakes. However, I am learning more about Him every day through prayer, fellowship, and continual study. I live in the freedom of knowing that in Christ, I have been completely forgiven. Today, when I sing “Amazing Grace”, I can barely make it all the way through without crying. I know that I was lost, but now am found! †

**Lisa (Gilbert) Winn** graduated from Adventism's Pacific Union College in 2002 with a B.S. in graphic design. After college she moved to North Hollywood, California, where she worked as a video editor. She was baptized at Grace Community Church on February 10, 2007, and later met her husband, Jonathan Winn, at Calvary Bible Church in Burbank. Lisa now lives in Yucaipa, California, with her husband and their new baby boy, Daniel. They are currently members of Trinity Church in Redlands.

## INTRODUCTION TO THREE ARTICLES ABOUT GROWING IN CHRIST

# WHO FORMS YOU?

**A**fter Martin Carey's article "Contemplating Prayer" appeared in the Spring, 2013, issue of *Proclamation!*, we received a thoughtful letter to the editor which we share in part here:

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I read with some concern Martin Carey's article...because there are a number of misconceptions in the article about spiritual formation.

My concern is that his criticisms may hinder your readers from being open to how spiritual formation concepts and practices could help them in developing a more intimate love relationship with God. This may result in the unintended consequence of hindering their growth in Christ.

I have studied and lived spiritual formation as taught by Talbot Theological Seminary for the past eight and one-half years. I graduated with a Masters in Theology, with an emphasis in Spiritual Formation in 2010. The spiritual formation that Martin presented in his article was vastly different from what Talbot teaches and by which I live.

However, before we get into the details, I wanted to say that I share Martin's passion for truth and living in the grace that God offers us. I rejoice in the freedom that he and other escapees from Seventh-day Adventism have in knowing that they are saved without works. I share his passion to not go back to being under the law or any false teaching.

So, in a spirit of Christian love and deep concern for the spiritual health of the people your magazine influences, I offer this response to Martin's article. We may not agree on everything, but hopefully we can better understand and respect one another through honest dialogue. I know we have the same goals of knowing and applying biblical truth to our lives and helping others to do likewise.

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### Editor's response

The writer explains his position further in the 13-page document he enclosed with his letter. Overall, he seeks to support spiritual formation as a biblical method for growing spiritually. He cites Scripture to confirm that both "our salvation and our sanctification are gifts from God through our faith," yet he also says, "we are also not sanctified by spiritual disciplines. They are a means to an end. They position us for God to work."

Scripture never teaches, however, that spiritual disciplines position us for God to work. Rather, God made us alive while we were dead in our sins (Eph. 2:5), thus making us able to respond to Him. He positions us to be able to respond; we do not position ourselves for Him to work.

Moreover, he says that "the entire Bible is true, but not all truth is in the Bible." He suggests that, in order to know how to love our wives or to govern our churches, we use biblical principles in addition to wise counselors, circumstances, and other means of guidance.

He further admits that although some of the genre's foundational authors such as Ignatius and Theresa of Avila "are vague about the salvation experience," he nevertheless finds "many of their teachings and practices...to be very valuable and biblical."

Because this letter's writer reflects the views of many within Christianity who have embraced the philosophy of spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines as tools for sanctification, we are sharing it as a backdrop for our trio of articles that address how we are sanctified as born-again children of God who have been ushered into the new covenant. We will also address two more statements from this writer's document in the sidebars contained in Martin Carey's cover article, "Are You Formed By Disciplines?" †



ARE YOU FORMED BY  
**DISCIPLINES?**

MARTIN CAREY

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,





**N**o other man could have spoken words like these. They are gentle and majestic words, and they are deadly serious.<sup>1</sup> Here is a sweet, simple invitation with extraordinary power, spoken directly into our souls. Thousands of books and sermons have been written on this passage, and after two millennia, Jesus' weighty offer still stands. Our response to His words is a matter of life and death. What is this "rest" that the Master speaks of, and how is resting possible while under the "yoke" that He commands?

When we hear Jesus' words for the spiritually weary, we want to ask Him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (Jn. 6:28). When we search the Scriptures for the answer, we hope to find the deeper life; we want to experience God's power to heal our souls. We also seek victory over sin. Still guilty and needy, we wonder what thing we haven't tried that will open up God's storehouse of blessings. We wonder, "Am I fully surrendered and trusting, and if I am, how would I know it?" Others appear to be happy and victorious, so why not me?

### Images of Victory

We have all been taught that Jesus is our prime example of the victorious life. When victory and rest elude us, we wonder what part of His life we are not imitating. We want to know what our part is, so that God can do His part. We know God has promised to make us like Jesus (Rom. 8:29), but when we struggle with sin and doubt, we are tempted to question His presence with us, and the truth of His words. We realize that for God to be real in our lives, we must hear His voice. So we search for victory secrets from other sources, sometimes from voices outside of Scripture.

We all have an image in our minds of what spiritual success looks like. There is that universal icon of health and success that we see in our everyday media. He is that fit-looking young man (or beautiful young woman), standing alone out in nature with arms raised in triumph, welcoming the rising sun. He is Victorious Man, that shining, anonymous ideal of strength that we strive to be. Many spiritual growth books also present an ideal of the victorious life and tout this basic message: God is waiting to have an amazing relationship with us, and if we develop our wills and skills in certain ways, miracles become possible. However, each new flurry of spiritual activity eventually becomes a struggle before we give up in discouragement, and then we repeat the cycle.

I don't write this as a sparkling example of the victorious life, for I have also struggled and failed, but I have also seen that God's mercy never fails. The words of Jesus have never changed, and they are just as true now: "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). We must know the answer to our question, how can we lay hold of this Sabbath-rest? Let's return to the Scriptures together for His answers to our spiritual spin cycle. In this study we will examine two radically different views of Matthew 11:28-30. First, we will look at how two leading Christian authors have used this passage to build a system of inner transformation through spiritual disciplines. These authors have been passionate about living a life of obedience and intimacy with God. Then we will look closely at the fuller context of this passage and what it reveals about the liberating truth of Jesus' yoke.

and I will give you rest."

Together as a closely coordinated team, **Willard and Foster have transformed the thinking** of mainstream Christianity in important ways, and their teachings have entered **nearly every Christian institution.**

### Spiritual Formation's Critique

Dallas Willard and Richard Foster have led the evangelical spiritual formation movement over the past 35 years. Willard taught philosophy at the University of California from 1965 until his death this year at the age of 77, and he was widely admired for his uncommon intellect and grandfatherly demeanor. Willard authored many books on Christian living, including *Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988), and *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (2010). Foster is a Quaker pastor and successful author who founded the Renovaré Institute in 1988. Renovaré describes itself as “a community of Christians seeking continual spiritual renewal in Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Foster first introduced his particular hybrid of spiritual formation theology to evangelicalism in 1978 with his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, selling over one million copies. *Christianity Today* has called it one of the ten best books of the twentieth century.

Together as a closely coordinated team, Willard and Foster have transformed the thinking of mainstream Christianity in important ways, and their teachings have entered nearly every Christian institution. They have diagnosed the evangelical church with the disease of nominalism, that creeping superficiality that has banished real holiness from our churches. They contend that nominalism infects churches that hold exciting worship services and emphasize “getting saved,” but fail to lead their members towards deep, transforming relationships with God. Nominalism has a liberal form also, where Christians have more passion for social justice than for renovating their own hearts. If the modern church does not get to its root problems,<sup>3</sup> Willard warned, it will perish.

Many of us are disturbed by what we see on Christian television programs and on stage in some churches, so we share concerns. However, Willard and Foster's critique goes far beyond just method or style. They question what has been at the very core of the original evangelical gospel: the cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Spiritual formation writers generally deny that the earliest Christians were focused on the cross, or any “theories of atonement” that were built around the cross and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>4</sup>

Willard has defined the gospel as “the good news of the presence and availability of life in the kingdom, now and forever, through reliance on Jesus the Anointed.”<sup>5</sup> Instead of embracing a cross-centered gospel, the earliest Christians, Willard said, were like the Desert Fathers, those fourth-century mystics who practiced “experiential Christianity,” and who lived out the life of Christ with spiritual disciplines. Original Christianity lived the real gospel, said Willard, while modern Christians have drifted far from their stellar example. Nowadays, conservative churches are

studying the Bible for doctrinal correctness, resulting in an “over-commitment to the Bible.”<sup>6</sup>

In a previous article, “Contemplating Prayer,”<sup>7</sup> I described the Desert Fathers who founded the mystical traditions of the Christian church and gave a brief history of their philosophy and methods. In the third and fourth centuries, thousands of Christian men and women withdrew to the Egyptian desert to live alone or in small communities to practice rigorous disciplines. They would deny themselves food and sleep, practiced celibacy, and sought God's personal words to them through deep meditation. Their ascetic lifestyle was intended to purge themselves of fleshly corruption so they could experience God's direct presence, and over time, become fit for heaven.

### Multiplying Authorities

In “Contemplating Prayer,” we explored the modern spiritual formation movement's wide-spread roots in Greek philosophy, the Desert Fathers, the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century, and in 20th century psychological theories.<sup>8</sup> These various streams of religion and philosophy, both Christian and pagan, have converged in the current mystical movement and are embraced by most popular spiritual formation authors today. This syncretistic influence raises troubling questions. Across the spiritual formation literature, we find a serious lack of Biblical support for the disciplines that these authors consider essential to spiritual growth. Richard Foster has acknowledged that Paul and the apostles did not teach the essential spiritual disciplines—because it was not necessary. Richard Foster explains:

“In the first century and earlier, it was not necessary to give instruction on how to ‘do’ the Disciplines of the spiritual life...Those disciplines were so frequently practiced and such a part of the general culture that the ‘how to’ was common knowledge.”<sup>9</sup>

That common knowledge is “a wisdom gleaned from millennia of collective human experience,” says Foster, and the Biblical writers took that for granted. They expected their readers to combine Scripture with other religious traditions. So, as we search God's word today for the secrets of life and godliness, we are being told that His word is not sufficient. For a deep Christian experience, we need to go outside God's word for the “wisdom gleaned from millennia of collective human experience.” Talbot Seminary professor J. P. Moreland agrees and told the Evangelical Theological Society that our churches have an “over-commitment to Scripture in a way that is false, irrational, and harmful to the cause of Christ,” and is practiced as a “mean-spirited...grotesque and often ignorant distortion of discipleship.”<sup>10</sup>

That criticism is the way faithful adherence to *sola scriptura* is now being portrayed by prominent evangelical leaders. As in the Reformation era, the church faces a crisis of authority. No one wants to be mean-spirited and ignorant, but if Scripture is not our sufficient, authoritative guide to spiritual truth, then we will continue to be scattered by a multitude of authorities, and others will discern for us what is light and darkness.

## A Gospel of Human Ability

Spiritual formation's collection of human wisdom also includes the philosophies of modern psychology. Mental health is a major concern for this movement, making spiritual growth nearly identical to the process of psychotherapy—especially Jungian analysis. Spiritual formation writers found a kindred soul in the analyst and mystic Carl Jung, as we see in the cases of Trappist monk Thomas Merton<sup>11</sup> and Fr. Thomas Keating.<sup>12</sup> Christianity needs to be “intelligent and powerful,” wrote Willard, also a respecter of Jung; it needs enough spiritual depth to address our broken souls and our “mental and emotional health.” From his perspective, true Christian spirituality is blended with psychological insight and founded in “the nature of human personality and in God's redemptive interactions therewith.”<sup>13</sup> We are broken, says Willard, and our hearts, wills, and bodies are not working in harmony as God made them. The good news, he tells us, is that the human soul has great spiritual potential that is largely untapped.<sup>14</sup> This conclusion means that as we develop an intimate knowledge of our deep selves, we treat our various pains accordingly.

What is spirit? For Willard, spirit is ultimately God who is Spirit, and it is also “unembodied personal power” that is “a common heritage of the human race.” Spirit, then, is an “ordered realm” of personal power that is possessed by all.<sup>15</sup> Here we see an example of the pantheistic roots of Willard's mystical thinking; everyone possesses a “divine spark.” Thomas Merton, another devotee of Jung, called this spark “a point of pure truth...which belongs entirely to God.”<sup>16</sup> This “unembodied personal power” is awakened and harnessed for good by living the “Christ-life”—practicing spiritual disciplines. Spiritual formation, then, is the process of learning about one's deep self and applying regular disciplines to heal the various parts of the personality. As our natural

spiritual powers grow with exercise, the total personality heals and unifies, and the person realizes his or her natural spiritual potential.

The alternative to spiritual formation is dysfunction, says Willard, and he quotes Romans 7:19 to illustrate the miserable, dysfunctional soul:

**For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

The man of Romans 7, Willard asserts, has a battle between his flesh and spirit because he is a spiritually dysfunctional man who is not transformed.<sup>17</sup> He may have been quickened by the Spirit of God, but the struggle with sin in his life expresses the disorder in his soul. In contrast, said Willard, the battle in Romans 7:19 does not apply to a transformed soul living out Christ's life.<sup>18</sup> That soul can say that he does the good that he wants, and the evil he doesn't want, he no longer keeps doing. Through the proper application of spiritual disciplines, his nature is changed. A formerly broken man finds it increasingly more natural to do good.<sup>19</sup>

Here we come to the core of spiritual formation philosophy: original sin, that condition from which we need to be saved, describes a misdirected, broken soul that needs to cooperate with God's power to restore and heal. From this perspective we don't need salvation because we are dead in trespasses and sins, or because we are by nature children of God's wrath (Eph. 2:1, 3). No, the words “dead in your sins” and “God's wrath” are relics of a failed “theory of atonement.”

In Romans 7, Paul identifies his true spiritual state several times in the chapter. It is true that complete victory from sin often escapes him, yet he is a man divided by two internal “laws” warring against each other. His “mind” wants to do what is right, but he lacks ability to do it. He is committing sins he doesn't want to do because of sin that dwells within him. However, sin is no longer controlling his mind, for he delights in the law of God in his “inner being”—that part of him led by the Spirit. Only someone led by the Spirit, belonging to Christ, has an inner being that delights in God's law. Those whose minds are set on the flesh are hostile to God and cannot submit to His law (Rom. 8:7). Paul's man in Romans 7 is the real Paul speaking, a man who serves the law of God with his mind, but sins because of the “law of sin” in his flesh (Rom. 7:25).

## ANSWERING A CRITIC

### CRITIC'S STATEMENT

**“Some of these writings [the classic authors of contemplation and mystical practices] have questionable and downright unbiblical teachings. Yet there is still a lot of truth in them. However, a young believer should not read these things from the original writings.”**

### RESPONSE FROM EDITOR

This admission of error sprinkled with good things in the genre's authors is the evidence that we cannot use these extra-biblical sources to teach truth. As people who have had to repent of a false prophet whose writings are a mixture of gross error mixed with truth, we understand that only Scripture can reveal Truth. Admitting extra-biblical sources

of knowing God's will dilutes our trust in Him and His unfailing promises. Our own minds and imaginations are fallible. God's Spirit convicts and teaches us as we submit our minds to His word and present ourselves to Him as living sacrifices for His service, allowing His Word to transform us by renewing our minds (Rom. 12:1-2).

# The gospel's language **will be transformed** from the moral to the therapeutic—to managing our natural, internal resources. **Spiritual formation is a spiritual rehabilitation program** custom-made to energize and rebuild our natural abilities.

In contrast, the gospel of spiritual formation does not recognize the depth of sinful human nature. If our problem is “dysfunction,” we won’t feel the need for Jesus’ blood atonement saving us from God’s wrath and eternal damnation. We will want divine soul therapy. Our focus will change from God’s actions completed through Christ in history, to our actions with God right now. The gospel’s language will be transformed from the moral to the therapeutic—to managing our natural, internal resources. Spiritual formation is a spiritual rehabilitation program custom-made to energize and rebuild our natural abilities. According to Willard, man has great potential for change in all his physical, mental, and spiritual parts.<sup>20</sup> Our capacity to cooperate with God’s grace enables us to reform ourselves through good choices and habits.

Mental and spiritual changes always involve the body, so they will have measurable, physical effects. This connection between mind, spirit, and body proves the great value of spiritual disciplines, says psychiatrist Curt Thompson, author of *Anatomy of the Soul*. New behaviors always change the brain, creating new neural pathways and demonstrating neuroplasticity, says Dr. Thompson.<sup>21</sup> People who practice disciplines such as fasting, confession, and prayer, for example, increase their awareness of what their own minds are doing, and by exercising their brains in those ways, they are stimulating growth of their neurons, both in physical size and in density of connections. Therefore, for Dr. Thompson, spiritual formation is “almost interchangeable with neuroplasticity.”<sup>22</sup> In plain language, he is saying that spiritual growth will produce measurable physical changes in our brains; if it does not, it is not genuine spiritual formation.

This idea that spiritual growth produces physical changes supports the strong theme of restoration of the true self in spiritual formation literature. As Willard has stated, spiritual disciplines serve to restore our whole selves back into the harmony of man’s original creation. By taking new and healthy pathways, we are obeying God’s commands to become our deepest, truest selves. Thus, living the sanctified life is a therapeutic process of healing and restoring the core of one’s true self. Sin, says Pete Scazzero, is the accretion of many layers of the “false self” that must be scraped away, layer by layer, like an archeological dig. It is through self-disciplines that the necessary self-discovery can renew one’s true identity.<sup>23</sup> Thomas Merton, a founder of the current spiritual formation movement, summarized this thinking well:

“For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.”<sup>24</sup>

Another voice in this school of thought is John Ortberg, an author and friend of Willard, who adapted Merton’s self-discovery

philosophy into a sanctification program he trademarked as “Monvee.” His book, *The Me I Want to Be*, translates Willard’s and Foster’s philosophy into a personalized sanctification application. In this model, through personality assessment and self-analysis, one can build his own individualized sanctification plan. This pursuit fulfills God’s plan for each of us, Ortberg said, since, “He wants to help you be the real you, the best version of you. He wants to help you be you-ier.”<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, Romans 8:29 does describe God’s plans for the “best version” of us, but it says nothing about finding our true selves or becoming “you-ier.” The transformation planned for those He foreknew is outside of the natural order, and vastly more ambitious:

**For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**

## Laboring for Grace

How do we receive the gracious gift of inner righteousness? We cannot earn it, says Foster, since it is a grace that is given. Then how does it come to us?

Happily there is something we can do...God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.<sup>26</sup>

Living the life of grace is living the disciplines, says Foster, and that is what changes us. To live the life, however, Jesus must be our “ever-present Teacher and Guide.” The disciplines will help us to hear his living voice, and that mystical, personal intimacy is the central experience of spiritual formation. The first discipline in Foster’s book *Celebration of Discipline* is meditation, a practice which builds the skill of hearing God’s inner, guiding voice day by day. The other 11 disciplines in his book, including fasting, simplicity, solitude, and guidance, are practiced to shape the soul. Meditation, however, is the discipline that can “create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary of the heart.”<sup>27</sup>

The “spiritual space” created by meditation is entered by mystical techniques that take us deeper into ourselves. Inner space, Foster says, is where we find God, and we must be

...willing to go down into the recreating silences, into the inner world of contemplation. In their writings, all of the masters of meditation strive to awaken us to the fact that the universe is much larger than we know, that there are vast unexplored inner regions that are just as real as the physical world we know so well.<sup>28</sup>

According to Willard and Foster, Christians who depend on reading the Bible and praying in the conventional manner will never have that intimate connection, and their efforts to change will fail. In his book *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship With God*, Willard is very clear on this point. An authentic walk with God requires personal words from God.<sup>29</sup> The voice of God in the Bible is a good general guide for life, but it is not sufficient for God to change us, according to these teachings. If you are not hearing His personal words to you on a regular basis, you are not growing spiritually. Many Christians who accept this premise and do not receive regular messages from God will feel inadequate. For those Christians who delve into their “vast, unexplored inner regions” to hear God’s voice, how will they know it is He who is speaking? Should they stake their lives on those words?

### By Which We Draw Near

How has God told us to draw near to Him? We will search the Bible in vain for instructions on how to explore the “vast unexplored regions” of our inner space, for that wisdom is not from the Bible but from the desert ascetics, Catholic mystics, and from other religious traditions. To answer Jesus’ wonderful invitation in Matthew 11, we must come to Him on His terms, and receive all the blessings He has promised. Do we draw near with the rituals of spiritual disciplines, or is there a more direct way?

The early Jerusalem Christians were tempted to return to the Old Covenant laws, a system with impressive rituals, tangible sights, sounds, and smells. These things could make men and women feel very religious. In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer made an impassioned, scholarly appeal to rely on Christ and His sacrifice alone. He may be invisible and afar off, now at the right hand of God, but through Him, “a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God” (Heb. 7:19). So what are the terms of our approach to God? We have “such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). Because of His sacrifice for our sins, once for all, we have immediate access to the throne of grace.

There is no other way of access to God than Christ and His blood. Through His broken body, the way into the Most Holy has

been prepared. There is no divine spark in any of us, and without the gospel of His bloody cross, we are dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1). Our Lord put it rather bluntly: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn. 6:53).

### Revealed to Babies

In Matthew 28–30, Jesus’ sweet invitation must be understood in the context of the verses before it. Jesus had just declared terrible pronouncements on three Israelite cities who had rejected Him, when He suddenly said,

**“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Mt. 11:25).**

The rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the leaders of those cities may have seemed like a failure, but here, Jesus thanks His Father for hiding things from them. In fact, it is His Father’s gracious will that the truth be only revealed to the *nepios*, the small, helpless, ignorant people. These are people who are not confident in their spiritual potential. Yet it is the Father’s gracious will to reveal things to them that even prophets and righteous people couldn’t know (Mt. 13:17).

By its very nature, the gospel does not appeal to the wise and confident. The pure definition of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

**...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...**

There is nothing in that stark sentence to validate any confidence in our abilities or potential. Our sinful condition required the death and burial of the Son of God, and those who do not put their trust in that message remain condemned (Col. 1:20-22). When the humble, unimpressive Jesus went about Judea proclaiming Himself the only way to God, the wise and confident were offended, just as they are today. This offense is because our universal condition of sin, our arrogant rebellion against God, makes us universally stupid. None of us can perceive the things of God through wisdom or skills, for He has made foolish the wisdom of the world:

## ANSWERING A CRITIC

### CRITIC’S STATEMENT

**“Spiritual formation teaches that contemplative prayer is but one means of grace that God uses to transform us. In my book, I describe and give examples of over eighty different disciplines that God can use to transform us.”**

### RESPONSE FROM EDITOR

The epistles are filled with gospel “indicatives”, the statements declaring what God has already accomplished in Jesus on our behalf. These indicatives provide the foundation for the gospel “imperatives”, the commands describing how we live as born-again Christians. For example, Colossians 2:6 illustrates this pattern: “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord

[indicative], so walk in Him [imperative].” In other words, Christ Jesus forgave our sins on the cross and rose from death; He made us His as we receive His sacrifice for our sin. We walk in Him exactly as we received Him: by grace through faith, not by performing disciplines. Rather, we are transformed by beholding the glory of the Lord. “This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

**For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21).**

The message of the cross has always been foolishness to the wisdom of man. When Christian writers attempt to supplement an “insufficient” Bible with the collective wisdom of the ages, they are repeating the folly of the false teachers of Paul’s day. The preaching of the cross may appear to be only a “theory of the atonement,” and it may feel like a stumbling block and foolishness, but without that preaching, there will be no power and no wisdom from God:

**We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23, 24).**

In verse 27, Jesus reveals His exclusive authority over all creation and His unique oneness with the Father. That authority includes His sovereign choices over those to whom He reveals the Father:

**All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**

It is Jesus, our merciful high priest, who rules all knowledge of, and access to, God. No one comes to the Father but by Him (Jn. 14:6). Jesus’ exclusive authority allows no confidence in mystical methods of access to God. He is not the Way-shower, for He is Himself the Way. Faith in His already-finished priestly sacrifice and resurrection for us is the only basis for hope for God’s presence (Heb. 4:14-16).

## Therefore, Come to Me

Now that Jesus has established His sovereign credentials and authority, He gives His invitation to the weak and weary: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (vs. 28). Just as He had done in the three cities, again Jesus targets His message to those who will feel the need for what He offers. At that time in Israel, ordinary people felt over-burdened with hard labor as they scratched out a living, as they fulfilled the many Jewish laws, and as they endured Roman oppression. This message was for them, and when Jesus spoke, they knew who they were. Like Solomon, every man found all his hard work to be futility, and “Even in the night his heart does not rest” (Eccl. 2:23).

Jesus was especially speaking of toiling under heavy religious burdens. The law was commonly called a “yoke,” the heavy collar that a farmer placed on his working animals to pull a load. A yoke was also a symbol of bondage to a foreign oppressor, as we see in Nahum 1:13. Jesus’ audience felt the religious yoke of many duties as well as the Roman yoke. Then He offered another yoke of His own making:

**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt. 11:28).**

His yoke is easy because He is the One who creates it and places it on us. Because He is gentle and lowly in heart, His yoke

design is never oppressive, and His rest is available nowhere else. In contrast, no man-made religious wisdom can ever bring rest. Religious systems have always constructed yokes to place on their followers, and by dulling the senses, they may create states of mind that feel restful. False religions share the same premise, that by doing certain religious works we can become skilled in entering the spirits’ realm to manipulate them into making us powerful. In contrast, Jesus calls the weary and broken to believe in Him as their all-sufficient Lord and to live for Him as adopted sons and daughters.

Spiritual formation’s leaders claim that we can create rest by selecting from among a large number of human traditions and custom-designing our own spiritual growth program. Out of that continual experiment, the life-style of Jesus will be imitated, and somehow God will show up to bring rest to the faithful practitioner. Yet Jesus has not asked us to imitate His lifestyle in the form of disciplines, especially ones that He never commanded anywhere in Scripture. He has not commanded us to live as the Desert Fathers, but He has commanded us to come to Him and take what He offers, without labor. His rest is not about a “life-style” at all, but something far more costly—and dangerous.

Unlike the ancient mystics, Willard and Foster recommend a nicer, cushier set of disciplines for today’s busy professional, yet their program is no less a human invention. Nowhere does Jesus tell us that communion with God must happen in “solitude,” or that we put ourselves under a “spiritual director,” or that we seek mystical spiritual encounters in “centering prayer.” Those are religious requirements invented by men, and they not only become burdensome, but they will also displace our trust in Jesus and His simpler yoke. No man can serve two masters.

The apostle Paul wrote about spiritual teachers who insisted that without spiritual disciplines and mystical experiences, the Colossians would be disqualified from Christ’s kingdom. Paul warns them:

**See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8).**

The Colossians were being seduced by clever teachers of human traditions, according to the “elemental spirits” of the world (Greek—*stoicheia*). They were not satisfied with the blessings that Christ and His gospel had brought them; they wanted additional spiritual blessings. Putting their trust in their works placed them in bondage to other spiritual powers (2:20; Gal. 4:8-10), a dangerous place to be. Paul reminded them, however, that Christ is the head of all powers in the universe. We have been buried and raised with Him, and we are complete in Him (Col. 2:10-12). Ascetic disciplines and mystical encounters do not bring extra spiritual blessings.

**Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind (Col. 2:18).**

Christians have died to the physical and spiritual forces of the universe, so they no longer submit their minds and bodies to human regulations and teachings. These teachings appear wise in “promoting self-made religion and asceticism,” but they are useless

# The cross tells **the truth of our bleak condition**, and that in the body of the Son of God, we had to die and must keep on dying. **There is no victorious living anywhere but at the cross.**

against the sinful nature. It takes something far more drastic to curb sin.

## Jesus' Impossible Yoke

Jesus gave out another invitation, a disturbing one that has driven away many potential followers:

**And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Mt. 10:39).**

This is not a comforting message of healing and rehabilitation for broken hearts. Jesus asks us to deny ourselves—our wants, our rights, and our dreams, and join Him daily on the road of execution. If we serve Him for the purpose of self-fulfillment, we are not serving Him at all, and will face final death. His followers cannot push the cross into the forgettable distant past so they can live the victorious life. On the contrary, the cross is our present, daily reality of death to our sinful natures:

**We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:6).**

The "body of sin" is still very much alive in us, and it must be killed regularly. We cannot live the victorious life of the resurrection if we cannot die the daily execution to self. The ugly, humiliating cross stays in the present to remind us of the real cost of living. Our typical quest for spiritual health includes a calculation of benefit, of gains and losses, but at the cross, our losses are total. The cross tells the truth of our bleak condition, and that in the body of the Son of God, we had to die and must keep on dying. There is no victorious living anywhere but at the cross.

## Reversal of Fortune

The last few steps of the long road were now coming to an end. The big wooden gates of the city were open to the crowds coming in. The tired pilgrim felt a surge of joy as he walked into God's own city, Jerusalem. He had walked nearly 1000 miles to get there, even passing safely through Egypt, so God's blessing was surely on him. Simon of Cyrene was a very devout Israelite, and he longed to find the true keeping of Passover. Today, he would fulfill his vows.

He was forced to stop when he heard angry shouting coming his way. The crowd pushed him near the center of the street, and that is when he saw them. A group of Roman soldiers were dragging three prisoners in his direction, all carrying crosses. A big, fierce-looking centurion led the way on a horse, bellowing orders, while screaming onlookers scurried all around. The procession

suddenly stopped in front of him; one of the condemned men had fallen under the weight of his cross. Simon decided he had seen enough when a soldier grabbed him. "You! Carry his cross!"

Simon could not refuse, so he stepped near the fallen convict and started to reach for the heavy lumber. He hesitated. The wood was splintered and dark with blood, both old and new. Simon now realized, if he touched this man's blood, he would be unclean for seven days and could not partake of the Passover Seder. His journey was now for nothing, and worse, he was among the enemy. A rough shove sent him sprawling to his knees, and two soldiers laid the heavy beam on his shoulder. Simon felt his rage boiling over as he stood up under the weight. Being a strong man, he could carry the dirty cross, but his heart rebelled.

"Filthy goyim," Simon muttered. "Isn't it enough that they pollute our land?"

Simon heard things from the crowd about this man whose cross he carried. This Jesus was a prophet and had performed miracles. Some even said He was Messiah. Simon looked at him again. If ever we needed a Messiah, it was now. But this man?

The procession now spilled outside the city, with the three convicts and Simon following close behind them. He felt even more unclean as he turned his back on the city gates. He began to notice how the condemned men had nothing to lose, so they cursed everyone. It seemed that everyone was cursing and shouting—all except one. Simon now realized that Jesus had said nothing, although judging from the appearance of his back, he had obviously been beaten the most. Dragging the cross behind him, Simon wondered about Jesus, but he could not see his face.

Jesus did not turn around but kept quietly trudging along, now falling, now getting up again. A group of holy men in robes were following close and taunting, just like the soldiers. Behind them were many women weeping for him. He was getting weaker and stumbling more. Simon thought to himself, "The real Messiah would never let this happen!" He wondered why so many people hated this man, and the whole scene became more confusing. He saw how Jesus kept taking the insults and realized how no criminal would act this way. With this man, there was no anger, no hatred, only determination to go to his death. He wondered, and then he remembered these words:

**Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter...so he opened not his mouth (Is. 53:7).**

They were nearing the place of execution, and an exhausted Simon let the cross slip from his splinter-filled hands. The soldiers nearby began to taunt him. "Careful, little man, want to join them?" Simon dragged the cross the last few paces and was finally relieved as the soldiers lifted it from him. He saw them pin Jesus down to the thick beams while a soldier held out the nails. Simon looked away and remembered words from the same prophet:

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted (Is. 53:4).

Confusion spread in his mind as he realized that no one could explain who the prophet was speaking of when he said:

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities...(Is. 53:5).

This man was innocent, thought Simon, and he shut his eyes as they nailed the convicts to their crosses and lifted them into position. He sat down in the dirt nearby, knowing this was the worst day of his life. This was his Passover, and here he sat among criminals and Gentiles, too unclean to return to the temple or to his people. Then he heard someone speaking from the cross above him, words that broke him:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34).

At last overcome, Simon bowed his head and wept.

## Let Us Go To Him

In the gospel of Mark, Simon is identified as the father of Rufus and Alexander (15:21), and the family of Simon was evidently well-known in the church. Paul says, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well (Rom. 16:13).”

Simon of Cyrene was sent from the city, but he was present for the real Passover meal, and history suggests that his presence at

that ultimate Passover forever changed him as well as his family. He was there as the Messiah was sacrificed for him, and never a holier feast was offered up. He had been with Jesus the Lamb of God, and outside the city he endured the taunts and abuse with Him. While religious rituals were being kept in the temple, Jesus was deemed unfit for decent, law-abiding society and was slaughtered outside the gates—just as the bodies of the dead animals used for sin offerings were thrown outside the gates.

**So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured (Heb. 13:12).**

Jesus says, “Come,” and it is from outside the camp that His voice commands us to draw near. To be made holy by Him, we leave behind all our religious urges and entitlements, from doing holiness our way, and leaving our very selves we join Him to bear His reproach. Following Jesus is not a safe venture, so He told us to count the cost. We don’t belong to the prosperous city any more. In taking His yoke, we also take up His cross to follow Him outside the gates. There, forgiven and sanctified forever by His blood, we find rest from our own works. “There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). True rest is found by faith in the historical certainty of the gospel. To live the victorious life is to live, day by day, as people who count themselves dead, buried, and raised with Him.

He is our life, for He is our Victorious Man. †

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## Fundamental Belief #8. The Great Controversy

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.

**T**here is no Biblical basis for concluding that any controversy has ever existed regarding "the character of God", "His law" or "His sovereignty over the universe". The book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (both the 1988 and 2005 versions published by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists) makes no attempt to provide Biblical foundations for these ideas and instead simply states them as facts. Moreover, this official book fails to cite the real source of this doctrine, Ellen White's *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, her flagship book that defines Adventist doctrine. What we know about Satan's fall as found in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12 is that it was based on his pride. The content of this controversy is a fabrication of Ellen White that taints nearly every Adventist doctrine.

Furthermore, there is no Biblical evidence that God has to be vindicated from any charges made by Satan. Nevertheless, if one assumes that this vindication is reasonable, the fundamental belief significantly places this vindication in the future: "the God of love will ultimately be vindicated". The cross was not enough to vindicate God's love. Although *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* gives a nod to the "Cosmic Significance of the Cross", suggesting that Christ accomplished the vindication of God in His life and death, it fails to explain the true Adventist doctrine of God's vindication. Is the Adventist administration actively hiding the organization's true

## ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #8

# THE GREAT CONTROVERSY:



# GOD NEEDS TO BE VINDICATED?

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**The content of this controversy is a fabrication of Ellen White's that taints nearly every Adventist doctrine.**

beliefs in publications that other churches would routinely examine?

This fundamental belief and its commentary are silent about how God will be vindicated in the future. In order to learn what further vindication beyond the life and death of Jesus Adventists believe is necessary, one must dig into more obscure Adventist literature:

"In the last generation God gives the final demonstration that men can keep the law of God and that they can live without sinning. God leaves nothing undone to make the demonstration complete. The only limitation He puts on Satan is that he may not kill the saints of God. He may tempt them, he may harass and threaten them; and he does his best. But he fails. He cannot make them sin. They stand the test, and God puts His seal on them. Through the last generation of saints God stands fully vindicated" (M. L. Andreason, *The Sanctuary Service*, Review and Herald, 1969, p. 318-19).

Andreason, it must be noted, learned this model from Ellen White:

"Just before us is the closing struggle of the great controversy when, with 'all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness,' Satan is to work to misrepresent the character of God, that he may 'seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.' If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from

heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world" (*Testimonies To the Church*, vol. 5, p. 746).

Ultimately within Adventism, it isn't God who saves man, but man who saves God from Satan's charges. Adventist doctrine contradicts Romans 3:21-26 and teaches instead that God is not fully vindicated by Christ's death. This may be the most blasphemous of their Fundamental Beliefs. †

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RICK BARKER

ARE YOU BEING  
FORMED BY

**LAW?**

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**S**eventh-day Adventists and Evangelical Christians have different vocabularies and, at times, different definitions of the same words. These differences create confusion during discussions between these groups and contribute to the barriers former Adventists face when transitioning into new churches. For example, the word “Law” in many evangelical circles refers to the whole counsel of God including any command of God given throughout the 66 books of Scripture. In general, the word “Law” does not specifically refer to the Ten Commandments or to the Mosaic Law. Therefore, when we are told in the New Testament not to gossip, for example, this command is “Law” from this evangelical perspective.

Related to this definition of “Law” is a concept many evangelicals refer to as “the third use of the Law”. This idea suggests that the Law, whether it is the Mosaic Law or the Law of Christ, has an ongoing function in the life of believers as a guide or source of instruction that directs a believer toward living a more godly, righteous life. Thus, according to this idea, the third use of the Law is not for justification but is rather for the sanctification of believers.

The Book of Galatians, however, argues against a sanctifying use of the Law for believers. To be sure, Christians from diverse backgrounds are quick to affirm that the Law does not save us, as Paul describes in Galatians 2:16:

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

Despite this agreement regarding the Law and justification, however, questions arise about the ongoing role of Law for those who have been justified.

## The Law in Galatians

It is important to understand what “Law” is being discussed in Galatians. It is a popular misconception to conclude that the “Law” being pushed upon the Galatians was the collection of rabbinical Jewish (or *Talmudic*) laws that were added above and beyond the Law given in Scripture. The consistent use and meaning of “Law” throughout the book of Galatians, however, argues against this notion. Galatians 4:21-25 makes clear that the Law being discussed is the Law given at Sinai:

**Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to**

**the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.**

The Law that comes from Mount Sinai is the Law given by God, including—and particularly—the 10 Commandments. The 10 Commandments, moreover, are specifically identified as the covenant given to Israel (at Sinai) in Deuteronomy 5. In other words, Paul’s reference to the covenant “proceeding from Mount Sinai” is a direct reference to the 10 Commandments, the actual words of the Mosaic covenant. Galatians 3:17 states that the Law in question came 430 years after the promise to Abraham. Again, this is the Law that God gave through Moses including the 10 Commandments. Furthermore, it would make no sense that Rabbinical laws—laws not given in Scripture—would be the laws that would lead one to Christ (Gal. 3:24) or shut one under sin (Gal. 3:22). The contextual basis is abundantly clear: the Law being discussed in Galatians is the Law of God given at Sinai, which includes the 10 Commandments.

When we have been made alive in Jesus, the Law given on Sinai no longer has any authority over us. We have been brought into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col 1:13), and the Law of Christ now constrains us (Gal. 6:2). Now the Holy Spirit, the Author of Scripture, applies the entire Word of God—the Law of God—to our lives, convicting us of sin and righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:8-9). In fact, the written instructions and rebukes from the apostles show that God’s Word has an ongoing role in instructing Christians. Because a battle between our flesh and the Spirit continues to wage in us in this life (Rom. 7:14-25), we are prone to deception when we try to justify our fleshly longings by attempting to convince ourselves that they are promptings from God. God’s Word, however, shows us our sin plainly.

## Purpose of the Law

We have established that the Law being discussed within the book of Galatians is a God-given Law. This Law of God is described as perfect (Ps. 19:7), good, and holy (Rom. 7:12). Yet the perfect Law could never make anyone perfect (Heb. 7:18-19) because righteousness can never come through a Law. Righteousness can only come to us through a promise to those who believe (Gal. 3:21-22). In fact, this inability of the Law to make us righteous is true not only of the 10 Commandments and other laws given at Sinai; it is true of any Law given by God, even the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Paul describes the righteousness we receive by saying it is “not derived from the Law” but is “through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9). He further explained this fact when, in Romans 3:21-22, he said, “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.”

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# ...NO LAW—NOT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS NOR ANY OTHER SCRIPTURAL COMMAND— CAN HELP US BECOME RIGHTEOUS.

In other words, no Law—not the Ten Commandments nor any other Scriptural command—can help us become righteous. Only God can make us righteous when we trust in the Lord Jesus, and this righteousness is His.

Ultimately, if we look to the Law for instruction, it can only provide the proof that we fall short continually and are in need of a Savior (Rom 3:19-26). This reality is the same conclusion Paul articulates in Galatians 3 when he states that the Law is a schoolmaster (a source of instruction and supervision) to lead us to Christ. Once we come to Christ, we are no longer under this instruction; v. 25, “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

## Sanctification and Law

“OK,” you may agree; “I see that the Law does not play a part in our justification. But what about sanctification?” Galatians 3:1-3 directly addresses this question:

**You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**

Throughout Galatians, Spirit and faith are contrasted with flesh and Law. In fact, the phrase “being perfected” would be a very good synonym for the concept of sanctification. So Paul asks the Galatians, and by extension each of us, “having been justified by faith through the actions of the Spirit, are we foolish enough to believe that we will be sanctified by the works of the Law in the flesh?” Clearly the intended answer is “no”. Our life with God, from start to finish, is by the action of His Spirit, not by our actions.

One evangelical seminary professor describes God’s role in our sanctification this way: “Sanctification means that the Spirit permeates everything the Christian thinks, says and does. The Christian’s personal holiness is as much a monergistic [see sidebar] activity of the Holy Spirit as is his justification and conversion. The Spirit who alone creates faith is no less active after conversion than He was before.”

Galatians 3:1-3, however, is not the only place in this chapter where Paul makes this point. We saw earlier that righteousness cannot come through any Law: “For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law” (v. 21). This fact—that no law can contribute to our righteousness—applies to sanctification just as much as it applies to justification. The Law—not just the Mosaic law but every command from God—is very good at accomplishing the role of point-

ing out sin, but it was never made to increase a person’s righteousness. Our attempts to observe the Law do not sanctify us. On the contrary, our attempts to focus on the Law arouse our sinful passions (Rom. 7:5) and ultimately increase our sin (Rom 7:7-11).

## The Work of the Spirit

Paul goes on to give a detailed contrast of how ongoing life in the Spirit operates differently from instruction by the Law. Galatians 5:13-23 says:

**For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.**

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**

There is a great deal in this short passage, particularly when we realize the immediate context of a discussion about not being placed in subjection to the Law of God given at Sinai. In proclaiming a believer’s freedom from the Law of God, Paul gives no ground to those who would take this as a “get out of jail free card” and let sin reign in their lives. Nevertheless, Christ’s death provides full pardon and freedom from the Law. How can we understand this apparent paradox?

Two things occur when we are born again. First, we die to our old self, and we also join in His resurrection through the new birth (Rom. 5:10; 6:4-5). We become God’s children, and His Spirit dwells within us (Rom. 8:16-17; Eph. 1:13-14). The result of His Spirit dwelling in us is that He produces fruit. Furthermore, there are no Laws—neither the Law given at Sinai nor the commandments of Christ—against this fruit. Significantly, Paul is contrasting this fruit of the Spirit with the deeds of our flesh. If there were any chance that we might be confused about our behavior, that we might wonder whether God’s Spirit or our flesh was leading us to an action, the descriptions in these verses make very clear which actions are from the Spirit and which are from the flesh.

This short description by Paul in Galatians is very similar to the longer description of flesh, Law, and Spirit found in Romans 7 and 8.

Interestingly, this passage also helps to explain how we can be both free from the Law through grace and yet establish the Law

(Rom 3:31). First, if we look to the Law as a guideline for righteous behavior, we'll always be failures, because the Law's purpose was to show us our sin and failures (Rom 3:19-20).

Therefore, if we perform deeds of the Law in order to achieve righteousness or to enhance sanctification, we will be forced to do one of two things; either we will have to admit complete failure—because the Law always convicts us of sin and never helps us achieve holiness—or we will try to rationalize the full demands of the Law and reinterpret it into something that we think we can actually keep. If, however, we allow all of Scripture to inform us of our sin as the Holy Spirit teaches us, we establish the Law as God's Word to us.

The Law, however, does not allow for reinterpretation and for lessening its demands so we can deceive ourselves into thinking we can keep it. When a person lessens the demands of the Law, he undermines both the Law itself and the holiness of God who established both its mandates and its punishments. Moreover, lessening the Law minimizes the value of Christ's death! When one has been truly freed from the demands of the Law by a full and complete pardon, he no longer has a fear of that Law because he is no longer under its authority. He can see his own shortcomings reflected back from the Law and not require any softening of its demands, because he knows that all of the demands of the Law have already been met in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and freely credited to him.

In other words, I am not afraid to admit that I am a sinner when I truly know that God has already forgiven all my sin. I am free from the Law.

The Law does not give us the desire to do what is good and loving; it is only able to show us that we are not being completely good and loving. The Spirit Who indwells us applies God's written Word to our lives, convicts us regarding God's will for us, places the desire for that will within us, and ultimately does the good work through us (Phil. 2:13).

## Recapitulation

In conclusion, we can summarize how we receive sanctification in the following way:

- We are under the Law of Christ, not the Mosaic Law or the Ten Commandments.
- We do not obtain justification through following any Law—neither the Law of Christ nor the Mosaic Law.
- We do not obtain sanctification through following any Law—neither the Law of Christ nor the Mosaic Law.
- The nature of any Law is that it can only point out sin, not change the sinner.
- The Law of Christ in the written Word of God, however, is still active in pointing out sin for believers.
- Sanctification is the work of the Spirit in us, not of our own work, nor do we accomplish sanctification while tapping into the power of the Spirit.

Our righteousness comes from God's work, not our own. It is the result of faith from beginning to end, as expressed in Rom 1:17a: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." †

## CLOSER LOOK

# WHAT IS MONERGISM?

There are two views of how we are justified and sanctified, and the words describing these two views are generally unknown to most Adventists.

## Two views defined

**Monergism** is defined as "the doctrine that the Holy Ghost acts independently of the human will in the work of regeneration" (dictionary.com).

In contrast, **synergism** is defined thus: "the doctrine that the human will cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the work of regeneration" (dictionary.com). Extreme examples of synergism are Adventism and Catholicism; both say that salvation combines God's work with man's obedience to law.

Among monergistic theologians there are differences of opinion about how sanctification is accomplished. While monergists generally agree that justification is entirely an act and a gift of God, some disagree about sanctification. Some say man's spiritual disciplines contribute to their sanctification. Other theologians say that even sanctification is monergistic—that not only our justification but also our sanctification is the work of God.

## We choose monergism

Life Assurance Ministries takes the position, based upon texts such as 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:11, and Hebrews 2:11, that both justification and sanctification are the works of God. While we are asked to believe and to put off the old man and to put on the new, the faith to believe and the ability and desire to obey are also gifts of God (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom 8:9-11).

We do not create a formula to explain the mystery of God's sovereign work in us; we have to believe every word of Scripture. We must hold in tension things that we cannot explain, but we know that only God can make a dead heart respond to Him, and only God can put His life into our still-mortal flesh and create His work in us. †

# EXPERIENCING NEW COVENANT LIFE: YOU ARE FORMED BY JESUS

DALE RATZLAFF

In our search for truth we often focus on the facts of doctrine and not on the experience that comes when the correct doctrine is discovered, accepted, and worked out in the life. I am not downplaying the importance of doctrine because experience based upon false or fuzzy doctrine will be worked out in life experience as well. That is the very reason why so many people in today's society are frustrated, discouraged and without hope. Therefore, experiencing new covenant life must be based upon the facts of the new covenant. A number of articles on the covenants have been written in previous issues of *Proclamation!* Therefore, I will not do an in-depth study here; rather I will just do a quick summary. Those who wish more information on the covenants will find them in the archives of *Proclamation!* and in *Sabbath in Christ*.

## Summary of the covenants

<b>The old covenant:</b>	<b>The new covenant:</b>
<b>Covenant partners</b> God and Israel	The Father and Jesus
<b>Words of the covenant</b> Ten Commandments	The Law of Christ
<b>Book of the covenant</b> Genesis to Deuteronomy	Gospels and epistles
<b>Entrance sign</b> Circumcision	Baptism
<b>Remembrance sign</b> Sabbath	The Lord's Supper

With the doctrinal facts of the old and new covenants well in mind, we now move to the experience that is worked out in the life when we internalize new covenant concepts. We will do this by unpacking the implications of the first two items mentioned above.

## Jesus our Covenant Keeper

Perhaps the most insightful discovery of the new covenant is that Jesus is the One who keeps the covenant. We enter the covenant simply by belief and trust in our Substitute and Representative who paid the price for our sin and broke the curse of death. Based on the word of God, this entrance into the new covenant takes place solely by grace, solely by faith, and solely by Christ. And here is where many of us missed the wonderful assurance that comes from this doctrinal truth. We want to please God ourselves and feel that if we fall short of perfect obedience or continue to sin, our standing with God is in jeopardy, forgetting that it is not our obedience but our trust in Christ's obedience that God credits to our account.

Christ's parable in Matthew 18:23 teaches a valuable lesson. It is in the context of forgiveness. Peter had asked Jesus how many times he should forgive a sinning brother. Note how Jesus ties His answer to Peter with the following parable:

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. *For this reason* the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves" (Mt. 18:22-23).



Then Jesus told the disciples the well-known parable of the ungrateful steward (v. 23-35). Several things need to be highlighted: first, the steward had no concept of the magnitude of his debt. He owed ten thousand talents. A talent was the most valuable coin of the day and was equal to about 6,000 day's wages for the common laborer. It would take about 160,000 years for the steward to pay off the loan—an utter impossibility. The fact that the servant said, "Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything," shows he had no realization of the humongous size of the debt. The point Jesus is making is that our sin is so large it is impossible for us to deal with it. There is only one recourse for sinners—to trust completely the forgiveness offered by God.

The second thing we should note is the slave's reaction. The fact that the slave went to a fellow slave and demanded payment indicated again that he did not understand the magnitude of his own debt nor the depths of the grace and forgiveness of the king. It appears the reason he went after a fellow slave who owed him but a small amount was to get some money so he could give something to the king. Perhaps he thought that at least a little payment would be pleasing to His master.

The two-fold lesson is clear. First, we can only comprehend the vastness of God's grace and mercy when we understand the depths of our own sin. We were born in sin with not only a sinful nature but we inherited the guilt of Adam. We sin with acts of commission and acts of omission. We sin by thought, by deed, and by lack of faith. Second, we must face the utter impossibility of our achieving or enhancing the righteousness of God by our diligent practice of the disciplines of the Christian life. Not even if we had another lifetime of practice could we please Him. In short, we cannot make ourselves pleasing to God by our own good works. Too often many of us have thought we accepted the full forgiveness and grace of God, but then we set out to make ourselves more righteous or spiritual. When we think we are progressing in holiness we begin to measure others by our own standards, and the poison root of judgmental legalism begins to flourish. This sort of judgment appears to be what was going on in the Corinthian church. Paul wisely gave this counsel:

**For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:26-31).**

Internalizing the truth that Jesus is our Covenant Keeper, our Substitute, and our Representative and that His one sacrifice for sin is 100% sufficient for all time brings a tremendous sense of relief, peace, and assurance. It is the necessary foundation for us to begin to fulfill the law of Christ.

My father died when I was in the fourth grade, so my mother was my role model from that time on. We were often strapped

financially, and at times people would help us in one way or another. When someone gave us money or some other gift, my mother would always say, "Oh, you should not have done that." Later, when Carolyn and I were married and we would do something special for my mother, she would say, "Oh, you should not have done that." It was not that she did not need or want the gift or service; on the contrary, she deeply appreciated it. Apparently, however, she did not feel worthy of the gift, and by example she taught me to respond the same way. It took years for me simply to say, "Thank you," when someone did something for me.

In contrast with our natural inclination to feel unworthy, however, if we have accepted Christ as our Covenant Keeper, we can know in the core of our beings that we are wholly pleasing to God—because of Jesus. This confidence that God fully accepts us in His Son is the essence of new covenant life. It is the engine that motivates us to love. It is the foundation of all that follows. We can say to ourselves, "Yes, in myself I am unworthy, but in Christ, I am worthy, fully pleasing to God, with the very righteousness of God accounted to me by my faith in my Covenant Keeper, Jesus Christ." Know it, believe it, and trust it. It is the gushing fountain of living water that will flow out through you to others. Drink deeply!

## The Law of Christ—Love mediated by the Spirit

Perhaps the second most important insight in experiencing new covenant life is discovering what it means to live under the law of Christ. Over and over again we read, "This is my commandment, that you love one another." Significantly, this law is not codified in a list of "don'ts" engraved on stone, but it is a dynamic reality taught personally to us through the Holy Spirit in connection with the written word of the new covenant. In new covenant life, the Spirit performs the same function that the law performed in the old covenant, except He guides us personally as we live in the Word of God and function in the body of the church. This truth we find woven into all of Paul's epistles to young gentile churches, but nowhere is the contrast between the covenants and the resulting life experience more clearly laid out than in 2 Corinthians 3:3-18.

## Covenants contrasted

### Old Covenant:

- written with ink
- on tablets of stone
- inadequate (implied)
- of the letter
- letter kills
- ministry of death
- came with glory
- ministry of condemnation
- glory fades
- now has no glory
- veil remains unlifted
- veil lies over their heart
- bondage (implied)
- unable to change heart (implied)

### New Covenant:

- written with the Spirit
- on tablets of human hearts
- adequate servants
- of the Spirit
- Spirit gives life
- ministry of the Spirit
- abounds in glory
- ministry of righteousness
- glory surpasses it
- remains in glory
- veil removed in Christ
- veil taken away
- liberty
- being transformed



Jesus and the writers of the New Testament all taught that the law of love takes care of all the questions of morality. When Paul explained his evangelistic methods of working with Jews who had the law and Greeks who were not under the law, he gave a helpful insight:

**For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but *under the law of Christ*, that I might win those who are without law (1 Cor. 9:19-21).**

Note how Paul specifically declares that this law of Christ takes care of all the questions of morality. It is a dynamic principle that covers *and goes beyond* all the specific moral laws of the old covenant.

**Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom. 13:8-9).**

For those of us who grew up on law, making a transition from old covenant law—the Ten Commandments, to the law of Christ—the law of love, was difficult. We were used to the “thou

The new birth is a supernatural event. It is not something we can conjure up—not by prayer, not by reading Scripture, not by fasting, not by silence, not by witnessing, not by giving, not by church attendance, not by any personal works. We come with an empty hand and allow the grace of God—God’s infinite grace that covers (remember the parable) up to 160,000 years of sinful debt. The new birth is an act of the Holy Spirit.

**For by one Spirit we *were all baptized* into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).**

“Were baptized” is aorist passive in Greek, indicating that the Holy Spirit is the active agent and we are the passive recipients of His work. Remember how the Holy Spirit in the new covenant takes the place of the law in the old as outlined above from 2 Corinthians? I have *highlighted* a few of the things below to show how this law of Christ—the law of love—mediated to us through the Holy Spirit works.

**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom *you were sealed* for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).**

**But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will *teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance* all that I said to you (Jn. 14:26).**

**But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, *He will guide you into all the truth*; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and *He will disclose to you what is to come* (Jn. 16:13).**

**Today we have hope for true transformation only by focusing on the glories of the gospel, the many declarations that God has made to believing Christians, rather than by trusting the practice of the disciplines touted to bring one deeper spiritually.**

shalt not’s” and thought that without them, we would be without moral boundaries. However, when one is born again by the Spirit of Christ he is then in a position to experience new covenant life. Unless we have been born again we cannot claim to be a true Christian. Being born again is a real experience and is not the same thing as being “converted to the truth”. That is only an intellectual assent to a set of doctrines, which may or may not be true to Scripture. However, when we hear, understand, and respond to the gospel, then the miracle of God’s mercy, grace, and full forgiveness is ours. Note the gospel order in the verse below.

**In Him, you also, (1) after listening to (2) the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—(3) having also believed, (4) you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is (5) given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:13-14).**

**And hope does not disappoint, because the *love of God has been poured out within our hearts* through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Rom. 5:5).**

**But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that *we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter* (Rom. 7:6).**

**For all who are *being led by the Spirit of God*, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but *you have received a spirit of adoption* as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*, and if children, heirs also, *heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:14-17).**

**And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the**

Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Rom 8:26).

## New Covenant Transformation

The law of Christ brings liberty and freedom mediated by the Spirit in connection with the Word. By walking in the Spirit (will-ing obedience to the Word, keeping a clear conscience with God and others), and by living the law of Christ and fellowshiping in the body of Christ, there is real hope for transformation. Referring once again to the contrast between the old and new covenants listed in 2 Corinthians 3, let us focus on the last contrast.

**But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:14-18).**

“Are being transformed” is another passive verb. It is the work of the Spirit. Our work is to behold the glory of the Lord. Today there are numerous instructors and methods touted to deepen spirituality. Some may be good discipline; however, when reading through the New Testament over and over again, God’s overall plan for transformation becomes clear. It is not through fasting. There is no instruction or command to fast in the New Testament. True, on several occasions we have the record that the church leaders used prayer and fasting before choosing elders. Fasting for some people may be useful. Some say it clears the mind and gives focus. I fasted for two days once, but it did neither for me. Other people are withdrawing from society seeking solitude and silence. This isolation may be useful for a limited time; however, it is not the emphasis of New Testament transformation.

The New Testament method of transformation is beholding the glory of the Lord. It is knowing that Christ is our Covenant Keeper. It is practicing the law of Christ as described in 1 Corinthians 13. It is knowing that we are seated with Christ at the Father’s right hand. It is knowing that we are fully forgiven, that we have eternal life and are qualified to receive an inheritance with Christ.

Paul’s burning desire was that his readers would understand the infinite love of God.

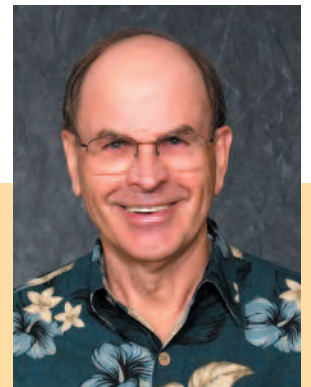
**For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,**

**that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:14-21).**

The ungrateful slave in the parable of Jesus in Matthew 18 would have been much better off contemplating the magnitude of the king’s forgiveness than trying to scrounge up a few pence to put toward his debt. Today we have hope for true transformation only by focusing on the glories of the gospel, the many declarations that God has made to believing Christians, rather than by trusting the practice of the disciplines touted to bring one deeper spiritually. Gaze into the glory of God. Live in the first two chapters of Ephesians until you make it home. Visit 1 Corinthians 13 until you know the names of love. Study the first eight chapters of Romans until your heart leaps for joy. Take a month vacation in Galatians, reading it through in one sitting every day until you can pick the fruit of the Spirit. Travel in the gospel of John until you know that you have passed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. Know what it means to enter into God’s rest, to have eternal life, to be set free from sin. Yes, I invite you to experience new covenant life and bask in the glory of God. †

### For further study

- “The Continental Divide of Biblical Interpretation”, [http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/Proclamation2005\\_MayJun.pdf](http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/Proclamation2005_MayJun.pdf)
- [http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/Proclamation2005\\_MayJun.pdf](http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/Proclamation2005_MayJun.pdf); *Sabbath in Christ*, Chapters 3-8; 15-17; 20.
- 2 Cor. 5:21.
- Eph. 2:3.
- Rom. 5:12-21.
- Mt. 5:28.
- Rom. 14:23.
- Jn. 13:34; 14:31; 15:12, 17.
- 1 Jn. 3:23; 4:21; 2 Jn. 1:5, 6.
- Phil. 3:3-9.



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

## THE TREASURES OF UN-WRAPPABLE GIFTS

“Un-wrappable gifts are my favorite,” said an older woman who lovingly calls me her adopted daughter. We were sitting in a restaurant sharing coffee and brunch together, and I asked her to explain the phrase she had just used.

“Un-wrappable gifts are the things that you can’t wrap or buy; they can be an experience shared together, an encouraging word, or help given by someone. I’ve gotten to the age when things break and eventually are thrown away—but un-wrappable gifts can never be broken or thrown away.” What profound thoughts she expressed in simple words. What she didn’t realize was that she had just given me an un-wrappable gift. She was leaving a legacy—this woman who had already raised her own children was now investing her time in me that morning.

What un-wrappable gift will you be giving this Christmas season? What legacy will you leave behind you in the form of a gift that can never break or be thrown away?

### Some un-wrappable gifts

Recently, I received a few un-wrappable gifts. A work-related rejection had left me feeling very alone and vulnerable. I described the situation with a dear friend. She encouraged me personally and then encouraged me in the Lord. “You are dearly loved, and God’s direction of your life...is not an accident. He is healing you.... You are not fatally flawed. You are not shameful. You are God’s beloved daughter, and you are a joint heir with Jesus.” Those words were an un-wrappable gift that reminded me to Whom I belong and Whose child I am.

Another gift encouraged me recently. I struck up a conversation with someone at a presentation. She saw me several days later and said, “I told my boss that the best part of my presentation was that I had made a new friend.” She was referring to me. They were simple words—but I felt valued and appreciated.

One of my former students saw me in church recently. She is being discipled by an amazing woman of God. In an excited voice the girl told me about receiving Christ at a youth camp in October. “I am different,” she said holding up her Bible. She told me that she thought she should get a new Bible, but she



Un-wrappable gifts  
can never be broken  
or thrown away.

didn’t want to give up this old one which was worn, dirty, and marked by her notes. As she told me of her love for her Bible, she didn’t realize she was giving me an “un-wrappable” gift. I had given her that Bible. In fact, when I had given my students their individually-chosen Bibles, I wondered if they would ever read them. Now this girl was holding up that well-worn Bible I had given her, and she was sharing her new joy in Christ. Knowing she had received Christ as her Savior and seeing that worn Bible in her hands brought tears to my eyes.

### The best gift

The greatest un-wrappable gift that I have ever received came in the form of a baby swathed in rags nearly 2,000 years ago. The child was born in poverty and His life was filled with rejection, but He changed me forever. He submitted Himself to a grisly death that purchased my life. He is the best un-wrappable gift I have ever received.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:16; NIV)

I, too, can say with my student, “I am different”, because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is the best un-wrappable gift I have ever received. He will never break and can never be thrown away. He will never leave me or forsake me. He has given me life by His death.

Have you received this amazing un-wrappable gift? †

Carolyn Macomber was a doctoral student at Andrews University when she discovered inconsistencies between Adventism and the Bible. She withdrew her membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2009. She is a member of The Chapel Evangelical Free Church in St. Joseph, Michigan, where she is the leader of a Former Adventist Fellowship. She works helping families prepare their children for school readiness.



**Excellent**

Greetings! Your journal *Proclamation!* is remarkably excellent. Keep up this high quality! Enclosed is a check to help. I have read your journal for many years from cover to cover. I believe I started with the very first one.

HIGHLAND, CA

**Take your medication**

“Manipulative enmeshment”? [See the article “Contextualization”, Fall, 2013] Whoa, we broke out the old thesaurus for that baby, didn’t we? You might want to look up what “enmeshment” means before you use it again. Here, I’ll help.

“Enmeshment is a state of cross-generational bonding within a family, whereby a child (normally of the opposite sex) becomes a surrogate spouse for their mother or father.”

“Manipulative enmeshment” is a term Colleen Tinker has thought up to impress her readers, who, judging from the Letters to the Editor, read (and write) at around a third grade level.

But don’t worry Colleen, they are all impressed.

Your article sticks out like a sore thumb. It is rare that one sees such bile and anger in a Christian periodical. You’re starting to sound like some of the letters you print.

You really need a vacation, [expletive]. No offense, but comparing honest hearted people, no

matter how mistaken in their beliefs, to child molesters is really beyond the pale. You should seek counseling when you get back from the beach...

You should stick to correcting the other authors’ spelling and grammar, rather than writing articles. Dale gets many of the same points across, without all the vituperation. Quite frankly, you are embarrassing yourself. You’ve probably got people so afraid of your temper that they are afraid to

**They convinced me that since I was adopted and was carrying the sins of my biological parents, I asked for and deserved abuse so I could become perfect for God’s return any day.**

confront you, but you can’t get at me, so you’re welcome.

What former Adventists don’t need is some shrill [expletive] going off for page after page about what she doesn’t like. You’re going to close down your own magazine if you’re not careful. No one is going to send you money so you can feed your frustration.

Breathe in, breathe out. Take your medication. Get plenty of

rest. And stop writing such mean spirited [expletive].

VIA EMAIL

**Spiritually abused and afraid**

I am on a healing journey, and I really, really appreciate your article “Spiritual Abuse among Religions” by Joanie Yorba-Gray, MSW, with Colleen Tinker (Winter, 2012). It explains so many feelings I have had and still have and the conflict I feel still. The hope in my heart is that I will finally be able to speak my truth

asked for and deserved abuse so I could become perfect for God’s return any day.

I was also so afraid of all non-Adventists; they were Satan or with Satan...

Thank you; your article has helped me a lot already.

BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

**Abhor your magazine**

Please do not send your quarterly magazine to me again!!!!

I don’t “bash” you for leaving Adventism, I have no respect for people who call themselves “Christians” yet bash other religions. I abhor your magazine and trash it upon receipt! So save yourself the postage and remove me from your mailing list!

KENNEWICK, WA

**Thank you, Dale, for your courage**

I was raised in a devout fourth generation Adventist home ... (and) attended grades one through 12 in an Adventist school. I did my best to follow the rules and regulations, but in my teens, I began to realize I couldn’t. I turned to a life of drinking ... and felt God couldn’t love a hopeless case such as myself... I dropped out of college, got married, and had a daughter. After a few years of unhappy marriage and another child, my drinking took an even more important role in my life, and my wife and I divorced.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR YEAR-END SUPPORT**

As 2013 draws to a close, we praise God for His faithfulness to keep *Proclamation!* in print. Sometimes we wonder whether or not we will have the money for the printer and for the post office when they need it in order to finish the job, but God has provided.

While we have (obviously) been able to mail this fourth issue this year, we remain behind in some of our bills. We ask that you join us in praying that God will provide. He knows those whom He is blessing to give; please join us in thanking God for His faithfulness, both in the past and as we face the future.

We praise Him for the privilege of declaring the gospel and the wonders of the new covenant. Thank you to those who share this ministry with us through prayer and monetary support.

We pray God will glorify Himself through *Proclamation!* and through each of us who have been set free and made alive through the blood of His cross! †



Richard and Colleen Tinker with Carolyn and Dale Ratzlaff.

It seemed drinking could help me forget not only my inability to live a “good life” but also the scary end time scenario that Ellen White prophesied which had terrified me since I was eight years old.

Meanwhile, I fell in love with a beautiful woman, and after a couple of years, I checked into a treatment center to start my sober walk. We got married about a year later. It was my plan to convert my wife to Adventism and be a perfect Adventist myself. She was open to Adventism, so she started studying the Adventist doctrine in earnest. She uncovered several questions that I could only partially answer (even with my 12 years of Adventist education under my belt), and a serious rift grew between us and almost tore us apart. I could not seem to get through to her and remove the veil.

Then the Lord began to reveal the truth to me. We read a lot of literature online, including one testimony by a former Adventist minister who spoke of his separation from the church and how he believed that the Adventist doctrine was false. It finally started to sink in. We found several of Dale Ratzlaff’s videos and watched them several times each. His loving and caring approach to explaining the true

gospel unveiled my eyes and unchained me from 41 years of bondage! God has become a living and breathing Reality in my life. And I’m saved!!

Thank you so much, Dale, for having the courage and conviction to take a stand against the false doctrines that are taught by the Adventist church. I am evidence that God is using you to spread the Good News about Jesus and His love for us! Praise the Lord!!

OLIVE BRANCH, MS

#### **Trampled, calloused consciences**

Whose cause is now being served by perpetuating perjury in the attack on the Law of God and the Bible and the relentless perse-

## I will always hang onto Galatians 5:4 and Colossians 2:17. The Sabbath was a mere shadow of something better to come! Now that I'm saved, I rest in Christ my Sabbath on a daily basis.

cution of the Church, its members, and on Ellen White and the inspired writings?

Are you people now beyond the reach of God’s Spirit? Wasn’t your current road to perdition hampered whilst “kicking against the pricks?” Are your consciences so trampled and calloused that they have now ceased to serve your own best interest?

Consider that better brains have tried for centuries to discredit God, His Law, and the Bible and have failed miserably. Seriously, Satan with his supernatural brain could not accomplish it, but now he dupes you into thinking you are engaged in a good cause when, in fact, all he is doing is roping you into his failure and his fate!

Since our Good God is not willing any should perish, why would you insist traveling down this bendy road to the eternal cliff?

If you can still hear, then harden not your hearts. If you have not already been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, then hear and turn and allow God to heal you while you can.

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Is. 55:6-7).

VIA EMAIL

#### **Effective ministry**

I’m a born again Christian, but some of my family on my Dad’s

side are Adventists. I think this magazine would be really effective in helping me witness to them as well as to my Dad. Thank you for being obedient to God’s Word and God’s Truth. Your ministry is awesome!

LOS ANGELES, CA

#### **Be reconciled**

We have been receiving your magazine for awhile. I looked over one once. I am sorry to see your dissatisfied opinions about God’s Church. I pray every day that your group will be reconciled with Jesus.

TROY, NH

#### **Not surprised**

I guess I shouldn’t be surprised by the negative comments in Letters to the Editor. Satan is very busy. I haven’t yet seen my Adventist sister able to see the error in her practice. I appreciate your good work.

GREEN VALLEY, AZ

#### **Praise God**

After my husband found the gospel of Grace, he was so ashamed that he had ever believed all that EGW “stuff”, but he was a biblical illiterate when he joined the Adventist church and took off to college at CUC. It didn’t help matters when he fell in love with me; I was full of EGW from childhood and was doing my pharisaical best to live by the 2000 or so Adventist rules! Praise God for showing us the freedom we have in Christ who said, “It is finished.”

I will never forget our visit on that bench, Colleen [at an FAF weekend], regarding our spirits going to be with the Lord. I was so afraid to believe it, but you and the Holy Spirit made it clear to me, after so many years of believing that my spirit was just the breath of life God gave me.

Maranatha—and Merry Christmas!  
IDYLVILD, CA

#### **Shout to the Lord**

When I read Dale’s testimony against the Adventist church, I shouted, “Praise God!” Someone else finally found out the truth!

For 38 years my spouse has tried to put the yoke of the Adventist faith around my neck with absolutely no success. For 38 years I’ve watched the Adventist organization do what they do, and I have always believed that it was not for me. I will always hang onto Galatians 5:4 and Colossians 2:17. The Sabbath was a mere shadow of something better to come! Now that I’m saved, I rest in Christ my Sabbath on a daily basis.

MEMPHIS, TN

#### **Wonderful articles**

Thank you for the wonderful articles. God bless you.  
PORTER CORNERS, NY

#### **Thank you**

Thank you again for the wonderful work you do to bring the true gospel to the Seventh-day Adventists. May God continue to bless you!

PASCO, WA

### 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

## Why we left Adventism

**From the editor:** We usually don't print really long letters, but we think that you will agree that this letter needed to be presented (with only light editing).

On April 19, 2013, we mailed a letter to the Senior Pastor of Vallejo Drive Seventh-day Adventist Church in Glendale, California, to officially withdraw our membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church after a combined 108-year history with Adventism between the two of us. We became Adventists in the Philippines, and we both had many leadership positions in our congregations.

We have been studying the Scriptures in depth for the last three years, without the filter of any church or religion, but with open hearts and minds, to try to reconcile it with some of our Adventist teachings. What we discovered were real eye openers, and liberating.

We have come to the conviction that Seventh-day Adventism's central doctrines cannot pass the biblical test; therefore, we cannot remain Adventists and maintain our integrity.

To make our transition as painless as possible (our feelings of having been betrayed by the frauds and cover ups of the Adventist leadership are now behind us), we will address here only the key Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists which the denomination claims make it uniquely God's only true church for the last days.

**A. 1844:** This date, called the great disappointment, is the culmination of William Miller's erroneous exegesis of Daniel 8:14. Miller first calculated the second coming of Christ would occur in 1843. When that date failed, the Millerites recalculated and set the date in 1844. Ellen G. White believed that it was God who purposely misled "His people" to believe first in 1843: "I saw that God was in the proclamation of

the time in 1843. It was His design to arouse the people and bring them to a testing point, where they should decide for or against the truth" (*Early Writings*, p. 232). Instead of humbly admitting a failed prophecy, EGW blamed God for the error.

God does not play games with His children nor deceive them!

**B. Investigative Judgment:** This "unique" doctrine is contrabiblical: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has

## We have come to the conviction that Seventh-day Adventism's central doctrines cannot pass the Biblical test; therefore, we cannot remain Adventists and maintain our integrity.

eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (Jn. 5:24).

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Rom. 8:1-4).

If Paul were waiting for the end of an investigative judgment that allegedly started on October 22, 1844, he would not have declared with certainty, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day—and not only to me, but to all those who longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 7-8).

When Jesus declared at the cross, "It is finished", the real and final sacrifice for sins had been offered! Then, when Jesus ascended to heaven, He immediately "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, and...serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man" (Heb. 8:1, 2). The central Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment has no

place in the completed work of Jesus!

**C. Sabbath:** While God rested (ceased from) His work of creation on the seventh day of the creation week, there is no record of man observing the seventh-day Sabbath as a regular day of rest, let alone worship, until God called the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt about 2,500 years later. The seventh-day Sabbath was given specifically to the Jewish nation as a sign between the Lord and the children of Israel (Ex. 31:12-18),

31). Notice how Peter responded to the Judaizers' requirement of keeping the law in Acts 15: 7-11, "Why are you questioning God's way by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke [the law of Moses with more than 600 requirements] that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the special favor of the Lord Jesus".

When people insist that Sabbath-keeping is a requirement for salvation, then they are preaching an un-Biblical Gospel (Gal. 3:1-14). In fact, twice the Apostle Paul warned about these false teachers: Rom. 14:5-11, and Col. 2:13-17.

Lastly, the writer of Hebrews re-affirms the fact that with the Christ-event comes the New Covenant which nullifies the provisions of the Old (Sinaitic) Covenant (Heb. 8:6-13). He further states that "the old system of the law of Moses was only a shadow of the things to come, not the reality of the good things Christ has done for us" (Heb. 10:1-12).

When people ask us what we are now, we are quick to answer, "We are *new covenant* Christians!"

We thank God that after decades of our hanging onto the veil of Moses, by His grace alone God removed that veil so now we can see to what the Old Testament and the Old Covenant were pointing: the Messiah, the Son of God.

We believe that the one and only continuing, authoritative, and reliable source of *truth* and guidance for God's church in these last days is His Son (Heb. 1:2). We believe that the true seal of every believer is the Spirit of God (Eph. 1:13). We also believe that the true test of discipleship is what Christ himself said, "all men will know that you are my disciples, if you *love* one another." (Jn. 13: 35).

FRED AND ROCHELLE HOSILLOS  
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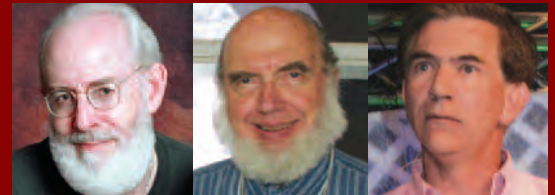
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**CONFERENCE SCHEDULE**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2014**

- 9:00 – 10:10 Session 1: Gary Inrig
- 10:25 – 11:20 Session 2: Colleen Tinker
- 11:35 – 12:30 Breakouts (also teen breakout)
- 1:45 – 2:40 Session 3: Gary Inrig
- 3:10 – 4:05 Session 4: Carolyn Macomber
- 7:00 – 9:30 Session 5 - Paul Carden and more!  
 Panel: Your questions answered

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2014**

- 8:00 – 9:15 Session 6: Dale Ratzlaff
- 9:35 – 10:30 Session 7: Gary Inrig
- 10:50 – 11:45 Breakouts (also teen breakout)
- 1:00 – 2:15 Session 8: Dale Ratzlaff
- 2:35 – 3:30 Breakouts (also teen breakout)
- 3:50 – 4:45 Session 9: Jon Rittenhouse
- 7:00 – 9:00 Session 10 - Gary Inrig

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2014**

- 8:00 – 9:00 Continental Breakfast and Fellowship
- 9:30 – 10:45 Worship with Trinity Church (host church)
- 11:00 – 4:00 Fellowship lunch (food served at 12:00)

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 WEBSITE FOR REGISTRATION COST, MAP AND LODGING: **FormerAdventist.com**

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THE LIFE AFTER WITH CHRIS LEE

I've always been a night owl. Mornings come in a fuzzy blur; halfway through my shower I begin to recall little details, such as my name, age, and marital status, but that's about the highest cognitive level I reach before several cups of coffee. Even then, full functioning doesn't seem to kick in until about 10:00 a.m.

Ah, but the night is when I come alive. That is the time I do my best thinking, studying, and writing. Naturally, then, I began to do most of my Bible study and reading at night.

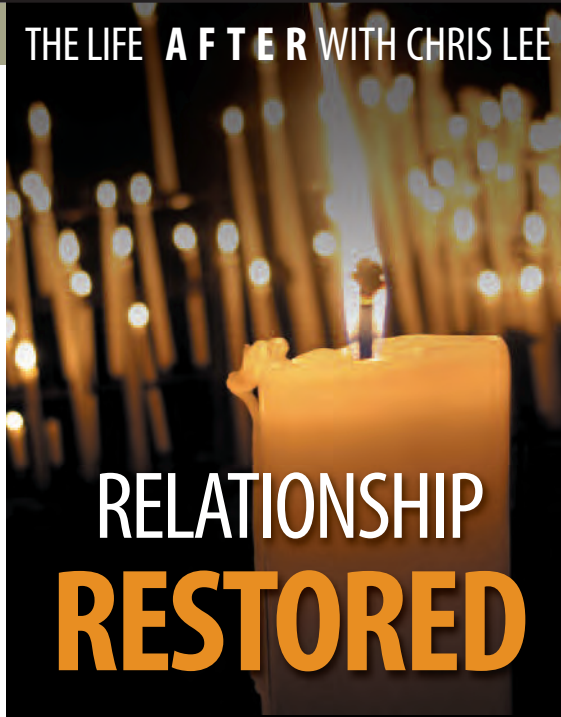
It was late. The kids were asleep; work and dinner were behind me. My wife had retired to watch a favorite TV show. I spent some time in a book of the Bible, then picked up a very small book from the Christian author du jour. It was a follow-up to a blockbuster mini-book that had focused on prayer. In the first booklet the author had promoted a very specific formula for effective prayer. His follow-up book was just as prescriptive, if not as narrow in its focus. The second book focused on "fruit bearing".

The gist of the book, as I recall it, was that bearing fruit is produced by abiding in Jesus, and abiding in Jesus is accomplished through spiritual disciplines. The author spent a good deal of time discussing the proper way to implement these disciplines. At one point the author said in essence, "I know of no great man of God who did not have his devotions in the morning." This declaration seized my attention. After all, I had a deep desire to burgeon as a man of God. Having recently left Adventism, I was hungry for any counsel that would help me learn, grow, and develop in my walk with Jesus. I was resolved to drive a stake into the heart of my inner night owl and its nocturnal rhythms.

I began setting my alarm early and dragging myself out of bed for devotions. It was a disaster. After months of perseverance I still sat hunched over my Bible, coffee occasionally



**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](http://ProclamationMagazine.com). You may contact Chris by email at [ambulator@gmail.com](mailto:ambulator@gmail.com).



RELATIONSHIP  
RESTORED

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Then it hit me, "This is just more-guilt inducing legalism."

dripping onto the pages from the mug cradled in my drooping hands. I read, then reread the same passage over and over without understanding or recall. I began to hate Bible study. I was angry at myself. I was guilty. I felt despair. I would never be a great man of God.

One night, when my head was clearer, I realized that, although there is one account of Jesus arising early in the morning to pray (Mk. 1:34), the Bible has at least two accounts of Jesus praying at night, even late at night. If mornings were magical, wouldn't the Bible make that clear? If night devotions were lackadaisical, didn't Jesus provide a bad example? Perhaps, biblically, there is no one right time to worship? Then it hit me: "This is just more guilt-inducing legalism!"

The Old Covenant Law was full of detailed prescriptions for worship, but Galatians 3:19-29 makes it clear that the Law was only a pedagogue designed to shut us up under sin, condemn us, and drive us to Christ. The passage goes on to declare that now that the Christ has come we are no longer under a tutor. We have become sons and heirs of God. Christmas changed everything! Jesus came to do something the Law could not: restore relationship. Worship is no longer about prescriptions, but about an intimate love affair that cannot be denied or contained. It's the difference between doing things with your wife because your marriage counselor said you must, versus being with your wife because you can't bear to be apart. Relationship changes everything.

In Galatians 4, Paul goes on to remind us that we can't have a relationship with two wives. Likewise we can't be under two covenants. So what's it going to be, Law or grace, legalism or relationship? May this Christmas season remind each of us that Jesus came to usher in a New Covenant that restores relationship. †