

IS THE CLEAR WORD AN OFFICIAL ADVENTIST PUBLICATION?

ProclamationMagazine.com

# Proclamation!

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS  
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS  
SABBATARIANS  
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

FALL 2014  
VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3

WHY WE LOVE  
GOD'S WORD





COLLEEN TINKER

## LOVING GOD'S WORD

I was scanning an online forum one day, and with a sense of disbelief I read the words of a former Adventist proclaiming his method of studying Scripture; he claimed to read every reference to a certain subject in the Bible in order to determine what to believe. This, the writer proclaimed, was how he determined that hell is not eternal. Doctrinal conclusions such as the reality of hell, though, cannot be determined simply by reading all the texts that come up in a Bible search engine. Context—reading entire chapters and books—is essential. Submission of one's mind and beliefs to God's word is also mandatory.

...THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT DOES NOT REPLACE GOD'S WORD BUT RATHER TEACHES US GOD'S WORD.

Using Scripture as a glorified encyclopedia, however, is not the only way I've encountered God's word being diminished by Christians. Some months ago I listened to a Christian leader pray, "We apologize for being greedy for Scripture, and we repent of being gluttons of Your word and for not taking Your word into our community."

This prayer echoes other phrases I've been hearing more and more from various Christians: "bibliolotry", or idolatry of the Bible; "head knowledge" instead of love from the heart, and so on. The assumption underlying these ideas is disorienting: that a person who is committed to focussing on God's word as the foundation and rudder for all of life will have a head full of Bible knowledge but a life devoid of practical love for the world. Yet this assumption is false.

The Bible is not a book of facts. It is the "living and abiding word of God," according to Peter, through which we are born again of imperishable seed (1 Pet. 1:23). It 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).

If we are not submitted to God's word and committed to allowing it to expose our motives and sins, we will fail to grow. If we do not submit our minds and hearts to the truth about the Lord Jesus, we may be highly moral in behavior but driven by spiritual busyness that silences the convicting words of God.

As members of Christ's body, we forget sometimes that the indwelling Holy Spirit does not

replace God's word but rather teaches us God's word. Truth is not in our own heads; it is in God's word. Unless we put that truth into our minds, we will be unable to live fruitful lives.

As the first wave of Israelites returned to Jerusalem after their Babylonian captivity, Zechariah reminded them of their fathers' failure to take God's word seriously:

"They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 7:12).

We who are part of the church have even greater access to and responsibility for knowing and submitting to God's word than did the Israelites. Because of modern publishing, we have God's word readily available—in addition to having the Author of Scripture indwelling us, convicting us, teaching us, and showing us how to take the next right step. Moreover, we are obligated to treasure God's word and to rightly divide it, submitting to it without superimposing our own understanding onto it.

In this issue Dale Ratzlaff presents God's inerrant and sufficient word as our ground of truth that reveals reality and exposes error, and Stephen Pitcher explains how *The Clear Word* covers Ellen White's teaching in a deceptively biblical format. Martin Carey shows us from Hebrews 2 how the Lord Jesus redeems and restores humanity's role in creation, and Russell Kelley uses grammar to demonstrate that the investigative judgment cannot be the fulfillment of Daniel 8:10-14. Jonathan Winn shares his experience of looking at Adventism from the "outside", and we also hear from our columnists Rick Barker, Chris Lee, and Carolyn Macomber.

My prayer is that a growing love for God's eternal, sufficient word will transform our lives, yield kingdom fruit, and fill our hearts with joy. †

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Back issues of *Proclamation!* and the blog site [ProclamationMagazine.com](http://ProclamationMagazine.com)
- Books and other materials by Dale Ratzlaff [LifeAssuranceMinistries.com](http://LifeAssuranceMinistries.com)
- Day by day commentary on the Sabbath School lessons [BibleStudiesForAdventists.com](http://BibleStudiesForAdventists.com)
- Testimonies, Bibles studies, and the forum [FormerAdventist.com](http://FormerAdventist.com)
- Large body of resources for studying Adventism [TruthorFables.com](http://TruthorFables.com)

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LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES



# IN TIMES LIKE THESE WILL YOUR ANCHOR HOLD?

How should we react to the frightening news stories we are hearing? Should we be preparing to run to the hills?

Throughout history there have been wars, and all too often they have been associated with unspeakable massacres. We should not expect to see anything different now. For man is deceitfully wicked, born in sin to sin. For many years the West has lived in relative peace. We have been blessed to live in a country that at least gave lip service to Judeo-Christian values. But things are changing, or should we say, going back to the wicked normal. Currently, throughout the world, thousands of Christians are being martyred for their faith: burned, crucified, buried alive, and beheaded—all because they refuse to convert to Islam. And we do not know when these “far away atrocities” will appear in our neighborhood.

For our daily devotions Carolyn and I are reading a Psalm each evening, and many questions come into our minds. There are so many promises of protection and deliverance. Yet we see Christians given over to the sword, dying unprotected. Many of them are actually in the process of taking the gospel of Christ to other lands and losing their lives in the process.

David had the same questions. Sometimes he cried out to God, and God did not seem to be there; he heard only silence. At other times David saw God intervene on his behalf. There is a certain mystery to God’s providence that is out of reach for us mortals. In Luke 21:16-19 Jesus gave his disciples these words:

“But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death,

and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

This statement almost seems like double speak—“some of you will be put to death...not a hair of your head will perish.”

During times when we or those whom we love and for whom we pray face uncertainty or even death, we would do well to focus on the promises of God that will not fail, promises we can claim 100%.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (Jn. 5:24).

“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from

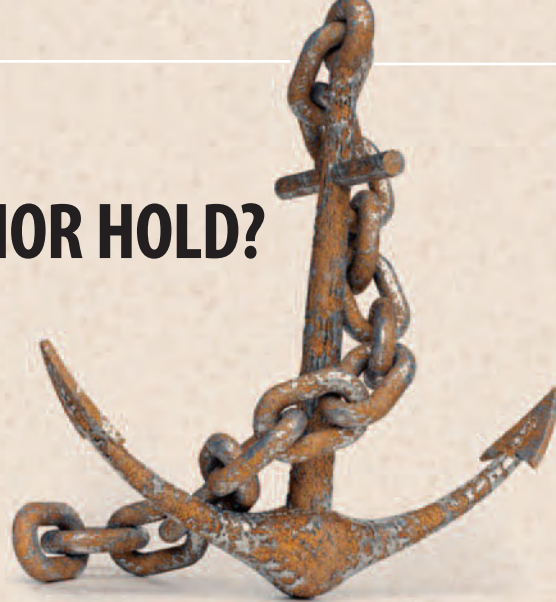
the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:12-13).

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (1 Pet. 4:12-14).

Come what may, if we cling to gospel statements such as these, our Anchor will hold in times like these.

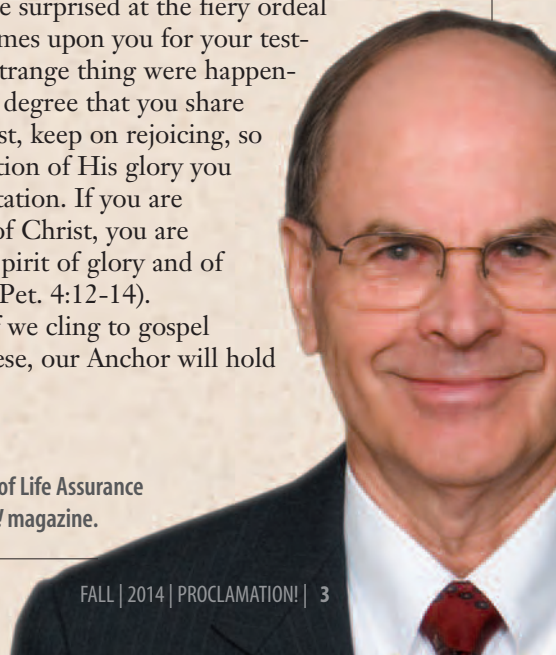
Dale Ratzlaff is the founder of Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine.



## THERE IS A CERTAIN MYSTERY TO GOD’S PROVIDENCE THAT IS OUT OF REACH FOR US MORTALS.



Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored five books concerning Adventism: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the unique doctrine of a pre-advent judgment that decides eternal destinies, *Truth About Adventist Truth*—a little book that’s perfect to give to Christians that need to understand Adventism, *Truth Led Me Out*—in which Dale Ratzlaff tells his own story of following Jesus, no matter the cost, and *My Cup Overflows*—Carolyn’s autobiography. Each of these books is available at [Ratzlaf.com](http://Ratzlaf.com) or by phoning (928) 554-1001.





## “They have their own prophetess!”

That was the first fact I learned about the Seventh-day Adventist church from my formerly Seventh-day Adventist wife, Lisa. Having been raised in a mainstream American evangelical tradition, I didn't have much of a reference point for, or opinion about, the Adventist church. I had never studied its history or its doctrine. I had never given a passing thought to the meaning of its name, although I could recall seeing a few Adventist church marquees as I drove by them.

Although Ellen G. White was apparently resistant to claiming the office of prophet for herself, and while the nature and authority of her writings are carefully nuanced by the Adventist church, what Lisa said spoke volumes to me, particularly when I learned that the Adventist church teaches that the gift of prophecy, which manifested itself in the ministry of Ellen G. White, is “an identifying mark of the remnant church” (quoted from Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief # 18). Based on my own experience with a teacher who made claims of unique spiritual insight, I understood the danger of associating with an organization that could claim to enjoy an exclusive status above that of other congregations that confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

### Hypocrite Finds New Life

Despite my parents' faithful witness to Christ, I only developed a thin veneer of a Christian identity. Familiar with the church's language, easily fitting into various programs, and at times showing great interest in learning more of the Bible, I nevertheless allowed worldly things to capture my attention and be treasured in my heart. I had no knowledge of God, much less a vision of His holiness.

**“If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (Ps. 130:3).**

In His mercy, God did not let me remain satisfied with my idolatry—I frequently struggled with depression. I began recognizing the inherent transience of autonomous pursuits of pleasure and of productivity. Though my life was a molehill compared to the mountainous journeys of the writer of Ecclesiastes, I had a firm grasp on the truth contained in his book:

**“Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after the wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (Ecc. 2:11).**

By this time I was away from home, and after a particularly strong bout of depression, I decided to try and seek God. I fell into close company with a Christian group at my college. Sadly, the person and work of Jesus Christ was not the focus of the teaching of that group; rather, the focus was on outward conduct, and the

# AN OUTSIDER LOOK

JONATHAN WINN



gospel seemed to have been assumed instead of regularly heralded. To make matters worse, my friendship with the group's unofficial mentor became quite codependent as I overlooked and explained away many “red flags” and uncritically accepted much of what he said. He fostered claims of having a unique wisdom that set him in a virtual class of his own, able to discern clearly the many problems in the church at large—not to mention his professing to have special insight into the spiritual world. He frequently spoke of suffering much as many past friends, family members, and acquaintances had betrayed or hurt him. It was hard for me to think of criticizing him, much less even to entertain a bad thought about him.

Several years later through a few providential events, I began to attend a church that was unlike any other I had ever experienced or even knew existed! The whole counsel of God's word was preached unapologetically and forcefully, and always the teaching led to God's gracious offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

I hated it! It sounded so proud, so prosaic—and it was positively deficient according to the perspective I had adopted during college

# BOOKS AT ADVENTISM



(a perspective which happened to be broadly and angrily critical of all those hypocritical, unloving churches in America). But to my surprise, the people there loved me and were patient with me as the preaching wore my hypocrisy down.

**“The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).**

As I learned more and more about the meaning of Jesus’ work on the cross and what His free offer of forgiveness entailed, as well as many other biblical teachings, I began to realize that those red flags I had overlooked in my college mentor were indicative of a deeper reality.

**“You will recognize them by their fruit” (Mt. 7:16).**

This was a hard truth to accept, and one that wrecked me emotionally with conflicting thoughts. I had a sense of being both betrayed and a betrayer; I felt regret over my own stupidity strongly coupled with fear that I was on a track towards being lost forever. On top of that, I felt as if an essential part of me had been razed to the ground; I felt very alone. I can remember being inwardly

paralyzed with mute anxiety for several weeks, going about my daily business like an automaton.

**“Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?” (Is. 2:22).**

Finally confessing these thoughts to a friend, I began the process of repenting from my fear of man and from depression, totally laying hold of Jesus Christ as the only One who had a claim on me, for both my allegiance and my confidence in salvation. Those days were hard but valuable. The fogginess of my thoughts and feelings slowly lifted as I began to learn to renew my mind daily with the promises of God’s compassionate leading and continual presence (Rom. 12:1-2; Ps. 42:5; Rom. 8:32), as well as to repent of the sinful attitudes and thoughts which had encircled me and enslaved me until then.

**“But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared” (Ps. 130:4).**

## Marrying Into (Former) Adventism

It was toward the end of this time of turmoil that I met Lisa. She was very patient with me as I was struggling with anxiety and conflicting thoughts and feelings. She had already gone through her own journey out of the Seventh-day Adventist organization by the time we met and had learned to find her rest in Jesus. It had been a few years since she overcame her ingrained fear of Sunday worship and had unlearned several other errant doctrines of the Adventist church which had left her confused about the true nature of God, sin, and the cross-work of Jesus Christ. She told me that, although she never felt like she was a particularly pious person, had never kept the Sabbath perfectly, and thought that there were problems with Ellen White’s

writings, she still had felt a comfortable sense of privilege and exclusivity growing up in the Adventist church.

After Lisa and I were married, we began to attend a church which was home to a group of former Seventh-day Adventists. Lisa and I began to visit that group’s lunches after church. Even though I struggled to understand some of their language and conversational references which were simply artifacts of the commonly-held tradition they had all left behind, I was struck by how they described their experiences of leaving the Seventh-day Adventist organization. On the one hand, I could never appreciate the weight of changing one’s mind about an organization with a legacy that was over a century old and included many schools and prestigious medical institutions. Neither could I fully empathize with the loss of many family members or friends—much less with the experience of being shunned by loved ones as many of the former Adventists were and continue to be. I did, however, understand the numbness that comes from losing a part of one’s identity and the fear of ending up beyond the pale of God’s good graces.



Additionally, I could understand how hearing certain Bible verses could trigger memories and feelings, unintentionally bringing up pain and a false sense of guilt.

What I most felt in common with the group was the radical understanding that Jesus Christ is all—that He is not only worth following, but also that He promises He will not lose any of His sheep (Jn. 10:28) and will always be present with His people (Mt. 28:30). I also identified with their desperate devotion to God’s word, for in order to overcome my own hypocrisy and fear of man, God had to speak new life into me (2 Cor. 4:5-6), and apply His word daily to my life (Jn. 17:17; Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:16).

**“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7).**

## Going to the Source

During our lunches, I would occasionally ask former Adventists to explain particular Adventist doctrines to me and to tell me why they lacked biblical support. I quickly realized how little I understood about several important topics; I was unable to argue well for or against certain beliefs, such as the relationship between the Old Testament and the New, prophecy, law, the state of the dead, and the nature of the atonement. As a husband and father, I realized I had to face my lack of depth in these areas; I’m responsible, after all, for the guidance and spiritual leadership of my family (Eph. 5:25 – 6:4). I realized it behooved me to have my beliefs springing from God’s word rather than having them solely informed and shaped by my tradition or surroundings.

In order to understand some of these issues better, I began a personal project to read not only the material from Life Assurance Ministries but also Adventist writings, evaluating both against the Bible. Reading Adventist materials ranging from Ellen White’s *Conflict of the Ages* series to contemporary Sabbath School Study Guides, from *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* to contemporary Adventist writers such as the eminent Samuele Bacciochi, I saw common threads in many Adventist publications. From the multitudinous commandments related to healthy living to impassioned rhetoric about the importance of Sabbath-keeping in the last days and to what can only be described as tortured exegesis supporting the doctrine of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment, I could see how totally alien Adventist doctrine was to a Biblical worldview. To be sure, one can generate strong-sounding rhetoric for certain Adventist teachings, especially

those related to the state of the dead and Sabbath-keeping, but I did not find Adventist doctrine to fit the Biblical data.

The most tragic and frustrating thing to read was the description of the “remnant church”. It would be marked, Adventist literature taught, by its adherence to the Ten Commandments (which are frequently described in language that seems more fitted to the person of Jesus Christ), the fourth one in particular. If one wandered outside its fold, that one would imperil his soul.

Now, it would be both disingenuous and irresponsible of me to say or imply that all members of the Adventist church hold to all 28 Fundamental Beliefs, or that all members believe that Ellen White’s writings do not suffer from problems. I know there are those that don’t believe and who also desire to reform the Adventist church. It would also be slanderous to say that there are no Christians in the Adventist church, or that no one could possibly be saved if they were either raised in the Adventist tradition or joined the Adventist church later in life. I believe that God is a compassionate Father, eager to receive back his prodigal children (Lk. 15:20-24). James Packer expresses this sentiment well:

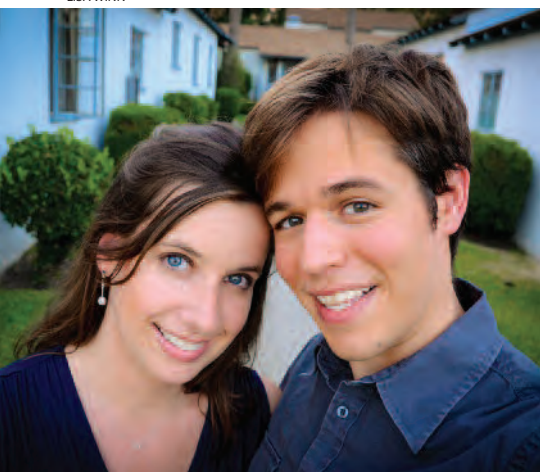
“God is very gracious and truly gives himself to all who truly seek him...never mind whether their theology is good or not so good. The modern bureaucrat conscientiously withholds benefits till the application forms have been completely and correctly filled up, but our God is not like that!” (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 129-130).

However, to try to frame one’s evaluation of the Adventist church by questions such as, “are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?” is to miss the point. Given the fact that the Adventist doctrine of the Sabbath as well as the many rules on healthy living espoused by Ellen White are clearly unvarnished expressions of the Galatian and Colossian heresies, for anyone to be exposed to Adventist doctrine is to put one’s soul in danger. Furthermore, the Adventist church’s identification as the remnant based on the Spirit of Prophecy (Ellen White’s writings) only adds to this danger, because this identity creates a basis for one’s security, privilege, and well-being that derives not from one’s identity in Christ, by a confession of faith in His finished work, but rather on a single person’s writing and on a human organization (1 Cor. 1:10-15; Gal. 3:27-29).

To any member of the Adventist church who may be dissatisfied with the organization’s teaching, or to anyone who has left Adventism, I would say, follow Jesus according to His word, wherever He may lead you. His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mt. 11:28-30). He has promised not to tempt or to try you beyond what you can handle, but rather to provide a way of escape that you may have endurance (1 Cor. 10:13).

To any current or former member of the Adventist church who may be hurting, I can say this: there are many people who have great compassion and empathy for you and would want to serve you by listening to your story and helping you understand the good news of Jesus Christ. Not only did He make you, but He is able to redeem you, and He will redeem your story as well. †

**Jonathan Winn** was born in Greenville, North Carolina, but has spent most of his adult life in California where he works in the insurance industry. He currently resides in Yucaipa, California, with his wife, Lisa, and their son Daniel. Jonathan enjoys reading, playing with Daniel, and catching up on sleep in his free time.



LISA WINN

## Fundamental Belief #11: Growing in Christ

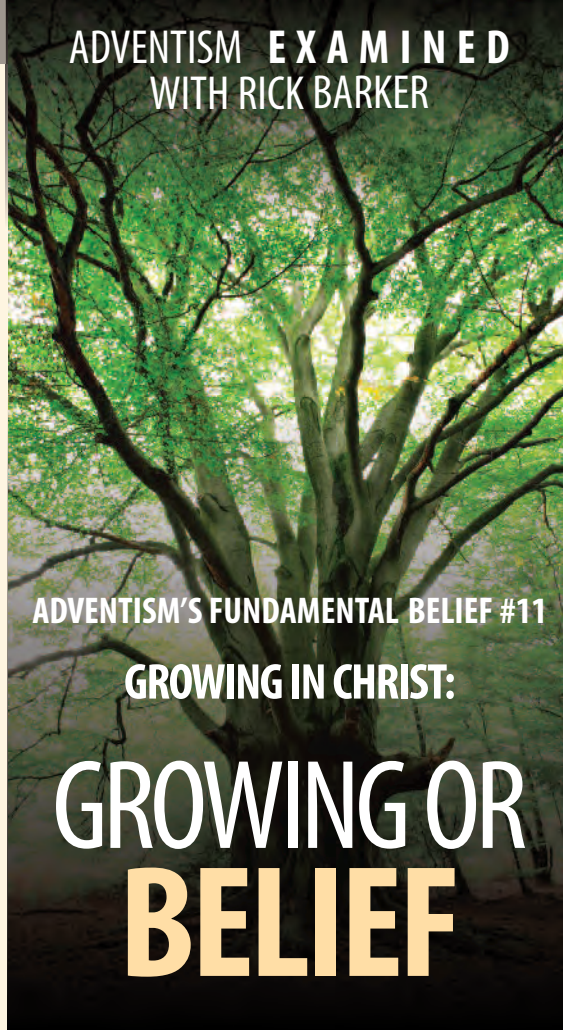
By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience.

### Comments about the belief statement

The Biblical accuracy of this belief statement depends entirely on the context of the claims. As this belief statement points out, Scripture is clear that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers leads to fruits that are evident (Gal. 5:22-23, Col. 3:12-15, Jas. 2:9-17), particularly in the way we treat each other. However, this belief statement does not point out that Scripture also states that converted believers are not perfect (Eccl. 7:20, Rom. 7:14-25, I Jn. 1:6-10, Jas. 3:2) in their own behavior, but are considered perfect because of Christ. We will not become righteous until the day in which we are all changed (1 Cor. 15:42-53).

Matt Slick of The Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry has pointed out that the key distinction between true Christianity and pseudo-Christian cults is how they distinguish between salvation (justification) and sanctification: "The cults consistently blur the meanings of the two terms and misapply the truths taught in God's word."

The question surrounding sanctification is not whether God changes those who believe in Him. Rather, the real question is



ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #11

GROWING IN CHRIST:

GROWING OR  
BELIEF

THE CLAIM THAT WE "GROW INTO  
THE LIKENESS OF HIS CHARACTER"  
IS A **TEACHING AND A WORDING**  
THAT COMES SOLELY FROM THE  
WRITINGS OF ELLEN WHITE.

whether these changes that He does in us qualify us for heaven, or if that qualification has already occurred.

The cultic view of sanctification is that sanctification is the process of God making us into righteous people who, therefore, are worthy of eternal life. The biblical and evangelical teaching is that it is only Christ's perfect life that is deserving of eternal reward, and sanctification occurs in those who have already been justified and "qualified" by being in Christ.

The key question about this fundamental belief, and a question that is not answered in the accompanying commentary of the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, is this: has salvation been fully accomplished by Christ's death in our place on the cross, or is salvation accomplished or maintained, at least in part, by applying the power achieved by Christ's death so that we "grow into the likeness" of Christ?

The claim that we "grow into the likeness of His (Christ's) character" is a teaching and a wording that comes solely from the writings of Ellen White. She proclaims that our characters must be perfected here on earth because they will not change between earth and heaven (*Christ's Object Lessons*, 316, 3 *Selected Messages*, 191). In fact, she states, "Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement" (*Testimonies For the Church*, vol. 5, 214).

The Bible emphasizes not "character" but belief in the Lord Jesus. This fundamental belief masks the underlying Adventist teaching that salvation is dependent upon our growth in Christ and our faithfulness to perfect our characters. †

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



# WHY WE LOVE GOD'S WORD

“SANCTIFY THEM IN THE TRUTH;  
YOUR WORD IS TRUTH” JOHN 17:17.

DALE RATZLAFF

## Strike where it leaves the pattern

I started Pacific Union College with a math major. Dr. Woods<sup>1</sup> was the teacher in several of my classes, and even though it has been over 50 years since I sat at his revered feet in old Irwin Hall, I remember well a few things he did and said. I was continually amazed that he could draw a perfect circle on the blackboard time after time when illustrating principles in analytic geometry and calculus. He could also add a column of five digit numbers in his head and then start writing the answer from left to right. I forget what he was trying to illustrate, but I remember well his illustration.

One time Dr. Woods was watching a blacksmith making a number of identical decorative iron pieces. As he watched he asked the blacksmith, “How do you know where to hit the red hot metal with your hammer?”

The old blacksmith answered, “You strike where it leaves the pattern.”

The question to which this borrowed illustration leads me is this: do you know your life pattern? Do you know it well? Are you willing to mold your life after the pattern?

Is there an objective guide you can follow so you stay true to your pattern? Do you have one pattern, or are you trying to follow two? Is your pattern one that has been tested and tried? Do you know it well enough so that you know when and where to strike the hammer if your life starts to leave the pattern?

In this short article I would like to feature the one objective, tested, and true pattern that Jesus has given us. This pattern, summed up in a single sentence, works for all believers in Jesus, yet it yields unique fruit in each life:

Jesus said, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17).

Reading the context will prove helpful.

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me (Jn. 17:15-21)

We find this meaningful statement of Jesus in His prayer to the Father just before the events of His passion. Note the pattern: “As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” Then our Lord states, “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in the truth.” Again we see the pattern. That we not misunderstand His words as referring to the eleven disciples only, we see that we are included in His prayer to the Father, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word.” Now we turn back to our central text for this study.

“Sanctify them in the truth, Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17).

Sanctify means to set apart, to make holy. We note that the sanctifier in this sentence is the Father. He is the operative agent, setting us apart and counting us as holy. The fact that sanctification is the Father’s work is why so often the word “sanctified” in the





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NT is in the passive voice.<sup>2</sup> However, the Father not only sets us apart in holiness for his service as Paul was set apart for the gospel,<sup>3</sup> but He has also provided a way whereby we can progress in personal holiness. Moreover, we find the way to personal holiness as well as the path of useful service the same way: by applying the truth to our lives—and the truth is the Word of God.

Sometimes, however, we discover several problems that keep us from realizing this wonderful application of truth.

### The Problems

One problem that many of us had was a low view of Scripture. It has taken time for me to adjust my view of Scripture to match the Bible's declarations about itself. Perhaps some of our readers are also in transition on this subject. As Adventists we were taught that it was not the words of the Bible that were inspired, but that the men who wrote the Bible were inspired and then wrote their inspired ideas in their own words.

A low view of the Bible's inspiration often results in one of two outcomes. First, it often lays the foundation for liberalism. We begin to doubt the historicity of the Bible; we question the way God is pictured in the Old Testament. We may begin to regard the Bible as a record of what the ancients thought about God and not see Scripture as the message from God Himself. A second outcome related to a low view of Scripture was that many of us did not really believe in the sufficiency of Scripture. Therefore, we accepted the premise that we needed another "source of truth" to help us understand the Bible more clearly. We were not prepared

to wrestle with the difficulties of Scripture or the simplicity of the gospel as presented in the New Testament. Instead, we often referred to the simple gospel of grace as "cheap grace". We felt that there needed to be some degree—in fact a large degree—of obedience to the law before one could be accepted by God. From the letters we receive and from personal communication, we sense a great fear in many Adventists of studying the Bible without the prism of Ellen White's commentary.

Many of us read Ellen White's statements about what happens when we lose faith in her writings:

It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the Testimonies [writings of Ellen White]. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, *then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures*, and then the downward march to perdition. When the Testimonies, which were once believed, are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends in destruction. (*Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 4, p. 211.)

If you lose confidence in the Testimonies *you will drift away from Bible truth.* (*Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5, p. 98.) [All emphases here and throughout this article are mine.]

Actually, just the opposite of her warnings has happened in my life. When I left the Adventist ministry, I determined not to look at the books written by Ellen White for a period of six months. I forced myself to deal with Scripture alone. By the end of the six months my understanding of the Bible had grown tremendously, and I never wanted to let her interpret it for me again.



... WE FIND THE WAY TO PERSONAL HOLINESS AS WELL AS THE PATH OF USEFUL SERVICE THE SAME WAY: BY APPLYING THE TRUTH TO OUR LIVES—AND THE TRUTH IS THE WORD OF GOD.

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Another outcome stemming from a low view of Bible inspiration is that many are blind to the dire warnings found in Scripture for adding to, subtracting from, or changing what Scripture teaches.

Jesus said, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” Truth, life changing truth, is found in Scripture alone. We can only hope to experience the fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer if we honor Scripture, hold a high view of Scripture, and diligently study and follow the truth revealed therein. That is the only objective pattern we have to direct our lives.

### A high view of Scripture needed

Whether we believe the Bible writers were inspired or that the words of the Bible themselves were God-given, we would do well to see what Scripture says about itself. If, as Jesus said, His Word is truth, we should thoroughly understand His Word so that the truth would be planted and grow in our hearts. It is only by His Word being implanted in our hearts that we will be sanctified, set apart as holy by the Father, and become able to grow in grace so that we might be all that He desires of us. I cannot fully develop the implications of this reality in this short article, but I invite the reader to delve deeply into how God’s word transforms us by purchasing and reading *Scripture and Truth* edited by D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge.<sup>4</sup>

Having a high view of Scripture, however, leads us to grapple with the question, can we trust the words of the Bible?

### The witness of the Old Testament

From the very beginning, Scripture portrays God as speaking in words.

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

We may speculate how Moses, the writer of Genesis, knew the

words God spoke at creation. In fact, some scholars believe Moses used previously existing documents in writing Genesis. The Bible itself, however, gives us the answer. For example, in my Bible computer program I counted over one hundred instances where Scripture says, “the LORD spoke to Moses” or “the LORD spoke further with Moses”. Thus, Genesis 5:1 states,

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God (Gen. 5:1).

This statement is followed by a list of Adam’s posterity. Interestingly, this formula of an announcement of a genealogy followed by a list of names occurs multiple times throughout Genesis.<sup>5</sup> We can trust that our speaking God told Moses the names appearing in those lists. If His Word brought forth creation, His Word could inform Moses what words to write—just as the declarations of His speaking to Moses affirm.

The Old Testament story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 is interesting to observe from the perspective of inspiration. Balaam was asked by Balak to come and curse the Israelites because Balak was afraid after he saw what Israel had done to the Amorites.

“Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.” So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak’s words to him. He said to them, “Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me.” And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, “Who are these men with you?” Balaam said to God, “Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent word to me, ‘Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.’” God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed” (Num. 22:6-12).

Most of our readers know the rest of the story. Little by little Balaam rejected the clear direction of God given through words.

Then the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth and said, “Return to Balak, and you shall speak thus.” So he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, he and all the leaders of Moab. He took up his discourse and said, “From Aram Balak has brought me, Moab’s king from the mountains of the East, ‘Come curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!’ How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced? As I see him from the top of the rocks, and I look at him from the hills; behold, a people who dwells apart, and will not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!” Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have actually blessed them!” He replied, “Must I not be careful to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?” (Num. 23:5-12).

As you read the whole story in Numbers, and how Peter interprets it, it becomes clear that Balaam was not personally inspired; rather, his words were inspired. Despite Balaam’s desire for the



wages of evil, God did not let his mouth curse Israel. In 2 Peter 1:20 we have this well-known statement:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

A little later Peter states:

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:9).

And he then uses Balaam as an example.

Having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet (2 Pet. 2:14-16).

No writer of the Bible suggests that we should not accept any other portion of Scripture. We do, however, have dire warnings to those who masquerade as prophets claiming to “speak for God” when God has not given them His words.

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. You may say in your heart, “How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?” When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which *the LORD has not spoken*. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:18-22).

Thus says the LORD of hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a *vision of their own imagination*, Not from the mouth of the LORD (Jer. 23:16).

The above references state forthrightly that God communicates to His true prophets through His words. It also gives a dire warning to false prophets whose predictions do not come true.<sup>6</sup>

There are numerous instances that could be referenced which show that God speaks to his messengers in words. Here are some examples:

David said to Solomon, “My son, I had intended to build a house to the name of the LORD my God. “But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth before Me (1 Chr. 22:7-8).

When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves so I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some measure of deliverance, and My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by means of Shishak (2 Chr. 12:7).

Wayne Grudem summarizes:

The distinguishing characteristic of a true prophet is that he does not speak his own words or “words of his own heart,” but words that God has sent Him to deliver (Deut. 18:18-20; Jer. 14:14; 23:16-40; 29:31-32; Ezek. 13:1-19; cf. Num. 16:28). Throughout the Old Testament there is an emphasis not simply on the general content of prophetic speech as coming from God, but on the very words themselves. God says to Moses, the archetypal Old Testament prophet, “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” (Exod. 4:12; cf. 24:3). The same is said of other prophets; “I will put my words in his mouth” (Deut. 18:18 cf. vv. 21-22); “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9); “The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak” (Num. 22:38; cf. 23:5, 16); “You shall speak my words to them” (Ezek. 2:7; cf. 3:27.<sup>7</sup>

This emphasis on the actual words spoken by the mouth of the prophet indicates something more than a conviction that ideas have been given by God to the prophet, who will then express the ideas in his own words. Not just the general message but also the very words in which it is expressed are seen as coming from God. And “the prophet who presumes to speak a word ‘not from the mouth of the Lord’ (Jer. 23:16) was a false prophet.”<sup>8</sup>

## The witness of the New Testament

The New Testament writers quote Old Testament historical events as true. Jesus quotes from one of the most disregarded stories of the Old Testament:

For just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Mt. 12:40).

Matthew, quoting Jesus, mentions that the men of Nineveh repented.<sup>9</sup> Luke records Jesus using several historical incidents from the Old Testament not only as illustrations, but as illustrations based upon true history.

But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian (Lk. 4:25-27).

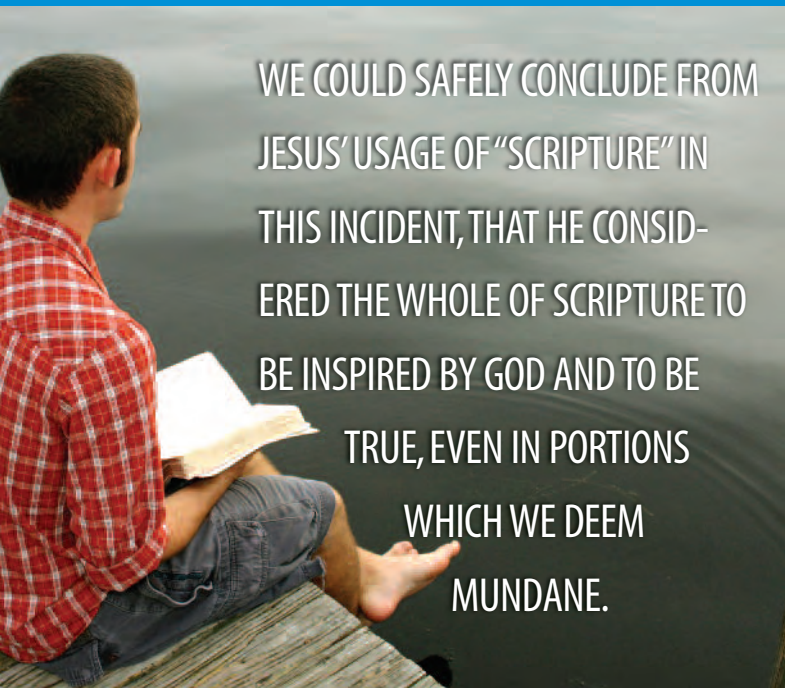
John accounts Jesus referring to historical events in the Old Testament as true to fact.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up (Jn. 3:14).

So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there (Jn. 4:5-6).

Paul refers to numerous Old Testament historical events and never questions their historicity: Abraham and the covenant of circumcision;<sup>10</sup> Abraham was about a hundred years old;<sup>11</sup> Rebecca was told that her elder child would serve the younger.<sup>12</sup>

The writer of Hebrews gives a detailed description of the Sinai tabernacle.<sup>13</sup> He states that the world was created by the word of God.<sup>14</sup> In his chapter on faith<sup>15</sup> the writer of Hebrews mentions details from the lives of Able, Cain, Enoch, Noah, Jacob, Joseph,



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Isaac, Abraham, Moses, Rahab and others, and there is no hint that one should question the Old Testament record of their lives.

Daniel is a book that has been questioned by liberal scholars, but Jesus speaks of him as "Daniel the prophet" and also as one who prophesies truth.

Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains (Mt. 24:15-16).

There does not seem to be even a hint in the New Testament that the historical events recorded in the Old Testament are untrustworthy. Not only are the Old Testament people, prophets, and historical events portrayed as real and factual, but the general writings are seen as God-given.

Jesus quotes a psalm of David and introduces it with, "David said in the Holy Spirit." This indicates that Jesus understood the Psalms to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

David himself said in the Holy Spirit, "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET.'" "David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him (Mk. 12:36-37).

On another occasion Jesus quotes from the Old Testament and says, "Scripture cannot be broken."

Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (Jn. 10:34-36).

That we may understand the far reaching implication of this statement to our discussion of the reliability of Scripture, I quote from Leon Morris.

Jesus' answer is to direct them to Scripture. He uses the term "law", which strictly applied only to the Pentateuch, but which was extended in meaning to embrace the whole Old Testament, and this is the use here, for the passage He cites is from the Psalms . . . Jesus points out that in Ps. 82:6 it stands written, "Ye are gods" (the cita-

tion is exact, agreeing both with the Hebrew and LXX). The passage refers to the judges of Israel, and the expression "gods" is applied to them in the exercise of their high and God-given office . . . A very high authority is being recognized in Scripture, for Jesus goes on "and the Scripture cannot be broken". Notice that he says this, not in connection with some declaration which might be regarded as among the key declarations of the Old Testament, but of what we might perhaps call without disrespect a rather run-of-the mill passage. The singular is usually held to refer to a definite passage from the Old Testament and not to Scripture as a whole. Even so, what was true of this passage could be true only because it was part of the inspired Scriptures and shows the characteristics of the whole.<sup>16</sup>

We could safely conclude from Jesus' usage of "Scripture" in this incident, that He considered the whole of Scripture to be inspired by God and to be true, even in portions which we deem mundane.

### God communicates using words in the NT

There is abundant evidence that the New Testament revelation is communicated to the writers using words. Consider the following references:

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Mt. 3:16-17).

Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" (Mk. 9:7).

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet. 1:17-21).

As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do" (Act 9:3-6).

The evidence is overwhelming that God uses the very words of the language of men to communicate to His chosen agents. Consider these other examples: the instructions to Ananias;<sup>17</sup> Peter's vision;<sup>18</sup> and the words of comfort and direction to Paul:

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).



Sometimes we wonder how the gospel writers could remember and record the very words of Jesus years later. Jesus gives us the answer.

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. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you (Jn. 16:13-1).

Moreover, the apostle Peter considered the writings of Paul as part of Scripture.

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:14-16).

It is my prayer that you, the reader, will consider standing on a “high view” of Scripture. I recognize this may create problems in some minds. However, the evidence for a strong view of verbal inspiration is well founded. Rather than pull the Bible down when we cannot logically understand something, let us recognize that the infinite Creator sees things we cannot see. We must bow the knee at the mystery of divine activity as well as His means of communicating His revelation to us. What Paul stated in a different context also applies here:

Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar (Rom. 3:4).

## The sufficiency of Scripture

As Paul sensed he would soon be executed for his faith, he addressed Timothy, his “son in the gospel”, with his important and final instruction:

And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Read the text above again, slowly. We can be assured that Scripture is all we need. It gives us wisdom. That wisdom leads us to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. “All<sup>19</sup> Scripture” including both Testaments is inspired by God. We don’t have to cut out all the miracles or things we don’t understand. Because it is inspired by God, Scripture is profitable or useful for teaching and should be the basis for Christian teaching. Pastors should be able to handle the word of God in a thorough and truthful manner. Moreover, Scripture corrects our waywardness. Reading Scripture keeps us from straying; it corrects our course, our life, and our decisions. Also, studying Scripture gives us training in righteousness so that we may be adequate. “Adequate” may also be translated as perfect, complete, or capable for every good work.

If a person has salvation, wisdom, and a tool that is useful, instructive, corrective, up-building in righteousness, adequate and capable for every good work, what else is needed? Scripture is sufficient because it is God-breathed. This verse in 2 Timothy is in perfect harmony with what Jesus said, “Sanctify them through the truth; Your word is truth”. In other words, if we follow the pattern in Scripture, the prayer of Jesus will be fulfilled in our lives; we will be sanctified in the truth because His word is truth.

Here we find the pattern for the Christian life. This pattern is sufficient for all we need, and it leads us to a glorious destination. Because we have this pattern given to us by God, our job is to “strike” when any teaching leaves the pattern of Scripture.

## Christian truth must rest on Scripture alone

This was the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation. We must be careful not to be led astray by the convoluted arguments of the cults which claim to follow Scripture:

- Some claim their modern-day prophet was foretold in Scripture; therefore the writings of their prophet should carry the authority of Scripture.
- Some claim that the Bibles used by the Christian church today were corrupted when they were translated from the “original Aramaic” to Greek even though the earliest manuscripts are all in Greek and there is ample evidence that many of the people of New Testament times, including Christ, were bilingual and spoke both Aramaic and Greek.
- Some claim that the Bible has been “corrected” by their prophet.
- Some publish and promote a corrupt “Bible”, supporting unbiblical doctrines. Readers of such a “Bible” will be led away from the true gospel and sanctifying truth.

The literal Bibles we have today, such as the *English Standard Version*, the *Updated New American Standard*, the *New English Translation* or the *New King James* are very accurate and trustworthy and should be the source of our doctrinal Bible study. Yes, we can trust Scripture to be our objective pattern that leads us to our living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal.

## Strike where it leaves the pattern

The old blacksmith in Dr. Woods’ illustration was knowledgeable in his trade. He had a trusted pattern and knew the consequences of leaving the pattern. He would strike where the metal left the pattern. Similarly, we are given the trusted and tried pattern of Scripture. We should be just as vigilant as that blacksmith and reject any deviation from Scripture which is the very word of God.

If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book (Rev 22:).

It is true that the above quote primarily refers to the book of Revelation. However, the organization of the books of the Bible is not haphazard. Genesis is a book of beginning and is thus found at the front of the canon. Revelation deals with the last times and is a fitting concluding book. It has dozens of quotations from other portions of Scripture and properly ends the canon of Scripture.

Therefore, it is not inappropriate to extend the warning given in Revelation to the whole canon of Scripture.

We should know our pattern in Scripture well enough so that when teachings arise that will begin to direct us away from the sanctifying truth of Scripture, we know it is time to “strike”.

Read over the following quotes. You decide if they speak with the inspiration of God and are in agreement with the trusted Word of God.

“While Moses was shut in the mount with God, the plan of salvation, dating from the fall of Adam was revealed to him” (*Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 231, 232).

“Now, our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 623, 1888).

“But Christ gave his life that man should have another trial. He did not die on the cross to abolish the law of God, but to secure for man a second probation” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 143).

“To be redeemed means to cease from sin” (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 71-35-1, Aug. 28, 1894).

“Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or feel that they are saved.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 155).

“You have a great work to do...It is impossible for you to be saved as you are” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 316).

“To obey the commandments of God is the only way to obtain his favor” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 28).

“We must be reconciled to God through obedience to his law and faith in Jesus Christ” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 294).

“Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425, 1888).

“I saw that Old Jerusalem never would be built up” (*Early Writings*, p. 75).

“...if you [Ellen White] are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds” (*Early Writings*, p. 40).

“The power of God would come upon me and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 302).

“As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I

would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me” (*Selected Messages*, Vol. 3, p. 32).

“I was shown the company pres-

ent at the Conference. Said the angel, ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.’ Solemn words were these, spoken by the angel.” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 131,132, written in 1856).

“My work for the past thirty years bears the stamp of God or the stamp of the enemy. There is no halfway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4. P. 230).

Scripture is the eternal, inerrant, sufficient word of our Triune God. We must reject all but the last statement of Ellen White above. Her writings have deviated from the clear pattern of Scripture, and in order to be faithful to God’s Word, we have to detach our connection with a prophet who claims to speak for God yet contradicts Scripture. Not only do many of Ellen White’s statements contradict Scripture, they also undermine the gospel. It also is clear that Ellen White’s “angel” did not tell the truth on several occasions. This fact should be like a large, red flag to get our spiritual attention.

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” (Gal. 1:8-9).

Yes, we must strike where the writings of Ellen G. White leave the trusted pattern of Scripture.

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). †

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Now deceased.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 1:11; 2 Tim. 2:21; Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 1:1.

<sup>4</sup> Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.

<sup>6</sup> I encourage our readers to get *White Washed* by Sydney Cleveland and read the chapter entitled, “Failed Prophecies”.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Scripture and Truth*, p. 22, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1992.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Mt. 12:41.

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 4:10.

<sup>11</sup> Rom. 4:19.

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 9:10-12.

<sup>13</sup> Heb. 9:1-5.

<sup>14</sup> Heb. 11:3.

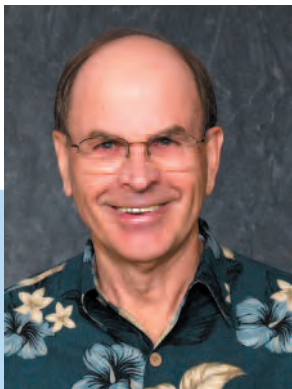
<sup>15</sup> Heb. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 526, 527. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 9:11-16.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 10:13.

<sup>19</sup> This could be translated as “each Scripture” but it makes little difference.



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# DOES THE **INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT** ANSWER THE **QUESTION** IN DANIEL 8:13?

RUSSELL KELLY

It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state” (Dan. 8:10-14).

An angel asks a question in Daniel 8:13, and Adventists try to explain the answer given in 8:14 this way: in 1844, Jesus opened the books of heaven, which contain the names and deeds of all who professed faith, and began judging, or investigating, only professed believers. This judgment is to determine who is worthy of being saved and re-created from the annihilation of “soul sleep”.

## Five errors in the Adventist doctrine

There are at least five grammatical and contextual errors in the Adventist doctrine which render their explanation of Daniel 8:14 irrelevant and incorrect.

**First:** Instead of answering how long until the vision of 8:8-12 would *end*, the Adventist answer tells when Christ would *begin* to cleanse the heavenly sanctuary and ignores the question about the vision.

**Second:** Instead of answering when the daily sacrifice from 8:11 would be restored, the Adventist answer tells when the final phase of Christ’s ministry would begin in heaven (although He has continued a ministry in heaven since His ascension). Adventism does not address the question of the daily sacrifice.

**Third:** Instead of answering when the little horn of 8:10-12 will *stop* persecuting the saints, the Adventist answer tells us when Christ will *begin* blotting out the sins of the saints. Moreover, they tell us those sins have caused the desolation of the heavenly sanc-

**HISTORICALLY, THE ANSWER PROVIDED IN MOST COMMENTARIES TO THE QUESTION ASKED IN 8:13 IS VERY SIMPLE.**

tuary since Adam’s first sin. Instead of being a judgment of the little horn, the investigative judgment is a judgment of professed believers.

**Fourth:** Instead of answering when the sanctuary will finally be cleansed from defilement by the little horn in 8:10-12, the Adventist answer tells us when Christ will move from one room into another in the heavenly sanctuary and finally begin cleansing the Most Holy Place. Again, instead of cleansing the sanctuary from its desolation by the little horn, Adventism

requires cleansing heaven from the sins of God’s own people.

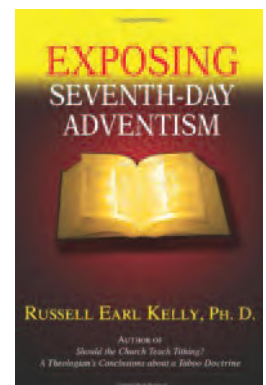
**Fifth:** Instead of answering when the host (God’s people) will stop being persecuted by the little horn, the Adventist answer blames the desolation of the heavenly sanctuary on the confessed sins of the host.

Therefore, incredible as it sounds, one must conclude that the Adventist explanation of 8:14 to the question asked in 8:13 has absolutely nothing to do with the context in 8:8-12!

Historically, the answer provided in most commentaries to the question asked in 8:13 is very simple: After 2300 literal sacrificial days [or sacrifices—see “Antiochus Epiphanes: is he the little horn?”, *Proclamation!*, Spring, 2014] in 164 B. C., the Jews won their civil war against Antiochus IV, restored the sanctuary, and gained their independence for the first time since 586 B. C. What a tremendously important historical event! The Jewish temple in Jerusalem was cleansed, restored, or rededicated to resume offering the daily sacrifices. Today this restoration is still celebrated by the Jewish holy day called Hanukkah, meaning dedication. Also, this was a normal cleansing, and not a special Day of Atonement-type cleansing. †

(This article is excerpted from Kelly’s book *Exposing Seventh-day Adventism* and is available through most internet book stores.)

**Russell Kelly** pastored SDA churches in North Dakota and South Carolina before leaving Adventism in 1982. He received a PhD in Theology in 2001 and has written three books. Russ lives in retirement in Washington, Georgia.



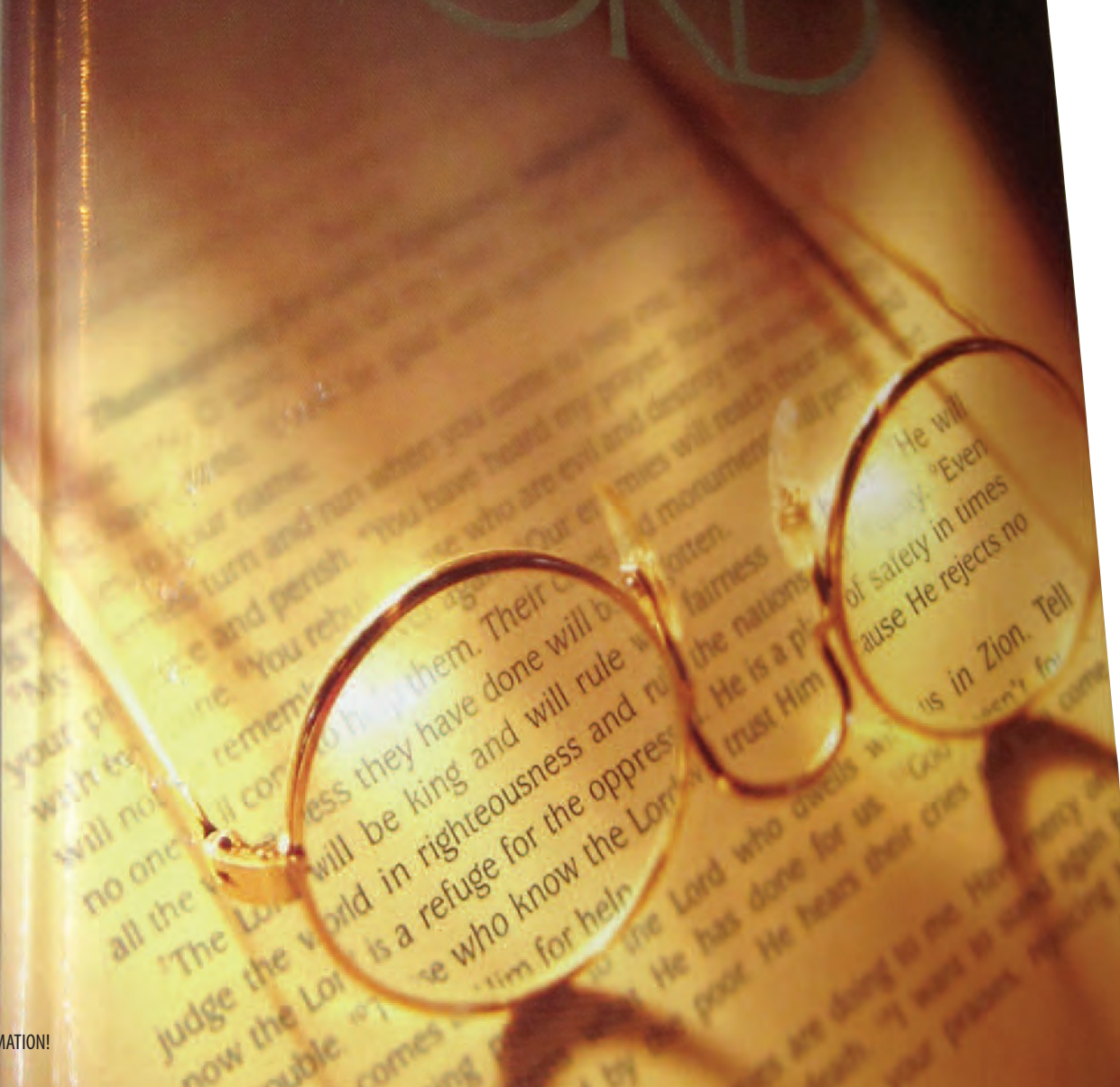
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THE CLEAR WORD

AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE  
TO BUILD FAITH AND  
NURTURE SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE CLEAR WORD

BLANCO





# CLEAR WORD OFFICIAL?

STEPHEN PITCHER

- WHAT IS *THE CLEAR WORD* ?
- IS IT AN OFFICIAL BIBLE OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH?
- WHAT STATUS DOES *THE CLEAR WORD* HAVE AMONG ADVENTISTS?
- WHAT KIND OF RESPONSES HAS *THE CLEAR WORD* GENERATED?

The answers to these questions reveal the truth that Adventists are conflicted about this unique, denominationally-specific work. On the one hand they love it because it endorses and explains Adventist theology using biblical terms and format. On the other hand, they know that this work seriously tarnishes their carefully-cultivated reputation as “evangelicals” if the Christian community were to understand its significance.

Jack J. Blanco, ThD, was the dean of the school of religion at Southern Adventist University when he wrote *The Clear Word* (TCW). He explains that he had decided to spend his own devotional time rewriting the New Testament text, and he specifically intended to rewrite Jesus’ words as He would say them today instead of as He said them 2,000 years ago. On the program *Between The Lines* produced by the Adventists’ Review and Herald Publishing Association, Blanco was clear about his methodology:

“If Jesus were here today, what would He tell you? Well, we know what He said, but how would He say it? ... If Jesus were here today, riding with me in the car, or meeting me on a walk, or whatever, and He’s talking to me, how would He say what He said? So I started with the Gospel of Mark, and then started writing it down, and then you know you go on and you try to imagine how Jesus is talking to you, trying to make this clearer. Then after you write a passage then you read it, and you say, ‘Well, let’s see...’ then you cross this line out, or this word out or if you write in the margin, you know, this was just a personal experience. And Samuel [interviewer], I used to get so caught up, I was in a different world. I was walking by the side of Galilee; I was listening to Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

In deciding to rewrite Jesus’ own words to us, Blanco ignored His specific teachings as well as the warnings found near the end of

the book of Revelation. Jesus taught that, in times to come, the Holy Spirit would bring to His disciples’ remembrance all that He had taught them. John 14:26 tells us: “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 have said to you.”

The Holy Spirit did give the apostles the understanding to write Jesus’ teachings down in the text of the New Testament. Today the Holy Spirit still teaches us the very words of Jesus recorded for us in Scripture. In fact, this function of teaching us the words of Jesus is one of the Holy Spirit’s roles in the life of believers today. We are not to imagine what Jesus would say to us; words we imagine He might say would no longer be the words of God. Rather, we are to reflect on what He has already said in His word. The words recorded in Scripture are truth regardless of the time in history in which we happen to be living, and the Holy Spirit teaches us what those actual words mean.

The first outcome of his conducting his devotionals in this fashion resulted in Blanco’s publishing them under the title *The New Testament: A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth*. Released in 1990, this early edition of what would eventually become a complete “Bible” contains some passages that have been altered to support early Seventh-day Adventist theology—theology that continues to shape Adventist doctrine today. For example, three central passages that support the deity of Jesus Christ and His oneness with the Father are changed in TCW to reflect Adventism’s foundational anti-trinitarianism. This kind of rewording allows Adventists with either trinitarian or non-trinitarian viewpoints to find support for their doctrines. Even further, these edited texts allow for tritheistic (or at least

bitheistic) interpretations. Below are the three texts compared with the English Standard Version:

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### John 1:1

#### 1990 Devotional Paraphrase

Before the beginning of everything, going further back in time than can be imagined, the “Word of God” was there. And the “Word of God” stood by the side of God. And the Word was fully God.

#### English Standard Version

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

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### John 8:58

#### 1990 Devotional Paraphrase

Jesus said, “Because I existed before Abraham was born.”

#### English Standard Version

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

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### John 10:30

#### 1990 Devotional Paraphrase

“You see, my Father and I are like one.”

#### The Clear Word (current ed.)

You see, my Father and I are so close, we’re one.

#### English Standard Version

I and the Father are one.

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These kinds of changes are sprinkled throughout the many versions of Blanco’s paraphrase. Encountered individually, they may seem subtle, but when compared with an accepted translation, these alterations clearly distort trinitarian theology. Moreover, the de-emphasizing of Jesus’ eternal oneness with the Father is not limited to the New Testament in TCW; Blanco has also reworked Old Testament passages. For example, his altering of Genesis 1:26-27 allows for a bi-theistic interpretation of the creation account:

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### Genesis 1:26-27

#### The Clear Word (current ed.)

But this was not the end of His work for that day. Next He said to His Son, “Now let us make beings who look like us and can reflect our thinking and our personality. Let’s give them the responsibility of ruling over and caring for the fish, the birds and the animals which we created.”

So they created two human beings, a male and a female, equal but with different functions, to reflect the unity of the Godhead.

#### English Standard Version

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

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Here Blanco has blatantly separated God from His Son instead of letting God be One. Moreover, Blanco has limited “God” to two persons, Father and Son, peculiarly omitting the Holy Spirit whose presence is implied in the traditional text which has God referring to Himself using the plural pronoun “us”. Instead, in TCW we have a “God” (actually, two gods) who have created a man and a woman to “reflect the unity of the Godhead” instead of reflecting “his own image” (singular). This bi-theistic wording both allows readers to have an unbiblical view of the Godhead and provides support for that view.

Moreover, Blanco’s rewriting implies that the Father and the Son have physical bodies, an implication contradicting the plain words of Scripture: “God is spirit” (Jn. 4:24). This revision of God’s essence further allows Blanco to define man’s reflection of God’s image as physical looks and mental capacities, thus eliminating the spirit as the reflection of God’s image which both men and women share.

## Is The Clear Word a Bible?

The first edition of Blanco’s full Bible paraphrase that appeared in 1994 was entitled *The Clear Word Bible*. After much feedback, however, the second edition, also printed in 1994, was retitled. The word “Bible” was removed, and the words “expanded paraphrase” were added to the subtitle of the book. In fact, during 1994 four separate editions of Blanco’s paraphrase were published, each with numerous textual changes. Since 1994, however, *The Clear Word* has not been referenced by edition number. Now subsequent editions are referenced by copyright date, and each edition represents new changes to the text.

Although the word “Bible” has been removed from the title, one only needs to turn to the table of contents to find “The Books of the Bible” listed, rather than “The Books of the Paraphrase,” or even simply “Books.” This ambiguity between the cover title and the table of contents demonstrates Adventists’ division over whether or not TCW is a Bible. Some use it as a Bible; some use it as a paraphrase, while others simply ignore it.

In reality, *The Clear Word* is marketed as a Bible. In both the online catalogs and in the Adventist Book Centers, TCW is displayed with the Bibles. Often, in fact, it is given prominence on an end-cap displaying all its formats and versions.

## Is The Clear Word Official?

Both Blanco and the distributor of TCW, The Review and Herald Publishing Association, have been clear in their statements: *The Clear Word* is not an official Adventist version of the Scriptures. Denials notwithstanding, Adventists’ practices often betray a different attitude. First, The Review and Herald is the flagship facility of the Seventh-day Adventist publishing industry. Within Adventism, books printed by The Review and Herald are considered denominationally approved. Thus, books both printed by The Review and Herald and marketed by Adventist Book Centers, as TCW is, carry an implied denominational approval whether or not they are “official”.

Furthermore, some Adventist pastors use TCW as a Bible and promote its use to their congregations. One such man is Pastor



Samuel Thomas, Jr. In an interview with Jack Blanco, on the program *Between The Lines*, a video presentation of The Review and Herald Publishing Association, he indicates that even on the local church level *The Clear Word* is trustworthy for Adventists to use, even for Bible study:

I [Samuel Thomas] have enjoyed [*The Clear Word*]. I have used it in teaching and preaching and ministry, and even in Bible Study....<sup>2</sup>

Not long ago we were at a meeting together. I stopped you [Jack Blanco], and I said I've shared TCW with my members and encouraged them to buy it, because they need to know that this—although paraphrased—it's theologically consistent with our Seventh-day Adventist faith, and so from that standpoint, you can say, "Here's not only a devotional reading or study for me, but I can rest on it," where you can't really say that about all the other devotionals.

[Blanco responds:] No, there are some translations that are a little tweaked, if I can put it that way, as one translation when it talks about not "divine punishment," but "divine punishing."

[Thomas continues:] And those are the kind of distinguishing differences that actually make *The Clear Word* more valuable, and that's why I appreciate it, because I knew that you would put forth every effort to make sure that it was consistent.<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, Blanco never corrects Thomas' statements about using TCW for preaching and Bible study. Furthermore, regardless of Adventism's official position on TCW, Thomas recommends it to his congregation and, via this video, to the rest of the watching Adventist world—and Blanco supports this endorsement. Thomas is not unique; he is only one example of the countless Adventists who use TCW as a Bible for studying, reading, and worship.

Blanco's double-speak, stating TCW is not an official Bible while endorsing its use as a Bible for teaching, preaching, and study, is further demonstrated in his own writing of the preface of the first edition of *The Clear Word Bible*. For example, although Blanco explains his imaginative rewriting of the New Testament in the episode of *Between The Lines* quoted above, the preface to the original *Clear Word Bible* implies that he used a more scientific methodology. In the preface to the first edition he says:

The New Testament was published first after being submitted to qualified colleagues for general accuracy, as well as to knowledgeable laymen for readability. ... After the first printing of the New Testament, it was decided to revise the New Testament and attempt to make it less colloquial, yet retain its contemporary style, and to republish it together with the Old Testament.

Some scholars take Genesis 1:1, 2 to mean that God created the material substance of the earth on the first day of creation week while others understand these verses to mean that God brought order and beauty to the raw mass of earth's material created previously. To paraphrase it both ways would be confusing to the reader, and after careful research I decided on the latter.

He continues in the same fashion throughout two and a half pages of text in the preface. Some of the statements to be found there include:

"... Kings and Chronicles at times appear to be contradictory unless they are allowed to complement and complete each other." "The description of Solomon's temple and its measurements also presented a problem ..." "The Psalms were difficult to paraphrase." Regarding the prophets, "To the best of my ability I tried to make one message flow into another for the sake of the reader." "Chapters 11 and 12 of Daniel were a challenge." "... I attempted to harmonize in the four gospels what at first appears to be contradictory. The more difficult passages were made clearer by allowing each gospel to inform the other three ..." "The epistles of Paul were the most difficult to paraphrase." "For the sake of the reader, the book of Revelation with its many symbols demanded a greater amount of interpretative freedom."<sup>4</sup>

In later versions of *The Clear Word*, the preface was reduced to a page and a half (2000 edition) and later (2003, the current version available in Adventist Book Centers [ABCs]) to less than a page. The scholarly methods to which he refers in the earlier versions are removed, and in their place he has written about the nature of a paraphrase. We must give him credit, however, for the first paragraph in the original *Clear Word Bible* preface. There he states:

This is not a new translation but a paraphrase of the Scriptures. It is not intended for in-depth study or for public reading in churches. Those who are better qualified have given readers of the Holy Scriptures excellent translations for such purposes and undoubtedly will continue to do so as additional manuscripts come to light.<sup>5</sup>

**IN REALITY, *THE CLEAR WORD* IS MARKETED AS A BIBLE. IN BOTH THE ONLINE CATALOGS AND IN THE ADVENTIST BOOK CENTERS, IT IS DISPLAYED WITH THE BIBLES. OFTEN, IN FACT, IT IS GIVEN PROMINENCE ON AN END-CAP DISPLAYING ALL ITS FORMATS AND VERSIONS.**



While admitting TCW is not for in-depth study, this preface does not indicate just how it should be used. The preface in the current edition of *The Clear Word*, however, says:

As has been stated in previous editions, *The Clear Word* is not a translation, but a devotional paraphrase of Scripture expanded for clarity. It is intended to build faith and nurture spiritual growth. It should not be considered a study Bible. Excellent translations of the Scriptures are available for such purposes.<sup>6</sup>

Blanco's writing contradicts his spoken words. By not correcting a pastor who uses and publicly recommends TCW for Bible study and preaching, Blanco gives implicit permission to use it in these ways. These opposing messages give the Adventist organization an excuse to argue that it does not have its own Bible while concurrently promoting the book to members as a means of reinforcing their unique doctrines by providing "biblical" support for them.

### How do Adventists use *The Clear Word*?

Individual Adventists differ in their responses to TCW. Many Adventists avoid using it altogether, and some have actually been vocal against the use of this text. Still others read it as a devotional guide. Others, encouraged by endorsements such as the article "In Defense of *The Clear Word*" by Jim Miller and published in *Adventist Today*, Sept./Oct., 2000, and by personal praise from people such as Samuel Thomas and Jack Blanco himself (quoted earlier), use TCW for serious Bible study and teaching.

In his article Jim Miller states, "Let me start off by saying that I am not a fan of *The Clear Word*, Jack J. Blanco's expanded paraphrase of the Bible."<sup>7</sup> He then goes on to defend *The Clear Word* when used as a "Targum". He explains that Targums are expansions of the Hebrew Scriptures, documents in which rabbis have inserted text into the passages to help explain their meanings. Miller's defense of TCW rests on comparing the nature of the Targums with TCW—an interesting but contrived distraction from the real problem. At the end of Miller's article he unwittingly articulates the seductive danger of TCW:

If I read Blanco's *The Clear Word* as an Adventist Targum I can enjoy and respect this expansion on Scripture. And the popularity of *The Clear Word* compels me to learn to accept its use in church.<sup>8</sup>

Here Miller admits that the paraphrase is being used in church, it is popular, and he is, therefore, compelled to accept its use. Yet the Seventh-day Adventist Church states officially that this work should not be used in church because it is not true Scripture. Many Adventists, nevertheless, do use TCW in church (and in any other place they would use the Bible), because they receive support for doing so from the semantic double-speak of many Adventist leaders and publications.

Using TCW as authentic Scripture is dangerous for obvious reasons. Using it as a devotional, however, is no less dangerous. Even casual use of this paraphrase reinforces Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. Everything the Adventist believes to be true, all the assumptions that define his great controversy worldview, are reinforced in TCW. The book itself never explains where its text deviates from that of the Bible, nor does

it footnote or explain the sources of several Ellen White statements woven into the copy.

### What Response Has *The Clear Word* Generated?

There have been a number of reactions to TCW, primarily from those within Adventism; evangelicals are generally unaware of its importance and distortions. One well-known evangelical scholar, however, Dr. Wayne Grudem, research professor of Bible and theology at Phoenix Seminary in Phoenix, Arizona, and general editor of the *ESV Study Bible* has responded to *The Clear Word* with a public statement:

I do not think anyone should trust *The Clear Word* as a reliable translation of the Bible, or even as a useful paraphrase. It repeatedly distorts the teaching of the Bible. It removes significant content that is in the original Hebrew or Greek, and adds new ideas that are not found in the original texts. Verse after verse has been changed simply to support unusual Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, but these changes are not supported by reliable translations such as the KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, RSV, or NIV, or even by dynamic equivalence translations such as the *New Living Translation* or free paraphrases such as *The Message*. I was deeply troubled as I read various verses because it was clear that these verses were no longer the words of God only, but the words of God mixed in with many words of man, and ordinary readers of *The Clear Word* will not be able to tell the difference.<sup>9</sup>

Various Adventist publications have also run responses to TCW. The South Pacific Division *Record*, an official paper of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, printed the following review issued by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference in 1994 when the paraphrase was just released:

A helpful new Bible study tool—when properly used—is available to Seventh-day Adventists: *The Clear Word*, prepared by Jack Blanco, head of the religion department at Southern College. ...

Where does *The Clear Word* fit into the picture [of translations, paraphrases, and paraphrases with commentary inserted into the text]? Since the author relies heavily upon extra-biblical sources, including the writings of Ellen G. White, it is more of a paraphrase/commentary than a real Bible.

Nevertheless, there has been considerable confusion and misuse of this study tool. One reason for this was the title of its first edition: *The Clear Word Bible*. The word Bible has now been removed. Another problem is the verse-by-verse format of *The Clear Word*, which makes the text appear as a Bible translation rather than as a paraphrase/commentary. Contributing to that misconception is the absence of footnotes to document extra-biblical sources.

To minimize the potential for confusing *The Clear Word* with an actual Bible we recommend that it not be used for preaching from the pulpit or in teaching Sabbath school. This would be a serious stumbling block to nonmember visitors who may already associate Adventists with cults like Jehovah's Witnesses who design their own Bibles to teach their strange beliefs. Seventh-day Adventists have no such problem; we can teach all our doctrines out of authentic Bibles familiar to Christians everywhere.

To summarize: *The Clear Word* is not actually a Bible, but a paraphrase/commentary that, when used properly, can enrich



one's devotional study and can be recommended in that way. It should not be used as the Word of God for teaching purposes.<sup>10</sup>

The statement above is confusing. It begins by declaring that TCW is a good “study tool,” yet it attempts to discourage members from using it in church or Sabbath school. Notice, however, the stated reason for not using TCW in church: “This would be a serious stumbling block to nonmember visitors who may already associate Adventists with cults like Jehovah’s Witnesses who design their own Bibles to teach their strange beliefs.” The caution appears aimed at preventing “outsiders” from knowing Adventists have their own version of Scripture.

In December, 1994, Martin Weber, associate editor of *Ministry* magazine, published the above article as a book review accompanied by a second review written by Greg Brothers, a former editor of *Signs of the Times*. Brothers illustrated his review with an apocryphal story of a boy in a Sabbath school class explaining the crossing of the Red Sea as a feat of modern military techniques, to which his Sabbath school teacher replied,

“Why Johnny, that’s not what the Bible says!”

“No,” said Johnny, “but if I told you what it says, you’d never believe me!”

Brothers continued:

Don’t laugh—Johnny’s dilemma is real. The Bible’s not an easy book to understand. And sometimes it’s even harder to believe!

That’s why Jack Blanco’s *The Clear Word* fills a real need. It’s a midrash—a running commentary that makes the Bible nice, safe, and simple.<sup>11</sup>

Brothers praises TCW’s “orthodoxy” and finally refers to it as a “Bible”:

Not content to make the Bible a kindly, gentle book, Blanco’s also seen to its orthodoxy. “The Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 is now “Sabbath morning.” Mark 7:19 no longer declares all foods clean. And in Revelation 21:22, Blanco has added that “the Temple or Sanctuary I [John] had expected to see was located outside the city as a reminder of what God had done for His people.”

Obviously, Blanco has given much thought to the controversies wracking our church: the nature of inspiration, the age of the earth, the authority of Ellen White, et. al. And his Bible provides simple answers for them all.<sup>12</sup>

Not all Adventist responses to Blanco’s bold work, however, were positive. Earlier in the year (1994) the new *Clear Word Bible* was actually banned from sale in the Victorian [Australia] Adventist Book Center.

Sales of *The Clear Word Bible*, printed by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, have been suspended in the Victorian Adventist Book Centre at the request of the Victorian Conference Executive Committee. The decision was made following concerns expressed by the South Pacific Division’s Biblical Research Committee noting that the paraphrase was like a denominational interpretation. A new edition will be published under a different title, *The Clear Word*. The executive committee plans to give further consideration when the new edition is available.<sup>13</sup>

In the North Pacific Union Conference *Gleaner* magazine, Alden Thompson makes the following statement in an article entitled “Adventist Bible, Adventist Message”:

NOTICE, HOWEVER, THE STATED REASON FOR NOT USING *THE CLEAR WORD* IN CHURCH: “THIS WOULD BE A SERIOUS STUMBLING BLOCK TO NONMEMBER VISITORS WHO MAY ALREADY ASSOCIATE ADVENTISTS WITH CULTS LIKE JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES WHO DESIGN THEIR OWN BIBLES TO TEACH THEIR STRANGE BELIEFS.”



Given the dramatic and far-reaching revisions found in this book, a more appropriate title would be *The Clear Word Commentary on the Bible*. In spite of Blanco’s candid statement in the preface that *The Clear Word* is not intended for “in-depth study or for public reading in churches,” many are making it their Bible companion for Sabbath school and church.<sup>14</sup>

Thompson explains his three reactions to TCW: admiration, puzzlement, and alarm. Regarding puzzlement he states:

But *The Clear Word* goes far beyond paraphrasing: it also harmonizes, expands and explains—and sometimes omits. One omission, for example, is the potentially troublesome phrase in Mark 7:19, that “Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’” (NIV). It disappears without a trace in *The Clear Word*.<sup>15</sup>

He expresses his alarm at how Adventist members are actually using TCW:

But I must admit my disappointment moves to alarm when I hear Adventists exclaim: “Finally! A Bible we can trust!” What’s wrong with the Bibles we already have? And have we become afraid to tackle the hard passages in Scripture? Let’s not confuse the simple beauty of the Gospel with the depth and complexity of Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

Another alarmed Adventist is Greek scholar Sakae Kubo who enjoys a strong professional reputation beyond Adventism. In a letter to the *Adventist Review* entitled “I Am Concerned”, he stated:

Blanco’s paraphrase has subtracted, added, and interpreted freely without footnotes or italics. Frequently the interpretation is Adventistic, sometimes even a private interpretation of the para-



THE CLEAR WORD IS AS “OFFICIAL” AS ANY  
OTHER WORK SOLD IN ADVENTIST BOOK  
CENTERS BECAUSE ITS PARAPHRASED PASSAGES  
COMPLETELY ENDORSE AND TEACH OFFICIAL  
ADVENTIST DOCTRINE.

phraser. I dread to find this version being reviewed by one of the scholarly journals ....

As far as I am concerned, any addition to the text is unnecessary, even if it is correct and helpful. Such additional matter should be included in the footnotes. But additions that are private interpretations should definitely not be included; in fact, they should be studiously eliminated.

I have several pages of texts in which unnecessary additions are made, some of them quite innocuous but some of them very disturbing. [Kubo then lists four pages of examples.] These Adventistic interpretations of the text cannot be claimed to have come out of the original text, but imported into the text.

The very obvious and serious danger is that our own people will be confused as to what the Bible really says. Interpretation has been so mixed in with the text that our people will think that the interpretation is part of the Word of God.<sup>17</sup>

These and other responses from inside the Seventh-day Adventist Church issue stern warnings about the dangers of using TCW in preaching or in teaching Sabbath school on the one hand, but on the other hand they allow the readers to use the work as a devotional tool. This mixed message appears to protect members from misunderstanding the Bible, but in reality it allows them to become even more firmly indoctrinated. By encouraging church members to use this work as a commentary, Adventist scholars are actually endorsing it as a helpful supplement to the Bible rather than teaching members to wrestle with Scripture. Using TCW as a commentary or devotional work

reinforces the notion that Adventist doctrines are derived from the Scripture. Their true source in the writings of E.G. White is totally eclipsed.

In contrast to these Adventist scholars' mixed reviews, William Johnsson, then editor of *The Adventist Review*, published a pair of articles in the April, 1995, issue of the official Adventist magazine. These articles reviewed two different paraphrases of the Bible: *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, and TCW. The three-page review of *The Message* was a reprint of an article by John R. Kohlenberger, III, and states that it is an “expansive paraphrase” in which one does “not know where the text ends and the commentary begins.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast to evangelical scholar Kohlenberger's response to Peterson's popular paraphrase, William Johnsson's review of Blanco's *The Clear Word* is only one page in length and favorably compares it to J. B. Phillip's *New Testament* and Taylor's *The Living Bible*.

The primary problem with Johnsson's review is that he states, “*The Clear Word* is fine if used as the author intended. Much potential harm can be avoided if readers of *The Clear Word* would stick to Blanco's instruction in the opening paragraph of his preface to the work: ...”<sup>19</sup>

*The Clear Word*, though, is not “fine” even if one sticks to the instruction in the preface. The rampant changes, additions, and deletions to the text allow someone with an Adventist worldview to remain comfortable while believing the Bible supports unbiblical doctrines.

Johnsson further misses the fact that *The Message* does not represent any denominational positions, while *The Clear Word* specifically adds Adventist dogma to the text, allowing many passages to oppose the original writings. A person can easily identify these altered passages, however, if one compares them to a reliable translation of the Bible.

Johnsson also fails to note that the expansions in *The Message* are minimal compared to the expansions in *The Clear Word*. For example, over 30 words are added to Daniel 8:14 in TCW, completely changing the meaning of the text. *The Message*, on the other hand, simplifies the words but retains both the general meaning and length of the text. Daniel 8:14 is the central passage for Adventism's core doctrine of its “sanctuary service”, but the Adventist interpretation of the passage cannot be supported from the plain words of Scripture. The following comparison demonstrates Blanco's addition of Adventist dogma to this text compared with Peterson's rendering:

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**Daniel 8:14**

*The Clear Word*

He answered, “After two thousand three hundred prophetic days (which represent actual years), God will restore the truth about the heavenly Sanctuary to its rightful place. Then the process of judgment will begin of which the yearly cleansing of the earthly Sanctuary was a type, and God will vindicate His people.”

*The Message*

“The other answered, ‘Over the course of 2,300 sacrifices, evening and morning. Then the Sanctuary will be set right again.’”

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## Editions of The Clear Word Bible

Since Blanco published his first New Testament paraphrase in 1990, there have been numerous editions of *The Clear Word Bible*.

In 1994 Blanco published his first full “Bible”—and its title contained the word “Bible”. Within weeks, however, a flood of criticism resulted in Blanco’s removing the word “Bible” and republishing the work as *The Clear Word*—his second edition. Editions three and four followed quickly that same year, and each contained editorial amendments. Six years later the 2000 edition was published with new text amendments, and in 2003 the still-current edition rolled off the Review and Herald press. The following year, 2004, yielded a new pocket-sized edition, and two paraphrases known as *The Easy English Clear Word* and *The Clear Word for Kids* were published in 2005. These last two are subtitled “A Simplified Paraphrase” and are textually identical, but they are titled differently to appeal to the two audiences they are targeting. One more new edition appeared in 2006: a giant print version of the text occurring in the 2003 edition.

Besides these different versions of his paraphrase, Jack Blanco has also published condensed works of various books of the Bible. The book *Savior* was published in 2008. It is a condensation of the four gospels blended into “one story”. *Witness* was published in 2009 and is a condensation of the New Testament from the book of Acts through Revelation. Finally, in 2010, *Visions and Dreams* was published with the subtitle, “A Fresh Look at Daniel and Revelation.”

## Conclusion

*The Clear Word* has received numerous reviews over the years by a variety of people, mostly within Adventism, yet these

reviews have been primarily negative in word and tone. Blanco’s paraphrase, which has changed with almost every new edition, continues to be used for teaching, preaching, Bible study, Sabbath School, and devotionals. Moreover, contrary to its author’s and publisher’s recommendation, TCW is not safe even if it is used only used as a devotional. Its altered text is formatted to look like a Bible, and unwary readers are deceived into believing that the Bible teaches Adventist doctrine.

In spite of the fact that some Adventist leaders have written about the problems within *The Clear Word*, there has been no effort to remove it from use. Instead, new editions and formats have been published, and they all are sold in the Bible sections of Adventist Book Centers as well as in their online catalogs. In fact, TCW is available hard-bound, soft-bound, leather-bound, pocket-sized, large-print, as an e-book, as an audio book read by Lonnie Melashenko, and also as the Gospel of John (1994, 4th edition).

The ongoing argument about whether TCW is an official Adventist version of Scripture or not is simply an extraneous argument. *The Clear Word* is as “official” as any other work sold in Adventist Book Centers because its paraphrased passages completely endorse and teach official Adventist doctrine.

The apostle John has the last word regarding this egregious distortion of God’s eternal word:

**I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18-19). †**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> From Youtube website:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy\\_roGWv0L8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy_roGWv0L8) at 2 minutes and 16 seconds into the interview.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Thomas, Jr. from Youtube website:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy\\_roGWv0L8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy_roGWv0L8) at 42 seconds into the interview.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Thomas, Jr. and Jack Blanco from Youtube website:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy\\_roGWv0L8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy_roGWv0L8) at 8 minutes and 38 seconds into the interview.

Online as of 11/13/13. Notice how the speakers use the words “devotional” and “translation” interchangeably. This should cause serious concern on the part of Jack Blanco; however, he is the one in the conversation that responds with “translation” after the interviewer uses the word “devotional.”

<sup>4</sup> Blanco, Jack J., All quotes from the Preface of *The Clear Word Bible*, 1st Ed., pp. vii-ix © 1994, Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 55 West Oak

Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740

<sup>5</sup> Blanco, Jack J., *The Clear Word Bible*, 1st edition, p. vii, Review and Herald® Publishing Association, Copyright © 1994 by Jack J. Blanco.

<sup>6</sup> Blanco, Jack J., *The Clear Word Bible*, 1st edition, p. vii, Review and Herald® Publishing Association, Copyright © 1994 by Jack J. Blanco.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, Jim, *Adventist Today*, “In Defense of The Clear Word,” Sept./Oct. 2000, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Permission has been granted by Dr. Grudem to quote his letter only in its entirety.

<sup>10</sup> South Pacific Division *Record*, October 29, 1994, p. 10. Also reprinted in *Ministry* magazine, December 1994, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Brothers, Greg, *Ministry* magazine, December, 1994, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> South Pacific Division *Record*, February 4, 1995, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, Alden, North Pacific Union *Gleaner*, December 12, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Kubo, Sakae, *Adventist Review*, April 1995, p. 15. Bracketed statement in original.

<sup>18</sup> Kohlenberger, John R., III, *Adventist Review*, April 1995, pp. 11-14.

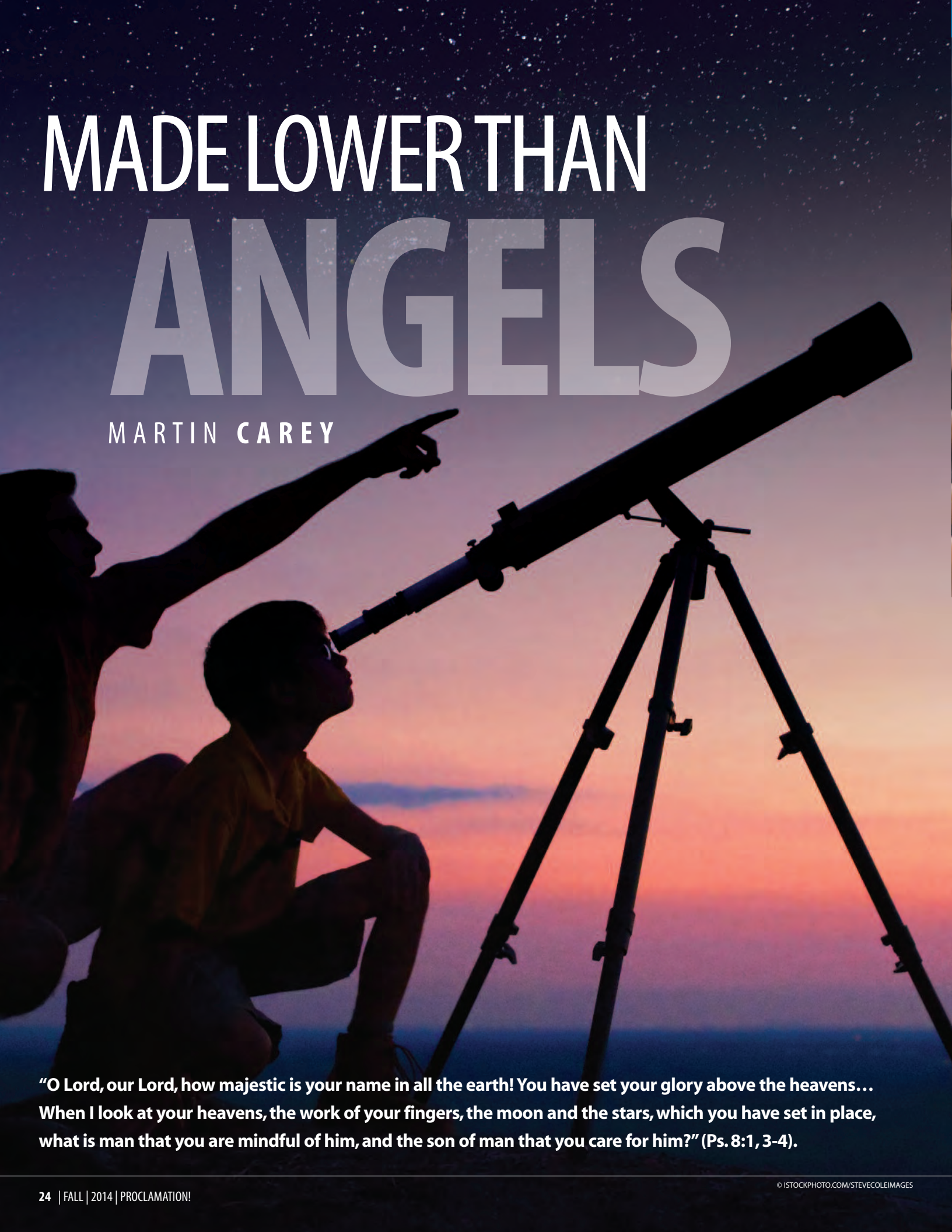
<sup>19</sup> Johnsson, William G., *Adventist Review*, April 1995, p. 14.

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# MADE LOWER THAN ANGELS

MARTIN CAREY

A silhouette of two people, an adult and a child, looking through a telescope. The adult is pointing towards the sky. The background is a starry night sky with a sunset or sunrise glow at the bottom.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens... When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps. 8:1, 3-4).



**T**he king stood outside beneath the stars, just as he had always done in his father's fields while surrounded by sheep, wondering at the marvel of his own existence. In the still darkness under the ancient lights, his thoughts often turned from matters of state to what men had pondered for eons—man's place in the universe. David was a warrior, a prophet, and a king of his tiny nation, surrounded by powerful enemies. His God needed to be very majestic, indeed. While many Israelites continued to bow the knee to the Canaanite gods, David wrote a worship song that asks a simple question, "What is man?" His profound answer to his own question refutes all the pagan cosmologies.

When we sit in the dark surrounded by starry glory hinting at an immense universe, we are given an opportunity to feel two sensations. On the one hand, the stars seem majestic and coldly distant, utterly dependable in their motions—yet terribly indifferent to us. On the other hand, they seem perfect, mysterious—even, perhaps, in total control of everything beneath them. Looking up at them, realizing what weak little creatures we are, we may feel subject to their power. Many cultures, in fact, have pictured the random scattering of points across the sky as a screen where they projected all their wishes and dreams. By imposing their imaginations on the silent stars, men have created a great revolving cinema of gods and heroes with elaborate mythologies. Even today, our star maps continue to display projections of human worship, both ancient and modern. Man has always tried to set his glories in the heavens.

David, however, saw glory above him and thought first not of man but of his Creator, whose glory is above even the stars, ruling all. David asked Him directly, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" Indeed, given the vastness of the universe, what is puny man that the Creator should care for him? From a natural perspective the cosmos seems to put man in his rightful place—somewhere near the bottom of the great "chain of being". In fact, pagans have always known that the numerous pagan gods, whatever their rank, have better things to occupy their energies than man. Uniquely, however, the Hebrew Scriptures contradict the pagan chain of being and its polytheism by declaring that man's significance is a gift from his Creator. David states in verse 5:

**"Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet..."**

## The Promises of Eden

Psalm 8 refers us to man's origin in the Garden of Eden where God showed extraordinary attention to Adam and Eve. The first man and woman had been created perfect, made in God's image, when He declared all of creation to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Not only were the first humans perfect, but they were appointed under God's authority to subdue the earth and fill it. In fact, their creation was cause for universal celebration and joy as the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38:7). When God crowned man with glory and honor and gave him dominion, there were great expectations for all of humankind. To uniquely resemble God, to visit personally with Him, and to be

given dominion over creation—these are honors we cannot fully comprehend.

What qualified Adam for his crown?

There was little about Adam to amaze us, for he was not a superhero with great powers, nor does Scripture specify what powers Adam had to enable him to exercise control over his vast dominion. Although he was perfect, Adam had to rule over animals that were faster and stronger than he. In fact, aside from naming the beasts, there is little evidence of Adam's actually putting creation under his subjection, although God's decree that man should multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28; 9:1) did keep the wild beasts from overrunning the land (Deut. 7:22).

Adam was "of the earth" and made from dirt—a humble origin of which Scripture reminds us frequently. As an earth-bound organism, he was physically united to the elements of our planet. Yet he was more than dust—but he was not a living being until God personally breathed life into him (Gen. 2:7). Adam's life derived from God alone, not from any natural property of the dust or from his physical body.<sup>1</sup> In fact, God's imparting the breath of life was more than His giving divine CPR to kick start a biological machine called Adam. Animals, for example, all breathe the same air we do and share much of our DNA, yet it was only into Adam that God personally breathed spiritual life, making man in His own image. God made man and woman in His own image with a unique origin and a unique spiritual nature. Because He is spirit, God imparted His spiritual life to them so they could personally know Him and worship Him in Spirit (Jn. 4:24).

To humble us, David tells us that man was made lower than the more powerful spiritual beings in the spiritual realm. Compared to mighty angels, Adam was earthbound, weak, and vulnerable. Considering Adam's limitations, we might be tempted to ask God, "How did Adam deserve that crown? Why not an archangel?"

Yet for reasons we will see later, God created a universe that could only fulfill His purposes through subjugation by man. In the beginning He placed Adam and Eve—perfect living souls—in a garden, but outside Eden, creation evidently had a certain wildness that God wanted man to subdue (Gen. 1:28). That subjection never took place. We wonder sometimes how creation might have been transformed by an unfallen Adam, but Scripture does not tell us what might have been. Instead, it tells us what man will finally be. Significantly, Scripture does not point us back to the original perfections of Eden in order to foreshadow the future. Instead, the Bible directs our attention away from Eden toward another world under a very different administration.

In Genesis 3, we see Adam and Eve listening to the serpent who claimed that, by doubting and disobeying God, they would become like gods, knowing good from evil (Gen. 3:5). In other words, in exchange for disobedience, the serpent offered "self-improvement", tempting them with illegitimate access to secret knowledge by which they could rise above their God-given natures<sup>2</sup> to find greater powers. Suddenly God's provision for them of ruling the earth and knowing Him personally was eclipsed by the promise of being "like gods", and they listened to the serpent. They broke their fellowship with God that day and fell to their spiritual deaths.

When God visited Adam and Eve that evening, He brought both swift judgment and distant hope. The first curses fell on the serpent who was now debased below other beasts, to crawl like a worm in the dirt (Gen. 3:14-14). From other Scriptures, we also know that God was applying the curses to the malevolent spirit who spoke through the serpent. Satan was now the most debased of all God's creatures, and this reality would be demonstrated until all his plans and efforts are finally defeated.<sup>3</sup> He would be loathed and dreaded by men, even among his slaves. Though he would bite the heel of the woman's Offspring, his head would finally be crushed. In contrast, Eve's children could place their hopes in her seed to conquer the serpent and restore all things.

When God said that the ground was cursed for man's sake, He meant that the earth was cursed with "futility" so that death would follow man and defeat all his works (Rom. 8:21). Today we witness everywhere the evidence of man's lost dominion over nature. We are still prey to disasters, diseases, and wars, and especially we are subject to our own fallen natures. The innocent and the guilty suffer alike, and even though we improve our technologies, we often use them to magnify our capacity for evil. This fact is demonstrated in Michael Crichton's science fiction book *Jurassic Park*.<sup>4</sup> In it he imagines a wild animal park populated with cloned dinosaurs that turn out to be violent and uncontrollable; they remind us that, in spite of our increased knowledge, nature is never our servant.

## Not to Angels

**"For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking" (Heb. 2:5).**

Angels were given authority by God to administer certain affairs of earth. For example, angels guarded the entrance to Eden after the fall (Gen. 2:24), delivered the law at Sinai (Heb. 2:2), continue to rule over earthly kingdoms (Dan. 4:13, 10:13), and are given power over nature (Rev. 16:4). There are evil angels who rule the nations, as we see in Daniel 10, and these "princes" oppose the work of God's angels (Dan. 10:20). Michael the

archangel, one of the chief princes, is the defender of Israel (vs. 21). Moreover, Paul tells us that we wrestle against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). These powers are usurpers of man's rightful dominion, and they must be cast out by the rightful king. In the time of Christ, Jewish culture carried strong beliefs in angelic hierarchies, both good and evil.<sup>5</sup> If their religious system had been delivered by God through powerful angels, how could Christians claim a greater authority for their gospel?

In the New Testament, the end of angelic domination is proclaimed.

**"For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking" (Heb. 2:5).**

The new cosmic order has already been firmly established for men, by the man from Nazareth. This was a shocking message, an unbelievable report to the Jews. Why should they listen to this message from a lowly peasant who was obviously lower than an angel? The answer shatters the Jewish paradigm and reveals God's provision: this humble Man who first delivered the great news is greatly superior to angels. The world to come will not be under the power of angels, and this Man has no place in their hierarchy. Hebrews 2 makes the message of Psalm 8 shine even brighter. We hear the question again, "What is man, that you are mindful of him?" We now have a better answer.

## The Qualities of Majesty

When man was given dominion and crowned with glory, his real domain included all things (Heb. 2:8). Obviously, we do not see all things under man's dominion. Where can we see evidence of all things becoming subjected to man? The prophet Isaiah warned us that the real answer would disappoint us:

**"For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Is. 53:2).**

## Praying for you

It's finally fall. Here in the desert Southwest, "fall" is more of a date on the calendar than a clear shift in temperature, but the days are shorter. Lacking chilly temps, we let the waning sunlight justify our hanging autumn wreaths and baking pumpkin-spice treats as we begin to anticipate the coming holidays.

As we look forward to Thanksgiving and Christmas, we at Life Assurance Ministries also think about how we will end the year financially as we produce the last two of our four annual issues of *Proclamation!* We truly praise our Father for providing for us and for blessing all those who support this ministry. It is His grace and blessing that has kept *Proclamation!* in print through the recent years of uncertain economic and political times.

We ask you to pray with us, however, and to consider contributing to Life Assurance Ministries if you aren't already doing so. We are behind budget as we go to press, and we need God to raise up donors in order to print and mail our fourth issue before the end of the year.

We pray that He will deeply bless all those who are committed to being part of this ministry. We know how life-changing it is to learn the true gospel and to know the real Jesus, and we thank Him for providing a means of spiritual and emotional support through *Proclamation!* for those who are processing their Adventism and finding a new foundation in Scripture and a biblical view of reality.

We pray for you. Please pray for us. †



Isaiah 53's little shoot, growing out of the old stump of Jesse's royal family (see Is. 11:1), is God's answer. "No!" we cry; "we want real dominion; is this unattractive shoot the best God can provide to restore authority to humanity? Unbelievable!"

This dwarfed, dry young plant poking through the dust, however, is God's promised Branch. He is not strong or beautiful as we expect Him to be (53:1, 2). In fact, because Jesse's Branch doesn't appear strong or kingly, most people turn away from Him, disappointed. Nevertheless, the Servant of Isaiah 53, lowly and weak, demoted beneath the angels, is the One who wins the crown of dominion over all creation. All the honor and dignity that is ascribed to man at his creation is found in the humble Servant, and nowhere else.

**"But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:8-9).**

While His inheritance is superior to anything ever given to angels (Heb. 1), His life on earth seems to be a terrible contradiction to His identity. Nevertheless, Hebrews declares that His rejection and crucifixion are the reason for His inheritance: Jesus was crowned with glory "because of the suffering of death" (Heb. 2:9). Moreover, He is crowned because, by God's grace towards us, Jesus took our death. His Father exalted Him because He humbled Himself by taking the form of a servant and was obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:8-10).

This apparent paradox begs the question: "But why should God pay so much attention to man that He would suffer for him?" If we ever battle with skeptical thoughts about the brutal aspects of the gospel, this passage indeed requires a closer look:

**"For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb. 2:10).**

How was it "fitting" or appropriate for the Creator of the cosmos to arrange such extreme suffering for His Son? For God to cause suffering does not seem, on the surface, consistent with His character. Wouldn't it be logical for God to save man by removing suffering, not by using it for His purposes?

The answers to these questions is in the passage. Since all things were created by God and for His glory (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:15), making Jesus suffer for us showed His grace. In other words, there was nothing ever inflicted on any person that God did not take upon Himself in the person Jesus. Therefore, it was completely consonant with God's character of justice and mercy to bruise His Son, fully intending that He should suffer:

**"Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief..." (Is. 53:10).**

Long before anyone suffered, the crushing of the Servant was in His foreknowledge and plan from all time (Acts 2:23). Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), perfectly in keeping with His perfect salvation.

From these and many other texts, we see that becoming a man and sacrificing Himself for His fallen brothers and sisters was, and always will be, Jesus' eternal identity.

**"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).**

## **IN CHRIST, OUR TRUE IDENTITY IS NO LONGER "FROM THE EARTH" WHICH IS OF THE DUST, BUT IN HEAVEN WITH CHRIST.**

Because He made the universe for Himself, He designed every last subatomic particle of it with His tasting death for us in mind. Nothing was left to chance, for the cross and the resurrection were "in the blueprints."

The Lord Jesus was fitted to be our complete Savior; He was "made perfect through sufferings" all through His life on earth. Importantly, He did not suffer because He was morally deficient; rather, His suffering as a sinless man thoroughly fitted Him for His role as our Savior and High Priest. Isaiah tells us (53:4) that the Servant has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." This statement, however, is saying far more than, "He was sympathetic to our suffering."

What Isaiah is telling us is that Jesus, our compassionate Messiah, takes on fully the darkest parts of our lives. He did not hold back on the cross, and He will not avoid our deepest griefs now. There is much more to these words in verse 4 than the English translation conveys. The Hebrew word for "griefs" is *choli*, which means affliction, disease, griefs, illnesses.<sup>6</sup> The Scripture does not separate illnesses of the body from those of the soul but connects them together as part of the same affliction. We could read the passage this way, "Surely he has borne our afflictions and illnesses, our griefs and sorrows." In the New Testament gospels, Jesus lives this reality thoroughly:

**"That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases'" (Mt. 8:16-17).**

We know that Jesus healed the afflicted and raised the dead, fulfilling the words of Isaiah. If we dig deeper, however, there is something profoundly intimate in His bearing our afflictions. There is a moving story in Mark where we catch a glimpse into the heart of the Son of God:

**"And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly" (Mk. 7:32-25).**

Why does Mark add the little detail that Jesus sighed while looking up to heaven? Healing this man was not difficult for Him, and He was certainly willing to do so. Here is something profound that we are allowed to see in Jesus' healing this suffering man—something we really need to see. Because Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the One who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, He healed that man by

bearing his entire affliction, his physical and mental pain, and all his guilt. Jesus felt all his anguish and carried its awful weight in His own soul.

The purity of Jesus' soul did not make him callous to the sufferings of sinners; rather, it made Him far more sensitive to them. He did not have a deceitful heart, as we have, that avoided the more disturbing realities of evil. He had what Alexander MacLaren called the "identifying power of the unparalleled sympathy of a pure nature."<sup>7</sup>

**"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).**

This is not a text designed to make us feel guilty for yielding to temptations, as some of us learned we must feel. The sympathy of Jesus is not like a Hallmark sympathy card, giving us nice paper sentiments from a distance while we grieve alone. No—His sympathy is ever-present and comes to us with His sovereign power as He carries us with all our burdens. For those who are born of the Spirit, He never leaves or forsakes us at any time (Heb. 13:5). That is who He is.

Even while He was on earth, although Jesus had all power and knew what was about happen in the next few minutes, He was not ashamed to grieve openly. "Jesus wept," John tells us in John 11:35 as he describes Jesus' approach to his friend Lazarus' tomb. The shortest verse in the Bible reveals the completely human Jesus feeling bereavement as well as the weight of the mourning of all the people present, even though in a few minutes He would raise Lazarus from the dead. What might appear as weakness in this Messiah is really the true mark of kingly majesty. All the griefs, all the trials Jesus had to bear were making Him "perfect," as One fully qualified to be the captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10).

## The Glory Above the Heavens

**"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet'" (1 Cor. 15:25-27).**

From the moment we first awaken every morning, we are aware that our world is not in subjection to us. We groan within ourselves; even those of us who have the first fruits of the Spirit are groaning while we wait for glory (Rom. 8:23). We see little evidence of that glorious future here, a place where it hurts to walk by faith. Even though we can't see much, though, what we can see is enough: we can see Jesus.

As believers in the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3, 4), we know that God raised Jesus from the grave to sit down and rule at the Father's right hand. We know that in Adam we all died, but in



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the risen Christ, "we shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). When we believe in Jesus and are born of the Spirit, we are no longer "in Adam", but we are "in Christ", our new representative. Everything He has done belongs to us: His perfect obedience, His dying and rising, His ascension to heaven, His inheritance and dominion of the entire cosmos—just as if we had done all these things ourselves.

What God's word is trying to tell us is that if we are born from above, we are no longer considered children of Adam. True, our bodies belong to the dust and we remain for now under the physical curses given to Adam and Eve, but our living spirits know Him and are joined to Him.

**"The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." (1 Cor. 15:45). "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven" (vs. 47).**

In Christ, our true identity is no longer "from the earth" which is of the dust, but in heaven with Christ. The sad effects of Adam's rule were ended in Christ, and His reign has already begun. That fact radically changes how we should think of ourselves. Paul told his friends in Corinth,

**"...one has died for all, therefore all have died...From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:14b-16).**

God's universe was always to be under the dominion of a man, determined by God's sovereign decree from all eternity. Adam never dominated the universe because he failed to remain humbly submitted to God's rule. The rulership of the universe was never intended for the mighty and the proud. The dominion of earth is fulfilled by another Man, an obedient Servant, lowly and weak, who was rejected as unfit for any crown. The Servant came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. He is the Lamb of God, slain from all eternity, for the saving of proud sinners like you and me. He is everything man was ever meant to be. Because of His humility, weakness, and dependency, the Lord Jesus is especially qualified for His crown. Those are the qualities of His divine majesty, so let us worship Him.

**"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). †**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Elicott, Charles, *Elicott's Commentary for English Readers*, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/2-7.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/3-14.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia, *Jurassic Park*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jurassic\\_Park\\_\(novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jurassic_Park_(novel))

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Angelology", <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1521-angelology#4349>

<sup>6</sup> *Strong's Concordance*, "Isaiah 53:4, choli": <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/2483.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Alexander MacLaren, *MacLaren's Expositions*, "Isaiah 53:4", <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/isaiah/53-1.htm>



I believed what I had been taught. The messages came to me from leaders in the Adventist Church and from the prophet, Ellen G. White. The goal of my life was to be perfect, because God was perfect (Mt. 5:48). Guilt and frustration were my constant companions, because perfection was always just out of reach. Now, after becoming born again and being disciplined using only the Scriptures, life looks different. My goal is not to be perfect; now the purpose of my life is much, much, more.

Ellen White wrote, and I believed, “Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in Heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14” (*The Great Controversy* 425.1).

Adventism taught that Christ died for my sins and I had to be perfect to be saved. It was an impossible conundrum!

The messages learned stated, “The righteousness of Christ will not cover one cherished sin” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 316). “We can never see our Lord in peace, unless our souls are spotless. We must bear the perfect image of Christ” (*Review and Herald*, May 30, 1882). “(Christ) came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness” (*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1902). “There is no safety nor repose nor justification in transgression of the law. Man cannot hope to stand innocent before God, and at peace with Him through the merits of Christ, while he continues in sin. He must cease to transgress and become loyal and true.” (1 *Selected Messages*, EGW, p. 213). “Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement.” (*Testimonies For the Church*, vol. 5, p. 214). “While God can be just, and yet, justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ’s righteous-



## ADVENTISM TAUGHT THAT CHRIST DIED FOR MY SINS AND I HAD TO BE PERFECT TO BE SAVED. IT WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE CONUNDRUM!

ness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties. God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be a continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul ...” (1 *Selected Messages*, p. 366). “To be redeemed means to cease from sin.” (*Review and Herald*, Sept. 25, 1900).

I was a living mess, always striving but never obtaining the required perfection while also believing Christ died for my sins. I had a twisted, misconceived “truth” that came directly from the deceiver. Biblical passages had been taken out of context and used to teach me lies.

Now, I live in the light of God’s perfect grace. Jesus died for my sins because I can never, as I live on this earth, be sinless, and anyone who claims to be able to live a sinless life is deceived (1 Jn 1:8).

Now I live in the battle between sinful flesh and Christ which Paul penned in Romans 7:14-25, and Romans 8:1.

Realizing I will never be perfect this side of heaven but that Christ is my righteousness gives me hope, and my purpose is different. Now I take time to

read God’s word and receive eternal pleasure at His hands (Ps. 16:11). My life is the Lord’s to speak His words and to serve others so that the Lord may be praised through Christ Jesus (1 Pet. 4:11). My focus is Jesus Christ, that He may be glorified, loved, and known. The purpose of my life is to grow in the One Who died for me and to know His word that teaches me Who He is.

I no longer strive for perfection. I am learning to live in the grace of His finished work. †

**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 and is a marriage and family counselor.



**I had no idea**

Thank you for your magazine and the article on abortion.

I had no idea that the Adventist church supports abortion. The specific examples are helpful: doctors doing abortions, promoting abortion, and owning abortion clinics.

All this was kept hidden from me. I remember a pastor saying something about soul and breath, but I knew nothing about the consequences of this false doctrine, that one is not a living soul until one breathes.

I am angry about all the false doctrines promoted by the Adventist church. Reading the New Testament over and over has taken me out of the erroneous thinking of this cult.

I try to show my Adventist friends truth from the Bible, but the common response is anger at me.

VIA EMAIL

**Commendation for standing up for truth**

I was amazed while reading your article on Abortion in Adventism. I felt so sad to read that the Adventist Church “supports” abortion in some of their medical centers! What an eye opener to read your very thorough and well written article. I went to the Nursing Program at Loma Linda

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**MOTTO**

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**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

University back in the early 80’s because it was a “Christian” school.

I am not Adventist, but am a Sabbath-keeper. I was surprised to find out after a few months that it wasn’t as “Christian” as I had hoped. My first professor, in the very first class I took, opened each and every class with a prayer. I cried each time he opened class in prayer for about a week. It was wonderful and I couldn’t wait to meet the other students and begin what I thought was going to be a wonderful, Holy Spirit-filled nursing program. Well, that class was the only one, in the 4 years I was there, that had prayer!

## TO READ THAT ADVENTIST LEADERS “HIDE” THE ABORTION GUIDELINES IN A DIFFICULT TO FIND WEB PAGE, JUST REEKS OF THEIR INTERNAL GUILT.

I slowly learned that “Adventism” was more a works oriented and very status conscious religion. Very few people were “Christians”—ones that knew our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, personally.

To read that Adventist leaders “hide” the Abortion/Interruption of Pregnancy guidelines in a difficult to find web page, just reeks of their internal guilt. The almighty dollar rules here. It so saddens me to know that the devil has deeply penetrated this institution, but they will have to answer to our heavenly Father both on taking the innocent life that God created and also leading young unsuspecting Christians astray. As James 3:1 states... “those who teach will be judged more strictly.” (NIV)

I want to commend you for standing up for the truth and the innocent unborn creations from God.

I truly appreciate your thorough writing and plan to pass it on to others. Thanks for the hard work you put into writing this article and all the investigative work behind the scenes.

SAN DIEGO, CA

**Fallen daughter joined with Romanism**

I am rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ and the three angels’ messages and have been for many years. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation.”

You and your deceived adherents have joined with the mother church (the Papacy) and have become a fallen daughter, as you share major points of doctrine with Romanism: pro-active opposition to abortion, and Sunday sacredness.

Also, you implicitly teach people to sin boldly, as bold, unrepentant, deliberate sinners are saved by grace. Your unconverted authors charge that the law of God is a burden and grievous and as a consequence implicitly espouse cheap grace. You cavalierly teach that sin is O.K. and that grace is cheap, and you ignore the horrible infinite cost that the Savior paid to redeem us from sin. Romans 6:1: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” And you further teach that emboldened sinners will be saved in their sins. Is that concept consistent with Matthew 1:21? You and Lucifer, who is a liar and a murderer, are charging God that His law is indeed grievous.

1 John 5:3-4 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” You wrest the Scriptures to your own destruction and the destruction of others (2 Pet. 3:13).

I highly suspect that you will not, again as usual, print my letter in your “publication” as I notice in your “Letters to the Editor” that you do not include letters that contain Biblical references, as your methodology of Biblical

hermeneutics is highly flawed. I am so sorry about the people that you have deceived and are attempting to deceive.

AMERICAN FORK, UT

**Editor’s note:** John is not referring to “law” or the Ten Commandments when he says believers are to keep God’s commandments. John consistently uses the Greek word *entole* in the places translated “commandments”, and in context John is saying that we are to keep the teachings of God given through the Lord Jesus. John further states that Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn.13:34).

**Excellent design**

Your article “Abortion in Adventism: Why Seventh-day Adventism Promotes Choice” was great, and there was an excellent graphic design on the cover.

DALLAS, TX

**EGW drove my request to abort**

What guts it takes to tell it like it is! Kudos on the subject of abortion in Seventh-day Adventist hospitals.

When I became pregnant with our unplanned third child, I was distraught because I had read in Ellen White’s writings that it is a sin to assume the responsibilities of parenthood without the proper preparation (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 380; *Child Guidance*, p. 64). While the context of her statement is the (assumed) need for future parents to study and understand how human organs work so as to be able to teach such things to their children (and if they can’t, it is a sin to assume the responsibilities of parenthood), I nevertheless felt unprepared for our third child in other ways. Significantly, I felt we could not afford another child at the time and thought my husband

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and I had surely sinned in irresponsibly becoming pregnant again.

“Fortunately” for us, my Adventist doctor at the Saint Helena Sanitarium and Hospital was performing abortions, so I asked him for one, telling him why I felt I needed it.

Praise the Lord, that blessed man who had delivered our first two sons, replied quietly, “It is legal, but if you really do not want this child, my wife and I will adopt him or her.” (I found out later they already had six adopted children.)

“No,” I sobbed. “If anyone is to keep it, it will be us.”

Not surprisingly, we can’t imagine our lives without our third son, and now also his wife and kids, too. How much joy and entertainment he and they have brought into our lives! What a terrible mistake it would have been to abide by Ellen White’s writings and not expand our family because we were totally unprepared (and therefore, I thought, had sinned).

I just can’t put into words how incredibly glad we are to be out from under that false prophet’s guilt-inducing teachings!

ROSSVILLE, GA

#### **Self-righteous, pompous, smug, condemning**

For some reason I keep receiving your magazine *Proclamation!* although I never subscribed. I am not and never have been an Adventist and see no reason to fixate on anti-Adventism. I have to admit that the magazine seems

self-righteous, a bit pompous and smug, and quite condemning of those who disagree. The magazine is glossy and probably costs a lot to produce, so why not take me off your list and save some money?

PENDLETON, OR

#### **Not interesting**

I don’t find your alternative editorial attacks on Adventism interesting. The paper just gets thrown away.

Perhaps your paper would be better spent proactively reaching the wider world with the true message of Christ.

HAPPY VALLEY, OR

#### **Thank you for addressing abortion**

Thank you for your article re: the Adventist position on abortion. When I was an Adventist pastor (for 20 years) I was somewhat ambivalent to the abortion issue. As I look back on it now, I can see that much of that ambivalence was rooted in the oversimplification of Genesis 2:7 (Body + Breath = Living being or soul). At that time I fully believed that the soul did not exist until there was physical breath. This would mean that the fetus was only potential life, and not yet truly life. After studying my way out of the Adventist church based on the biblical truth of the new covenant, I began to study the Bible from cover to cover with a heart to understand what it truly taught about other subjects as well. Once I discovered that the Bible clearly teaches that the “breath of life” was far more than

merely physical breath—that humans are made up of a spirit, soul, and a body (1 Thess. 5:23) and that the spirit or soul is a conscious separate part of who we are (Rom. 8:16, Jn. 11:33), not just mere breath—my attitude toward abortion changed dramatically. At first I subconsciously began to feel differently about it but later understood that it was better biblical theology and paved the way for a greater understanding of human life. It does begin at conception (Ps. 139:13-16). Thank you for highlighting this issue so clearly in your article.

GREG TAYLOR, LANCASTER, PA

#### **Be born again and forgive who hurt you**

The Ten Commandments are a law of love. Reading your magazine I noticed that you “proclaim” loud and clear your resentment and bitterness toward the Adventist Church. May the Lord help you to “really” be born again, so you can forgive whoever hurt you. Then you will be able to use your money, your time, and your talents to “proclaim” God’s love. So many people don’t know Jesus!

VIA EMAIL

#### **In support of Ratzlaff’s recent article**

Daniel 8 describes the 2300 evening and morning sacrifices (1150 days at two sacrifices per day) prevented by the Little Horn. The angel emphasizes this message by declaring, “The vision of the

evenings and mornings which was told is true” (Dan. 8:26).

This vision could not be about heaven or 1844 since neither of these involved sacrifices. Ellen G. White tried to counter the assurance of the angel by claiming that tamid never referred to sacrifices.

Then I saw in relation to the “daily” (Dan. 8:12) that the word “sacrifice” was supplied by man’s wisdom, and does not belong to the text... (*Present Truth*, Nov 1, 1850).

Quite the opposite of her assertion, the Bible always used *tamid* to refer to these sacrifices.

*Tamid* is an abbreviated form for *olat tamid* (“daily burnt-offering”) and refers to the daily (morning and evening) sacrifices as set out in Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:1-8 (cf. 2 Kings 16:15; Ezek. 46:13-15; Neh. 10:34, and 2 Chron. 13:11) (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*).

Nevertheless, EGW declared, “I have been instructed that regarding what might be said on either side of this question, silence [obfuscation] at this time is eloquence” (*Woman of Vision* p. 512).

This command was enforced on questioners with the usual duress, but her discredited statement that *tamid* doesn’t mean the morning and evening sacrifices continues to be published to this day. (What do Jewish scholars know about their own vocabulary?)

Bottom line: Antiochus Epiphanes fulfilled Daniel 8. 1844 did not.

HARRY ELLIOTT, SUNNYVALE, CA

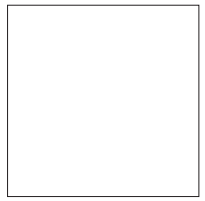
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THE LIFE AFTER WITH CHRIS LEE

“Colossians 2 isn’t referring to the Sabbath as a shadow fulfilled in Christ. It’s only referring to the animal sacrifices associated with the Sabbath.” The ongoing dialogue had taken a truly bizarre turn.

My Adventist friend had been e-mailing me to state his disagreement with my view of the Sabbath. His main point was that the Decalogue requires observing the Sabbath and, according to him, nowhere does the Bible ever change that command for Christians. I, of course, referred him to the second chapter of Colossians which refers to dietary laws, annual festival sabbaths, monthly new moon sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath day all as shadows that have been fulfilled in Christ. The text seems plain enough; these things were all shadows that have been fulfilled, and we shouldn’t let anyone judge us on their observance.

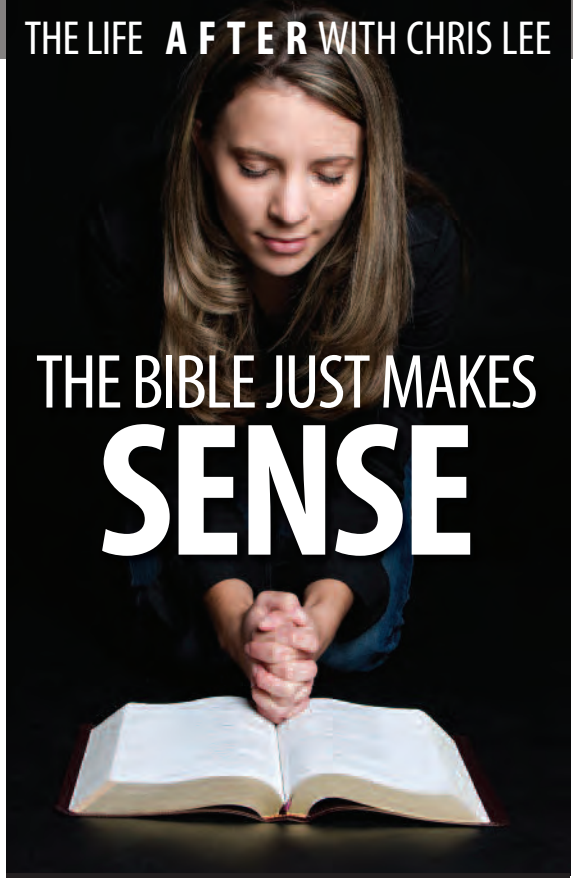
Needless to say, my friend was a bit disconcerted by what seemed to be a very straightforward passage of Scripture making Sabbath observance no longer binding on new covenant believers. Initially he came back with, “That text isn’t talking about the weekly Sabbath. It’s only talking about ‘ceremonial’ sabbaths.” Such a position is untenable for a number of reasons that I pointed out.

After consulting with an Adventist scholar, my friend eventually came to the same conclusion. Trying to deny that Paul is talking about the weekly Sabbath in Colossians 2 makes gibberish of the text itself and additionally forces the reader to interpret “Sabbaton” differently from the other 67 times it appears in the New Testament. One might think that would be the end of the conversation, but not so.

“This text is referring to animal sacrifices offered on the Sabbath,” my friend insisted. He and his scholar friend had discussed this rebuttal as a more viable position. I asked where in the passage Paul referred to animal



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sacrifices. He responded by asking how I knew the passage wasn’t referring to them. His position was that as long as I couldn’t prove the passage wasn’t about sacrifices, then I shouldn’t discount the possibility.

I had nothing. It was as if he had said, “There’s a Martian invasion on the way. Prove to me there’s not.” It’s difficult—some would say impossible—to prove a negative. A Martian invasion seems unlikely, fanciful, and in contradiction to a straightforward observation of the planet Mars, but I’m not sure I can definitively prove it’s not possible. The conversation fizzled out shortly thereafter. Absent a common frame of reference and basic logic, the discussion disintegrated.

So how did we get to such a strange place with such a strange

interpretation? I’ve thought about this question quite a bit over the years. My conclusion is that my friend and I had fundamentally different views of Scripture. For my friend, the Bible was a book to be used in the service of supporting certain preconceived beliefs. Parts of the Bible that didn’t seem to fit those beliefs were to be distrusted, discounted, and explained away. One could continue to express belief in the Bible as long as certain passages could be reshaped to avoid a conflict with Adventist theology. Having a prophetic and inventive Adventist scholars to interpret the Bible was imperative.

The life after Adventism is so different. It is incredibly freeing simply to be able to accept the sufficiency of God’s word. An authoritative prophetic is no longer necessary to make sense of the Bible. The Bible comes alive when you’re finally able just to read Scripture in a straightforward way and accept the plain sense of the words. The Bible just makes sense because it means what it says. Refreshing. Liberating. The Truth really does make you free. †