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Sep 02, 2015 05:29 pm | Mary Hilde

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God wants us to eat meat

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Come and see

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**Higher criticism in the Adventist church**

Aug 28, 2015 06:40 am | Mark Sheffield

The question of women’s ordination dominated the headlines at the recent 2015 General Conference, but the real concern was the advancing power of “higher criticism” within the church.

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1 million GLOW tracts to be ‘scattered’ in Philadelphia before Pope’s arrival

Mary Hilde

In Pope Francis’ first visit to the USA Sept. 22, thousands of fans will greet him in Washington D.C. and even a 180-foot-tall painted image of himself will pay homage in New York City, but when he arrives in Philadelphia on Sept. 26 to visit the Festival of Families and conduct mass for the World Meeting of Families, he will be greeted by a city inundated with 1 million GLOW (Giving Light to Our World) tracts distributed by Seventh-day Adventists.

“We were not planning on doing anything in regard to this event,” GLOW Director Nelson Ernst said. “It was seriously because God got our attention and told us clearly this is what He wanted.”

Originating in California as an outreach to encourage church members to distribute free pocket-sized tracts, GLOW is now printed in 45 languages. Its emphasis of getting everyday Adventists to carry literature with them wherever they go is key to their 10-day mission trip to Philadelphia this month.

“Literature has served as one of the primary tools of God’s church for ages and will play a role until the end,” Ernst said. “We hope to excite interest in searching the scriptures in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people in September.”

GLOW is looking for lay volunteers to help on their mission trip, which is slated for Sept. 18 to 28, 2015.

“It is time for rational, thinking, non-conspiracy-theory Adventists to begin doing something,” Ernst said. “There is sufficient evidence now to see the Papacy is gaining momentum in linking itself with the U.S. and the evangelical-protestant world.”

GLOW has developed a tract on Jesus’ second coming specifically for the World Meeting of Families event the Pope will attend, but they will also be distributing tracts such as “Why I Go to Church on Saturday,” “Is There Hope After Death,” and “Where is God When I’m Hurting?” Versions of these tracts can be read at glowonline.org.

The mixture of eight titles they have chosen for their mission represent a spread of doctrines, including the Sabbath, state of the dead and Daniel 2. The 1 million tracts all advertise "Great Controversy" books, and there are 125,000 tracts of each of the eight titles.

Their mission trip can only accommodate 50 volunteers, but they still have space. If people can’t come all 10 days or participate in the entire program, they must provide their own transportation upon arrival. If anyone has special circumstances or are locals who want to help, they can email Ernst directly at nernst@cccsda.org.

GLOW has cabins for their missionaries 50 minutes outside Philadelphia. The facilities, tracts, and breakfasts are provided free, but they will be responsible for travel arrangements to and from Philadelphia, lunches and miscellaneous items ranging from $115 to $170. An anonymous donor has already purchased all the tracts for the mission project, which totaled tens of thousands of dollars.

After the basic plans had come together for the mission trip, the GLOW team stumbled on an Ellen White quote from letter 296, 1904, which Ernst said validated they were doing the right thing.
It read: “I was given instruction that as we approach the end, there will be large gatherings in our cities…and that preparations must be made to present the truth at these gatherings. When Christ was upon this earth, He took advantage of such opportunities. Wherever a large number of people was gathered for any purpose, His voice was heard, clear and distinct, giving His message. And as a result, after His crucifixion and ascension, thousands were converted in a day…Leaflets containing the light of present truth should be scattered among the people like the leaves of autumn. To many who attend these gatherings these leaflets would be as the leaves of the tree of life, which are for the healing of the nations… The time has come when, as never before, Seventh-day Adventists are to arise and shine, because their light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon them.”

So this won’t be the only large event GLOW will be working. They will likely be adding large organized outreaches on their regular to-do list, such as spreading another 1 million tracts at the next Super Bowl.

“If anyone is impressed to come, they have to sign up immediately and cooperate with us to get through the necessary preparations,” Ernst said. “The more the hands, the lighter the labor. Distributing 1 million tracts will be a challenge, but it is one we want to rise to meet!”

To register or read more about this project, visit http://1millionglow.org/.
God wants us to eat meat

Omar Miranda

September 1, 2015

When did you become a Christian? Years and years ago? A couple of years ago? This year? This month? Today?

Whenever you made the decision, I hope that you’re growing spiritually, both in your relationship with Jesus and in your knowledge about Him, living a Christian life, and sharing Jesus with others. If you’re not doing any of these things, then you’re a BABY! Hold on! Don’t get upset with me - that’s what the Bible calls you.

If you’re growing spiritually every day, great! But don’t stop, because there’s always room for improvement.

“My friends, you are acting like the people of this world. That’s why I could not speak to you as spiritual people. You are like babies as far as your faith in Christ is concerned. So I had to treat you like babies and feed you milk. You could not take solid food, and you still cannot, because you are not yet spiritual. You are jealous and argue with each other. This proves that you are not spiritual and that you are acting like the people of this world.” (Contemporary English Version, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Wow! Paul really let the Corinthian Christians have it - with both barrels! What could have been happening with them that he had to be so bold? Well the bottom line was that everybody in the church in Corinth was arguing because some members liked Pastor Paul and others liked Pastor Apollos, and the church was becoming divided because of it. Isn’t it interesting that nothing changes in history? I’m sure that there are some Bible teachers and pastors that you like better than others, but Paul’s response was twofold:

1. It’s not about the teacher; it’s about Jesus. Jesus is what’s important.
2. The Corinthians were acting like non-Christians and spiritual babies.

Instead of being able to talk to these Christians in a mature way, Paul had to remind them that they were “not yet spiritual.” How about you? Are there attitudes and actions that you’re still choosing that are making Jesus say to you, “You’re still a spiritual baby!” Is God trying to fatten you up by giving you spiritual solid food, or as other Bible versions call it, “meat”? Are you resisting being fed solid food?

Guess what happens to babies who don’t progress from milk to solid food: they don’t grow like they should, or worse still, they die! Are you growing in Christ and becoming a mature Christian? Or are you stagnating, doing nothing and going nowhere spiritually? Or, worse still, are you dead?

The writer of Hebrews gives this stinging rebuke: “By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food. People who live on milk are like babies who don’t really know what is right. Solid food is for mature people who have been trained to know right from wrong” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Did you catch the inference that people who are spiritual babies don’t know what’s right? In fact, he says that the only way for a spiritual baby to know right from wrong is to receive training. I have two young children. My daughter is 13, and my son is 9. There are things I allow my daughter to do that I won’t allow my son to do. Why? Am I trying to be unfair and mean? Not at all! I don’t allow my son to do those things because he’s either not physically or developmentally able or ready to do them. He gets really upset with me and really envious of his sister’s increased freedoms. But he hasn’t reached the maturity of his older sister. In fact, if I allowed my son to do them, one of three things would happen:

1. He would get physically injured and/or killed.
2. He would get frustrated because he would consistently fail.
3. He would lose interest quickly because he is not ready for the task.

The best way that I can strengthen and prepare my son to do those things that my daughter can do is to continue feeding him greater and greater amounts of food and to expose him to things that stretch and strengthen his skills. If he chooses to eat the food, he will grow, mature and develop...then and only then that will he be able to do the things that my daughter can now do.

You might ask yourself, Self, what does this have to do with me? I believe that the metaphor of babies, milk, maturity, and meat applies directly to our spiritual lives. Let me ask you a couple of important questions:

1. Are you the kind of person that gets upset that other Christians are doing things that you can't do, or that they appear to have more biblical knowledge than you?
2. Do your Christian brothers and sisters seem to be passing you by in their Christian walk? What I mean is do they seem to be getting closer and closer to Jesus every day?
3. Do your Christian brothers and sisters seem to be gaining victory after victory over certain previously difficult areas of their lives, such as certain bad habits, sins, and addictions, and you're not?
4. Do you recognize that God is trying to help you mature, but you'd rather stay a baby?
5. Is there anything that you are keeping from God that He's asking you to change?

Hebrews 6:1 says: “We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ. We shouldn't need to keep talking about why we ought to turn from deeds that bring death and why we ought to have faith in God.”

God will bless your efforts at maturity if you just try! Just make sure that your motives are right, because if they're not, the changes won't be consistent and long lasting. If you or someone you know continues to live with the same bad habits, sins, and, addictions they had prior to becoming a Christian, this should be a huge red flag that spiritual growth isn't happening. Remember what Jesus said: “You will know them by their fruits” (New King James Version, Matthew 7:16).

In other words, people can say a lot of things, but the way that you'll know if they really made a change and are growing as Christians is by their behavior, by their actions. The Christian life is about peace, power, and overcoming. It's not about stagnation, failure, whining, and complaining. Even if all you're doing is moving forward by baby steps, at least you're moving forward! Before someone can run, they must first learn to crawl.

I've met many people who became Christians decades ago and yet continue to be spiritual babies. They don't tell others about Christ, and they're not active and working in their church; they're just taking up space—like a bump on a log. They're angry, mean, critical, spiteful, unloving, unforgiving, selfish individuals - like human prunes - who are emotionally and spiritually shriveled up, stuck in their ways, and absolutely refuse to grow! I hope that you won't die spiritually. I hope that you'll consistently thrive and grow up into spiritual maturity.

It might surprise you to know that God wants you and me to eat meat - spiritually speaking, of course. In the midst of this information, maybe it's time you seriously and soberly assessed your spiritual health by taking your spiritual pulse. What you learn will hopefully reinforce teaching that you've already received and knowledge that you already have. But if not, it may surprise and shock you!

And if your heart is cold, hard, and dead, it needs a good shock to start beating for Jesus again. Turn up the juice and get the paddles—CLEAR!
Come and see

Owusu-Banahene Francis

Owusu-Banahene Francis August 30, 2015

Often, we create imaginary scenes and then hold on to them as if they were real. The tragedy of it all is that it is so easy to believe lies and dismiss truth. Sadly, we can have faith in things that will assuredly fail while we ignore that which cannot fail. Though we easily fall into this trap because we are fallen beings, we have been given more than enough evidence to cast off our faulty imaginations and believe in the promises of God.

THE CHALLENGE

The lazy man says "There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the street" (King James Version, Prov. 22:13). The slothful man might not have seen the lion himself. He may have heard it from someone or perhaps even assumed it, but the bottom line is that he believed a lion on the street would kill him.

Most people in the world today are “heavy laden” yet like the slothful man they refuse the only real solution to their problems. They refuse to believe that Jesus loves them and will forgive their sins, and they continue to cling to false assumptions about the helplessness of their situation sometimes never accepting Christ’s pitying love for sinners. Tragically, they sometimes end up believing that their sinful choices are a natural part of them and since nothing can be done about their situation, they may as well live in sin, hoping for unconditional acceptance from God.

Even many professed Christians are no different because they have not surrendered to a loving God with all their heart, soul, and mind (Mat. 22:37). Nor have they presented their bodies “as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto” Him (Rom 12:1). Contrary to their sincere desire for righteousness, they still make ungodly life choices. Some consider their situation to be insurmountable, and others are remorseful with a strong desire to forfeit their indulgences for the sake of their God, but to these, sadly, the uncertainty of life beyond their decision continuously deters them.

THE DANGEROUS ASPECT OF IT

At first thought, the slothful man seems to be very pessimistic. But, his real problem is not the lion in the street. It is the lion within. It is that he feared the danger without, while ignoring the very real dangers within, his lazy spirit and the real lion, Satan. A guilty conscience can become like “a lion in the street”, while we ignore the reality of salvation offered by Jesus. Like the Prophet Zacharias we ask, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years” (The New International Version, Luke 1:18). Like Sarah who laughed over the wondrous promise to her (Gen. 18:12), we ignore or belittle the “eternal love” (The King James Version, Jer. 31:3) of God and do not claim His promises. In other words, we ignore the lion within that causes us to believe Satan’s lies about how God sees our situation.

A BIBLICAL TEACHING

John wrote, “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, we have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, come and see” (KJV, John 1:45,46).

In his search for confirmation of the truth behind John’s proclamation concerning Jesus, Nathanael had retreated to a secluded place in meditation and prayer. His question betrayed his prejudices and doubt about the new discovery. But Philip did not bother about providing evidence for his friend and merely invited him to “come and see” for himself. We read in Desire of Ages that if Nathanael had trusted in his prejudices and doubt, he would not have
found Jesus, for “it was by seeing and judging for himself that he became a disciple” (White, 140).

While the Bible presents many lessons about how fundamentally important our faith is, (Heb 11:6; James 1:4-7), it also presents the need to “come and see” Jesus. Naaman, though he initially had a proud and lofty spirit, got his healing because he bathed in the River Jordan according to the instructions of the prophet Elisha. In addition, Mark tells us of a man who brought his child to Jesus and when he entreated “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief” his son was healed (Mark 9:22-27). Zaccheus made the effort to climb the tree so he could see for himself.

What “Come and See” really means

“Come and see” is a call to relinquish all false presumptions of one’s current condition and take the bold step to lay them bare before Jesus, just to prove Him. For example, the lazy man in the book of Proverbs preferred to believe his real danger was due to a lion in the street, while he clung to false presumptions about his true situation.

Why should we prefer to remain in sin or to be burdened by a guilty conscience, disgrace, disappointment, or stigmatization, when we can experience Jesus’s love and forgiveness? “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 1:18). Let’s reason and understand our real need for Jesus. Let’s reason and understand that He is waiting to offer us salvation and freedom from sin. Let us not forget that Naaman cast off his pride and bathed in the River Jordan. The father acknowledged his unbelief and his child was healed and Zacchaeus saw his need and climbed a sycamore tree, to see Jesus.
The question of women’s ordination dominated the headlines at the recent 2015 General Conference, but the real concern was the advancing power of “higher criticism” within the church. Many faithful Adventists in favor of women’s ordination saw the issue in simple terms of fairness and equity without realizing the true source of contention—the question of biblical authority. In reality, the foundations of current theological disagreements in the church are changing because the hermeneutical principles of many Adventists are changing.

WHAT IS HIGHER CRITICISM?

The Reformation, which preceded the growth of modern science, made the Bible the most influential book in Western society. The exponential growth and reach of the Bible as the source of truth was astonishing. Never before had the Bible touched such a wide audience. The first book to be printed by Gutenberg Press was a Latin language Bible in the late 1400s. Many common people read or heard the Bible read, freeing themselves from the many superstitions and delusions propagated by the medieval Church. This freeing of the human spirit opened the way for modern science. Human authority could be questioned and truth could be discovered by the direct, unimpeded, study of nature and the Scripture.

As the influence of the Bible grew, it gained critics as well as adherents. The book that had freed the human mind became itself the object of an all-out assault. Skeptics placed themselves above the Scripture, and higher criticism was born. Science became emboldened to question the fundamentals of the biblical worldview, even to doubt the very existence of God. Critics of the Bible challenged the assumption that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (English Standard Version, Prov. 1:7). Modern skeptics attempted to do the impossible—find meaning and truth without reference to God.

Every possible branch of science was enlisted by enemies of the Bible to undermine its authority. Geology and biology played the most significant roles. The words of Paul in Romans 1:21 became more meaningful than ever: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

THE RESULTS OF HIGHER CRITICISM

For well over two hundred years, the Bible has been attacked with devastating effect. Millions of believers have lost their confidence in the Bible. Learned authorities assert that much of the Bible is nonsense. Walking on water? Ridiculous. The virgin birth? Impossible. A world-wide flood? An entertaining story. A creation in six days? Pure myth. Gender distinctions? Don’t exist. Homosexuality? Not a sin.

The essence of higher criticism is the arrogant idea that mere mortals can speak with greater authority than the most authoritative book of all time. Higher critics stand in judgment of a holy thing. However, Jesus said, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). By chipping away at this or that apparent error or this or that failure to live up to man’s expectations, higher critics claim god-like powers of discernment in their interpretations of Scripture.

At the grassroots level, where the members of the church look to the pastor for biblical guidance, higher criticism has its most serious effects. The pastor must tread lightly through the Bible. There are passages in the Bible that are hard to explain in modern terms with modern presuppositions. (A woman once turned to her husband in church, exclaiming that what the preacher had just said was highly offensive. He replied, “Sweetheart, he was reading from the Bible.”)
Pastors under the influence of higher criticism are fearful of biblical mysteries and quandaries that fall outside their own understanding. Did God really ask Abraham to kill his own son? Did God really command that all men, women, and children from a certain town be killed? Did God really command that a man be stoned to death for picking-up sticks on the Sabbath? Did Jesus really say we must hate our own families in order to follow Him? Did Christ have to die?

Unfortunately, higher criticism has offered simplistic answers to these so-called problematic concepts. The difficulties have been explained away by applying faulty means of interpretation. The obvious question becomes, Why bother studying the Bible carefully?

The sad thing for the church is that many people's Bibles are getting shorter and shorter. The number of acceptable texts is receding. If present trends continue, the Bible in one hundred years will consist of one reliable statement: “God, if he or she exists, is sometimes a nice person.”

An old pastor was asked many years ago, “When will the Lord come?” He responded, “When the power comes back in the preaching.” Has higher criticism destroyed the possibility of powerful preaching from the Word of God?

THE USE OF WOMEN’S ORDINATION BY HIGHER CRITICS

Instead of relying on the simplest and most elegant means of interpretation - the plain reading method - higher critics in the Adventist church, without much fanfare, have offered an altered interpretive system, a system substantially different from the one that helped create the Adventist Church. They advocate a principle-based, historical/cultural method of Bible interpretation. This method stands as a corrective to the Bible when it fails to conform to contemporary philosophies.

Women’s ordination has become a wedge issue in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Higher critics, and that is what cultural critics are, have attempted to sway unwary Adventists with a no-brainer question: Aren’t women equal to men? Since the answer to this question is “yes,” the argument appeared to be over. But at the General Conference the church rejected the “obviously true” cultural argument.

Through its “no” vote, the church offered a nuanced biblical interpretation. Yes, men and women are equal before God, but biblical distinctions in gender roles remain. The higher critics depended upon the general acceptance of a modern belief system, feminism, while at the same time suggesting that the Bible is culturally backward and misogynistic. The General Conference delegates depended on the plain-reading method of study of the Scriptures and a review of the position taken by pioneers of the church, including Ellen G. White.

A NEW ACCUSATION APPEARS

The “no” vote on women’s ordination, as well as the clarification of the church’s teaching on the short-age of the earth, brought about a telling response from some Adventists. Higher critics within the church charge that Adventism has fallen into “literalism” and “fundamentalism.”

A little history is important: In an effort to halt the advance of Bible skeptics, believing Christians in the nineteenth century created a coherent intellectual response that became known as “fundamentalism.” On solid intellectual grounds, fundamentalists fought to maintain the integrity of the Bible. They sought to preserve certain fundamental teachings as non-negotiable truth. As the battle between believers and nonbelievers raged into the twentieth century, a caricature of the conflict gradually emerged: smart people don’t take the Bible literally, but ignorant people believe every word. This stereotype is now pervasive in Western culture.

Though Adventists are technically not fundamentalists because they reject certain fundamentalist teachings such as verbal inspiration and an ever-burning hell, Adventists are literalists. What is misunderstood is that literalism is essentially the same as historical/grammatical interpretation, the traditional method of biblical study. Adventist pioneers were literalists. To charge the Adventist Church with literalism and fundamentalism is meant to demean
and ridicule the church for simply being itself. In other words, higher critics want to characterize those who disagree with them as ignorant and unsophisticated.

What higher critics choose to ignore is that not all literalists are the same. Some literalists are ignorant. They deny the interpretive importance of figures of speech, literary genre, and symbolism. This version of literalism is biblically unsound. Adventists accept the Bible as a literary book written in human language for the understanding of human beings. This is the plain-reading method of interpretation.

Literalists look at the Book of Genesis, for instance, and find no intellectual reason within the context of the Scripture to treat a day of creation as anything other than twenty-four hours. They see from Scripture that Adam and Eve were real people (as did Jesus since He speaks of their son Abel as a real person; see Luke 11:51). Higher critics judge these passages, not on biblical grounds, but on scientific grounds. The creation story cannot be literal, they argue, because certain scientific data says it’s impossible.

WHY LITERALISM IS INTELLECTUALLY SOUND

The Apostle Paul foretold that the church would become the object of certain sorts of people from within. He described them as being “lovers of self,” “proud,” “arrogant,” “unappeasable,” “slanderous,” and “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:2-5). If one thing is certain, it is that higher criticism denies the miraculous power of God.

The Bible records the supernatural acts of God. If the Bible is meant to communicate with humans, it must do so in human language. Literalism means reading the Scripture in the same way people read any literature. That is, by using common reading skills that are so obvious that they should not need to be explained. For example, it does not take an expert to understand Psalm 36:1, “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart.” This text involves the personification of sin, but no readers are confused by this figure of speech because they are endowed by God with the ability to understand how language works.

Early reformers such as Wycliffe had no trouble understanding the truths in the Bible. All they needed was free access to the Scriptures to learn truth. Before higher criticism, no one questioned the plain teachings of Scripture. What was questioned was whether or not the Scriptures had ultimate authority for the believer. The Roman hierarchy did not doubt what Scripture plainly asserted. The Church simply doubted that those assertions were more authoritative than tradition. After all, “Even the demons believe and shudder!” (James 2:19). The devil himself is a “fundamentalist” and “literalist” because, intelligent as he is, he knows what the Bible is saying only too well. He is no fool. Instead of doubting the Word, he uses his supernatural ability to distort its plain meaning.

HIGHER CRITICISM DESTROYS THE LAW

The Law of Moses, the totality of which encompasses the first five books of the Bible, is a single literary unit. It often uses the language of legal contracts. What higher critics fail to see, when they attack a literal creation, is that the Book of Genesis is part of a contract between God and man. Genesis lays out the background of the contract.

Law is meant to be clear to all the parties involved. Higher critics wish to break the unity of the Law of Moses by making Gen. 1-11 mythological and symbolic. No judge would ever admit “symbolic” evidence into court. How can God hold mankind accountable to a Law that cannot be clearly understood?

THE NOT-SO-HIDDEN AGENDA

Higher critics in the Seventh-day Adventist Church want to destroy some of the church’s most fundamental beliefs and substitute them for the deductions of secular science. It is dangerous that such people are willing to replace the plain teachings of Scripture with the shifting sands of human rationality. In these last days, the words of David are truer than ever: “Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go
astray after a lie!" (Ps. 40:4)
The horse that wouldn't go to church

Rebecca Nowdesha

August 25, 2015

Samuel had changed. All of his co-workers had noticed. As a foreman at the local flour mill, it was his duty to inspect the transactions and conduct of those under him. The old Samuel had not paid much attention to inaccuracies, lateness, or cheating among his subordinates. These things were common in his culture and foremen often turned a blind eye to such behaviour.

But the new Samuel was different. His recent religious journey had transformed his whole life. Once a member of the dominant religion of his country, he had recently become a Christian, joining a protestant denomination. Then he was introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist message by a local pastor. He eagerly embraced each new truth. As his commitment to Christ and His truth grew, his habits at work changed. He now did his work to please God, not man. Instead of passing over corruption and embezzlement, as is common in his culture, Samuel refused to approve anything that was not just and upright. His convictions brought him into conflict with his coworkers, who soon realized their lucrative habits were at an end unless they could get rid of Samuel.

“What can we do?” They inquired of each other. “How can we be rid of him?” They soon contrived a plot whereby they could be rid of him and his family, forever. Like the enemies of the biblical Daniel, they decided to use his faithfulness against him.

Samuel was punctual, a trait uncommon in his culture. He was always the first one at church, in spite of poor roads and difficult traveling conditions. Each Sabbath morning a man with a horse and cart would come to collect Samuel, his wife, and their five children and take them over the same road, across the same bridge, to church. Because of Samuel's insistence on punctuality, the cart driver came on time as well.

But the cart driver was late on the morning that our story takes place. Samuel and his family had prayed as usual that God would protect them throughout the day. As usual, they prepared for church and then waited for the driver. When he finally arrived, Samuel and his family quickly arranged themselves in the cart and started off. Or at least they attempted to start. As soon as the driver signalled his horse to begin, the horse began to balk. He snorted and bucked, fighting every effort to make him move. At last he moved forward reluctantly, but only for a short distance. Again he fought, kicked, snorted, and refused to move forward. Again and again the driver urged his stubborn horse to move forward, only to gain a few feet of progress.

“What is wrong with your horse today?” Samuel asked the driver in frustration, "He's never done this before.”

“I don't know." the driver replied. “He didn't want to leave home today. He fought me all he way here.”

The sun climbed in the heavens as Samuel and his family fought their way over the familiar road toward church. They had nearly reached the bridge when Samuel decided he had had enough. Already church service was well underway. He did not want to arrive late. “Please take us home." he asked the driver. Tired of fighting the stubborn animal, the driver gladly turned back. No sooner had the cart turned around than the horse took off running and didn't stop until he reached Samuel's home. “What was wrong with the horse? Why had God allowed his family to miss church?” Samuel must have wondered. But he did not have long to wait for his answers.

Sunday morning Samuel began work at the flour mill as usual. (He had received special permission to work on Sundays since he did not work on Sabbath.) He had not been working long when a group of his co-workers rushed up to him, falling on their knees before him. They begged for forgiveness. “We were angry at you for your strict honesty and wanted to kill you and your whole family. We knew you always go to church by the same road, so we waiting under the bridge to kill you. We saw how the horse refused to go forward and then raced home when you
The horse that wouldn't go to church — ADvindicate

turned around. It was a miracle! Your God is the true God!” They exclaimed.

This experience greatly strengthened Samuel's faith and the faith of his whole family for generations. For the rest of his life Samuel served the Lord with faith and power. He is now asleep in Jesus, but the memory of God's deliverance that day lives on in the heart of his daughter, who told it to her son, who told it to me. His faith and missionary zeal can still be seen in the lives of his children and grandchildren. We, too, can gain strength as we remember that the same God who preserved Samuel and his family, still watches over those who choose to be true to Him, at any cost.

*Rebecca Cameron Nowdesha is a Bible worker and medical missionary who has devoted her life to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ's soon coming around the world.*
Radical skepticism about the claims of the gospels is in vogue, including the “Jesus as myth” position, which argues that Jesus never even existed. It would be nice if we could ignore these anti-Christian arguments, but we cannot. I hear reports of Adventist young people, educated in our Adventist school system, who have their faith shaken when they come across radical skepticism such as the “Jesus as myth” position. As I will argue in a future article, Adventists tend to start with the assumption that God exists and that Scripture is the word of God, then proceed to show how Scripture supports Christian doctrine, including our distinctive Adventist doctrines. Sadly, Adventists also tend to neglect what is sometimes called “pre-evangelism,” the refuting of radical skepticism. So let’s examine some of the arguments that Jesus never existed.

Unfortunately, there isn’t enough space in a single article to refute all the arguments put forward by the “Jesus as myth” skeptics, so I will focus on one common argument held by all these skeptics. They believe there isn’t any first century secular evidence to support the claim that a real man named Jesus, son of Joseph, ever existed.

In How Jesus Became God, author Bart Ehrman, a liberal theologian, wrote “What sorts of things do pagan authors from the time of Jesus have to say about him? Nothing. As odd as it may seem, there is no mention of Jesus at all by any of his pagan contemporaries. There are no birth records, no trial transcripts, no death certificates; there are no expressions of interest, no heated slanders, no passing references – nothing. In fact, if we broaden our field of concern to the years after his death – even if we include the entire first century of the Common Era – there is not so much as a solitary reference to Jesus in any non-Christian, non-Jewish source of any kind” (Ehrman).

RESTRICTIONS TAILORED TO DENY JESUS’ EXISTENCE

Notice how the author states there is no first century evidence, nor even a solitary reference from non-Christian or non-Jewish sources. Why exclude Jewish sources, when Jesus is believed to have been born a Jew, in Judea, and lived his entire life in Judea and Samaria? Wouldn’t Jews have been most likely to leave a written mention of his life? Isn’t it an extremely artificial, even bizarre, restriction to demand external corroboration of Jesus’ life from foreigners who did not share Jesus’ country, religion, or culture?

EXPOSING EHRMAN’S CLAIM

We should be suspicious of such a restriction because it excludes the historical records of Flavius Josephus (AD 37 – 100) that mention Jesus. In fact, Josephus is as respected and reliable as any ancient historian in the Western tradition. Yes, he was born a Jew and fought against the Romans during the First Jewish-Roman War (AD 66 – 73), but, interestingly, in AD 67 Josephus surrendered to Roman troops commanded by Vespasian, who later became emperor. He defected to Rome and was granted Roman citizenship. He then Latinized his named. He was born Yosef ben Matityahu (Joseph son of Matityahu), but he took Vespasian's family name, “Flavius.” Interestingly, he was a friend and an adviser to Vespasian's son, Titus, who commanded the Roman legions at the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, leading to the death of over a million of Josephus’ former countrymen, and the enslavement of nearly 100,000 more, according to Josephus himself.

Was Josephus a “religious” source or a “secular” source when he wrote Antiquities of the Jews (c. AD 94), in the Greek language, for non-Jewish readers? Do you see how Ehrman's statement was carefully tailored to omit the fact that Josephus, was a Jew by birth and a Roman by choice, and therefore a credible source, written during the first century?
In Antiquities, Book 18, we find Josephus discussing Herod Antipas’s murder of John the Baptist, an important verification of the gospel story. “Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, [emphasis mine] who was a good man... Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion... Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod’s suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death” (Josephus, Chapter 5, 2).

In addition, Josephus documents that “there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared” (Josephus, Chapter 3,3). This noteworthy passage is referred to as the Testimonium Flavianum, the testimony of Flavius.

At this point the skeptics will jump in and say that this passage was not actually written by Josephus but is a later forgery. The skeptics are partially right: some of the Testimonium probably was added later. Most scholars suspect that later Christian redactors tampered with the passage to add three “interpolations” supportive of Christian orthodoxy: (1) “if one ought to call him a man,” (2) “he was the Christ,” and (3) the sentence referring to the resurrection.

To dig into this issue in more detail, the earliest extant version of the Testimonium is in a quotation by a fourth century Christian apologist and historian, Eusebius, in his Historia Ecclesiastica (History of the Church) written around AD 324. However, an earlier Christian source, Origen (AD 184-253), wrote that Josephus had written about Jesus, but had not recognized Jesus as the Messiah. This suggests that Josephus had originally written a neutral, objective description of Christ, something like, “He was called the Christ,” but Eusebius or an earlier Christian redactor had either left out the word “called” or inserted the entire phrase “He was the Christ” to make it appear that Josephus had endorsed Jesus as the Messiah.

This theory is consistent with Josephus’ later mention of Jesus, in Antiquities, Book 20, Ch. 9, 1, where he is careful to state that Jesus “was called Christ,” not that He necessarily was the Christ. “Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."

This passage in book 20, in contrast with the Testimonium in Book 18, is almost universally acknowledged to be original and un-tampered. It constitutes a separate confirmation of the historicity of a man named Jesus who was called Christ and who had a brother named James.

Thus, the modern scholarly consensus about the Testimonium Flavianum is that Josephus had written a neutral description that was later modified to make it friendlier to Christian orthodoxy. If the three suspected interpolations are removed, the rest of the passage flows smoothly within its context, and fits Josephus’ writing style. It also fits well with an Arabic language version of the passage that was discovered in the 1970s, and is likely authentic.

There is very little scholarly support for the view that the Testimonium Flavianum is a total forgery, and in any case the mention in Book 20 of Jesus as the brother of James is a separate mention of Jesus as an historical figure. So contrary to Bart Ehrman’s carefully contrived implication, there is indeed a first century mention of Jesus by Josephus, a very reputable naturalized Roman historian.

Now that we’ve exposed Ehrman’s technically correct but misleading claim, we should note that there is also a crucial reason for his arbitrary cutoff point of the end of the first century. There is an early second century mention of
Jesus by an entirely pagan, gentile, Roman historian, named Tacitus.

In his Annals, Book 15, Ch. 44, written around AD 116, Tacitus discusses how Nero blamed the Christians for a fire in Rome that many believed Nero himself had ordered: “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”

Even while acknowledging that the Christians were falsely blamed for the fire, Tacitus is contemptuous of Christianity; he asserts that Christians practiced “abominations,” and he includes Christianity among “all things hideous and shameful.” Tacitus, no friend of Christianity, is merely reporting the historical facts, and these facts are entirely consistent with, and provide an independent secular verification of, what is recorded in Scripture.

Does the fact that Tacitus was writing in the early second century, render his account unreliable? In other words, are historians writing in 2015 about events that occurred in 1930 (the same time gap between Tacitus’ Annals and the crucifixion of Christ), considered unreliable because of the passage of time? To ask that question is to expose the absurdity of the contention. When we write about 1930, we’re writing about recent history. Eighty-five years is but one lifespan; many who are still alive today were born before 1930, including two of my uncles and one aunt.

Strictly speaking, these historical references to Christ do not absolutely prove that Jesus existed, only that many people in the first and second centuries, including very reputable historians, believed and reported that Jesus existed. It should be noted that this is all the proof we have for the existence of an overwhelming majority of historical figures. As historian Michael Grant writes in his book, Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels, if we apply to the New Testament “the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus' existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned” (Grant 1977).

In other words, if we applied to other ancient historical figures the level of skepticism necessary to deny the existence of Jesus, it would become almost impossible to write history. Those who understand history as a scholarly discipline do not make absurd evidentiary demands. This is why virtually all modern scholars of antiquity agree that Jesus was a historical figure who really lived and died.

THE BEST ARGUMENT IS CHRISTIANITY ITSELF

How was Jesus able to inspire a movement if he never existed? For the first 250 years of Christianity, there was no worldly advantage in being a follower of Jesus, only the very real possibility of persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom. Is it reasonable to believe that the world-transforming movement of Christianity grew from nothing or a non-event? Relying solely on human reason and experience, the overwhelming likelihood is that there was a real person underlying the phenomenon of Christianity. To assert otherwise is the height of irrationality.


Conundrum of the balanced view

Ron Woolsey

Scenario One

The year was 1999, and a denominational publishing house heard my conversion story from homosexuality, and asked me to submit my story for publication, as a resource for our denomination. I was given a deadline of four weeks.

After much prayer and fourteen-hour days of writing, I met their deadline. After many months, I finally called for a status report.

“Oh! You haven’t received your manuscript? It was supposed to have been returned to you.”

“Why would it be returned?” I asked.

“It was rejected. The book committee decided they wanted a more balanced view.”

“Balanced view of what?” I asked. “I was asked to submit my story. Are you suggesting it is unbalanced?” I was alarmed.

“No, they just thought it would be better to have more stories to put into one book in order to present a balanced view,” came the reply.

I wondered aloud, “So stories of victory and success must be balanced out with stories of failure? Why?”

For fifteen years now I have continued to face the conundrum of the balanced view, this puzzle, as time after time I have been inhibited by the need to present a balanced view of the subject of homosexuality and the church. Ironically, I had to have my book published by an outside publisher who in turn sold it back to the denominational publisher to facilitate placing it in all the English-speaking ABCs around the world.

Scenario Two

A few years ago I was invited to share my testimony at a conference on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church. Sadly, I was discredited by one who promoted a view of “once gay, always gay,” and my presentation was therefore reduced to a mere interview. During the conference, this same individual replaced me on a panel addressing the university student body to present “a balanced view”. Critics and skeptics have repeatedly dismissed me as a perfectionist because I share of my personal experience of victory over homosexuality and how God offers salvation from sin rather than in sin.

Through the years, as opportunities to share were becoming less and less, I had made it a matter of prayer to ask God that whatever time I am given, the Lord will make it count. And at this specific conference on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church, He did. In the closing presentation the speaker stated, “When Ron Woolsey stood here opening night, held up his Bible, and said that he found everything he needed in the word of God to turn and walk away from homosexuality, that set the tone for this entire conference.”

Scenario Three

Once again I faced the conundrum of the balanced view when invited to speak at one of our denominational
universities. This time the invitation was held up in committees for months, because of the very “controversial” nature of my story.

“But there are two sides to this issue…” they insisted.

“OK! So, why don’t we present the second side, God's side…?”

I pointed out that I had graduated from their university, with a degree in theology, with honors, and that I was a conference pastor. Therefore, if straight/gay alliances are allowed on campus, why can’t I be trusted on campus with God’s perspective? Eventually approval came through, and the student body, filled with great interest and appreciation for my message, warmly received me.

Scenario Four

Two issues especially caught my attention at the recent North American Division Ministers Convention and break out sessions preceding the General Conference Session--women’s ordination and homosexuality.

Though leadership had commissioned much study over the past few years, the “pro side” of the issue was promoted while the “con side” was ignored and even suppressed. The absence of a balanced view was noteworthy.

There were three different seminars addressing the LGBT issue. My ministry, “Coming Out Ministries”, was originally scheduled to have two of these sessions, but one was taken away due to “controversy”. Again, we prayed that the Lord would make whatever time we had, really count, and I truly believe He did.

However, when another seminar, with a very different message, was given more than twice the time we were given, many people who attended both sessions expressed confusion. I explained that both seminars were in fact presenting the same message, but only to a point. Both seminars presented a message of love and acceptance. However, Coming Out Ministries teaches the full gospel - that acceptance from God is conditional upon an entire surrender of the will, including the need of repentance, surrender, discipleship, transformation of character and victory over the sin of homosexuality, as with any other sin issue. Therefore, along these lines, the two seminars parted ways.

At the same North American Division Ministers’ Convention, a lesbian Adventist, a gay Adventist church elder, and the parents of a gay man married to another man presented testimonies. In fact, a gay Adventist was given time for a power point presentation denouncing all efforts to lead homosexuals to victory and transformation. Sadly, no testimony of victory was given. A psychologist even testified that she had never seen anyone overcome homosexuality. Some in attendance turned and waved at me, for I was redeemed 24 years ago and have been married now for 23 years and am the father of five children.

One of the organizers defended these presentations, saying that the gay issue has more than one ideology and therefore, they needed to present a balanced view. However, such a balanced view left many unsettled.

Do we need to present a balanced view by giving equal time to political correctness, conventional wisdom or social sciences?

Is not God’s view balanced in itself? God teaches us that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (King James Version, Jeremiah 17:9).

In 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 we read, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.”
THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF BALANCE

In Proverbs 20:23 we read, “Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good.” God help us if we are weighed in the balances, and found wanting.

We read in Revelation 6:5, “And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.”

Sadly, “not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven…Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:21-24).

Apparently, balance with God is not found between two opposing views, but rather between truth and acceptance, between the law and obedience, between God’s expressed will and our compliance.

You see, “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). The only way we can be found righteous is in the Lord, (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). Perfect balance is found within justification and sanctification, and within pardon/forgiveness and cleansing/ transformation.

Christ’s righteousness is imputed, or attributed to us at the point of confession and repentance. In addition, Christ’s righteousness is imparted, or created in us through His grace, His transforming power, when we surrender to Him and to the process. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Notice the balance here.

Micah 7:19 reads, “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Ellen White explains, “Satan stands at the head of all the accusers of the brethren; but when he presents the sins of the people of God, what does the Lord answer? He says, ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?... They were therefore standing before God clothed with the garments of Christ’s righteousness…Every sin of which they had been guilty was forgiven, and they stood before God as chosen and true, as innocent, as perfect, as though they had never sinned” (RH August 29, 1893).

We read in Acts of the Apostles that “John saw the mercy, the tenderness and the love of God blending with His holiness, justice, and power” (White,489)

“When we study the divine character in the light of the cross we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice.” (White, 333).

Now this, I contend, is a balanced view.
Are you all in for Him?

Darcee Christensen

August 18, 2015

We know the story and we know how it ends. We even have an instruction manual to guide us to the assured victory, yet many still fear the end of time. Though prophecies foretelling catastrophic events and even death decrees might play a significant factor in provoking fear, why do Seventh-day Adventists fear when they know that God will prevail against evil? While non-believers are afraid because they do not know or trust in the scriptures, as Seventh-day Adventists we have the assurance of God’s victory, foretold in His word. Therefore, I believe there is greater underlying motive causing many Seventh-day Adventists to dread what should be their greatest hope.

A COMMITMENT PROBLEM LEADS TO FEAR FOR TOMORROW

Simply put, I have observed that many Seventh-day Adventists today have a commitment issue. Though they may faithfully go to church, pay tithe, and participate in daily devotions, many have failed to seek God and let Him infiltrate every aspect of their life. Instead, they seek worldly success. As a freshman in college, on the brink of my adult life, I am not immune to this same struggle. I often struggle with becoming distracted when contemplating my own future of desire for success. God asks us to surrender completely to Him, but it is sobering to realize that many of us do not entrust 100 percent of our life to God’s will.

For example, we read parables about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, but fail to apply the message to our own life (New King James Version, Matt. 13:44-46). These lessons call us to invest everything in searching after God. Therefore, God wants this goal to be at the forefront of our every thought and decision. I am afraid that we have become half hearted. I believe that those of us who fear the end of time have a subconscious realization of our personal failure to commit entirely to God’s cause. In other words, we are apathetic, and we know it. We understand the standard God is calling us to, but we are too wrapped up in our own selfish ambitions to comply. We are afraid because we know we are not doing all that we can for the glory of God. We do not want to sacrifice the pleasures of this world, and therefore we fear the consequence we know are coming.

A BALANCING ACT THAT LEADS TO OUR FALL

I have often wondered how, throughout history, men and women of God could have chosen the obvious wrong path. What was Eve thinking when she took the fruit? How could all of the disciples abandon Christ at His darkest hour? How could Peter deny Jesus when he had just been warned that he would? How could the priests have failed to accept their long awaited Messiah? How could the antediluvians reject the invitation to enter the ark? Sadly, the sobering truth is that we have continued to follow this pattern. We try to maintain our balance with one foot in the ark, but the rest our bodies are engrossed in the affairs of the earth. However, to be saved, we must be fully inside of the ark of salvation even if this shuts us out from society.

WE MUST TAKE GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS SERIOUSLY

Though we are equipped with warnings and instructions, sadly, we fail to act on them even when they are abundantly clear. First Thessalonians 5:17 calls us to, “pray without ceasing,” and Deuteronomy 6:5 instructs us to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart,” yet many do not even begin to think about God nearly as frequently as they contemplate their favorite baseball team, their next winter vacation or how they will advance within the company. However, the Bible makes it unmistakably clear that there is no middle ground. Either we are all for serving God or we are not. We must take these counsels seriously if we are to be ready for Christ’s soon advent. Jeremiah 29:13 informs us that God is only found when we search for Him with all of our hearts. This leaves no
room for complacency. Ephesians 6:13 guides us to, “take up the WHOLE armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done ALL, to stand.” We should be doing everything in our power to prepare to stand for Christ!

**LOVE FOR JESUS, THE ONLY LASTING MOTIVATOR**

The greatest fear of death or love of life will never enable us to endure the tribulation to come. Our only hope is to fall in love with our Savior so that He absorbs our precious thoughts and time. In fact, this love will give us the desire to fervently study the Bible. We will begin to constantly pour our hearts out before God in prayer. Experiencing this love will be so incredible that we will not be able to keep it to ourselves. We will happily share with all who are willing to listen and we will humbly serve others as Jesus would. To effectively draw others to Jesus, these actions must spring from genuine love for our Savior.

However, following God goes against our natural selfishness. Therefore, if we are to be His children, we must be intentional in our walk with Him. Following God will not offer the glamour and fun that this world uses to entice us. Rather, following God will offer hardships, trials, persecution, and yes - true joy. Second Corinthians 4:9 points out that Christians will be persecuted on every side, but we will never be forsaken. Followers of God may experience pain, loneliness, discouragement, and rejection, but they press on because they know that the joy to come is immeasurable. Nothing can compare to the wonder of basking in God’s presence.

When we truly see all that Jesus has done for us, we cannot make an unworthy sacrifice for His cause!

I especially love the way Ellen White describes this pure joy in her vision of heaven, recorded in Early Writings. “We tried to call up our greatest trials, but they looked so small compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that surrounded us that we could not speak them out, and we all cried out, ‘Alleluia, Heaven is cheap enough!’” (White, 17).

We know the story and we know how it ends. We even have an instruction manual to guide us to the assured victory, yet many still fear the end of time.

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The God of little things

Shane Hilde

When we hydrated, we decided to hop in the car and scoot down the road to Thera. Mary grabbed her phone and we were off. Thera was about a 10-15 minute drive, and the town is a tourist trap, making parking a challenge, but thankfully our little Fiat 500 rental was able to fit in the smallest of spaces. We hopped out of the car and headed down to the main strip. I gave a reflexive pat to my pocket to check for my phone, but no phone!

“Wait! I forgot my phone in the car,” I said.

I ran back to the car and looked through it. Nothing. An anxious feeling began to take hold of me as I frantically searched the car. I looked everywhere.

“I can’t find my phone. I don’t even remember where I had it last. I remember taking pictures and set it down…”

The reality of what must have happened hit me, kicking my stress into high gear, as iPhones aren’t cheap.

“Well, we'll just have to drive back and look for it,” Mary said.

She was taking this better than I expected. I was hating myself for being so stupid as to forget my phone in a foreign country, and to top it off, I had placed my phone in airplane mode. This meant I couldn’t even track my phone to see where I had left it.

We raced back to Oia and checked the two locations we had stopped, but there was no phone, and a hopeless feeling set in. I had left my phone on the bench and now it was gone. I was more upset over losing an expensive phone than I was with what was on the phone. What a waste of money, I thought to myself. And with other misfortunes happening not even a day before, such as Mary scratching the rental car bumper, our Greek experience was quickly turning into a mini nightmare.

I called T-Mobile to see if they could track my phone if it was in airplane mode. The answer was no. They suspended service, and I marked it lost on my iCloud account. I was quite depressed the rest of the day. I secretly wondered if this was God’s doing. I suppose blaming God for anything bad that happens in our lives is a typical human response. Maybe I was spending too much time on my phone and this was God’s way of forcing me off it. While I was upset about the loss of my phone, part of me was relieved I would have a forced break.

A few days later we flew back to Athens to catch a flight to Cairo, Egypt. I woke up in my hotel and checked my email. I had a new message come through from ADvindicate’s contact page. The subject line immediately caught my attention. It said, “Cell Phone Missing.”

I couldn’t believe it. My eyes quickly fell to the message.

“Dear Sir, We have found a cell phone dropped by the church here in Greece,” a man named Thanos wrote. “We saw you are managing the facebook page of this website and it was the only way to reach out to you.”
“This website” was ADvindicate. He was able to see the notifications on the locked screen and saw that whoever owned the phone also managed ADvindicate’s Facebook page, and from Facebook he visited ADvindicate and emailed me.

Two days after I arrived home, my phone arrived via Fedex.

I said multiple thank you’s to God for watching over my phone and bringing it back to me. I couldn’t help but be reminded that God is interested in the details of our lives. And even though losing an iPhone could be considered a silly first-world problem, God still cares.

Jesus said in Matthew 6 not to worry about life. The birds don’t sow or reap or store their food, yet God feeds them. The flowers or grass aren’t worried about clothes, but God clothes them, and in God’s eyes we are much more valuable. We aren’t to worry about the basics of life, or even things that might seem huge and impossible. God already knows and promises to provide and make a way -- even for a lost phone.