July 15, 2011

**This Week at Adventist Today**

**Praise Me!:** Is God displaying a dangerous megalomania when he unapologetically asks for our praise? What does it mean to "praise God?" Is God looking primarily for words, or action? Prepare for the weekend by reading Mark Gutman's thoughts on what it really means to praise God. [Read more](#)

**Personal Autonomy Versus Institutional Conformity:** Are the recent resignations at La Sierra University black-and-white in their moral consequences? Is it possible to agree with the decision of the university, while believing in the shortcomings of the policies in this decision? Nate Schilt urges us to consider the pragmatic side of what has become a dispute fraught with moral judgmentalism. [Read more](#)

**Adventist Camping At Its Best:** Spread those antennae! Catch some cartoons! Heinrich's drawings pack thousands of words into a few terse lines. Check him out.

**Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife:** Little if anything is being said in current Adventist journalism about the current renaissance of interest in Heaven. Just a few years ago, belief in Heaven was waning, and preachers and theologians rarely discussed it. But times have changed! Ron Spencer's review of a recent moderate treatment of the topic suggests that Adventism may be missing a golden opportunity to cash in culturally on this bonanza of interest. In today’s marketplace, if anything Heaven is hotter than Hell! [Read more](#)

**Giving It All Up To Get It All:** Moments of truth come at different times for different folks. In the meantime, Jesus through the Gospels plants the seed through stories, says Don Watson (Abe Lincoln, by the way, planted his political thoughts the same way; is there something transformational about stories?) Jesus was calling his followers to ultimate
commitment, to the last full measure of their devotion. And in giving all, he promised they would achieve the desire of their hearts. Read more

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When I preach a sermon, I always ask that my listeners tell me how wonderful the sermon was. When I audit financial statements I want my clients to thank me profusely and elaborate on all the benefits that my work brought them. And I want readers of this writing to send in their compliments on the wonderful new world my ideas have opened up for them.

Does that strike you as odd? People aren’t supposed to ask for compliments, are they? Even if they want compliments, they are at least supposed to have the social graces not to ask for them. (By the way, the whole first paragraph is tongue-in-cheek.) Yet in the Bible we find God telling us to praise him. (The objection may be raised that it’s the Bible writers, not God, who tell us to praise God, but since we say that God is kind of telling the writers what to write, it would seem to boil down to the same thing.)

Revelation 4 pictures a choir that apparently does nothing but praise God 24/7. Don’t they do anything else? If I had a group of people who did that to (or for) me, I think I would tire of it quickly, but I am not God, and as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways than my ways. So maybe I should stop asking questions about the scene in Revelation 4 and join the choir.

Wait a minute! On this planet, we tend to be suspicious of places where the leader is always spoken of respectfully. In North Korea, the president is called “Dear Leader,” and if you live in North Korea you had better refer to him that way and only that way. In Thailand, Harry Nicolaides spent time in prison because his fictional book, of which there were only 50 copies, had suggested that a member of the royal family might have done something considered improper. We who live in countries where we are allowed to criticize any leader shake our heads at the idea that citizens of a country are forced to say that the leader is wonderful. But do we give God a pass on commanding praise while we scorn the same directive from other leaders?

C.S. Lewis, in Reflections on the Psalms, points out that “We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence, or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand.” Or does that despising not apply to our religious world? While we may find demands of praise by God as reasonable, Friedrich Nietzsche spoke for many when he declared, “I cannot believe in a God who wants to be praised all the time.”

I suggest that there is a common sense way to understand the commands to praise God, without feeling that for religious purposes you’re being asked to act like a citizen of North Korea.

Imagine that one Sabbath I visit a church and preach a sermon that explains that we should wear orange shoes to church. After the sermon, people praise me for the wonderful sermon, gushing on how helpful they found it. A month later I go back to preach, and I can’t help but notice that nobody is wearing orange shoes. Undeterred, I preach a sermon on the idea that we should be using the Inspired Version of the Bible, and I let the congregation know where that version can be bought at an affordable
price. Again, the comments after church are very complimentary, expressing appreciation for the best sermon the people have ever heard. A month after the sermon about the Inspired Version, I return to the church to preach again. Nobody is wearing orange shoes; nobody is carrying an Inspired Version. I preach on the idea that true Christianity will be demonstrated by wearing sunglasses. As the people talk with me after church and start complimenting me on the fantastic sermon, I tactfully say something to the effect of, “I prefer to see your praise acted out rather than given as words that are contradicted by your actions.” I would rather see folks wearing sunglasses and using the Inspired Version and wearing orange shoes than hear them telling me how wonderful my sermons are. If they really thought what I said was helpful, I would see a few more orange shoes.

In Isaiah 29:13 we read a complaint about how “these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me. . . .” In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks why folks call him “Lord” when they don’t do what he says (e.g., wear orange shoes). In effect, these folks are in a 24/7 choir but doing nothing to help hurting people around them.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asked us to let our light shine before others in such a way that others will be drawn to glorify God. It’s said that the highest form of flattery is imitation, although I can’t give a specific Bible text for that. If we understand flattery as an excessive form of praise, we could posit that what the choir in Revelation 4 is really doing is helping others, being kind and loving, as Jesus demonstrated God to be. (“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve . . . ?” Hebrews 1:14, NLT)

In Amos 5:23 God is presented at the end of a passage complaining about religious services and ceremonies by saying, “Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.” But in the next verse he says, “[What I really want is for you to] let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Even as many sports fans like to cheer (sing the praises of) their heroes, religious people often like to sing and talk about their admiration of God. God isn’t trying to shut off such natural displays of emotion. But he lets us know that talk is not as meaningful as action. When God asks us to praise him, he’s not asking us to say “Rah-rah! You are wonderful.” He’s asking us to live godly lives - lives that help bring about improvement in the lives of others and lead others to think that God’s way of life is worth employing.

Guidelines for Productive & Courteous Comments:

- This is the writer’s court & play – no upstaging please
- Stay on topic – don’t wander off chasing butterflies
- Be brief – no more than 3 modest paragraphs – if longer, you are too windy
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- Absolutely no denigrating of individuals – to err, earns banishment
- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often
William Noel 1 week ago Reply

Mark,

What a contrast between the praise of God being expressed in scripture and how little we hear in church. Might that be proof of how few pew-warmers have ever had a serious encounter with Him to discover just how truly great he really is?

Pat Travis 1 week ago Reply

Mark,

That's interesting and yes we too are to purpose to make a difference in others lives...but we "do not preach ourselves" so that "we" can truly "Praise Me" literally.

This is how great Jesus is in the Father's estimation..." 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is a Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil.2:8-11.

Perhaps we should go and do likewise to the glory of the Father?

regards,
pat

Frank Allen 5 days ago Reply

The apostle John defiantly did not have a “praise me” attitude, either in his Gospel or letters, neither did John the Baptist.

Yet I have noticed how some SDA evangelists create a cult around themselves. As I open a USA evangelist web page I see his smiling face, his books, his CD’s, his sermons, places he has been, his next series, all for sale at a price. His monthly brochures are filled with his accomplishments as his personally and Bible in hand face—is front and center. When I buy his merchandise, I affirm his teachings and bring praise to his indispensable interpretation of Scriptures that I could never understand were it not for his wonderful ministry.

Nowhere on his web or monthly brochure is given any room for fresh insights about Jesus, instead there is a steady stream of doom in soon to appear last days of trouble. Fear sells and this keeps people focused on world events giving assurance that Sabbath keepers will be shielded as long as
stay tuned and give their money to this prominent evangelist.

This kind of ministry alarms me, for it seems so far from the Gospel model, where funds were only collected for the poor. It was not that money was unimportant; Roman culture was obsessed with gold and silver. It is that money when united with preaching fame ("praise me") are ego centered.

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Timo Onjukka
4 days ago

If I understood the writers point; adulation leads to the cult and worship of personality. This is sometimes too evident within the corporate ranks, and nothing seems more antithetic to the truth than the throng of servile kool-aid sippers who engage neither conscience nor reason, but blindly follow some charismatic personality.

True adoration leads to emulation (of the One worthy; NOT me). If my sermon is about the message and not about mere messenger, the highest praise would be that the hearers become inspired to effect true change in their lives. Change, perhaps not just to the externals (colors, songs, liturgies, etc) but deep, meaningful, world-changing change.

In the tongue-n-cheek reference, yes, our all-too-human need for positive peer valuation would actually make some degree of it true; all humor requires premise of plausibility if not outright some reality. With this backdrop, even when our message is about the truth, and not about US, how challenging to not permit the "praises" to feed the wrong spirit. This is a very difficult task, especially in this media-driven visual world.

The Lord asks for contrite heart and a humble walk...oh that each follower of Jesus would humble themselves in this servant-leader role.

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Mark Gutman
4 days ago

Summarizing my message in 2 points:
1. Over and over the Bible tells us to praise God - that is, God asks for praise - which seems either like a dictator's demand or a "socially unacceptable" rule.
2. The praise God wants is for us to "go about doing good." Words of song or prayer are not excluded, since we tend to "praise" (with words of rah-rah) people we admire, but words are secondary. As Emerson put it, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

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Steve Billiter
3 days ago

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

While doing is important, words are too, but shallow words that should be acted upon and are not, therein lies a problem;

Mat 12:37 For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.
Too often the pages of the Adventist Review as well as Union papers are peons of praise for individuals. The AR used three pages telling about the accomplishments of Neil Wilson on his demise. Isn't that overdoing it?

As I see it we have too often substituted praise for man instead of praise for the Deity. Even the dissonance of clapping in a sacred service in church reflects our praise of persons. Is it conformity to our culture? Even kids are greeted with "good job" for a mediocre accomplishment.

Ted Wilson didn't want clapping, but loud Amens were O.K. It's all culturally related: In Bible times we read of people clapping their hands in praise. When did it be disrespectful to God?
I argued in my blog last week that the request for the resignations of the LSU4 was not criminal, and it should not be seen in the stark moral terms that those who demonize the General Conference (GC) and La Sierra University (LSU) administration wish to portray it. Some who read that blog seemed to think I might be an ‘Educate Truth’ plant. Far from it! I think Educate Truth (EC) likely sees these issues in very stark moral terms as well. They just demonize the LSU4 rather than the administration. About the only thing I have in common with the sponsors of the EC website is a belief we should expect no less transparency, accountability and openness from academic institutions in the Church than we do from clerical institutions.

Unlike the folks who host the Educate Truth website, I believe the Church and LSU are being tragically diverted and enervated by challenges over doctrinal conformity. Creationism and abstinence would not be on my top 28 list of priorities for the Church or its institutions of higher education. I do not agree with the Church’s traditional teaching regarding biogenesis and the Noachian Flood, though I am certainly not qualified or competent to defend my skepticism. And I wish SDA science professors felt greater freedom to honestly present the scientific problems with creationism. Furthermore, I do not believe in the Cana Grape Juice Myth, a major pillar in the SDA Church’s teaching regarding alcohol consumption. (I do behaviorally conform to the Church’s teaching on this issue, however, because I do not wish to breach covenant relationship with my faith community.)

Having said that, I believe a private organization has the right to set its own rules, even if they’re stupid, archaic, and have nothing to do with morality. Furthermore, the organization should be able to anticipate those who choose to become part of the organization will do so with the understanding they are expected to conform to clearly articulated policies. They should generally be free to question the wisdom or legitimacy of those rules, but they cannot reasonably expect to casually violate those rules and policies without adverse consequences. Those in leadership roles should feel even less freedom to publicly or privately undermine institutional values and standards. And yes, the institution should also follow its own policies and rules.

Getting beyond the question of whether the recording should have been used, I suspect most partisans who are upset over the ‘forced’ resignations would be no less upset if the alcohol consumption had come to light in a different manner, and been used as a basis for requesting the resignations. They believe the policy prohibiting alcohol consumption is a stupid policy with no Biblical or moral basis. Yet progressives regard as sacred the due process policies which they claim were not followed by LSU administrators. Is there a double standard here?

So who decides what policies are sacred, what are not, how to prioritize those policies, and what consequences should flow from violation? And why do we have to make huge moral issues out of every policy concern? Suppose a judicial review concludes LSU administrators didn’t dot every ‘I’ and cross every ‘T’ when they offered resignation in lieu of disciplinary hearings. Does that make them evil, malicious, and un-Christian? Does it mean they intended to violate their own policy? So what if the LSU4 chose to drink alcohol? Does the fact they obviously violated policy with intent to do so, make them bad people? Surely not! But why is the LSU administration being demonized by the Left?
while the LSU4 are being canonized?

Every issue with policy and legal ramifications doesn’t necessarily come with clear moral choices. If the legal considerations clearly favor the position of the resignees who want do-overs, I am sure the Board will sound the retreat, and the LSU 2, 3, or 4 - whatever the number - will either be reinstated, have their hearing, or both. It will be because it is legally prudent to do so, not because it is a moral imperative. What if the legal analysis does not clearly support vacating the resignations? Would the LSU4 partisans then concede the moral issue to administration? I doubt it. So aren’t the partisans really offering a 'heads-we-win-tails-you-lose' analysis? "If policy and law support our position, LSU administration acted immorally; if it turns out we’re wrong on policy and law, LSU administration still acted immorally."

It is generally assumed top leadership in an organization serves at the pleasure of the CEO and/or the Board. When a leader is philosophically and behaviorally out of step with the values of his/her organization, and when that nonconformity becomes, or threatens to become, notorious, why doesn’t the institution have a right to respond in a self-protective manner? Why can’t the institution simply say, “We understand your values, and we respect your personal freedom. We just want someone representing the institution who is more philosophically aligned with its values.”

Is it possible to have deeply held opinions and beliefs without insisting that God is on your side?

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- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often

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**Seminary Student**

very good !

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**Seminary Student**

excellent !
Nate,

You say "Having said that, I believe a private organization has the right to set its own rules, even if they’re stupid, archaic, and have nothing to do with morality."

Yes and no. If LSU wants to remain accredited by WASC then they do not have the right to just any set of rules. The governance has to conform to norms of other institutions. You know nothing of how accreditation works.

LCME and WASC have a powerful role in how an academic institution formulates its rules.

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Doctorf1

Non conformity? To what? They were accused of drinking, but that did not occur. The 4 individuals were joking and no alcohol was at the gathering. The board chair and some others were annoyed because of the scientific viewpoints of these faculty and because they had a derogatory view of some of the members of the board.

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Elaine Nelson

Until all the facts are in we should withhold our judgement.

Doctorf1 has identified the "Catch-22" that is the dilemma: The church wishes to impose a YEC on the Science Department. The WASC accreditation cannot approve such teaching. Without WASC accreditation the school loses its university status, and with it all government funding. Guess which will rule: Money or religious doctrine?

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Patti Grant

To propose that LSU administration had any degree of autonomy in this decision is to deny the all-encompassing power of the GC hierarchy. Adventist history is replete with examples of when the GC says "Jump" SDA administrators have no choice but to ask "How High?" on the way up. And university counsel gave the appearance of being all too eager to leap into the fray without allowing for a scintilla of mercy. Is this what Jesus would do? Send them straight to the Guillotine?

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Galion Arthur Joy

I will repeat that those who pay tithe to the church, entrust their Children and support SDA institutions, whether that be educational, medical and church administrative, have an absolute right to expect that those instructors, administrators and ordained ministers all support, endorse and live the SDA Fundamental Beliefs. If one does not, then they have a "MORAL OBLIGATION" to surrender their credentials and not expect salary, sustentation or other support from those whom have absolute Faith in the Bible, The Spirit of Prophecy and the duly adopted Fundamentals of Faith by
the General Conference in session.

There is no higher representation on earth and if you cannot accept that guidance, then exercise your Right of Conscience, leave the Body of Faith and either join a similarly thinking group of biblical allegoryist or set up your own body of Faith for those similarly enjoined in thought and lack of Faith.

The Right of Conscience cuts both ways in that every individual has the Right of Conscience but with that Right of Conscience come the honest duty to recognize that if you do not believe in the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamentals of Faith, that conscience should require your resignation and separation from the Body of Believers that have the full faith and spiritual experience that allows them to live in harmony with the Body of Believers that share so unreservedly in that Faith.

I challenge the allegory crowd to show serious moral character, exercise your Right of Conscience and exit from those who cling to the Faith of Jesus and the Biblical record embodied in that Faith.

I believe unreservedly in the Creation Week Story, the Pre-deluvian, deluvian and post deluvian history. I absolutely believe in the Divine intervention in the Ten Plagues that lead to the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, the Red Sea road to escape, the Cloud by day and the fiery cloud by night, the daily Manna and the parting of the Jordan as they entered Canaan. In summary, I BELIEVE and HAVE ABSOLUTE FAITH IN THE INTEGRITY OF GOD'S MESSAGE AND GUIDEPOSTS TO MAN INCLUDING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN THEIR TOTALITY AND THE PROPHESIES, INCLUDING THE 2300 DAYS AND THE JUDGMENT.

I shall not bore you with the length and breadth of my absolute and unwavering FAITH, but would suggest that if you cannot believe and have no Faith, you are likely much more at home and of HONEST CONSCIENCE outside the BODY OF FAITH represented by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AURreporter

Doctorf Doctorf1

Gailon you are back with the screaming capitalizations I see. What does your faith have to do with teaching science? Religion has nothing to do with the science behind how nature works. Also try reading Understanding Genesis. You will find that the 6 day creation story is a rehash of the polytheistic Babylonian creation myth known as the Enuma Elish (sp, I hope I got the spelling right). Theologians have known this including SDA theologians.

Gailon Arthur Joy

And just where did the Babylonians develop a basis for their myth? Oh, and who decided it was a "myth"?

I will affirm my Faith insists there is more than sufficient basis for the six day creation and it interlocks nicely into the Sabbath message.
The science you assert is based upon theories and a time line not supported by any written record. I will stick with the Bible and the Bible only as my basis for science and Faith.

I will avoid the "wisdom of man" as inherently defective.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AURreporter

Doctorf Doctorf1

Gailon I have news for you. The bible you purport to is the wisdom of men at the time. Wisdom, mixed with their perceived experience with their god. Just because something "interlocks" with a sabbath message does not make a belief "true."

Kevin Riley

Had we insisted from the beginning that no one who doubted current beliefs could stay in the church and argue for change, where would we be? We did not originally believe in the Sabbath, or a number of beliefs we now hold. Would we still be the 'Shut door Adventists' rather than the Seventh-day Adventists? If we insist everyone who does not believe unreservedly in the total conservative package you hold to, how many SDAs will be left? Just where do you draw the line between essential and non-essential doctrines? I am willing to claim at least a desire to have absolute faith in God, but I am not willing to claim absolute faith in my interpretation of Scripture, nor in the church's interpretation of Scripture. I seem to recall that it was Ellen White's position that God alone is infallible, and I prefer to place my faith in infallible things. I believe the Bible is inspired, I believe Ellen White was a prophet, but I am reluctant to place absolute faith in either, and I do not and will not place absolute faith in the church's, or any one else's, interpretation of either. To do so seems essentially un-Adventist to me. A belief in present truth (does anyone believe in that any more?) requires us to be open to the possibility that any of our beliefs may be wrong, or may need to be changes either slightly or completely. I find some of the points of view put forward here too liberal from my POV, but I do not want the questions silenced or the questioners expelled. I believe the correct response is to study the issues and answer the objections.

A church that believes it has the truth and is not open to the possibility that it may be wrong is a church that is not following God, but feels it has arrived. Unless we are sure that Ellen White's statement that "we have many things to learn and many, many things to unlearn" no longer applies, than there are truths we do not know, and 'many, many things' that we believe to be true that we need to unlearn - apparently because they are wrong.

Gailon Arthur Joy

Obviously, we have a well documented and written record of just how the Church Founders came to apply one precept upon another carefully and prayerfully to bring about the uniquely logical Adventist Message.
To challenge this based upon theories and the "wisdom of man" over the infallible word of God is to turn one's back on the foundations of Faith.

I would recommend a study of the TRUTH to be found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophesy that you rebuild your Faith. You will need a well-grounded Faith in the crisis ahead and you must study and cling to that eternal message that your Faith fails you not and you not become a part of those who loose their way.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

Elaine Nelson 4 days ago Reply

Do you also teach one of the sciences in a university? What suggestion do you offer for those who have a dual responsibility: to abide by the church's YEC, and also to teach the scientific knowledge to meet the qualifications expected by the student, and required by university status?

If your suggestions were followed, all SDA universities would no longer receive necessary approval by the respective accrediting associations.

There are SDA Bible schools, simply "Google" and you will find a number. These offer the type of education you are suggesting. It's like wishing to drive, yet refusing to get the state's license. Universities cannot operate with their accrediting associations. That's the plain, unvarnished truth. They can operate under the SDA blessing as Bible schools, however, So there are choices to be made.

Gailon Arthur Joy 3 days ago Reply

To paragraph one I will reply that I would challenge this simple assertion. There is more than substantial evidence that many foundations of science are more than challenged and I would guess that Academia (purportedly tolerant of alternative views) would logically allow an alternative science based upon good science and not compliant neurosis. And it would be the perfect chance to share one's Faith with those in error.

And to the premise that SDA Schools that do not achieve accreditation, do I not understand they CHOOSE NOT TO ACCREDIT THEMSELVES. The graduates seem to perform quite adequately without a license. Many people elect not to or cannot achieve state licensure (including illegal immigrants) but perform their life's duties without the license.

There are choices to be made and let not those "choices" lead to a loss of one's eternal soul simply for the approval of man.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter
Nate,

There was no alcohol at the meeting yet you say "Getting beyond the question of whether the recording should have been used, I suspect most partisans who are upset over the 'forced' resignations would be no less upset if the alcohol consumption had come to light in a different manner, and been used as a basis for requesting the resignations."

You then say "They believe the policy prohibiting alcohol consumption is a stupid policy with no Biblical or moral basis."

Show me where the Bible condemns alcohol. It does no such thing. It condemns drunkenness like it condemns other excesses. Jesus drank wine and I am sure it contained alcohol not the lunatic SDA belief that it was "fresh grape juice." When you suggest that SDA views on wine etc are somehow sacred and supported by the Bible is misleading. They are not.

I don't know how I can make it any clearer, Doctorf. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE SDA TEACHING RE: ALCOHOL IS SACRED, NOR DO I BELIEVE IT IS A BIBLICAL TEACHING. It is sacred for me personally because I feel have been called to a covenant of abstinence through my community of faith. Organizational rules should not have to be sacred or Biblically mandated to be taken seriously. Nor should a community of faith be limited in its covenants, beliefs, and behaviors to what is rationally compelled or can be logically inferred from scripture.

Nate,

The issue is personal for you, fair enough. Abstinence is a classic boogeyman created through your community of faith. In addition, this community of faith supposedly justifies itself through the bible. You cannot divorce the SDA community of faith and its views on alcohol from the bible that supposedly is its foundation.

The SDA non-alcoholic obsession is made out of whole cloth and cannot be supported biblically.

I find that a ludicrous assertion founded upon ones own wisdom and ignorant of the vast evidence
of the destructive influences and wasted lives of those that fall to the pleasure of this poison to the human body in its various forms.

I find no basis for the premise that God, in his infinite wisdom, would endorse the use of a toxic poison such as alcohol as part of a heavenly diet for those preparing for translation. But, then, perhaps we have lost sight of the purposes of diet in that special preparation process and the example we should be to our fellow man.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

Overcliff Road 4 days ago Reply

I tend to agree with Nathan that if professors, pastors and teachers no longer agree with the tenets of the organization they work for then in most cases they have an ethical obligation to admit that and resign. However this same principle may also apply in a way that I had not heard anyone mention until this evening, which Elaine Nelson brings out in excruciating clarity here. If an organization is so conscientiously dedicated to the principle of correlation between one's beliefs and one's affiliation then maybe Adventist schools should all revert to being bible schools and not seek to accept the privileges that come with being affirmed as universities by outside accrediting agencies. Wouldn't integrity to the stated ethical principle require that same kind of honesty, so that the educational institution as a whole would avoid putting on and benefiting from a false identity?

laffal 3 days ago Reply

Reverting back to Bible schools is for the most part what the initial thrust for Adventist education was to be about.

Nathan Schilt 3 days ago Reply

Overcliff Road - I didn't say what you attribute to me. I think professors, pastors, and teachers should be able to critique the tenets and values of the organization they work for. Otherwise, how does an organization grow? There can be a fine line between openly and respectfully urging rethinking/change, and going underground with a don't-ask-don't-tell practical disdain for institutional values and lifestyle guidelines. There can also be difficulty discerning just what the real tenets of an organization are.

For example, I suspect that some, if not most, of the LSU professors who endorse evolution have not changed their beliefs since they were hired. If LSU hired these professors, presumably knowing where they stood on evolution, couldn't one reasonably argue that the University has thereby sent a message that the creationism tenet of the University, to the extent it is a tenet, has been waived? Is it fair to change the rules now, when it clearly was not an issue at the time of hire? Just asking...
Nathan,

The professors may have been avid slobbering creationists at the time of their hiring over 35 yrs ago. However, over the course of experience and new knowledge the professors may have altered their views. I know I did when I discovered I could use conserved sequences in the mouse genome and human genome to look at gene expression in a species where the code for similar proteins is not known. Darwin proposed that particular traits necessary for the survival of a species would be conserved. We see this in the genetic code. We are 75% similar to a rat genome. We have as many gene coding sequences as a fruit fly. Pretty unimpressive? Or very impressive?

Adventist education debated intensively whether or not to voluntarily accept accreditation during the 1920s. The worry was about worldly influences and higher capital requirements. Then in 1931 the Journal of American Medical Association published an account that the College of Medical Evangelist accepted 118 freshmen but only 31 came from accredited institutions. The Secretary of the Department of Education at the General Conference immediately demanded that henceforth CME would qualify as a professional school and only accept students from accredited institutions. Today of course the requirements are even more robust and LLU School of Medicine cannot accept students unless they are recruited from accredited schools. And since all Adventist colleges and universities are now accredited by secular organization students can qualify for federal and state grants and loans. WASC for instance is accredited by the U. S. Department of Education. And these federal loans, in some cases make up about 90 percent of the tuition for an SDA college, is how the schools survive...not appropriations from the church. Students can also transfer their grades and course work to other accredited institutions.

AAA is not accredited by the U.S. Department of Education but is a self-imposed sectarian accredited agency that mimics the secular (self-study and review teams from other Adventists). The consequences of losing secular accreditation such as WASC or SACU could be the death blow for Adventist education since the Church is unwilling to financially underwrite the costs. So when anyone says, the Church can demand certain subjects be taught to support church dogma that is not exactly the case. Adventist institutions are now beholdng to the tax-payers than to the church just by looking at capitalization of education. This is much more complex than most people understand. They think that an Adventist college or university could simply drop its secular accreditation and become a Bible College. Graduates could not be hired to teach in public schools, many employers will not hire graduates without accreditation, graduate schools deny entrance, dental and medical pre-med students cannot apply to LLU or Kettering, etc.

And the Congress which funds the Department of Education insists that students who receive federal loans be properly trained broadly, not church dogma, to perform as citizens of the country...well balanced and able to think through issues and problems. You cannot expect under these circumstances that Congress is going to look favorably through WASC and other secular accrediting agencies to train individuals in a narrow bandwidth of learning. When it comes to science WASC will review how well students are being exposed to mainline scientific education...not creationism...a
relational belief. Of course there is give and take in a faith based institution...but there will be standards that must meet the objectives of the Department of Education and the Congress. LSU could be facing consequences that might become more serious unless Adventist educators and administrators begin to treat this relationship with some seriousness.

Cheers
tjoe

Doctorf Doctorf1

Joe,

Nice summary. You are correct. If SDA schools lose their WASC accreditation, from a monetary aspect they are in trouble and would cease to exist as there is not enough money from the GC to support all of our colleges and universities.

Elaine Nelson

It is good to hear the voice of reason repeat the absolute importance of secular accreditation. Without it, all the SDA colleges and universities would close their doors in the blink of an eye.

Be careful what you wish for as the law of unintended consequences always results.

Overcliff Road

Just for clarification's sake I was not advocating the idea that SDA schools give up accreditation and become "bible colleges." I was just wondering out loud whether the ethical principle assumed in this discussion: that there should be a correspondence between one's personal beliefs and one's affiliation would not, when applied on the institutional level, demand such a move.

T. Joe & Barbara Willey

Let me try to understand your comments Overcliff Road "just for clarification sake," since it sounds interesting. You are not "advocating the idea that SDA schools give up accreditation and become Bible Colleges." (Right?) So that settles this issue.

Although Lisa Beardsley, the director of the AAA would disagree with you. Her comments to the Riverside newspaper was "The real crux of the matter is whether the Bible has a privileged position as a source of knowledge." Basically she is advocating a Bible College configuration, not a university with broader educational ambitions. This implies that AAA gives priority to indoctrination.

On the other hand, you are "just wondering out loud whether the ethical principle assumed in this
discussion: that there should be a correspondence between one's personal beliefs and one's affiliation would not, when applied on the institutional level, demand such a move." Now you turn and go in the opposite direction and advocate a reconfiguration of Adventist colleges and universities to be Bible Colleges. There is nothing wrong with that if indeed it is an "ethical principle." Just don't expect America's tax payers to support SDA's schools, but instead be prepared to strike out on your own without the ability for students to be recognized for further training, including nursing, dentistry and medicine, and jobs that require secular accreditation as in public education.

Do you see any fuzzy logic in this reversal of your position. It is like saying, "I am going to go shopping at Home Depot downtown in San Jose" and on the way you turn north and go across the Golden Gate Bridge heading in the opposite direction towards Portland Oregon.

Good luck in any case along the way. Accreditation is one way to regulate human lives, among other things. Long ago (almost a hundred years) Adventist educators decided that accreditation would bring a quality to education that drove ignorance away. Recasting the routine practice in mid-cycle would have enormous consequences. Review what has happened to Atlantic Union College and the financial exposures that impact the students when an Adventist college fails and you will see what I mean. Be careful with all manner of reforms. Consider the alternatives and outcomes. To be perfectly clear about this, it is my opinion that Adventism today is respected because of its commitment to (1) higher education and (2) winsome health practices. This in comparison to Jehovah Witnesses which does not encourage higher education. And Loma Linda University sitting as the flagship has done more to gain acceptance of Adventism on both accounts. It is the king-pin to secular accreditation. If all Loma Linda had was accreditation from AAA its graduates would not be allowed to practice the healing arts. So it is a public protective issue as well as an ethical principle.

Cheers
tjoe

Doctorf Doctorf1

13 hours ago Reply

Joe,

Lisa suggested the same thing at LLU and within a year she was gone. Dr. Beardsley almost advocates a return to the dark ages of adventism. The problem she faces as you suggest is that SDA schools have done a good job in educating our young people. With education comes the ability to ask questions and reason. In the case of scientific reasoning the data do not support SDA fundamentalism. People like Dr. Beardsley are scary.

Overcliff Road

4 days ago Reply

Okay, I'll try again and hope for the best.

Judging from the fact that tjoe and possibly Elaine seem to have misunderstood my first comment I will assume that I did not express myself clearly. Either that or I jumped into the middle a
conversation that has been going on for a while and thus, as a result, people have read into my first comment something that I did not intend. In any case I was not making a recommendation that SDA schools give up accreditation. And if by coincidence someone from "AAA" (whatever that is) did in say something to that effect I was neither aware of that fact nor supporting it. I was merely responding to the comments I saw on this very thread and taking note of a potential disconnect, as follows.

I was wondering whether the same ethical principle that many would like to enforce on a personal level - for instance, on some professors at La Sierra - may not also apply on an institutional level. If so, then those who press that ethic so vehemently may not like the consequences of the very principle that they insist on. That was my point.

To be more specific, if it is true that under no circumstances should anyone, by hiding their true beliefs and positions, ever remain affiliated or benefit from association with an organization that they do not fully agree with, then could it be that by receiving accreditation from outside agencies our denominational schools are not in fact doing that very thing: putting on false pretenses in order to receive benefits (i.e. accreditation) from a system that they do not really support?

I hope that makes my intended point clearer. Now, whether or not you too think there may be some ethical inconsistency here, well that is exactly the issue I would like to receive feedback on.

Elaine Nelson

Overcliff,

If it appeared I misunderstood your comments, let me clarify: Yes, I agree with you when you said:

"If an organization is so conscientiously dedicated to the principle of correlation between one's beliefs and one's affiliation then maybe Adventist schools should all revert to being bible schools and not seek to accept the privileges that come with being affirmed as universities by outside accrediting agencies. Wouldn't integrity to the stated ethical principle require that same kind of honesty, so that the educational institution as a whole would avoid putting on and benefiting from a false identity?

That would be the honest and upfront expression wouldn't it? Rather than appearing to meet WASC accreditation while seeking to undermine the very essentials that require accreditation. IOW, registering students for courses with the expectation and statement that the school meets full WASC accreditation, thus accepting federal and state funds? This would be hypocrisy and "untruth in advertising" wouldn't it?

Markham

"The Right of Conscience cuts both ways in that every individual has the Right of Conscience but with that Right of Conscience come the honest duty to recognize that if you do not believe in the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamentals of Faith, that conscience should require your resignation and separation from the Body of Believers that have the full faith and spiritual experience that allows
them to live in harmony with the Body of Believers that share so unreservedly in that Faith." Gailon
Arthur Joy
AUReporter

I fully subscribe to this statement as I understand it although I have no idea exactly who the author
is. Frankly, I don't even read comments from persons who have confessed they are no longer
members of the church. It is beyond my comprehension that someone who left the SDA church years
ago would spend endless hours, apparently, dissing the church and its beliefs.

If I ever reach the point of not accepting Creationism as reflected in Scripture and taught by the SDA
church, and no longer accept the veracity of the Flood story I will ask for removal of my name from
official membership and not spend time on AToday explaining why I believe the SDA church is on
the wrong track.

Elaine Nelson

Anything that is beyond one's comprehension indicates that he or she is unable to see any other view.
If we cannot realize that each one of us has views that are owed just as much respect as another, then
we have not yet matured and reached understanding of humans. It is narcissistic to feel that one's
own view is the only possible one. Does that infer that all but SDAs are somehow either unintelligent
or badly informed? Is that an attitude that converts non-SDAs?

This site allows all to participate, regardless of church affiliation. There are some who know much
more about the inner workings of an institution and how the doctrines were formed. (Hint, like
sausages and laws, religious doctrines should not be seen being made.)

Nathan Schilt

Thanks to those of you who have emphasized the accreditation angle as a check on the ability of
LSU to set whatever standards it chooses. You have helped to make my point. Just as the exercise of
personal autonomy contrary to the rules of an institution is fraught with consequences, so
institutional choices may run afoul of policies set by agencies to which an institution is beholden
either by choice or by law. To the extent that institutions try to enforce moral and religious values
which run afoul of standards set by outside governing authorities, it will find itself in trouble. This
appears to be just fine with those who are waving the accreditation flag. And I agree.

So why, IF faculty members run afoul of religious and moral standards set by the institution, which
are within the purview of institutional authority, should they not expect to find themselves in trouble?
Back to my original questions: As between an employee, who agrees at hire to work under the
policies and standards set by his/her employer, and the employer, who gets to decide what policies
are important and what are not?

Doctorf, assuming for purposes of argument, that the University had unimpeachable information,
morally and lawfully obtained, that the LSU4 had in fact adopted a lifestyle which included alcohol
consumption in moderation, would the University be within its rights under its policies and
acculturating standards to request their resignations or institute other disciplinary action? I'm not asking whether you think abstinence SHOULD be the policy. I know the answer to that.

Doctorf Doctorf1

Nate,

Your question is rhetorical. I am not dishonest and the answer is yes. But you and I know that alcohol consumption has nothing to do with the issue of why these people were brought before this small band of inquisitors. Alcohol consumption was assumed by the recording. It was a joke. Its like me coming home after a day of nonsensical admin meetings where we "pray" for gods guidance and wisdom and once our heads come up, we are left with "what the hell are we going to do now." God is absent in these discussions and after the prayer god is a mere afterthought. I sometimes kid around with my wife and say "man do I need a drink." Its banter.

The issue here was due to the ongoing friction between science and religious dogma and these professors teach the science and not the religious dogma. That annoyed some people who see themselves as the vanguards of faith as well as enforcers.

Elaine Nelson

Does the control over faculties private lives extend into their homes? Or, were they hired to teach certain subjects PLUS agree to abide by a lengthy list of how they should live outside the classroom or campus? A general statement that they agreed to live by SDA beliefs could have even included their assent to all the 28 Fundamental Beliefs which even the strictest Adventist would have difficulty totally affirming.

The AAA is at cross purposes attempting to meet two impossible goals. My bet is that WASC will rule the day. If the church's standard is chosen, look for LSU to close in less than one year.

As an aside: the local 12-grade academy in the town where I live has been operating for more than 100 years. It is now facing closure, owing $1.7 million, with $1.2 million to the local conference, and approximately $500,000 to vendors, insurance, etc. This amounts to $35,000/month shortfall.

It is facing the same fate of other SDA educational institutions in the U.S. With insufficient funding. So to believe that a university such as LSU can choose to ignore the larger percentage of its funding and continue to operate is to refuse to face reality.

Nathan Schilt

Elaine, help me understand your point. I thought the potential conflict between WASC and AAA pertained to Church and doctrinal authority over science classroom curriculae. That seems to be the point of your second paragraph. It is a valid one. Most SDA Church members who send their kids to La Sierra, like the AAA, also want to ignore reality. They want certain values and beliefs promoted in the classrooms, but they also want the benefits that come with accreditation. Usually these types
of conflicts are resolved through institutional compromises that are not wholly satisfying to either interest, but simply help to soften the dissonance.

But isn't this a very different issue from the one presented by the resignation of the LSU4? I have assumed, without knowing its contents, that indeed the faculty/employee handbook at LSU does prescribe behavioral standards for faculty which apply 24/7. In other words, I assume that it would be cause for termination if faculty members were hosting bacchanals in the privacy of their homes, a prospect with which you seem to have problems. Without getting into whether or not proper procedure was followed, or what behavioral standards were allegedly violated, are you suggesting that the behavioral standards prescribed by LSU for its employees/faculty may be a problem for WASC?

Elaine Nelson

While I do not know the formal accusations against the LSU4 and only what is on the grapevine, here and other blogs, it appears that there are cross-purposes which cannot be resolved by adhering to both the AAA and WASC.

Yes, it is likely that parents send their children to LSU to get a "good SDA education" which they expect to include more indoctrination into Adventism. Yet, at the same time, they want them to receive a good university experience which necessitates studying science, the humanities and other subjects, all of which may raise questions about SDA beliefs. It appears to be a demand that cannot be satisfactorily resolved, as teachers who have dedicated their lives in a particular discipline are being asked to forget about their knowledge and instead, teach the Creation story in Genesis which would take 1/2 of one class session; or else attempt to combine the two into one coherent answer. Does anyone think this can be done to the satisfaction of both AAA and WASC? Suggestions, please.

I have no information on the contracts signed by these accused, nor if behavioral standards were violated. Therefore, I cannot comment on them, only the accusations that have been made include drinking alcoholic beverages (unconfirmed, even denied). If using alcohol is grounds for dismissal, there are numerous other prohibitions equally qualifying for dismissal.

It is difficult to believe that WASC would be at all involved in whether or not faculty imbibed alcohol; on the contrary, it is such a common custom in all professions that it seems particularly odd that WASC would have anything to say about this, as they approve all universities where alcohol is freely used--at home but not in classrooms.

If this is a problem with WASC, it has not, so far, been mentioned. WDYT?

Kevin Riley

Elaine

As part of employment by the SDA church - whether or not one is personally a member - is the agreement to live in harmony with SDA standards. In the past, contracts I have seen specifically stipulated a 'conservative' SDA lifestyle. I do not know of any SDA organisation that would not...
consider imbibing alcohol a sufficient reason for dismissal. More than likely the person would be asked to resign, as the church tends to like to avoid dismissals unless necessary. It is not a question of what you, I, or employees, believe to be the biblical standing of the no alcohol policy, but of what church policy and employment contracts/agreements state.

I have seen contracts that state that the employee and their family will follow church guidelines in their lives. I believe I once signed one myself that stipulated that. I am pretty sure that they could be challenged legally, and I haven't seen that for years, but when a person enters into an agreement to work for a church organisation it is not uncommon for part of the agreement to be that they will support and follow church guidelines.

Elaine,

I had lunch with one of "the 4." They were not drinking. It was a joke during the conversation post board meeting. They were discussing the board meeting. Alcohol was an "add on" issue. Its clear that particular people on the board had it in for these professors. I suspect that the view from the board was "better the academic death of these 4 than the whole institution." Brigham Young used the same argument when the evidence for the Mountain Meadow Massacre implicated him and others in the church hierarchy.

Elaine,

WASC will not concern itself with alcohol use. The issue will be governance and following procedures. I have been through 4 LCME and WASC accreditations. A major issue is the governance relationship between administration and faculty. Its always a testy issue in SDA schools. At UC schools the faculty regents have veto power over the administration. Thus, admin at those schools cannot act by fiat. Its a delicate dance at SDA schools where upper administration clearly has all the power. Admin gets around this issue by having policies in place that supposedly guarantee that the rights of faculty are not trampled. Faculty committees act soley as "advisory" which WASC and LCME begrudgingly accept but hold the feet of administration to the fire every 5-7 yrs when they come to re-accredit SDA institutions.

Elaine Nelson

It has been repeated here that no alcohol was used by the LSU4. Do you have contradictory information? If so please give us the evidence. Otherwise, it is mere rumor and speculation. Gossip, as I recall, was one of the sins condemned much more than alcohol use.
Over on the Spectrum blog, the letter from WASC is detailed and its meaning for LSU. It is a serious document and must be given consideration if LSU is to continue to receive WASC accreditation.

Nathan Schilt
4 hours ago

On the alcohol issue: The transcript of the recording readily yields a strong inference that alcoholic beverages were being consumed at the private gathering. Additionally, audible statements on the recording, as transcribed, indicate a comfort level with alcohol consumption as an positive lifestyle choice for the individuals present at the gathering. Would I find to a moral certainty, beyond a reasonable doubt, on that evidence alone, that alcohol was consumed by all four gentlemen at the private gathering? NO! Would I find by a preponderance of the evidence that consumption of alcoholic beverages occurred at the gathering and that it was an underground lifestyle choice for those present? Most definitely.

I do not believe that the recorded trash talk alone would have prompted a request for resignations, much less actual resignations by all four. It seems to me that any reasonably intelligent individual, confronted with false accusations of alcohol consumption, would angrily dig in his heels rather than resign. From what I know of the resigning Board member who was responsible for the inadvertent recording, I find it difficult to imagine him being easily intimidated or bullied by false accusations, particularly when leveled by Church institutional authorities.

So I think most reasonably objective individuals would agree that the transcript of the recording permits, if not compels, a inferences that rise well above "rumor and speculation". That's just my opinion. Could I be persuaded otherwise? Of course. But I don't think it makes sense, based solely on self-serving hearsay statements offered by Doctorf (not that there's anything wrong with hearsay - everything we know at this time is based on hearsay) to insist that detached observers should dismiss the alcohol issue as a joke that was misunderstood.

Doctorf Doctorf1
3 hours ago

Nathan,

Two did dig in their heels. The other just did not want the fight and chose to deal with the issue in a law suit. You do not know these people like I do and after listening to one of the four and my 30+ yrs of knowing two of the 4, the recording makes sense. It was banter. Once again, alcohol is a peripheral issue. The real issues are the ongoing angst of board members who had problems with the scientific perspectives of these faculty. But, then again science does not validate ones mythological beliefs.

Elaine Nelson
3 hours ago

If inferences indict, we are all susceptible. To "presume" alcohol was an "Underground lifestyle" is patently wrong, no more so that to accuse someone of drinking because he may have entered a bar.

Reminds me of the story of a widower who was accused by a woman, a fellow church member, of...
being an alcoholic because she saw his truck parked in front of a bar. The next night, he parked his truck in front of her house, left it there all night, walking home. This silenced her! Such accusations would be laughed out of court, so why should good SDAs be less skeptical?

Nathan seems to be relying on "hearsay" a very poor reason to charge anyone.

Nathan Schilt

You're right, Doctorf. Reasonable inferences that can be drawn from the transcript may well be refuted or counterbalanced by other evidence such as character evidence - usually not admissible in a court of law, by the way. The fact that you see the evidence in a different light, thanks to conversations you have had with a participant who has not, to my knowledge, made a public statement, certainly entitles you to draw a contrary inference - that alcohol banter was all in jest. But it does not make the inferences I have drawn, based on the transcript of the recording alone, unreasonable, even if they turn out on closer inspection, in light of all the evidence, to be untrue, does it?

To whom was alcohol a peripheral issue and how do you know? Presumably those who requested the resignations did not recognize the banter as a joke. Is your belief that alcohol was a peripheral issue not the product of debatable inferences you have drawn from evidence that is probably considerably softer than the transcript at issue? Why does "permission to infer" seem to be a one-way street for the Adventist Left? Is it reasonable to infer, from the fact that some Board members had problems with the scientific perspectives of some of the LSU4, that those who initiated the resignation proceedings - not the Board, as I understand it - saw alcohol as merely a "peripheral issue"? That, it seems to me is a considerably bigger stretch than the inferences which I suggest are supported by hard evidence on the recording.

Your first two sentences make no sense. You say "two did dig in their heels." Do you mean that they resigned and are not contesting their resignations, or that they didn't resign, or something else? If they resigned and are not seeking recission, that doesn't sound very much like they dug in their heels. As to the other two who "just did not want to fight," common sense suggests that by trying to contest their resignations in a court of law, they have taken on a considerably bigger, more expensive fight than they might have had by refusing to resign when confronted with false charges, and seeking, through internal process, the vindication that their defenders seem to think is a foregone conclusion. What am I missing? It sounds to me like what they want is to fight really big battles on a big stage. I'm okay with that. But it doesn't square with your statement that they resigned because they didn't want to fight.

Elaine, we're not talking about indictments here. These are not criminal proceedings. Furthermore, nearly all conclusions that we reach, and opinions that we embrace, are based on inferences that we draw from circumstantial evidence. I'm not sure what you mean when you say it is "patently wrong" for me to infer from the transcript that alcohol consumption appears to have been an underground lifestyle. It certainly wasn't open, correct? And whether the transcript of the conversation supports the conclusion that it was a lifestyle choice is really a judgment call that can be made only if one has read the transcript.
As for your humorous analogy - If you saw me walk into a "gentlemens' club" (What an oxymoron!) and emerge two hours later, would it not be reasonable for you to draw certain inferences about my taste in entertainment, if not my character? I think so. Other possible explanations for what you observed would not render your negative inference unreasonable, would they?

Would it have been unreasonable for the accuser in your anecdote to infer that the bar patronizing fellow church member was likely out of step with Church orthopraxy if she had a recording of him saying, as he left the bar, "Thanks for the brew."? Information that the Church member was an actor who was actually in the bar to do a movie scene would certainly go a long way toward dispelling the inference. But retaliatory conduct - parking his car in front of the woman's house the following night - would do nothing to dispel the inference. It would only be an indignant exclamation point to the possibility of innocent explanations for what she observed. In a faith community, I do not think it would be unreasonable for other members of the faith community - which had mutually covenanted among its members to a lifestyle of abstinence - to tell the clever truck driver, "Okay, Joe, we get your point. But you still got some 'splainin' to do."

Elaine Nelson

Regardless of any and all explanations, the truck driver certainly had the last word!

You do not have sufficient permissions to post a comment.
As late as 1997, belief in heaven was declared "dead" in the United States—in a cover article in Time magazine, no less. Preachers weren't talking about heaven, the article said; young men training to be priests didn't learn about heaven in seminary. Even evangelicals treated the topic with something like embarrassment. Besides, who needed heaven when life on earth was so good? In 1997, unemployment hit a 28-year low and the Dow exceeded 7,000. Titanic was the movie of the year and Celine Dion swept the Grammys. "Heaven," the Time article said, "is AWOL."

Yet a 2007 Gallup polls reports that now 81 percent of Americans say they believe in heaven (up from only 72 percent in 1997). Why the tremendous upsurge in this doctrine? Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife, by Lisa Miller, the religion editor of Newsweek, attributes the change, in part, to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. "We Americans watched live on television as people jumped one hundred stories to their deaths, as—incredibly — those massive towers crumbled to the ground. In the days that followed we imagined the three thousand terrible deaths, one by one, as we read, with tears streaming down our faces, of last phone calls, e-mail messages, voice mails."

The terrorists themselves believed that in death they would be transferred immediately to paradise. Writes Miller, "On September 11, religion left the provinces of American cultural priorities and took its place at the center. Because the attacks caused so much needless and inexplicable death, heaven was always nearby."

Since then, books, movies, and many popular songs have alluded overtly or obliquely to death and the hope of heaven, including The Rising by Bruce Springsteen, a tribute to those who died on 9/11. The title song describes the singer's own version of heaven, as a place where children dance in a bright sky.

In her book, Miller traces the history of the concept of heaven as an "apocalyptic" view that began to gain popularity in Judaism.

"Some Jews began to believe the faithful among them would ascend to heaven where they would
live as themselves with God after they died," writes Miller, "This was a radical change. Until then, heaven was the home of God — not of people. But history and culture had begun to breed in certain Jewish sects an overwhelming sense of doom; they were having premonitions about the end of history. The Jews who wrote prophetic scripture began to talk about eternal life with God as a reward for those who were 'righteous.' It's enough to say here that until 200 BCE people didn't go to heaven. After 200 BCE, some of them did."

That the author shares the surname of William Miller, Adventism’s earliest promoter of Christ’s return, is certainly coincidental, but fitting. She also explores Muslim views of heaven, discovering they parallel those of Judaism and Christianity in significant ways. Interesting for Adventists who do not drink alcoholic beverages, Muslims (who are taught to abstain from alcohol) are told that in heaven they will drink wine, but will not become drunk. Muslims are also taught heaven will feature meals with flesh food entrees.

Adventist readers will find fascinating Miller’s in-depth look at the controversy over “grace vs works” as the ticket to heaven. This conundrum, though disputed for centuries, is anything but resolved, she says.

Readers will find her discussion of the changing concepts of heaven especially interesting. Because our culture was born (and remains) tied to the apocalyptic fervor of early American revivalism, Adventists would do well to read this moderate treatment of a subject common to all major faiths. It’s a touch point we share with all great religions, and on which we do well to become better informed, intellectually and historically. This book provides a coherent and useful overview of the topic for the busy reader.
In Matthew 13 the disciples asked Jesus why He taught the people with parables instead of just speaking plainly. His reply is very important for us as well. "To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. That is why I use these parables." (Vs. 12-13) Jesus had said it hundreds of years before in a Psalm of David, "For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." (Psalm 107:9) Because God never wants to impose or force His way into our lives, He framed His appeal to men in stories. If men were not interested (thirsty) at that time, the Holy Spirit could bring the stories to their remembrance at a later time and renew the invitation. Or if evil men wanted to use Jesus' words against Him, they would see nothing important in these "harmless, meaningless fables." But to people who had been battered by sin, starved, utterly dehydrated, and parched, the Holy Spirit found soil extremely fertile and receptive to the good news. These were the people who "listened" and God gave them understanding. Understanding isn't given to people simply because they are brilliant scholars, or highly acclaimed leaders. It is given to those who are thirsty, those who listen with hungry ears to hear salvation.

By the way, this question by the disciples (Why do you speak in parables?) came in response to Jesus' parable about the four kinds of soil. Remember the sower goes out and sows seed on a pathway where birds ate it, on rocky soil where the sun scorched it, and then among thorns that choked the seed. These are all examples of people who are exposed to the gospel but aren't thirsty and hungry for it. They don't hear it because life has them distracted, overwhelmed, or blinded. But the fourth soil is fertile and it represents people like the disciples and other simple sinners who are thirsty for the Good News of the Gospel. They are "listening" and it produces fruit in their lives - a relationship with Jesus.

So let's talk. Is a relationship with Jesus everything to you? I'm not asking you if you go to church and are super involved. I'm not asking you if you're an active member in some good, solid denomination. I'm asking you, "Is being a disciple, following Jesus, everything to you? Do you have religion or do you have Jesus? Is He the SOURCE from which everything else takes place in your life - your marriage, your investments, your giving, your kids, your education, your future plans, your purchases, your telephone calls, texting, twitting, Facebooking, every minute of your day?" I'm not talking about being a fanatic crazy person who can only speak in King James English, shout "Praise the Lord!" and only read the Bible. I'm talking about a relationship with Jesus where you follow HIM into everything you do and ask His opinion about every decision you make. I'm talking about total surrender of everything you have and are to Jesus. Not "taking-your-fun-away" kind of surrender, but a realization that Jesus, the Creator-God is a genius when it comes to people and how they work and act and think and do. I mean He knows us backwards and forwards and He knows what makes us happy and fulfilled - He's the inventor of our engine, the author of our story, the engineer of our entire mechanism. Only total surrender to our Creator will cause us to enjoy the purpose for which we were made.

By the way, that's where Jesus was headed in this whole chapter (Matthew 13) - total surrender (People who are really listening to Him in every part of their life). Here's His punch line: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and
sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!" (Matthew 13:44-45) Don't misunderstand what Jesus is talking about here. He is not talking about your salvation; He is talking about being a disciple. Notice what Oswald Chambers says about this distinction: "Our Lord never requires the same conditions for discipleship that he requires for salvation. We are condemned to salvation through the Cross of Christ. But discipleship has an option with it." (My Utmost for His Highest, Feb. 22) And here's the option: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24). God saved us in order to get us back, to reconcile us [Romans 5:10], because He knows that it is only in a totally surrendered relationship that the abundant life He promised is possible. If we want The Treasure, The Pearl (Jesus, inside us, in total control) we must sell everything we have to get it. God isn't talking here about a Garage sale; it is much more all-encompassing than that. He is talking about giving Jesus everything you are or have - every sin, every habit, every prejudice, every dream, every plan, every client, every contract, every family member, every car, your house, every pair of shoes, every gun, every magazine or book, every minute of every day, every day of every year. You have to surrender everything if you are to have Jesus.

But one word of caution, never make the mistake of thinking that when you totally surrender, Jesus will diminish one iota of your joy or real happiness. On the contrary, your joy will increase. John 16:24 “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” When we give everything to Jesus, we will begin to recognize how perverted our sense of what happiness is. We are like a man who has been sick all his life and doesn't know what it feels like to really be well. Paul puts it this way, "Our eye has not seen, nor has our ear heard, the things God has prepared for them that love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

So how do I sell everything I have for the Pearl of great price? I don't know if God has A WAY that He wants us to do it, but ONE way would be to simply make a list of all the areas of your life - Your family (Go ahead, make it personal, list their names), your Job and the people at that Job, your stuff (Name it - your house, your car, your food, your gadgets, etc.), the intangibles like your thoughts, sins, habits, plans, hopes & dreams, ideologies, theologies, politics, etc., your ministry (Work in the church or community, offices you hold, organizations you belong to, activities you engage in, people you help), your vacations, leisure time, etc. So make that list and then solemnly lay that list before God and tell Him you give it to Him and ask Him to do with it whatever He wants to do with it, or use it however He wants to use it, or change it however He wants to change it. Then as you live your life every day, give Jesus your "to do list", ask Him to drive with you, speak on the phone for you, text for you, twitter for you, make the presentation for you, explain for you, confront for you, plan for you - well, you get it. That's living the life of total surrender – a live centered, focused around a relationship with Jesus. You and I, always including Him in everything we do – in every facet about us.

A word of caution here: This is not one of those lists that gives you control over God and heaven like before you heard the gospel. This doesn't earn God's favor - you already have it. It is not the price for heaven - that's already been paid. But if there is anything in your life that you will not give to Jesus, it is an idol, and any idol you have will drive a wedge between you and God and eventually you will find yourself a long ways away from Jesus and that's a very dangerous place to be. Only in His arms are you really safe. Some of you will think that it's no big deal to withhold one area of your life - control a few things - that you want to be in charge of, make a few decisions on your own. After all, God has everything else. Well, God will certainly allow you that liberty, but it's like stepping outside the walls of the Cities of Refuge back in Bible times – there’s no protection out of the arms of God. There’s no
protection for that thing that is not surrendered and when one thing is withheld, Jesus is not KING so the entire relationship is put in danger.

Lastly, I want to remind us all why it is safe to surrender all. We may not know what God is doing with our health or our 401K, or our job, or our kids, or anything else, but we know who God is. Calvary has settled that. Because of Calvary we know that total surrender is safe - safer even than in our own hands. Romans 8:32 "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

So if you want to get it all, give it all up.

Guidelines for Productive & Courteous Comments:

- This is the writer’s court & play – no upstaging please
- Stay on topic – don’t wander off chasing butterflies
- Be brief – no more than 3 modest paragraphs – if longer, you are too windy
- We ask you to be considerate & courteous – the golden rule, remember
- Absolutely no denigrating of individuals – to err, earns banishment
- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often

Ella M Rydzewski

Thank you for a soul-searching blog that confronts us with the truth about ourselves and what God needs from us to make our lives happy and productive.

Elaine Nelson

It's a lovely sounding cliche:
"if you want to get it all, give it all up," but the few ascetics who really followed that advice, still needed friends to bring them food and water (Simon Sylites?).

How does that work in one's life? Who takes care of the family when the breadwinner is no longer there? Who takes care of you when you are too old, disabled, or even cannot find work? Saying "The Lord will take care of you" is right up there with "the birds do not worry for food, so why should you?"

Of course there is the Pauline quotation that he who does not provide for his family is worse than an infidel. Always a text for every occasion.
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