This Week at *Adventist Today* Online

**Commentary and News**

**Fall 2011 Issue Online***

Is the Adventist Church guided by the Bible, and the Bible alone? Former *Adventist Today* editor John McLarty leads off the Fall 2011 issue (no online) by deeply probing that question. The issue continues the examination of conditional prophecy and the prophetic gift of Ellen White; it explores the advantages of diversity; seeks answers on how homosexuality was regarded by the primitive Christian church; and ponders “What If” the Adventist Church were to split. Adventist Man, of course, continues to ponder mysteries so profound, we just have to shake our head and smile…. *Subscription needed*
Urbanization of the Globe: The Greatest Missional Challenge

The most significant issue coming out of General Conference Annual Council is a strategy paper titled “Mission to the Cities.” Adventism has done well in the countryside and in smaller, island nations, says Blogger Monte Sahlin, but has yet to conquer the large cities—even as the cities of the world continue to multiply in size. The “quick and dirty” approach to evangelism must change if we are to truly reach the large cities of the world in a comprehensive, Sahlin writes.

Atlantic Union College Insists it Will Reopen

Though a planned merger with Washington Adventist University has fallen through, Atlantic Union officials say the college will reopen.

The New Deal

Blogger Preston Foster says Adventism still distrusts grace and prefers to hitch its wagon to the law, especially as special protectors of the Sabbath. In the process, he says, we split our focus and try to uphold both the old and new covenants simultaneously. The Sabbath can stand alone on the New Testament example of Jesus.

Reality or TV?

With the proliferation of religious television, are Adventists losing touch with the “real thing” known as personal worship? Television is not reality, writes Nathan Brown, and we must ask ourselves if sitting in front of a television offers the same spiritual benefits as seeking the Lord personally, in real time, with real people.
Thin Soup

Is our religious soup becoming too thin—too intellectual—without enough mystical and ritual substance to satisfy the whole spiritual being? Columnist Ed Dickerson says we need to keep a fine balance between the two.

Test of a Good Leader

Moses’ great achievement, says columnist Don Watson, is that he stood up for the children of Israel when they least deserved his support—when they had fallen to the depths of sun, he refused to consent to their destruction. So it is today. Great leaders are great intercessors for the people.
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I have been ruminating lately as to why no prominent non-Adventist pastors or theologians have accepted the seventh day as the Sabbath. Pastors such as Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Leith Anderson, Rob Bell, Andy Stanley, Charles Stanley, Joel Osteen, Ed Young, Adam Hamilton, Max Lucado—and I could go on—have shown no conviction on this subject.

Famous writers such as C.S. Lewis and Philip Yancey have not embraced the seventh-day Sabbath. World-renowned evangelists such as Billy Graham and Luis Palau and thousands of theologians such as Walter Brueggemann, Rowan Williams, Emil Brunner, Thomas C. Oden, Woffart Pannenberg, N.T. Wright, and Karl Barth have remained committed to their understanding of the Lord’s day.

As Adventists, we have preached that the final conflict will be over worship. Will we receive the seal of God (the seventh-day Sabbath) or the mark of the beast (Sunday)? But Sabbath keepers remain a tiny minority. Why?

Jesus told his disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit in full glory and power and what his primary role would be. “And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment. … When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:8, 13).

**Where Is Holy Spirit Conviction?**

Why has the Holy Spirit not convicted even one of the above-named individuals to worship on the seventh day and not on the first day? Is it possible that keeping the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath is important in a way that we have not yet discovered?

The Sabbath has been a great blessing to me and to my family. When we celebrate it in the right way, we receive a blessing that we cannot receive on any other day. It is the birthday of our world and the most striking symbol of our salvation. As we rest from our work on that day, we are reminded that we too rest from any work that we think might contribute to our salvation. It is a wonderful reminder of salvation by faith in the grace of God.

God inaugurated the Sabbath at Creation, and it is valid until Jesus returns to take us home with him. But is it possible that our particular interpretation of the role of the Sabbath in final events was meant for the 19th century and was in some areas conditional? At that time we had little or nothing to say about the Muslims. Now there are almost as many Muslims in the world as there are Christians. What would Sunday legislation mean to them now? Given the situation in our world today, is a meaningful Sunday law possible—one that could point to the requirements stated in the Book of Revelation of a mark in the hand (practice) and in the forehead (thought)? Is China on the verge of supporting such legislation? What about Hindus?

We do find conditional prophecies in the writings of Ellen White. In 1856 she wrote: “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms,’ some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.”

**Conditional Prophecy**

From our vantage point now, we know that everyone present at the Conference did become “food for worms.” How do we determine which prophecies are conditional and which are unconditional? Could this apply to some of our interpretations of Daniel and Revelation? For example, at one time Turkey featured heavily in our end-time scenarios. Now we never mention this nation.

But back to my main point. Why, after Adventists have been preaching the Sabbath for some 160 years, have there been no converts from the ranks of large-church pastors and theologians? Have they all been rejecting the convicting power of the Holy Spirit?

Please, I would like to hear your answers to these perplexing questions. What do you think?

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1. Sister Clarissa M. Bonfoey, who fell asleep in Jesus only three days after this vision was given, was present in usual health, and was deeply impressed that she was one who would go into the grave, and stated her convictions to others.
The Lesser Light

Thank you for your recent article, “Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?” (Summer 2011). Your questions were pertinent and thoughtful. It is clear that to define her writings as “a continuing and authoritative source of truth” is to equate her writings to Scripture. Also, thank you for emphasizing that only God is infallible and that all prophets grow in their understanding of God and his Word. Whenever I am confronted with a perplexing statement, either in Scripture or in her writings, I have no problem suspending judgment.

Thank you so much for the article “Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?” In almost all counts you took the article right out of my brain—especially the part pertaining to our personal responsibility to “weigh carefully what is said” by prophets. Like you, for years I’ve maintained that the gift of prophecy did not die in 1915 and that the Spirit of Prophecy (that is, the Holy Spirit) continues to move in the lives of people today.

I wonder if we have wrongly taught a black and white perspective on the gift of prophecy that can’t be truly supported biblically? You used the standard Deuteronomy 18:22 as your support for how we view true and false prophets. But I would ask you to look closer at the actual text. Does what a prophet says have to be always true, let alone authoritative? Can a prophet be in good standing and still get it wrong? In this vein, I asked the White Estate (Robert Olson in particular) just such a question when they were going around to the colleges doing “damage control” back in the early ‘80s at Pacific Union College. My question and statement went like this:

The prophet Nathan agreed with David that he should build the temple of God. Later God had to straighten Nathan out, who in turn had to qualify David’s involvement. Was Nathan a “false prophet” because he spoke out of turn? Didn’t the test of time and truth bear him out to be a true prophet even though he spoke in error?

Again, have we painted our prophets into a proverbial corner by demanding that everything they say be true? Don’t systematic passages that explain the gift of prophecy fully persuade us of our responsibility to test everything that is said rather than just take what the prophet said unquestioningly? Isn’t truth “truth” regardless of who says it? Does a person who has been accepted as a prophet garner infallibility? Ellen G. White taught otherwise, but do we truly take her advice regarding her errors? (I find it interesting that we throw around the word “infallible” but rarely talk about her errors.) Your article rightly says that we haven’t had much integrity on this issue.

May I add a thought to the apostle vs. prophet authority issue that you brought up toward the end of the article. When we read passages like 1 Corinthians 15, doesn’t the very designation of apostle give what that apostle says more authority than what a prophet says? When John says, “we have seen with our eyes…and our hands have touched” Jesus, isn’t he telling us that they were eyewitnesses to the Son of God’s incarnation and that this gives them authority no one else has? If we took this position, wouldn’t we be more apt to measure the lesser light by the Light of the World?

Lastly, when Ellen G. White wrote about being the lesser light, wasn’t she comparing herself to the moon? The moon has no light of its own. It is waxing or waning every day. Once a month it can’t even be seen. Only once a month is it full. And when it is full, it is still full of holes. How like every man and woman who reflects HIS love.

Congratulations on pointing out the 180-to-360 degree change of some of her statements. As you state, “Adventists have spent millions of dollars in research to try to prove the infallibility of Ellen White, and still we have not satisfied the critics” (p. 14). I suggest that critics base their judgments on what she said, not what others think she said.

In 1844 didn’t she have a vision about the “midnight cry”? In 1847 in Early Writings, p. 27, she wrote about...
that vision. Midnight cry—wrong; shut door—wrong; open door—wrong; breast plate of Jesus—wrong; investigative judgment—wrong. At that time one was lost or saved; you really didn't know when your name would come up for judgment. ...

Back in the 1940s, what troubled me as a teenager was Turkey, the World War II Dardanelles, the end of time, and that four-headed leopard who could bite you in four different places all at once. I guess the most troubling thing about the Seventh-day Adventist prophet is the amalgamation of man and beast theory "seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals and in certain races of men."

Seven Questions

Editor's Note: When we asked General Conference President Ted Wilson to answer seven questions for Adventist Today, he declined. We printed the questions without his answers (Spring 2011). Consequently, we have received the answers as one of our readers sees it. She is Lucille J. Roos, who writes from Dexter, Oregon.

Ted Wilson should not be offended by my answers for him. I am 88 years old, and my mother, Levona Crutchlow, went to school in Healdsburg, California, with his grandfather, "Nat" Wilson, along with Alonzo Baker (Lonnie).

1. Our readers would like to know the human side of their world leader. What would you like to share about yourself in 200 words?
I am not divine.

2. You are making revival and reformation a hallmark of your administration. Why is this so important?
Revival and reformation are end results. Go to #5.

3. The 1976 Annual Council called for a similar revival and reformation. How does this call build on the previous call?
Let's have no more "retreats" but more "advances." Go to #5.

4. Since the 1976 call did not bring its desired results, what lessons can we learn that will make a difference in this call?
Go to #5.

5. Are there limits to theological diversity in the Adventist Church? If the answer is Yes, how do we determine those limits?
There should be theological diversity allowed or else we are not studying or thinking; however, there are only three non-negotiables. Not 28, only three.

- God is our Creator, Redeemer, and loving, merciful Friend and Father who will save all who trust him.
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to supply evidence of his Father's love and care.
- How we treat each other and those who do not agree with us indicates how well we interpret and understand #1 and #2.

6. Apart from the need for revival and reformation, what other major challenges does the Adventist Church face?
From the General Conference on down, the conferences are top heavy. They have lost touch with reality and the faithful ones out in the boondocks.

Who are the ones doing the revival and reformation? They are the ones in ASI, Patch, 3ABN, LLBN, Pine Knoll with Jonathan Gallagher, and Tropical Health Alliance. Do they lack money? NO. Are they making a difference? They surely are!

7. How do you build consensus among the wide diversity of leaders at the General Conference, Division, Union, and Conference levels?
Limit the number of positions and let each cultural division create their own set of guidelines as to woman preachers or elders.
What is our authority when it comes to matters of theology, faith, spiritual life, and religious law? The classic Adventist answer is the Bible. Ellen White’s writings, the ante-Nicene fathers, science, and grandma’s stories may be interesting, but they are not ultimately authoritative. Our only real authority is the Bible and the Bible only.

That’s what we claim. But is it true? No. Not in practice. Our behavior demonstrates the powerful influence of several authorities. We “know” something in the theological arena from the interplay of the Bible, the church, and human experience. The Bible alone is not sufficient.

The Bible is sufficiently complex that godly, smart people will come to different
conclusions about what it means. The nature of Christ, human nature, the fate of the wicked, Sabbath keeping, soteriology—these are the most religious of subjects. But 2,000 years of Bible study has not brought Christians together. Various churches have decided what the Bible means when it addresses these issues. Members, and especially clergy, of these communities are not free to promulgate their convictions on these topics based on their personal reading of the Bible. Their reading of the Bible is constrained by the authority of the church.

In Adventism, this community restraint is illustrated by our doctrines on the Trinity and eating pork. There is a nearly universal consensus among Christians regarding the plain meaning of Scripture on these two points. Regarding the Trinity, Adventists agree with this consensus. On the matter of eating pork, Adventists disagree with the vast majority of Christian scholars about what the Bible teaches. In each case, of course, we believe our teaching is the plain meaning of the Bible. We regard those who interpret the Bible differently as so benighted or perverse that they must be expelled from preaching and teaching positions in the church.

It does not matter how many texts or how much ancient or contemporary scholarship a theologian adds to support his views. If he teaches non-Trinitarian views of God or advocates eating pork, the Adventist Church will insist he is not reading the Bible correctly. It is impossible for a scholar using any imaginable method of Bible research to change the mind of the church regarding any of our 28 doctrines. On these points we “already know” what the Bible means. So, in practice, the Bible itself is no longer the sole authority or even the supreme authority when it comes to matters addressed in those doctrines.

A further illustration of the authority of the church: there are Adventist doctrines we can find in the Bible only if we are instructed by the church. Out of the billions of people on the planet today, not one single, solitary individual will ever find 1844 in the Bible unless that person is taught by Adventists. In the last 100 years, no Old Testament scholars have seen 1844 in the Bible unless they were influenced by Adventist scholarship. It’s not that 1844 is not in the Bible, but the Bible by itself is hopelessly insufficient to teach people this doctrine. They must be taught by the church. No one today attempting the putative William Miller approach to Bible interpretation—reading without reference to commentaries, attempting to use the Bible as its own interpreter—would ever come up with the full suite of Adventist doctrines.

**Human Experience**
In addition to the Bible text and the interpretive authority of the Church, we are guided toward truth by human experience.

In the early 1900s, Adventists agreed with other Anabaptist groups in disapproving of women dying their hair or wearing makeup. Those items of female vanity were proscribed along with earrings and necklaces. There is no explicit prohibition on wearing jewelry in current Adventist doctrine, and we don’t think twice about hair coloring. What changed? There was no new discovery about the meaning of ancient Greek words. Human experience led to the change. Interaction with cultures outside of North America compelled us to rethink our interpretation of the Bible. That, and realizing that the principles undergirding the original proscriptions against jewelry (e.g., inordinate self-indulgence) spoke more loudly against major donors’ Mercedes than against $5 earrings.

Similarly, it was human experience that drove the church in North America to reinterpret the New Testament passages clearly condemning divorce and remarriage. We didn’t throw our Bibles away. Neither did we find it appropriate to stick with the plain reading of the text (which is reinforced by early Christian literature). Our pastoral concern for real, live people compelled us to make room in the church, and even among our clergy, for people who violated the ideal clearly articulated by Jesus.

Using experience as a basis for church decision-making is affirmed in the Bible itself. In Acts 15, when Peter urges the church to not impose the Mosaic rules on new members of the church, he bases his argument strictly on the long experience of the people of God. In Peter’s argument, experience is given priority over the plain meaning of the Scriptures. Another example of the appeal to experience is the call to test prophets by the fulfillment of their prophecies. Note in this argument that the prophet possesses no authority on the basis of a claimed connection with God. Rather, prophetic authority is determined by the experience of the people. The experience of God’s people could not create the content of the prophet’s message. However, the experience of God’s people could correct or invalidate a message brought by a prophet.

**Science**
Science is a particular type of human experience, or perhaps we could say it is a method for aggregating human experience. Scientific knowledge is not the discovery or possession of an individual. It does not require us to trust the non-reproducible experience of any particular individual. It is communal knowledge.

The notion of science as an authority
The coherence between natural law, moral law, and the character of God has long been a theme in Adventist theology. We believe moral and religious laws promulgated by God are descriptions of how human life works best. So we expect correct interpretation of the Bible to align with the best in human wisdom. Knowledge gathered from Scripture.

Among Adventists, this controversy is concentrated in the area of geochronology: How old are the fossils? How old is the solar system? According to the plain reading of the Bible, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them over the course of six days, 6,000 years ago. According to science, the solar system formed about 4.6 billion years ago, the first fossils about a billion years later.

What to Do?

Exodus 20:11 (NIV) says, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them." The language is crystal clear. During the week of Genesis 1, God made everything—bugs, beasts, birds, sky, sun, the Milky Way, the universe. Everything.

Curiously, during the three Faith and Science Conferences sponsored by the General Conference, every conservative theologian who addressed the issue contradicted the plain meaning of these words. They all insisted the words "the heavens and the earth" did not really mean "the heavens and the earth." God did not create the sun and planets on the fourth day. God did not create the fundamental matter that comprises Earth during creation week. The universe and, more particularly, the bodies of our solar system, including Earth itself, are billions of years old. This departure from the plain meaning of the text was not challenged by either General Conference President Ted Wilson or Biblical Research Institute Director Ángel Manuel Rodríguez. There was every appearance of total unanimity.

Adventist scholars and most administrators re-adjust their understanding of the plain meaning of the words "created the heavens and the earth" to accommodate science. They set aside the plain meaning of Scripture regarding the age of the solar system and accept instead the testimony of experience (i.e., science).

Moving from the Old Testament to the New, Paul wrote that death entered the world through the sin of one man, Adam. In light of these words, Adventist theologians argue that any departure from six days/6,000 years will destroy our doctrine of salvation. However, these theologians do not, in fact, take Paul's words here at face value. Influenced by the experience of feminism, they modernize his words about a man's sin and talk about human sin as the originator of biological death. Of course, this is not what Paul says. Paul blames Eve for being first to sin, but he does not reckon her sin to be serious enough or her status to be exalted enough for her wrongdoing to cause death. It was the male's sin that caused death. Theological assertions about an absolute link between human sin and all biological death require reinterpretation of the plain meaning of Paul's words.

So How Do We Know?
The past offers guidance for the future. Our current doctrines came into being through an interplay of Scripture, the church, and human experience. Going forward, we can be confident a statement is true when it aligns with the testimony of the Bible, the church, and experience. When any one of these sources of information contradicts our statements, the tired old cliché "needs more study" is probably the truth.

The coherence between natural law, moral law, and the character of God has long been a theme in Adventist theology. We believe moral and religious laws promulgated by God are descriptions of how human life works best. So we expect correct interpretation of the Bible to align with the best in human wisdom. Our experience of Sabbath-keeping affirms the wisdom of the commandment. Faithfulness in marriage, carefulness in diet, and abstinence from tobacco are positively correlated with "the good life." Experience, the Bible text, and the authoritative interpretations of the church agree.

Unfortunately for the tranquility of the church, the expected convergence has not happened in geochronology. While the vast majority of Adventists believe the church doctrine of six days/6,000 years, the majority of Adventist scientists, at least in North America, see an unbridgeable contradiction between what we know from Scripture and what we know from nature. The steadily accumulating data in the geological sciences point overwhelmingly to ages for fossils that are congruent with the ages Adventist leaders accept for the solar system.
Response From a Nitpicker

By Richard Coffen

Editor’s note: This response from Richard Coffen, retired Vice President for Editorial at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, is what I was looking for when writing the article “Is Ellen White Really a Lesser Light?” (Summer 2011). He makes some excellent points, and I will revise my article further as a result of his cogent observations.

At the outset, I must emphasize that I find my understanding of Ellen G. White and her function quite in harmony with the overall thrust of Newman’s article. His emphasis agrees with what I understand to be a consensus among Seventh-day Adventist biblical and systematic theologians. Those at the Ellen G. White Estate will have to speak for themselves, but I suspect that their informed insight(s) will also largely conform to the thrust of Newman’s thought. Will the majority of Adventist administrators concur? That remains to be seen. I surely hope that they will.

However, I have some comments that may add to the discussion, for dialogue will surely occur now that Newman’s article circulates in the public arena. It seems to me that by and large the following observations do not weaken, but rather strengthen his perspective.

To summarize my reaction to the article: I suspect Newman has gone “a bridge too far.”

Overstatement

For instance, it seems to me that his overall argument would have been stronger had he not overstated the exactitude of Old Testament predictions. Newman writes: “If what the prophet said did not come true, then he was a false prophet. ... His message was either completely true or else it was false” (p. 15). And Newman uses as an example Micaiah’s prediction to King Ahab.

Newman reports: “An Old Testament prophet would have been stoned to death if he had made ... mistakes. ... The Old Testament is full of prophecies in which the smallest details always came to pass exactly as foretold” (p. 17). Once again he provides examples, such as “dogs eating Jezebel” (p. 17).

According to the scriptural evidence, neither fulfilled predictions nor unfulfilled predictions either vouchsafe or destroy the bona fides of a prophet.

Fulfilled Predictions—“If a prophet arises among you ... and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet” (Deut. 13:1-3, NET).

Unfulfilled Predictions—Newman’s exaggerated assertions set us up for disappointment when we discover that Old Testament prophets didn’t necessarily bat a thousand when it came to predictions.

On one level, this becomes clear when we understand the traditional Adventist view of conditional prophecy, even though some of these conditional predictions were not written with an if-then formula.

On another level, we can point to various unfulfilled predictions proclaimed with great certainty by Old Testament prophets. Contrary to Newman’s asseverations, the recipients appear to have allowed a “fudge factor” for God’s prophets.

Example 1—Jeremiah 34:5 says of King Zedekiah (see verse 2): “You will die a peaceful death. They will burn incense at your burial just as they did at the burial of your ancestors, the former kings who preceded you. They will mourn for you, saying, ‘Poor, poor master!’ Indeed, you

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have my own word on this. I, the Lord, affirm it!” (NET). How and where did Zedekiah die? He died a blind prisoner of war in Babylon. “The Babylonian army chased after the king. They caught up with him in the plains of Jericho, and his entire army deserted him. They captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where he passed sentence on him” (2 Kings 25:5-6, NET). Nebuchadnezzar “had Zedekiah’s eyes put out and had him bound in chains. Then the king of Babylon had him led off to Babylon and he was imprisoned there until the day he died” (Jer. 52:11, NET). Hardly the predicted “peaceful death”!

Example 2—Elijah had predicted of Ahab that “In the spot where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood they will also lick up your blood—yes, yours!” (1 Kings 21:19, NET). That’s a very specific detail. Naboth’s blood was shed in Jezreel, where he had his residence. There, in Jezreel, Elijah predicted that Ahab’s blood would be shed and lapped up. However, according to 1 Kings 22:38, Ahab’s blood was lapped up in Samaria (not Jezreel).

Example 3—God told Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar and his armed forces would succeed in demolishing Tyre. “They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers. I will scrape her against your walls and tear down your towers. . . . He will cover you with the dust of your streets, your trees, and your soil he will throw into the water” (Eze. 26:9-12, NET).

The divinely predicted and detailed destruction never happened. God later admitted such: “King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was rubbed bald and every shoulder rubbed bare; yet he and his army received no wages from Tyre for the work he carried out against it” (Eze. 29:18, NET). So, God said he would give Nebuchadnezzar a consolation prize. “I am about to give the land of Egypt to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. . . . It will be his army’s wages” (Eze. 29:19, NET). (Some biblical scholars question whether or not this new forecast ever met fulfillment.)

Bad Predictions

Ezekiel probably had the worst batting average for predictions of any Old Testament prophet. Read the detailed account of the restored temple that God described to Ezekiel, which was never constructed, divine blueprint or not!

Example 4—“In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage’” (Isa. 19:24-25, RSV). Would anyone have sufficient daring to tell us when that prediction came to pass?

Little wonder that Jerome T. Walsh has written: “Prophecy is not a mechanical process but a living word. Fulfillment need not mesh with prediction like complementary gears: if the central thrust of the prophecy is realized, variations in circumstantial detail are irrelevant.”

Let’s move on. Newman’s wording here and there throughout the article sounds as though he espouses a dictation theory. “Prophecy is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. . . .”

Evidence both biblical and extrabiblical points in the direction that in the ancient Near East, spokespersons could and did choose their own words to express the message of their authority figure (their king, for example), even interpolating their own words into the message that had been entrusted to them.

For this understanding, see “The Rab Ša-qe-h between Rhetoric and Redaction,” by Jerome T. Walsh, Journal of Biblical Literature, Summer 2011. Walsh’s rhetorical analysis leads him to conclude that 2 Kings 18:22b provides not Sennacherib’s words but those of Rab Ša-qe-h (p. 271). Speaking of verse 23a, Walsh claims: “This clause spells out the specifics of a wager that the Rab Ša-qe-h himself—not Sennacherib—has just proposed in v. 23a. . . . It should be construed not as part of Sennacherib’s original message but as part of the Rab Ša-qe-h’s elaboration of that message.
The sentence is best read as an unmarked quotation of an offer authorized by Sennacherib and made in his name, but introduced into the discussion by the Rab Ša-qe-h only as part of his diplomatic negotiations” (ibid.). Walsh calls it “the Rab Ša-qe-h’s elaboration” (pp. 274-275). “In vv. 23-24 the Rab Ša-qe-h makes his own intervention plain” (p. 276).

**What Ellen White Never Claimed**

On another front, Newman’s case would have been even more cogent had he reminded readers that Ellen White at no time and at no place ever claimed to be an inspired commentator who wrote an inspired commentary on Scripture. Those Adventists who refer to her writings as an “inspired commentary” are just plain wrong, ignoring her repeated statements about the role of her writings serving as a lesser light pointing to the greater light, etc. Newman makes her assertions to this effect quite clear. We need to be told again and again that this perspective (that Ellen White never wrote an inspired commentary) grows out of Ellen White’s own explicit asseverations and is not imposed on her by “doubters.”

There’s one small inconsistency I think I noticed, though perhaps I missed something while reading this excellent analytical piece. At one point in the article, Newman defines the term prophet: “The root meaning of prophet is ‘to see, perceive, understand’” (p. 15). He is correct. The prophet’s chief function was to address the people on God’s behalf, having been inspired (commissioned) by his Spirit. Newman words it this way: “Each in some way claimed to be communicating a divine message” (p. 15). However, later in the article he writes that by New Testament times “the meaning of the word prophet had changed ... It had lost its meaning of prediction, foretelling the future” (p. 16). If I read Newman correctly, forecasting the future was not the Old Testament meaning of the word prophet. That being the case, how had that meaning, which the term never had, come to be lost?

Might the discussion about Old Testament Bible writers, New Testament writers, and Ellen G. White be better framed under the rubric of inspiration rather than of titles, such as seer, prophet, apostle, messenger, etc.? Ellen White never claimed the title prophet. We attribute that job description to her. However, if her self-image as a messenger is correct, how does that differentiate her from the Old Testament prophets, whose chief role was to relay divine messages to the people?

Even then, although Adventists by and large do not accept the concept of “degrees of inspiration” (thanks to Ellen White’s opposition to the term), internal evidence from Scripture makes it quite clear that there are varieties of manifestations of the dynamic of inspiration. Some inspired writers, as George Rice has so clearly pointed out, needed no revelation but relied on eyewitness testimony (such as Luke). Expanding on this perspective, we need to recall biblical evidence which reveals that other inspired individuals felt moved to write letters of instruction with both positive and negative admonition (such as Paul). Yet additional inspired writers received direct communication from God—person-to-person, so to speak (such as Moses). Still other inspired persons experienced ecstatic manifestations (such as pre-king Saul). Some inspired individuals had dreams and visions (such as Daniel). Other inspired writers heard “auditions” (such as Isaiah). Some inspired persons appear to have had nightmares (such as Ezekiel). Yet other inspired writers were moved with emotion to write poetry (such as David). And still other recipients of inspiration played—musical instruments (such as the sons of Asaph and Jeduthun).

**Homiletical Ellen White**

Another point may be in order. And it is here where I suspect certain church administrators just might go ballistic, because we have seen that precedent when they dealt with Des Ford. Newman avers that “Ellen White when using Scripture is mostly ‘homiletical’ and ‘evangelistic’”—citing terms used by Robert Olsen. Or as Newman frames it elsewhere in the article: “The prophet’s speaking on behalf of God ‘was for encouragement, exhortation, or reproof, and it was rarely predictive’” (p. 15). I am convinced that both Olsen and Newman are correct in their observations, which is in essence precisely what Ford said when he insisted that Ellen White’s role in the church was “pastoral.” Certain church bureaucrats blew a gasket over Ford’s terminology, accusing him of “not believing in Ellen White”—a ludicrous allegation when it comes to Ford, as anyone who personally knows him will acknowledge! But it is precisely this function that other inspired writers fulfilled—be it seer, prophet, apostle, messenger, or ...

Many thanks to Newman for also underscoring Ellen White’s maturation not only intellectually but also spiritually! The logical conclusion from this data is that she (like the Old Testament and New Testament prophets) could make—and did make—factual errors in (1) grammar, (2) spelling, (3) history, (4) science, (5) exegesis, and (6) theology. (Because of space limitations, I refrain from providing examples of such errors among both biblical writers and Ellen White.)

Newman’s article should become required reading within every echelon of the church—from persons in the pew, to local pastors, to seminarians, to overseers at the White Estate, to administrators throughout the hierarchy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Compared to 21st-century believers, early Christians wrote surprisingly little about homosexuality. While some Christian writers in the first two and a half centuries appear to condemn all forms of homosexual behavior, most commented only on specific aspects of it, such as intercourse with minors. No author of this period singled out homoerotism as an especially repulsive sin, and when mentioned, it was only incidentally when discussing other matters.

Disapproval of homosexual activity—or certain aspects of it—appeared early in the church. In the New Testament, we find 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. Contrary to some misinterpretations, Romans 1:27 does not say that it is a sin, but a punishment for prior misdeeds.

Some church fathers in the second century continued this seemingly negative bent: Aristides of Athens in A.D. 125; the well-traveled Justin Martyr in the City of Rome in mid-century; Athenagoras (also of Athens); Bishop Melito of Sardis in Turkey in the 170s, Bishop Irenaeus in the 180s, and Clement of Alexandria (dean of the world’s foremost Christian educational institution) in the 190s. Another second-century bishop who made passing references against it was Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and, later, teacher of Irenaeus. Polycarp was probably “the angel of the church in Smyrna” addressed in Revelation 2:8. Another book of revelations, those of the Apostle Peter, was of like mind in the first half of the century. The recently discovered Gospel of Judas (also second-century) condemns it, inferring that it was a corruption newly introduced into Christianity by mainstream believers (i.e., not Gnostics).

Transitioning into the early third century was Tertullian, a converted ex-lawyer who became a clergyman in Tunisia and was the founder of Latin Christian literature. Always a rigorist, he was more prepared to condemn debatable practices as sin than were other writers before the middle of the century.

The present study concludes at A.D. 249-251, a time of severe persecution, mass apostasy, and upheaval in the church. It approximately coincides with the death of Origen, who had succeeded Clement as dean, and later became the leading Bible scholar, teacher, and preacher of his own day and for centuries afterward.

These were all voluminous authors who touched on homoeroticism only a few times amid a huge mass of material on other activities.

**Pederasty**

The most commonly mentioned aspect of same-sex gratification was intercourse with young boys. Pederasty was considered sinful by some church fathers, who wrote nothing against relations between adult males. Among them were a bishop of Antioch (Syria) in the mid-second century and a friend and financial backer of Origen. Four comprehensive collections of Christian ethics and life were produced before A.D. 230, none of which forbids homosexuality. One prohibits oral sex, but only by a woman on a man.

Depending on how broadly or narrowly their wording is interpreted, some ancient believers may have censured only particular types of homosexual acts while allowing others. Polycarp, the Revelation of Peter, Irenaeus, and Origen prohibited “men abusing themselves with men” and “men defiling each other.” The question arises whether homosexual acts in themselves are abusive and defiling or whether God forbids only those homoerotic positions that abuse or defile due to other factors. After all, heterosexual relations may or may not be abusive or defiling, even between spouses. By being specific, did these early Christians suggest that some kinds of same-sex relations could be loving and enriching, and therefore permitted to Christians?

Some of the above-mentioned authors quoted Leviticus 18:22 to the effect that males are forbidden “to lie with a man as with a woman.” Although some homoerotic acts are imitations of...
heterosexual ones, others are anatomically possible only between males. A conservative interpretation of Leviticus and these church fathers would forbid only the simulations of regular sex but permit uniquely male-male positions. Those magazines at the drugstore indicate that gays use a wide variety of techniques and do not lack imagination.

In addition to how restrictive an interpretation is to be given to “men lying with men as with a woman,” there is the issue of whether this prohibition is binding in our day. It would not apply if its sinful nature were rooted in social/cultural factors rather than eternal anatomical differences. In the world of the Bible and the early Church, women occupied a position subordinate to males, with a status little different from slaves or animals. Thus, treating a man sexually as if he were a woman may have been forbidden only because it meant subjecting him to an inferior status, thus abusing and defiling him psychologically and socially in that culture. If so, the ban was not aimed at same-gender sensual gratification as an evil in itself and thus because too frequent indulgence weakens the rectal muscles and creates problems in defecation. The rarity with which it was discountenanced may indicate that some New Testament and other early Christian authors meant only sodomy when condemning homosexual activity.

Questions

The foregoing study raises a number of questions. Are all homosexual relationships abusive and defiling in themselves, or are they permissible when these elements are absent? Are all varieties of homoerotic acts a sin, or only those positions in which a participant is demeaned or degraded by the standards of his own culture, or are imitations of heterosexual positions? At what age does a boy become a man, thus rendering intercourse no longer pederasty?

The foregoing presentation partly distorts the focus and preoccupations of early Christians in two respects. First, homoeroticism was touched upon by less than 7 percent of the 500-plus extant Christian writings of the period. Ninety-three percent did not mention homosexuality. Still less did single it out for special condemnation but regarded it as one sin among many—no better, no worse. As in Origen’s opposition to “the lovers of money, and the lovers of ambition, and the lovers of boys,” the ancient Christian writers always mentioned it in company with other offenses, never alone. All of the citations against homosexuality in this article appeared only in lists or general discussions—one passing mention amid a host of other material. No author in the first three centuries devoted a chapter, let alone a book, to the phenomenon. Most references consist of only one or a few words. Unlike some in the 21st century, early Christians did not treat it as the greatest sin or as especially important.

Secondly, early Christian writers condemned gluttony, greed, and untruthfulness at significantly greater length and with much more frequency than homosexuality. Individual authors and the consensus of Christians before A.D. 251 regarded these offenses as more deserving of condemnation than what a minority do in their bedrooms. This may help account for the absence of adult homoerotism in ancient Christian moral codes. Selfishness, gossip, and lying appear to have been much more common and to have warranted more frequent condemnation in Christian antiquity than homosexuality.

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1 Apology 8, 9, 13, and 17.
2 1 Apology 27; 2 Apology 12.
3 Legatio 34.
4 On Pascha 53.
5 Against Heresies 4.27.4 and 5.11.1.
6 Paedagogus 2.1, 2.10.
7 Letter to the Philippians 5.3.
8 Revelation of Peter 32.
9 Gospel of Judas 38, 40.
10 Apocleticum 46; Against Marcion 1.29.4; De Corona 6; On Modesty 16.
11 Commentary on Matthew 14.10; Commentary on Romans 4.4.8, 9.28.2; Dialogue with Hilarides and other Bishops 10.9; Homilies on Jeremiah 12.11.1; Homilies on Leviticus 4.4.4, 14.2.4; Letter to Friends in Alexandria.
12 Theophilus To Autolycus 2.1.
13 Ambrose the Deacon, Hypomnemata.
14 Letter of Barnabas, Didache, Didascalia, Sentences of Sextus.
15 Letter of Barnabas 10.8.
16 2 Apology 12.5.
17 Commentary on Matthew 10.24.
As someone who grew up in and around church, it is something I have heard many times. And anyone who has spent time around camp meetings, evangelistic series, and other regular preaching could hardly have missed the “personalized version” of John 3:16. Usually leading up to or as part of an emotional appeal to “accept Jesus as your personal Savior,” it goes something like this: “For God so loved [insert your name here] that he gave his one and only Son, that [if insert your name here] believes in him, [insert your name here] shall not perish but have eternal life.”

For all of the wonderful complexity we find in the Bible’s story of God, the heart of the gospel can be summarized in a single sentence that even a child can memorize and begin to understand. And this personalized version is a valuable way of emphasizing the personal love of God for each of us and the choice each of us has to make to accept God’s gift offered through Jesus. As such, this adaptation of the well-loved Bible verse portrays an awe-inspiring and life-changing truth. We need to know that both sin and salvation are realities we need to take personally—and seriously.

**The Creator DIED**

*By Nathan Brown*

For God so loved the world..." and the word is kosmos, meaning “the world as a created, organized entity." That “John 3:16 is about me” is an important starting point; that the plan of salvation so neatly summarized in this verse has implications for the whole of creation is something we need to spend more time exploring.

Of course, this is not about mounting an argument for universalism—that everyone will be “saved” regardless of their choices for or against God and his plan. Instead, the focus is on God’s love that reaches out to all and on his purpose of working through those who choose to cooperate with him to redeem and ultimately re-create the whole creation. It is a broader understanding of salvation, stepping away from the temptation to self-centeredness that sometimes mars the understanding of salvation that so easily arises in our individualistic Western way of thinking.

Yes, salvation is about me and my saving relationship with God—but it is not merely about me. Theologian N.T. Wright puts it like this: “Justification is not just about ‘how I get my sins forgiven.’ It is about how God creates, in the Messiah Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, a single family, celebrating their once-for-all forgiveness and their assured ‘no condemnation’ in Christ, through whom his purpose can now be extended into the wider world.”

We can, perhaps, readily accept that God loves people other than just ourselves. He loves those we love, and we can rejoice in that. In addition, he loves those we reach out to, and our recognition of this is often our motivation for reaching out in the ways we do. But he also loves those we are afraid of, that we don’t know how to show and share God’s love to. God loves people—all people, everywhere, all the time. God’s favor is not limited to our favor.

**Creating the World**

Creation is one way we see this demonstrated. The Bible consistently points to the world around us as evidence of God’s goodness. Paul urges that all people have an opportunity to encounter God through his creation: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Jesus also referred to the natural world and the created order as evidence of God’s love and a means by which all people are recipients of divine grace: “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). As well as all of the goodness of the natural world, life itself is a gift from God and, regardless of the individual’s response or attitude to God, every person is a recipient of that grace.

But even this reading does not do justice to the breadth of John 3:16’s “for God so loved the world...” If this summary of God’s love and his offer of salvation were limited to all of the people in the world, we would need to go back and perhaps rewrite the Creation account in Genesis 1. If this were God’s sole focus, the Creation poem would be much shorter. Rather than carefully describing God’s specific acts of creation on each of the days, the whole story could be neatly summarized by something like: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and then said, ‘Let us make man in our image...’ ”

If God were interested only in “saving souls,” nothing
important happens in Genesis 1 until verse 26. Instead, six times in the six recorded days before there is even mention of human beings, we read “and God saw that it was good” (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The refrain is repeated on day six right before the creation of Adam. It becomes obvious that, as well as providing a home for the first people, God takes pleasure in each step and in each part of Creation. He even specifically blesses the living creatures he has made (see Gen. 1:22) before he blesses either humanity or the Sabbath.

Human beings do have a special place in Creation, and more attention is given to their creation in Genesis 1 and 2 than to the rest of the story. But it is interesting to note that the first “definition” of what it means to be human includes being created in the image of God and situated in relationship to Creation (see Gen. 1:26). Creation is important to who we are as human beings in relation to God and, while humans are an intrinsic part of Creation, it is clear that God has a special regard and concern for the rest of the created order.

Praising and Groaning

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, all of creation was affected. The reality of sin changed the relationships between God and humanity, between humanity and nature and, it seems, between God and all of his creation (see Genesis 3). God is still the Creator, and he still orders and sustains all life. But perhaps in ways analogous to the change in the relationship between God and his people, God’s relationship to his creation is rendered less direct and more difficult.

Not that there aren’t still glimpses of God in the created world. As noted above, God still speaks and works in and through the natural world. And somehow, the creation and the creatures themselves have voices that offer praise to God and echo the relationship for which they were created: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds ... .” Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens” (Psa. 148:7-10, 13).

But even in this ordered praise, the tones are muted, the celebration is incomplete, and the brokenness is evident. The praise is mingled with groans (see Rom. 8:22). Life is punctuated by death. Creation is beset by decay—and somehow yearns for re-creation: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-21).

In a sense, the dislocation of creation because of human sin was most visibly demonstrated at the crucifixion. C.S. Lewis described the resurrection as the “great miracle” that introduced a entirely different kind of possibility into the world, but the death of the world’s Creator within the confines and limitations of that world must be no less a magnitude of “anti-miracle.” It is little wonder that nature turned away and violently revolted at this darkest moment in human history (see Matt. 27:45-51).

But perhaps the natural world could not then understand that even in this darkest of moments, the Creator was working to re-create—that even a Creator’s death is an act of Creation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ... .”

Agents of Re-Creation

Contrary to what has been assumed throughout much of Christian history and theology, the Bible is clear that the ultimate purpose of salvation is re-creation. God’s plan is for the world to be restored to its original goodness. As such, we are called not only to accept his offer of salvation but also to be participants in and agents of that salvation in our world today, in anticipation of the complete re-creation promised by God (see Rev. 21:1-5).

This has significant implications for how we understand our role in God’s salvation and our relationship to the created world in which we have been created and re-created: “We are not saved from the world of creation, but saved for the world of creation (Rom. 8:18-26). Humans were made to take care of God’s wonderful world, and it is not too strong to say that the reason God saves humans is not simply that he loves them for themselves but that he loves them for what they truly are—his pro-creators, his stewards, his vice-regents over creation.”

Because God so loved us, we are called to love what he loves. Because “God so loved the world”— as a created, organized entity—so must we. Because we have accepted God’s gift of salvation, we seek that same salvation and re-creation for our fellow human beings, our fellow creatures, and the whole created world. And in a specific and special way, we are now God’s agents for serving, preserving, helping, and healing in our world—and to all of creation.

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*All Bible quotations are from the New International Version.

3 ibid, p. 234.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not now—and, after the initial generation, never was—a monolithic religious body. People with Adventist church membership status are diverse in languages, socio-economic status, racial identity, and even in religious beliefs. Some variety in beliefs can be explained by social customs of the various societies represented within the membership, and some by the seriousness of devotion to spiritual living, but even after those factors are taken into account, there is a diversity of religious beliefs among us—even in North America.

What shall we make of this observation? One response is to deny and argue against the observation, but the evidence is all around us and has been there for generations. Another response is to be energized to correct this unfortunate reality. In this response, the Adventist subgroups in political ascendancy promote their values and priorities and hope that the rest of us catch the vision—or, more accurately, their vision—of Adventism. Surely this would lead to a finishing of the work (i.e., the Adventist Church fulfills its triumphant mission), because the membership finally would be doing it the way it was supposed to be done.

We should not be surprised if at various times in our history there have been manifestations of political purges to purify the leadership of the Adventist Church in order to further these goals. Then, when another subgroup gets their chance for visibility, they go on their own campaign to fulfill their vision of the church. I have wished I could be in charge for the next cycle, because then I know the church would be what it was called to be. If I just could shape its destiny; if only I could be king!

**Measuring Adventist Diversity**

Obviously, this response is ineffective, too. We may have learned by now that diversity is often a very positive element in a social group. In this view, diversity is not a liability, but an asset. This concept of diversity as a positive attribute is difficult to accept if one has a monolithic view of Adventism, in which all true Adventists are “like me.” It is time that a new test of what constitutes a true Adventist is developed, and it needs to be more gracious than the conclusion that a true Adventist is “like me.” True Adventists could...
have differing beliefs, and real Adventists could populate both sides of some dividing difference. Uniformity in adherence and devotion to a particular set of detailed religious beliefs, sometimes known as disputable issues, is not explicitly required or expected in the Gospels or by Christ in his teachings in order for converts to be considered legitimate. This is a good thing, because such uniformity is not realistic for any group of adherents, especially as the group being examined grows from tens to thousands and as the time frame moves from years to centuries.

In the accompanying table, I have carved out characteristic tendencies of some of the subgroups within Adventism in the United States. The labels for the categories are inherently subjective and are not intended to be offensive; identities for individual readers will probably not line up in one single column. I have not worked to make the table unassailably accurate; my intention is to illustrate the diversity of religiously informed priorities and values among us. Most of the dimensions below are best considered as disputable beliefs, and we do often dispute them among ourselves! See Chart, page 18.

In spite of the typecasting of various subgroups of Adventists in the accompanying table, the categorizing I have done is not urged upon anyone as a precise description. I am confident that many readers could revise the table above to make it more accurate from their perspective, but that is not my point.

The totality of the range of beliefs, values, and priorities indicated above illustrates my point: the Adventist Church is not a monolithic, homogeneous organization, but rather a diverse people, even in many aspects of their belief systems. The individuals within each of the above groups would identify themselves as true Adventists, living with strong convictions about spiritual issues, even though some may have grave doubts about the authenticity of other people with differing values within the Adventist spectrum.

**New Criteria**

Again, I ask, what shall we make of this observation of diversity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions (arrayed from political left to political right)</th>
<th>Progressive Adventism</th>
<th>Evangelical Adventism</th>
<th>Conservative Adventism</th>
<th>Historic Adventism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secular Politics</strong></td>
<td>Democrat or Independent</td>
<td>Republican, Democrat, or Independent</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>ignores politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popular Culture</strong></td>
<td>values popular culture, observes spiritual themes embedded in it</td>
<td>values popular culture</td>
<td>has awareness of popular culture</td>
<td>ignores and avoids popular culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Education</strong></td>
<td>college, graduate school</td>
<td>college, graduate school</td>
<td>secondary, college</td>
<td>secondary, college, or homeschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food Preferences</strong></td>
<td>vegan or vegetarian, clean and unclean meats</td>
<td>vegan or vegetarian, clean meats</td>
<td>vegan or vegetarian</td>
<td>vegan or vegetarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secular Reading Material</strong></td>
<td>fiction and non-fiction, local and national news, scholarly journals, websites</td>
<td>fiction and non-fiction, local and national news, websites</td>
<td>primarily non-fiction, national news, websites</td>
<td>non-fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Reading Material</strong></td>
<td>variety of Bible translations, Adventist and non-Adventist materials</td>
<td>variety of Bible translations, some Ellen White, Adventist and non-Adventist materials</td>
<td>KJV and NIV Bibles, Ellen White, official Adventist materials</td>
<td>KJV Bible, Ellen White, independent conservative Adventist materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Music Preferences</strong></td>
<td>contemporary Christian, hymns</td>
<td>contemporary Christian, hymns</td>
<td>hymns</td>
<td>hymns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Views of Ellen White</strong></td>
<td>denies prophetic authority</td>
<td>perhaps prophetic authority similar to non-canonical Bible-era prophets</td>
<td>prophet of similar importance as Bible minor prophets</td>
<td>full prophet of similar importance as Bible major prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creation</strong></td>
<td>regards Genesis account as a figurative narrative conveying spiritual truth</td>
<td>interest in literal six-day Genesis account, open to figurative interpretations</td>
<td>full acceptance of literal six-day Genesis account</td>
<td>full acceptance of literal six-day Genesis account as a testing belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How We Are Saved</strong></td>
<td>there may be multiple paths to heaven</td>
<td>by grace alone</td>
<td>by a faith that works</td>
<td>by a faith that works toward moral perfection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perfectionism</strong></td>
<td>rejects goal of moral perfection</td>
<td>possible only through substitution of Christ’s perfection</td>
<td>possible in this life through God’s power</td>
<td>possible and necessary in this life through God’s power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Views of Remnant Status of SDA Church</strong></td>
<td>rejects talk of remnant status, interested in interfaith dialogue</td>
<td>avoids talk of remnant status, views remnant across all faith traditions</td>
<td>accepts corporate SDA Church as remnant</td>
<td>accepts corporate SDA Church identity and personal identity as remnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Religious Priorities</strong></td>
<td>transformation in Christ, social justice</td>
<td>salvation in Christ</td>
<td>doctrinal fidelity</td>
<td>doctrinal purity, triumph of the SDA Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of beliefs? My recommendation is that we consider new criteria to be applied in identifying whether or not we are true Adventists. Persons wondering if they truly belong to a religious fellowship like the Adventist Church should ask themselves:

- Do I want to belong to this group?
- Are my beliefs and values (essential, core beliefs are the criterion beliefs in this assessment) compatible enough with the group’s beliefs and values for me to be comfortable here?
- Will my association with this group be helpful to me spiritually? Am I open to learning from the group?
- Will I belong and be accepted socially?
- Am I willing not to actively work against the core teachings and values of the group or otherwise seek to disrupt the ministries of the group?
- Am I willing not to be monomaniacal about my personal favorite theological idea or disputable issue, in which every discussion ends up somehow being about my favorite idea?
- Am I willing to support at least some of the ministries of the group with my time, talents, and financial contributions?

If yes can be answered to all of the above questions, then the person should be a good enough fit to continue belonging to the group, and the group should accept the individual as a true member. By this criterion, the four categories of historic, conservative, evangelical, and progressive Adventists could all be legitimate Adventists—and should regard members of the other groups as real Adventists, even if they are not “like me.”

There is yet another group of Adventists among us, a fifth group not included in the table above. This group we could call “cultural” Adventists, whose fellowship among us is driven less by spiritual convictions than by routines and social connections with family and friends within the church. They value these connections enough to be in fellowship, but for a variety of reasons they do not have strong convictions about the doctrines of the SDA Church. They probably could answer yes to all of the above fellowship criteria questions, but they may not have thoroughly examined their own beliefs and values. Some cultural believers develop into very convicted believers over time, so let’s keep them coming to church!

At initial admittance to membership, the Adventist Church has a valid interest in checking the new member’s agreement with a set of fundamental beliefs before admission to the church; at a later time, the above criteria could apply. However, I hasten to distinguish that being accepted by God as a true believer at the point of soul conversion and being accepted by the SDA Church as an initial full member are different events in time.

Within Adventist history and its view of the future informed by Ellen White’s writings, there is an expectation that believers will be “shaken out” at some point. With the frequently uncivil dialogue between various subgroups of Adventists, it is easy to imagine adherents at either extreme of the spectrum leaving the official church fellowship out of disgust. Is this a shaking? If so, we are losing people from both the historic Adventist and progressive Adventist wings of the church; the apparent shaking phenomenon is an equal-opportunity offender as those with more extreme positions give up on the church conforming to their ideals. I also fear that we are sometimes losing people at the center out of disillusionment with the internecine feuding and weariness with the essentially political arguments among us.

**Diversity As Strength**

If we regard diversity as a strength, then when we lose adherents to the spectrum of SDA beliefs, we lose valuable assets. This diversity has the potential to correct or at least hold in check our worst tendencies as a group, and we genuinely need this virtue as one of the ways divinely intended for believers in fellowship to stay organizationally healthy and true to mission, a view supported by Ellen White. The Adventist Church is stronger when it includes diversity of beliefs, and we should challenge those who would say “good riddance” to departing members who are different from us. From this perspective, none of us has the place to say, “Love it or leave it.” We should be saying, “Love it and help it be better” by staying connected, staying in dialogue, and respecting the legitimacy of other positions even if they are different from our own. We can agree to disagree, we can respect the legitimacy of adherents with different positions than our own, and we can work together with a spirit of brotherly love.

We need a spectrum of beliefs within Adventism, painful though it may be to some of us. This diversity of beliefs is normal and ultimately good for the functioning of any church, if the leadership can “keep it together.” We need leaders who can guide our dialogue in the model of the spirited conversations among passionate family members, who disagree but still love one another and who regard the disputing family members as real family. Where this has happened, it has been a powerful witness to the grace of God in the lives of believers, a grace that brings a unity of purpose rather than a uniformity of disputable beliefs.

For many generations, the Adventist Church has been diverse in its members’ religious beliefs. This diversity, in itself, is not a problem to serving God faithfully as an organization. However, the manner in which we have handled these differences during some eras has been a problem in our church, and it has led to internal strife and power struggles that were essentially a form of political conflict. It is time that we accept the diversity within Adventism as a given, as a potential strength, and learn to respect those members who choose to stay in fellowship, even though they may not be “like me.” Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church there is a variety of thought about disputable beliefs, yet we should seek to regard each other as legitimate Adventists. Diversity of beliefs can be an asset, and this diversity can be under the tent—or at least the guy wires—of Adventism.

Dr. Rob Erwin is an elder in his local Adventist church and is on the faculty of Niagara University in Lewiston, New York.
By Eric Webster

I respectfully wish to hold the General Conference president accountable for his attitude toward Fundamental Belief No. 12. I believe that some of his utterances in his sermon on August 6, 2011, at the ASI convention are at variance with the intent and character of this Fundamental Belief.

Of course, “holding one another accountable” might not be the most Christian thing to do. It often elicits the fruits of the flesh, such as suspicion and a judgmental spirit. But the campaign to “hold one another accountable” was launched by Elder Ted Wilson in his inaugural address at the General Conference Session held in Atlanta in 2010. And so this is a child of his own making, and until the Lord shows us a better way, we will have to live with it.

While Elder Wilson was no doubt sincere in his attempt to hold the church on course as far as Creation and music and other issues are concerned, the invitation to “hold one another accountable” has extended the opportunity for anyone in the church to sow suspicion toward any other member or leader whose views of truth might seem to differ from his or her own. This often leads to a spirit of suspicion and division.

If the church carries on in this spirit, we might soon have to change Christ’s identification of his true followers. He said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another” (John 13:35). We might be forced to adapt this to read, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you hold one another accountable to truth.

In this regard I am reminded of the following comment by Ellen White: “Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world.”

We certainly should pray that none of us will fall into this category of believers by our unChristlike attitudes.

A Faulty Definition of the Church

Returning to my contention that Elder Wilson’s suggestion made on August 6 is at variance with Fundamental Belief No. 12, let us return to his sermon. Toward the end of his message, he outlined several important items that he believed would help the Seventh-day Adventist Church to remain strong. The final one was to the effect that we should not invite non-SDA scholars and ministers to be the main speakers at our churches, conventions, retreats, or institutions. The heart and intent of this suggestion from the top runs counter to the core meaning of Fundamental Belief No. 12.

Look at No. 12 and No. 13 of our Fundamental Beliefs.2 No. 12 deals with the whole, invisible church of Jesus Christ, his body and bride, while No. 13 focuses on the Remnant movement, or as L.E. Froom wrote, the “Movement of Destiny.” Take a few moments to carefully and prayerfully read these two statements and you will see that No. 12 encompasses far more than the Adventist Church.

Fundamental Belief No. 12 states in
part: “The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. … we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. … The church is God’s family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish.”

Some, on cursory reading, might think that this is referring only to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is not. Fundamental Belief No. 13 indicates that we have just spoken of the “universal church” in No. 12, and now we focus on the Remnant movement. No. 13 starts by stating, “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ”—the substance of what has been enunciated in Fundamental Belief No. 12.

**Attitude Toward Non-Adventists**

If non-Adventist ministers or scholars ask us what our attitude is toward them, we would quote Fundamental Belief No. 12 unashamedly. They would understand that we accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ living up to the Christian light they have, as we are endeavoring to do. We do not judge them by declaring that they are not members of Christ’s universal body.

Our practice at communion services corroborates our understanding of Fundamental Belief No. 12. We often announce that we believe in open communion and that any non-Adventist Christians present may feel free to participate with us in the Lord’s Supper. This is a supreme acknowledgment that these individuals are accepted to participate in one of the most intimate and significant symbols of the church. We do not stop to first inquire if these worshippers observe Sabbath or Sunday, or how they view the immortality of the soul. We do not even ask them to first outline their health or dietary practices. We simply accept them in good faith as part of the body of Christ and worthy to partake of his body and blood.

Imagine if we were asked to make a statement in *Christianity Today* on our attitude toward other Christians and we presented three statements. These would be printed together for the Christian world to study. The first statement would be Fundamental Belief No. 12, the second would be an outline of our practice and belief regarding fellow Christians at our communion services, and the third would be a statement from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists discouraging our churches, conferences, and institutions from allowing non-Adventists to speak at our gatherings. Would they not be puzzled and perplexed? Would they not find the third statement out of harmony with the first two?

Not that I am calling for indiscriminate use of non-Adventists in our churches and institutions. But this would be better served by local decisions than by a blanket decision from the top.

I wonder if Elder Wilson has had any close and intimate relationship with ministers of other churches? Has he had an opportunity to belong to a ministerial association and to fellowship and pray with these ministers?

**Association With Non-Adventists**

My own association with ministers of other churches has been a blessing to me. I have been a member of the local Bible Society for years, and I have experienced the sincerity of many of these men and women who devote themselves to God’s work. Our churches have been blessed by some of these representatives, who have preached in our churches and promoted the Word of God.

For many years I have also belonged to a Ministers’ Fraternal while pastoring a church. I observed the members’ dedication and their love for Christ. When I first entered the association, a Baptist minister welcomed me with the words, “We will help you get straight on the Sabbath question.” I did not reply, and we never debated the question. As the months and years went by, that same minister softened toward me and even wished me a happy Sabbath one Friday afternoon when I phoned him.

As editor of the *Signs of the Times*, I began giving the magazine to these ministers. Even when I stopped attending the Fraternal, I kept on mailing the *Signs of the Times* to several of the ministers. I have been doing that now for well over 15 years. That same Baptist minister now tells me that he has the *Signs* next to his bed and reads the magazine before going to sleep. He reads it from cover to cover. He also places the magazine in the foyer of his large church so that his members can be exposed.

For a number of years, our little church company met in the Methodist church hall. The minister of that church also was a member of the Ministers’ Fraternal. I established a relationship with him. Once I had the opportunity of arranging for one of our visiting General Conference ministers to take the Sunday evening service in his Methodist church.
It was a blessing to all.

The time came when he and his family moved to another congregation in another part of the country. Just before he left, I invited him to take the service for us one Sabbath morning in his own church hall. It was a real blessing to all of us. I also presented him with a gift of one of our special Adventist books. I am still to this day mailing this man *Signs of the Times* and *Ministry* magazines.

**Will We Interact or Isolate?**
The choice is ours. We can either decide to isolate ourselves and cut ourselves off from other Christians, or we can interact for the sake of the gospel of Christ and the message of grace and truth for these last days.

If a local church or Adventist college or university decides to invite Philip Yancey to address them, it is their privilege, and this cannot be denied by the personal suggestion of even the General Conference president. We should be careful of “kingly power,” of which Ellen White herself warned back in 1915.3

Elder Wilson’s comments on non-Adventist speakers goes a step further. During his inaugural address in Atlanta, he counseled our ministers to find their spiritual light and guidance from Adventist sources such as the Biblical Research Institute and to limit their exposure to non-Adventist literature. It seems to make sense that if our members and ministers should not hear an occasional message in word from these speakers, it would be far better never to read their books. The reading of non-Adventist writers would carry much more influence than the 45-minute oral message of these “apostates.”

Exposure to the written word is far more influential than exposure to the oral word. Are we really discouraging our men and women from reading literature from non-Adventist writers? Where would we have been if L.E. Froom had not exposed himself to a mass of non-Adventist thinking as he composed his monumental series, *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* and *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers*? His work on conditionalism influenced even men like the late John Wenham and John Stott!

How about the exemplary reading pattern of HMS Richards, Sr., who exposed himself to a massive array of authors in his study? He remains one of the most powerful and significant preachers in the Advent movement. And what about the current preaching of Dwight Nelson of Pioneer Memorial, who appears to be reading a different book every second week? He is certainly exposing himself to a mass of non-Adventist Christian thinking. He is currently one of the most potent preachers of the Advent movement.

Should Clifford Goldstein be encouraged to cut out his wide reading of philosophical works? And what about the example of Ellen White herself? The list of books she owned in her personal library reveals some 1,500 volumes.4 She exposed her mind to the thinking of many of these authors. She even found it in order to use many of these non-Adventist authors as sources for her writings.

If Elder Wilson is serious about limiting exposure of non-Adventist thinking in oral and written form, does he propose closing down our Theological Seminary at Andrews and also all of our universities? It is really impossible to run these institutions in an acceptable manner if confined only to Adventist literature. And what about *Ministry* magazine, which regularly publishes non-Adventist authors?

While I am sure that Elder Ted Wilson is sincere in his desire to keep the Adventist Church on course, I would sincerely appeal that he be guarded in expressing his personal convictions regarding our relationships with other fellow Christians. In his concentration on revival and reformation, I would suggest that there is room for us to reform in our attitude toward other Christians who might not appear to be of this fold. Jesus Christ had quite a bit to say about this.

May we all prayerfully and discreetly bring our attitude toward other Christians into harmony with Fundamental Belief No. 12 and with our practice of the Lord’s Supper.

*Eric Webster is an 83-year-old Adventist pastor who, with his wife, Ruth, has edited the Southern-African edition of *Signs of the Times* as a self-supporting ministry for 21 years.*

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1 *The Desire of Ages,* p. 310.
2 See http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html
3 See *Life Sketches,* p. 386.
4 Email from Cindy Tutsch, associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, Aug. 25, 2011.
How to Manage If the Church Splits

BY JIM BRAUER

I have heard more and more friends wondering aloud, “What is going to happen to the Adventist Church?” It appears to be heading toward a split. It reminds me of way too many marital fights that ended up in divorce. Sometimes the couple focuses on all of the little reasons why they can’t stand each other, rather than focusing on the important reasons why they got married in the first place.

The greatest tragedy in any disagreement is to fail to be Christian, kind, civil—and maybe even loving—in our deportment, discussion, and dialogue even as we disagree on fundamental issues.

Fundamental Values
In this time of conflict and polarization, I would like to propose some fundamental values that I believe are crucial and very important to remember.

It is not about: money (tithe), turf, or power.
It is about: the picture of God and being faithful to Scripture alone.

It is not about: fighting over policy, politics, and keeping my retirement.
It is about: being willing to stand up and be counted for the correct grace-filled picture of God.

It is not about: my behavior and keeping track of others’ behavior.
It is about: continuing to be filled with grace, even as others attempt to malign, impugn, or assign motives. God bless them!

It is not about: me, my righteousness, or Jesus changing me in order for the Holy Spirit to be poured out.
It is about: thanking God for already having poured out his Spirit (Ephesians 2) and for giving us access to the throne of God and bestowing gifts on his children (Ephesians 4).

It is not about: begging and pleading for God to give something he already has given!
It is about: allowing and empowering the local church to contextualize the gospel message so that the local church becomes a church of significance—salt in the world that has lost its interest.

It is not about: repeating all of the latest stories of brothers and sisters who may be attacking us or what is important to us.
It is about: sticking to the mission of caring about others and slowly earning the right to speak truth into a postmodern secular society.

It is not about: attempting to tear down the organization.
It is about: attempting to dialogue together and see if there might be room to endorse a grace-based brand of Adventism and allow it to function side-by-side with the conservative brand, without attacking or interfering with each other.

It is not about: suggesting which brand is the correct brand, but rather recognizing that, just as in 1888, maybe the church needs to wake up and decide to finally choose Jesus alone!

It is about: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! Plus nothing!
It is not about: me, my behavior, my sins.
It is about: understanding all that God has already provided in Christ alone, and choosing to die daily and follow him as Lord, Master, Guide, and Friend.

It is not about: my righteousness—never had any, never will.
It is all about: Christ’s righteousness. His is the only kind. He covers me.

It is not about: cheap grace, doing whatever I want, a license to sin.

It is about: the joy and freedom of following Christ, recognizing that he thinks I am perfect even though each day, as I draw closer, I see myself as more of a sinner.

It is not about: throwing out the wonderful gift God gave this church in Ellen White.
It is about: recognizing her role as the lesser light pointing to Scripture alone. Her words are counsel, and we allow the Holy Spirit to convict and apply the lessons and principles as he sees fit.

It is not about: lobbing “Ellen G. White hand grenades” and hoping they’ll blow up in our friends’ laps so they will know that they are wrong, and in their dying breath will admit we are right.
It is about: knowing Jesus, who is the truth, the life, and the way.

It is not about: having the truth, or trying to prove who has the truth.
It is about: following the Lamb wherever he goes; welcoming other disciples; listening, praying, and following him together.

It is not about: declaring ourselves to be God’s favorite, his remnant, his only people.
It is about: JESUS!

Jim Brauer is the Southern Asia-Pacific Division Adventist Missions director and project consultant.
Conditional Prophecy and Last-Day Events

By Alden Thompson

This article is supposed to be about “conditional prophecy.” But it’s such a scary topic that we will ease into it with a much-too-long preamble.

All-or-Nothing Thinking

“Conditional prophecy” is a scary topic because it so easily slips into a kind of all-or-nothing thinking that is even scarier, allowing small things to put big things at risk. Some, for example, link the idea of a universal Sunday law so closely to the seventh-day Sabbath that the Sabbath seems to waver if a Sunday law isn’t looming on the horizon.

The fear of collapse is a very real feeling. But when we measure it against Scripture, it doesn’t make sense. Furthermore, it’s not biblical. A Sunday Scripture, it doesn’t make sense.

Let’s simply look up the references for Sabbath in a good concordance.

The Bible begins by affirming the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation, and the fourth command in Exodus 20 confirms that view. But there’s more. With no mention of Creation, Deuteronomy 5 affirms the Sabbath as a memorial of redemption, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. But whether it’s a Creation Sabbath or a redemption Sabbath, it’s still the same Sabbath, and it’s rock solid.

The New Testament is equally clear, pressing the question of how to keep the Sabbath but never quarreling over the fact of the Sabbath. And here Jesus’ teachings and actions are a remarkable echo of Isaiah 58, the “fast” that loosens the bonds and lets the oppressed go free. The Gospels record five healing miracles that Jesus deliberately performed on the Sabbath: a withered hand, a stooped back, dropsy, the paralytic of 38 years at the pool, and a man born blind. We have much to learn from that cluster of miracles.

An Illustration From Adventist History

Before turning to conditional prophecy, let’s consider an illustration of the all-or-nothing danger from the perspective of an earlier crisis in Adventism, the debate over righteousness by faith at the 1888 General Conference.

At one point, the larger issue was being debated under cover of a more focused issue, the interpretation of law as “schoolmaster” in Galatians 3. Is it the moral or the ceremonial law? Traditionally for us it had been the ceremonial law. But in 1888, A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner begged to differ, arguing that it was, in fact, the moral law.

Ellen White entered the fray when she heard a brother blurt out an example of all-or-nothing thinking: “If our views of Galatians are not correct,” he exclaimed, “then we have not the third angel’s message and our position goes by the board; there is nothing to our faith.”

“Brethren,” she responded. “This statement is not true. It is an extravagant, exaggerated statement. If it is made in the discussion of this question I shall feel it my duty to set this matter before all that are assembled, and whether they hear or forbear, tell them the statement is incorrect. The question at issue is not a vital question and should not be treated as such.”

But it wasn’t easy. The issues so troubled some of the brothers that a motion was put on the floor to restrict Bible teachers to teaching “only what has been taught hitherto.” One brother was so agitated that even Ellen White’s pointed rejection of the motion didn’t faze him. In her presence, he voted for the motion with both hands.

As for Ellen White, the issue was neither the doctrine of grace nor the interpretation of Galatians 3, but the “spirit” dominating the meeting. Indeed, the bitterness she saw triggered some stunning statements from her. “For the first time,” she exclaimed, “I began to think it might be we did not hold correct views after all upon the law in Galatians, for the truth required no such spirit to sustain it.”

She described how she felt when she reached her room after the discussion. “Whichever way was in accordance with a “Thus saith the Lord,” she wrote with fervor, “my soul would say, Amen, and Amen. But the spirit that was controlling our brethren was so unlike the spirit of Jesus, so contrary to the spirit that should be exercised toward each other, it filled my soul with anguish.”

Conditional Prophecy

Now this lengthy preamble about the dangers of all-or-nothing thinking applies with equal force to “conditional prophecy,” because that, too, seems to put at risk, at least for some, that other Adventist pillar: Jesus’ second coming. But questioning our knowledge of the events leading up to the Advent is a far cry from questioning the Advent itself.

The “commandments of God” and the “faith of Jesus” were the two anchors, the two pillars, that bonded early Adventists together. Indeed, when they organized their first churches in 1861,
they signed this simple covenant: “We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenan ting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ [Rev. 14:12].” Central to the commandments is the Sabbath; central to the faith of Jesus Christ is his promised return. Let’s be clear: whatever we do with conditional prophecy or end-time events does not move a pin from those landmarks, the ones reflected in our name: Seventh-day Adventist.

**Required Reading**
I hope the long preamble makes it clear that there is no point in going further unless the Adventist landmarks are in place. When they are secure, however, we can begin to nibble on “conditional prophecy” in bite-size chunks.

The first step is to list the “required” reading for this assignment under four headings, with brief commentary on each. At the end, I want to call all Adventists to study this topic together.

1. **Old Testament “Last Days” Chapters.** Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14 are three chapters about the last days that don’t fit tidily into the New Testament view. According to the New Testament, Jesus’ return moves us quickly to a perfect world. Revelation 20 describes a period of turmoil at the end of the 1,000 years. Otherwise, the transition from evil to good is clean, with peace during the 1,000 years, and peace again after fire consumes the devil and his supporters (Rev. 20:9).

   But the picture of gradual elimination of evil in the new earth as seen in Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14 is quite different. Children are born and people die, though not before they grow old (Isa. 65:20-23). In Zechariah 14, evil gradually succumbs to the good.

   Something like 30 million American Christians, however, apply these passages to the 1,000 years between a secret coming of Jesus (rapture) and a public one. To be consistent with their view of the Old Testament, these Christians expect childbirth, death, and animal sacrifices during the 1,000 years, even though they are evangelicals who believe in the completed atonement on the cross! They also expect the temple to be rebuilt on the site of the Moslem mosque in Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock.

   That’s what happens with the rejection of the idea of conditional prophecy. These devout Christians believe that every prophecy from God must be fulfilled in precise detail. Thus they move all “unfulfilled” Old Testament prophecies to the 1,000 years.

   The second reading assignment points to what Adventists have had to say about all of that.

2. **A Landmark Adventist Article.** An article titled “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy” was published in 1955 in volume four of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary.* J. Paul Grove, one of my professors at Walla Walla College in the early 1960s, insisted that we know the article well. What I have discovered, however, is that today almost no one remembers it. All Adventists know about the Sunday law. But very few know how the Bible, the Great Disappointment, and Ellen White come together in this remarkable article that takes “conditional prophecy” seriously in exploring God’s original plan for Israel. The third reading assignment tells that story.

3. **A Crucial Ellen White Quotation.** A paragraph in Manuscript 4, 1883, is the crucial one, though it wasn’t published with its full context until 1958. The manuscript was Ellen White’s response to the accusation that Adventists had tinkered with later editions of their books to cover up key aspects of the Great Disappointment and its aftermath. Her response includes this quote:

   “The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.”

Our question today is: Can Adventists learn from our heritage how to deal with conditional prophecy so that it strengthens faith rather than diminishes it?
carefully. It was the 1844 Disappointment that forced Adventists to come to grips with conditional prophecy—reluctantly. But even though Ellen White addressed the issue pointedly in 1883 in a letter to a critic, she never used the key quotation in any of her published works while she was alive. Meanwhile, the mantle of what we might call the “prophecy-with-precision” impulse fell on the shoulders of the futurist Dispensationalists, the Left Behind people of our day. They know the future and have their charts to prove it. Our question today is: Can Adventists learn from our heritage how to deal with conditional prophecy so that it strengthens faith rather than diminishes it? That leads us to the last reading.

The Practical

Anywhere and everywhere Adventists can preach that the beast of Revelation 13 is coercive and deceptive. Anyone who coerces and deceives is in league with the beast. Today, however, the great threat to our Sabbath is not coercive Sunday legislation, but secularization. Almost no one takes sacred time seriously anymore.

In the past, Adventist Sabbath-keeping simply echoed Sunday-keeping. Can we rediscover Sabbath in these new circumstances when almost nobody is keeping Sunday? Perhaps a famous Ellen White quotation could help us catch a vision of the Sabbath for the last days. When everyone else has abandoned sacred time, Adventists could be God’s people “whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole,” a people “who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”

Honoring the Sabbath in the face of death is one thing, but what an opportunity to honor it when all around us people are “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage” (Matt. 24:38). So let’s open our Bibles and our hearts. Let’s talk with one another and pray with one another until we can say with the believers in Acts 15:28 that our conclusions “seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

3. The crucial line is from Ellen G. White in Manuscript 8a, 1888, The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, p. 133: “Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak.”
6. ibid., p. 223.
8. Five paragraphs from Manuscript 4 had appeared in Evangelion (Review and Herald, 1946), pp. 695-696. But the full manuscript was not published until 1958, in Selected Messages, Book 1. Neither source indicates the original recipient of the manuscript.
10. The KJV of Jonah 3:10 states that God “repented;” the NRSV says God “changed his mind.”
Where Is the Adventist Church Headed?

Change is in the air for the Seventh-day Adventist Church!

But beyond simple change, what direction should the church be headed? What is the destiny in the 21st Century of a church dedicated to going out of business when Jesus returns?

In this new 130-page book, “Where To? The Adventist Search for Direction,” Adventist Today editor David Newman, D.Min., looks at both church history and the current condition and leadership of Adventism. He proposes some specific directions—based on gospel principles and modern realities.

Trying to return to the past is neither possible nor prudent, writes the author. The world is changing, and ministering to end-time society in the manner and using the principles of Jesus cannot be accomplished by simply replicating past approaches.

The book challenges the church to rise to the occasion, put first things first, and move the gospel forward, nation by nation, society by society. In times past, when all nations were essentially Third World in perspective, a one-size-fits-all approach worked. But with sophistication, education, and increased standard of living has come need for better approaches, with significant changes in the models of the past.

We must triangulate new avenues to the hearts of the people, as we spread the gospel in increasingly complex times.

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Is Spiritual Formation Bad for Us?

By Kenley D. Hall

Howard, Rick, The Omega Rebellion: What Every Adventist Needs to Know...Now. (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2010), 224 pages.

Beginning in 2009, a growing debate emerged in the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the teaching of spiritual formation in various Adventist universities and in particular at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. The proliferation of books and websites promoting a form of mystic and Eastern spirituality has alerted Christians of all denominations to the dangers of certain approaches to communion with the divine. Seventh-day Adventists are rightly concerned about avoiding mystical and Eastern practices as a way of communing with God. Authentic Christian spirituality is a topic that is near and dear to all of us, since it has been one of our core values since our formation as a movement in 1863. However, without an open and honest discussion of the issue of spiritual formation, we face a twofold danger.

First, there is the danger of uncritically embracing all forms of spiritual formation. Second, there is the danger of the proverbial “throwing the baby out with the bath water.” We risk rejecting all forms of spiritual formation, including principles taught in the Bible and espoused in the Spirit of Prophecy that are the very things that promote true spirituality and discipleship. We need these principles now more than ever, as the church makes an appeal for reformation and revival.

Rick Howard’s newly published book has fanned the flames of the growing debate over spiritual formation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But has his book made a positive contribution to a discussion that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does need to have? According to the back cover of his book, Rick Howard has pastored for 33 years in the Eastern and Central United States. He claims that his five-year involvement in the occult world, and the subsequent light of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, provide him with unique insight into the last-day deception that God’s people will face.

Exposing End-Time Omega

In the introductory paragraph in Chapter 1, Howard states that the purpose of the book is “to expose what may be the end-time omega from presently gaining a foothold in our beloved church” (p. 17). In order to expose what he thinks the omega may be, he recounts the trials faced by the Adventist Church at the turn of the 20th century, brought on by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and the publication of his pantheistic ideas in Living Temple. Howard offers this lesson in history because, as he points out, according to Ellen White the church will face a similar deception in the last days. The title for Howard’s book and his method of exposing the final deception are not unique. His title and his arguments are similar in many ways to Lewis Walton’s book Omega, published in 1981. The most fundamental difference between the two books is the speculative interpretation that each author gives to the Omega deception. Walton wrote his book as a counter attack to the teachings of Desmond Ford, Walter Rea, and Ronald Numbers. Thus he saw the Omega as the evils of modern critical thinking that were entering the church. Twenty-nine years later, using the same historical framework as Walton, Howard has reframed the speculative interpretation of the Omega as the practices of spiritual formation that are entering the church.

The sources Howard uses to make his case cannot be analyzed, since the book contains neither a bibliography nor a reference list. Devoid of sources, he resorts to rhetoric, emotionalism, and questionable reasoning to make his case.

In the first chapter, before even beginning to lay out evidence for his claims, Howard seeks to encourage readers to accept what he will say based on faith and not reason. He claims that “there were many undeniable providences of God that brought together those who recognize this deception” (p. 19). Thus it is “God’s leading to expose and explain those teachings hidden under the innocent-sounding term of spiritual formation” (p. 19). Whether by intent or not, the implication is that if readers disagree with or challenge the arguments that Howard makes in the chapters that follow, they are not questioning Howard; they are questioning God.

Howard makes an interesting secondary claim to unique authority on the subject of the omega. He argues that the five years he spent in the occult make him more qualified to see the last deception. It is a curious argument if you follow it to its logical conclusion. It
could suggest that time spent with the Devil is more important to discerning the counterfeit than time spent with Jesus Christ.

**Questionable Reasoning**

The most disturbing aspect of Howard's book is not his claims to authority. Rather, it is his questionable reasoning and the lack of evidence to support his conclusions. In Chapter 2, Howard begins to expose the teaching or program that he sees as the omega: spiritual formation. However, he very narrowly defines spiritual formation in the context of the Roman Catholic tradition and practice of spiritual formation arising from the teaching and practices of Ignatius Loyola. He has thus set up a clear word association that he will use throughout the book. When readers hear the term *spiritual formation*, he wants them to hear *Roman Catholic* and *Jesuit*.

He uses such a word association for his sweeping claim that the spiritual exercises of Ignatius (of the Jesuit order) are the foundation for all spiritual formation. Notice his logic. Because he narrowly defines spiritual formation in a Roman Catholic context, it follows then that all spiritual formation is based on the theology of a Jesuit; thus this must also exist with [Richard] Foster, [Henri] Nouwen, and the unnamed Adventist pastor that spiritual advancement will only take place when one masters the ability to enter into the mystical silence of contemplative prayer” (p. 119). Howard then makes the sweeping claim that “the opinion exists with [Richard] Foster, [Henri] Nouwen, and the unnamed Adventist pastor that spiritual advancement will only take place when one masters the ability to enter into the mystical silence of contemplative prayer” (p. 120). This claim is completely unsupported by the pastor’s quote, in which there is no talk of mystical silence or contemplative prayer. Very literally Howard has put words into this pastor’s mouth.

Notice how Howard again manipulates a quote from an unnamed Seventh-day Adventist pastor: “Real spiritual formation is a process of growing more and more in tune to discernment of God’s voice as well as more and more tuned to discernment of God’s moving in my life, in the ordinary of life, as well as even in the difficult times of life. That’s where real spiritual formation, or at least the value of spiritual formation, is seen” (p. 124).

It should be noted that we are not told the context of the larger conversation of which this quote was a part, nor is any reference given for the quotation. We are just supposed to trust that some Adventist pastor, at some unknown time and in an unknown context, made this statement. After presenting the quotation, Howard follows his word association argument. He tells the reader to note “how this pastor spoke of ‘the discernment of God’s voice’ as a part of his experience” (p. 125). He then suggests that because discerning the voice of God is often the main attraction of contemplative prayer, the pastor must be talking about contemplative prayer. Yet note that the pastor never talks about contemplative prayer. Howard is merely trying to make him an offender for a word.

In an interesting contradiction, the author asserts under the chapter titled “Rebellion” that in response to his personal cry to God for help to understand why people are chasing after his interpretation of the omega deception, he heard the answer “Rebellion!” He goes on to say: “It was unmistakable. I knew it was not my mind’s voice, but the Lord’s” (p. 156). How did he know it was not his voice but the Lord’s? He had to be able to discern the Lord’s voice. So Howard can discern the Lord’s voice; but when a pastor expresses that desire, somehow it is inherently wrong? Of course, in the dizzying logic of Howard, that is because the pastor was talking about discerning God’s voice in the context of spiritual formation, and according to Howard, all
spiritual formation is Roman Catholic and Jesuit.

**Catholic Mysticism**

Howard offers another quote taken from an Adventist website to prove that Catholic mysticism is slipping into the church. In response to a question about a favorite memory from GODencounters, a pastor answered, “lingering in the presence of God” (p. 114). Before offering the quote, Howard suggests that the answer is most telling. It seems that according to Howard, it should concern us that a pastor desires to linger in God’s presence. According to his argument of guilt by word association, he points out that Ellen White talked about people during the omega being deceived about the personality of God and where his presence is. Thus what this pastor says regarding lingering in this presence of God must equal the omega deception about the presence of God.

The context of Ellen White’s statement on being deceived about where the presence of God is was made in the context of Dr. Kellogg’s pantheistic views that God is everything and in everything. However, Howard twists this argument to suggest that those who talk about having Jesus in their hearts have displaced the presence of Jesus from the temple in heaven and cancelled out the need for a sanctuary in heaven. Somehow he misses the fact that Scripture presents not an either/or but a both/and. Jesus works as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 5:14-16; 9:12) and also dwells within our heart temples through the presence of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Cor. 4:10).

Ultimately Howard’s whole argument about the presence of God should be disconcerting for Seventh-day Adventists. He narrowly defines the presence of God, arguing, “could it be considered that those who practice spiritual formation have their own personal sanctuary which they carry with them in their hearts; a sanctuary replacing the genuine, the one the Lord pitched and not man? ... To place the person of Jesus inside all human hearts is without a doubt pantheistic (p. 135).” His argument turns the Apostle Paul into a pantheist for claiming that “Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV). Additionally, his narrow argument turns Ellen White into a pantheist when she says: “We may drink, and drink again, and ever find a fresh supply. He in whom Christ dwells has within himself the fountain of blessing, ‘a well of water springing up into everlasting life.’ From this source he may draw strength and grace sufficient for all his needs.” Ultimately, Howard’s position about the presence of Jesus in the light of “the law and the testimony” must be seen as doctrinal heresy.

In addition to these very isolated quotations, which Howard seeks to use as evidence based on word association, he makes other very broad and sweeping claims without presenting any evidence. The following are a small sampling:

“‘It is a fact that many in our beloved church have received training in spiritual formation, where they have learned to practice “contemplative/mystical prayer”’” (p. 142). Yet Howard offers no evidence to back up his supposed fact.

“It is a fact that there is a movement spreading rapidly through the Protestant community, called the ‘emerging church,’ whose influence has reached all the way from the local congregations to the universities and leadership of our Seventh-day Adventist Church” (p. 154). Once again, he offers high-volume rhetoric and no evidence to back it up.

**Do Not Listen to Non-Adventists**

Another argument that Howard makes in his book is that Seventh-day Adventists should never attend seminars, listen to DVDs, or read books by non-Seventh-day Adventists for the purpose of receiving teaching. He supports his argument with various Ellen White quotations. However, he never addresses the context of the statements that he uses. Nor does he address the fact that at times Ellen White encouraged Adventists to attend the meetings of others and to invite them to speak at our meetings.

“The Lord knows that our knowledge of the truth is not enough to protect us from Satan’s final work of deception. ... the only way to victory is to have a personal knowledge of Satan’s plans and activities” (p. 177). This argument, taken to its logical conclusion, would suggest that it is more important to have a personal knowledge of Satan than of Jesus Christ.

While an honest and open discussion of spiritual formation is needed in the Seventh-day Adventist church, Howard’s book does not make a positive contribution to this discussion. Ultimately, Howard’s book is high on rhetoric with few facts to back up his assertions. It is a book that will appeal to Adventist conspiracy theorists, who do not allow facts or the truth to get in the way of a good story.

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1 Ellen G. White, Pastoral Ministry (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1995), p. 268.


3 For an example, see her book Temperance, p. 218.
The Secrets of My Strength
The other day I came upon editor David Newman in the correspondence room of the Adventist Today building.

“Here,” he said, peering at me over his thick granny glasses and handing me a packet of letters. “From your admirers.”

I eagerly sat down at a nearby table—so eagerly that I sat on my cape wrong and almost choked myself—then opened the letters and read them one by one. Most, I confess, were from the feminine gender. “Adventist Man, why aren’t you on Facebook?” implored one correspondent, who seems also to have sprinkled her letter with some kind of perfume. But a few notes, in a brusquer hand, were from men, mainly asking how I got those muscles portrayed in the illustration.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must first confess that famed action-comics artist Arturo Fenster-Tweebie let me know that for an extra hundred bucks he would be willing to enhance my biceps and pectoral muscles, so I took him up on it. Money well spent, I’ve always thought.

However, I am still quite a muscular and healthy guy, and in the interest of my readers I will now share some of my secrets. I must first give a generous nod in the direction of the Adventist lifestyle, which—as all well-read Adventist Today readers know—gets us into National Geographic and on “Blue Zones” lists with gratifying regularity.

However—and I don’t know what got into their heads; maybe it was too many late-night Roma lattes—the Adventist Health Study people have ignored an entire sector of body-strengthening practices that church members regularly engage in. Let me note them here, to help nudge the Ship of Science toward a truer course.

Transporting potluck tables. I’m talking, of course, about the old, solid potluck tables, not the newer ones made of plastic. The old ones needed to be heavy-duty, of course, because of the many weighty casseroles they were called upon to bear. My boyhood frame attained the muscles you see in my picture (allowing for Arturo’s hundred-dollar enhancements) by simply setting up and carrying these tables in the fellowship hall.

Using the “gag” reflex. It took awhile for the wonderful ethnic vegetarian food to penetrate my boyhood congregation, which meant that the ladies of my church would dutifully work from early vegetarian cookbooks, producing earnest lentil loaf casseroles with the flavor and consistency of one of Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian bricks. Each time my eyes fell on one of these productions, my involuntary gag reflex tightened my abs, toning them remarkably.

Carrying study Bibles. Catering to a decidedly unhealthy obsession, certain self-supporting Adventist publishers have taken to producing single-volume editions that contain the King James Version Bible, marginal references, Spirit of Prophecy footnotes, and the complete Conflict of the Ages book series.

Unofficial sources tell me that a new study Bible is in the works, containing the above contents plus the complete works of Uncle Arthur (including The Bible Story 10-volume set), the entire collection of 1888 materials, plus an optional glue-in insert featuring all published Adventist Today issues in 4-point type. This volume will be bound in leather, with a zipper, and will have two small wheels and a telescoping handle. If you buy a copy, remove the wheels, and within weeks you will become as muscular as I am!

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant of the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

Articles Needed
Please consider submitting—by email to adventisttoday1966@gmail.com—articles on topics of interest to Adventist Today readers, especially in the following areas:

■ How Do We Understand the Times?
What impact, if any, should culture have on our theology and practice?

■ Beliefs—Can Thinkers Believe? Can Believers Think?
How do we decide what is by faith and what is by evidence? Must we have concrete evidence for everything we believe? What is the role of science and faith? Are the Bible and science interrelated, or are they separate realities—neither of which directly informs the other?

■ Mission of the Adventist Church Today
Is our mission still the same as it was in the 19th century? If it is, then why? If it is not, then what is our mission today?

■ Hermeneutics—How Should We Understand the Bible Today?
What are the key principles or interpretive tools for making sense in today’s culture? What part does culture play in understanding the Bible, in Bible times, today?

■ World View
What is a world view? How does a world view impact the individual and the church?

■ What Defines an Adventist?
How much do you need to believe to be an Adventist? The 28 fundamentals? The 13 questions in a baptismal certificate? Believing the Apostles’ Creed? How far can a member stretch the Adventist boundaries and still be an Adventist?

■ What Does an Experience With God Look Like?
How do you tell a Christian from a non-Christian?
Back Cover ad
Printer to place
By far and away the most significant thing that happened at the recent Annual Council of the General Conference executive committee of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the adoption of a strategy document entitled, “Mission to the Cities.” It forthrightly recognizes that the world is rapidly urbanizing and this represents the major challenge for the cause of Christ and the future of the Adventist movement.

Around the world, the Adventist faith has made the greatest penetration in relatively small island nations. Pitcairn, the smallest territory on the United Nations list of countries, has the highest percentage of Adventists in the population, and that population is less than 100. Antigua has the highest percentage of Adventists of any country in the Americas and it is one of the smallest. Adventist faith seems to do best at the margins and not do very well in the largest blocks of the population.

In fact, in the largest cities on the globe, in many cases the majority of the Adventist membership is made up of immigrants and there are virtually no converts among the indigenous residents. Often these are immigrants from island nations in the Caribbean and the South Pacific where the percentage of Adventists in the population is very high.

Why has the Adventist movement not done better at reaching the mainstream of the population? Whenever I hear this discussed in Sabbath School or conversations around the potluck table, I hear the same excuses.

1. Adventist faith demands too high a ‘cost’ in lifestyle requirements, Sabbath-keeping, etc., to attract worldly urbanites.
2. Ellen White said we should move out of the cities.
3. The secular city is prejudiced against the Adventist message.

In fact, none of these has any hard evidence to support it. What is true is that urban mission is demanding and we usually look for the quick and dirty approach to doing the work of Jesus.

The strategy document voted at the 2011 Annual Council makes it clear the quick and dirty approach is no longer acceptable. Urban ministry is to be ‘comprehensive,’ including “caring compassion ... meeting needs” as well as evangelism. It specifically asks for “a sustained and ongoing approach that does not culminate with a major public evangelistic meeting.” It includes public evangelism, but that is not to be the bulk of the enterprise that gets most of the budget and time.

The example of Jesus, Scripture and statements by Ellen White are all included in the document to...
underline the reality that the cities cannot be significantly impacted if the Adventist Church continues to focus on quickly cherry-picking a few converts instead of digging in for the long, hard path of truly wholistic and Christian ministry.

Near the top of the document there is an affirmation of those Adventists who “for decades...have been living in and effectively sharing their faith in many of the world’s great cities.” This document nonetheless represents a sea of change in the way we do outreach. It will be a real test of the denomination’s leadership to see if they have the vision and patience and fortitude to gently, insistently help local churches and pastors change their long-accustomed ways of doing things and learn new patterns.

The percentage that the average conference spends on evangelism and community service is in the low single digits. We spend almost all of our money and energy on maintaining existing institutions and taking care of the saints. Investment in research and development, creating new approaches is virtually nonexistent in most conferences.

The strategy document envisions a systematic process of innovation through pilot projects. First, the General Conference will work directly with the North American Division and the two union conferences and five local conferences in the New York City metro area to establish a model program there. Then, each of the 13 world divisions will be asked to select a major metropolitan area in their territory for a similar project. Then, ‘each of the nearly 130 unions’ will be asked to do the same, and eventually ‘each of the over 500 conferences’ and similar organizations.

That process is seen as taking until the next General Conference Session in 2015 to get fully rolled out. That fact will undoubtedly raise the cynicism of some observers, knowing the history of denominational leadership reveals a typically short attention span that will run out of steam before significant impacts are achieved. Yet, the facts are that eventually — sooner or later, around this initiative or some other events — this transformation is bound to happen. It is an inevitable part of the spiritual heritage and calling of the Adventist movement. It is also a part of the maturing of new religious movements as they get to the size and sophistication of ours.

I want to speak a word of appreciation for Pastor Ted Wilson, the GC president who is leading this charge. To those who know him, it does not come as a surprise. He started his ministry as a missionary to New York City. He wrote a Ph.D., dissertation at New York University on this topic. His heart is in urban mission. The greatest contribution of the first second-generation GC president will be the denomination’s embrace of urban ministry. His father believed in it and it has been part of his spiritual development from an early age.

Ultimately, the real potential for change in this landmark document is in the hands of pastor and lay leaders in local churches and conferences. Ask your church board to discuss this document and say what it means for your local church. (You can download a copy here). What impact is your church making on the community where it is located? Do you have ministries of compassion and service that meet needs every week? Do civic leaders view your church as making a significant contribution to the community? Do you have a flow of potential new members into group activities and social settings where your members can make friends with them? Are there small groups or seminars or house churches or community Bible classes that teach what it means to follow Jesus each week? How many hours per week of volunteer time is invested outside the internal activity of the congregation on Sabbath? What percentage of your budget or local giving is devoted to outreach?
There are many examples of Adventist churches across North America who have started model ministries and are impacting their community. A number of these are in urban communities. If you really want to, you could do the same.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

Are there dedicated Adventists who thoroughly understand the culture of the cities' populations? They are far different from the usual rural and small towns where Adventism has flourished in the past. Large urban centers are usually only work places with the high-end office employees heading out to the suburbs and beyond or stay in the city to enjoy the night life. Commuting from the cities is a way of life. The residents are often there because they cannot afford to move out.

They are mostly jaded, skeptical, and distrustful of anything new that appears to be a "sell." We know very little of the future plans. People are often distrustful and trust must be gained before they will listen. The usual 6-week evangelistic or Revelation seminars are doomed from the get-go. Unless someone is an expert publicity expert and experienced marketing professional (do we even have such who are Adventists?) to plan and devise public announcements or making people aware of our presence in the city.

There should be long months of planning before this gets off the ground.

cb25 3 weeks ago Reply

Monte,

The approach outlined above seems to focus on methodology and process as the cause of our current weakness in urban areas. Similarly, changing these is seen as the solution. There are no doubt many other factors including lifestyles, education, and cultures.

However, perhaps all of these, and particularly a focus on methodology, miss a key issue: Message content.

What if the nuts and bolts of what we are taking to the people misses the mark? What if it will always be a "misfit" to the education, lifestyles and cultures of urbanized people? We can change our "marketing" all we want, but if the content of our "package" is not what people want or need, what do we achieve by all our effort in change?

Of course if the problem is content not method, then we must ask the question: "Can we change our content to meet the urban education, lifestyle and cultures without losing the essence of its value? I think the answer is yes. If we should, are we willing? How do we do so?

In short, I suspect we need to "urbanize" the Gospel, not our methodology. (most of that should get tossed out altogether). We need to take faith beyond a carefully crafted doctrinal package to a simple belief that "God Is". An urbanized gospel will seek simply to show that living a life knowing God Is, and treating others as you would treat yourself is pretty much the whole story.
What grows out of that is God's business, because worship and faith are very much personal matters of the heart.

Kevin Riley

Chris,

I believe you ask questions that should be considered. I would even agree with your conclusion that we need to 'urbanise' our message. I just don't believe we need to go as far as reducing it to "God is". With one or two possible exceptions I believe the SDA message can be presented in a form that makes sense to modern urban people without losing the historic content of the Christian gospel.

That we are not being successful with reaching urban areas is obvious. I saw figures a few days ago that in Sydney Conference 64% of its members have no roots in Australia. I take that to mean that 36% of the members were either born here in Australia or have at least one parent born here. I am not sure that the figures for Melbourne would be much different. There are 'native' Australian churches that are growing in the cities, but most are on the outer edges. Most growth in Australia seems to come either from SDA migrants moving here or migrants becoming SDA when they arrive. I still believe we can reach urban (and rural) areas with the gospel, but I do sometimes wonder if our leaders or people are prepared for both the hard work and the changes necessary to do that. Perhaps respectable middle class suburban comfort is our greatest enemy.

Elaine Nelson

Adventism claims that is fulfilling the commission given by Jesus to take the Gospel to all the world. This has been adjusted, modified, and edited to mean that it is Adventism that should be taken to the world. This is a corruption of the Great Commission which did not include the Law with its focus on Sabbath and a six-day creation, prophetic writing 2,000 years after the Bible with additional instructions, dietary restrictions, tithing and more. If this is the Gospel that is to be preached, and converts added, it is a life-time project, and the long-lasting retention rate is not encouraging.

David

I wonder how many of the “frequent commentators” live in the great metropolis, care to share the good news or more important they are involved to do it.

cb25

Hi Kevin and others...
"God Is" does push the boundaries a bit I guess. Those percentages on Sydney are interesting. When I think about it our local Church here would have a quite high percentage too. It would be interesting to see what could come out of some brainstorming of how to "urbanize" the Gospel, especially if trying to maintain a fairly distinctive SDA look.

David, I now live in a relatively small city (60K), but have lived in larger. Am I involved? Do I share the good news? That all depends how you measure it: if you measure by "am I involved in a Seminar, door knocking, giving studies, etc etc. NO. But, I think measurement tools like that, or most other of our traditional ways of defining that we are "doing evangelism" are part of the problem and need to be re-assessed too:)

Monte Sahlin

3 weeks ago

cb25, Kevin and David, I am encouraged by your dialog. I am a fourth-generation Adventist and for some reason I simply don't see all of the negative aspects of Adventist faith that so many people see. I respect their concerns; they make sense. But I just don't see them. Maybe I am self-deluded. Maybe it is faith. I see something different in the heritage of Adventist faith, which is particularly appropriate to urban, postmodern culture. I see a faith that is Christocentric, inclusive, compassionate, progressive and hopeful. I see God's bottom line in the city of Revelation 21, not in Revelation 19. Elaine, the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28 must always be seen in the context of the introduction to Christ's mission in Luke 4. "I have been ordained to bring good news to the poor ... those suffering from disease and disability ... the oppressed." The most Second Advent-focused sermon of Jesus in Matthew 24-25 puts it together and describes what it is that Christ is asking His followers to do while they wait for His return. It is about how we live. It is a clear message, but not necessarily a message of doctrinal assertions as much as a message conveyed in "the fruit" (quality of life) of spiritual connection with Jesus and His way. Don't get me started; I am writing a book. I have seen the power that this hopeful, compassionate, creative, progressive, inclusive, authentically Christocentric Adventist faith can have among urban, postmodern people. Don't miss the forest by focusing on the down trees in your path and the weeds along the way.

Elaine Nelson

2 weeks ago

If only there was not so much concern on Adventist doctrine and more on compassion and true concern for those in need (and not simply a "hook" to introduce Bible studies) Adventists could do so much more. But the projection of distributing millions of the Great Controversy, without a concern for its success or even antagonism, is one of the most futile exercises of monies that has been proposed in many decades. Who is expected to fund this exercise? What are the projections of conversions with a book that risks antagonizing many of its readers? If this is the mission to the cities, God help us!

Kevin Riley

2 weeks ago

Elaine

I am still not persuaded there is a necessary connection between placing less emphasis on SDA
doctrine and more on 'compassion and true concern'. I would agree with Monte that these things are already part of the SDA package. It is how we put it together in real life, not in theory, that we need to work on.

I attend a church with a membership of over 470, and so far I have not met a nasty or uncaring person among them. They want to reach out to their neighbours, and many do on a personal basis. What is needed is a way of moving people from "SDAs make good neighbours and friends" to "I think I'd like to learn more about the SDA church". And I agree with William's comment below that that comes from listening to - and following - the Holy Spirit far more than from trying the latest Conference supported program. Not that the programs are necessarily bad, but they aren't really the answer we are looking for.

William Noel
Reply 2 weeks ago

Stand aside, all you theorists and those who expound about it! Let me share a few thoughts from my three years doing mission work in New York City where my wife and I were part of the Greatern New York Conference's Medical Van Ministry from 1980-83.

The organized church will never be effective at evangelizing the metro New York Area because concepts of ministry and outreach that church leaders will give verbal or financial support are too far removed from street-level reality to ever be effective. This includes public evangelistic meetings, most literature distribution, colporteurs, health seminars, etc. They simply do not work with any effectiveness.

Success depends on very simple elements where individuals have been redeemed by God and have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to share their love for God with others. It does not require preaching, teaching, giving Bible studies or working in health care. It does require letting the Holy Spirit lead you into the ministry He has empowered you to do. From my experience, I'll give you a 95% probability that it will be outside the activities and concepts we typically associate with evangelism. This means people will be connecting with their co-workers, neighbors and people they meet on the street and touching their lives with God's love in ways that turn their hearts to Him.

If church leaders want to promote church growth in metro areas they can be most effective by illustrating the need and encouraging people to seek jobs in the cities so they can evangelize one-on-one. Then they need to step aside, leave those people to depend totally on the Holy Spirit to provide the resources they need to be effective.

My wife and I have many fond memories of working in New York City. We have some real adventure stories to tell. While I enjoy reflecting on those times, what I savor the most is recalling the times I met someone who told me they were in the church because I had touched them with kindness and taken an interest in them personally without pushing religion on them.
These are some very important comments on another sister site:

"I was born in NYC and have lived here all of my life. I am not from Texas and a NYC wanna be. I was not schooled in Battle Creek, or Berrien Springs and if I were, I would certainly know nothing about how to work a big city like NYC. I am not a pastor who read a book on city work and now thinks they are a genius. No, I am simply a New Yorker who is tired of the (put your own word here) that everyone is speaking about.

All this talk about "Mission To The Cities" from people who know nothing about NYC. I was the former pastor of Church of the Advent Hope in New York City just a few years ago. I resigned my position there when it became clear (EDITED BECAUSE I HAVE A MORTGAGE) Get it? I got it and got out. Get it? You want to know the real scoop of what goes on behind the scenes? Write me and I will tell you. It will all be in the book. Please Get it, when I publish it!

I am now the pastor of Manhattan Church in the West Village. That is Greenwich Village - you know where Gay people, Actors, Film Makers, Musicians and most of New York City's elite live and walk and enjoy life. It is a vibrant place to be, whoever you are. I have been there only a few weeks and boy, do I need the prayers of those I love. Not because of the neighbors, but because of the members. Get it?

Jesus Christ would have lived in Greenwich Village and he would have loved everyone there. Christ was a New Yorker at heart. He accepted everyone. Get it?

We have blown it in NYC. The New York Center, located in the heart of Times Sq. was sold in the 1970's to The Church of Scientology for about 1 million dollars. The Church of Scientology!, now serving as it's world headquarters. It was given away, by a conference president and an administration who knew nothing about business or NYC. You don't sell property in NYC you lease it. Get it?

I was 23 years old back then. I warned them not to sell the building as I was working for the NYC Department of Urban Planning at the time and knew first hand that the Times Square area was going to be rebuilt. Of course that news meant nothing to the conference, since they never went to see a play or a concert in the area. You know "Good Adventists" don't go to those type of places. When that building was sold, (and by the way, Mr. Wilson had nothing to do with the sale) the work in Greater NYC came to a complete stop.

Then let us talk about the hospital, Bates Memorial Hospital, once operated for a few hours less than 30 minutes from midtown, that was taken over by the State of New York. The church lost that magnificent property since the State played with the leadership of the church like a little child and took it over. That wonderful place never even opened it's doors.

There is even a current building that remains on West 40th Street that is under utilized and a waste of time in it's current state of not only use, but of how it looks. I was trapped in it's elevator for an hour one evening, because the elevator hasn't really been working up to speed for years. Years. I don't get it. Get it?

This is New York City not some ragweed infested backwater. Get it?

Our current president G. Earl Knight is a good man and is providing new and focused leadership. He is supportive and wants to do great things here. With little funding it is very hard indeed. What
the conference, what New York City needs are committed people, not tourists who will come here for a few weeks then skip town to the comforts of Berrien Springs or points North, East, South and West.

They are welcome to come and more than a few would do well to live here. Get it?

Let me stop now before I get in real trouble. I need a bagel. Not the kind they serve in Collegdale, TN.

William Noel  
2 weeks ago  Reply

Elaine,

That is the voice of real experience! The Manhattan Church was the first church I visited after arriving in NYC and I have been there numerous times. That neighborhood is one of the most challenging local mission fields I have ever seen.

Kevin Kuehmichel  
2 weeks ago  Reply

Hey folks,

I'm new to the site and Adventist Today, but I'm not new to urban ministry. Monte knows me well and what we have done in our context. I have been in the inner urban area of Cleveland, Ohio for 15 years and planted a church there. Been here from the beginning as the founding pastor and have learned much. (note: my family and I moved into the area and live within 15 blocks of our church, I am well known in my community and volunteer at the recreation center as a coach, I do not drive into my district) I know its not NY, but I believe it still registers in the top 50 largest cities in North America. Our "church" worships in a store front that is our community center. We give out clothes, food, serve hot meals, offer our building to homeless for an address and phone number and give the homeless a chance to do laundry. We are open 6 days a week and serve over 500 people from the community every month. We are here for the long haul and we have made a difference. We are rebranding Adventism in our community from the people with rules to the people who really are nice and help people. I have a supportive conference and I enjoy what I do. You can check out more on our web site www.woff.org if you want. Watch the two videos posted and you can see first hand our building and some of our ministries.

William Noel  
2 weeks ago  Reply

Kevin,

That is real ministry in the model Christ gave us. Keep up the good work!

Ella M.  
1 week ago  Reply

A wonderful ministry, Kevin. This is what churches need to do more of. God bless.
Kevin I saw your web and video, you are doing a great job! I think other “cities” could learn from your experience. Your post is refreshing in this desert of criticism to the SDA church and message. I’ll be happy to send a donation to your project. Keep the good work.

We should quit worrying about growing the church and instead focus on gaining converts for the kingdom. E.G.W. tells us in the Testimonies that it is better to have 6 true converts than 60 nominal converts. It seems there are too many trying to drag the church into the Saddleback seeker-sensitive ideas or the emerging church/faith house Manhattan waste-of-time approaches which water down the Everlasting Gospel, 3 Angels Message, The Beauty of the Sanctuary Doctrine, the Sabbath, etc. There is no need to water down the purity of truth for "growth". We don't want the church to end up like the Hollywood church.

That's a sobering reminder of our challenge. Jesus told us to make disciples (followers). Too often we stop at just baptizing them and fail to mentor them into mature christians.

I do not advocate any dilution of truth. Still, we must remember that growth in Christ is a progressive experience and not everyone is ready to accept everything right away. If we try to teach them too much, we are in serious danger of turning them off to everything. I long ago lost count of the people I've seen leave the church because of how certain members were expecting these spiritual infants to have a mature understanding of all doctrines.

I do not espouse to be a megalopolis guru, (although I worked and was mentored (and continue to be) by a few for a number of years) but I do have a heart that enjoys being drawn toward where God is already working in a community and requesting His permission to stand beside Him and for Him. I have done so in a number of cities.

During my last call, when we entered the Greater Chartiers Valley area of the Pittsburgh Metropolitan region in 2004, there was absolutely no Adventist presence. Pittsburgh has the absolute lowest Adventist presence of any 1 million or more Metro area in the United states. We were able to define for the community what Seventh-day Adventism IS. We do not see ourselves as progressively redifining, rather agressively re-establishing our pre-'Historic' 1940-50's heritage. We want to go back to being a people of community involvement as well as be involved in important societal calls to recognize issues close to God's Heart such as Unity among the Body of Christ, ambivalence toward unhealthy public norms, injustice, equality, peace, and care for the
other (those that have issue with ecumenical effort, please refer to the book of Evangelism, bottom of page 143 through to 144... **Considering Pastors of Other Denominations** as well as sections refered within and following).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htzzdAHs4co

This is a video of an Adventist Pastor fighting to get an occupancy permit to begin a social-entrepreneurial enterprise on East Main Street (center of city business district) in Carnegie (Pittsburgh Metro). The primary downtown area was still struggling to develop after a devastating flood 2 years prior. Townspeople consistently told us that if the downtown district was not rebuilt and stores did not come back, that the city was destined to be blighted and not recover until it was restored. So we began developing business plans to stand beside other courageous entrepreneurs that were determined to inject life back into the sector. The local officials assured me that we would not get the vote required for an occupancy variance, even though we were dedicated to paying all regular business and property taxes. The best vote I could hope for was a 5-1 no vote (our only supporter had watched first hand ACS in Florida help get his brother back to his feet after the hurricaines there. He also stood beside us in initial clean-up efforts in town. Supported us, but would not advocate out of fear of costing too many political chips with the other good 'ol boys on council) They even for the first time (that I witnessed in three years) had one council member 'present' via telephone to assure the 'no' vote (listen to Larry's confusion as he hears his colleagues vote 'yes' through the telephone speaker... "What the...did Vera say? I ABSTAIN!", and after all the other council people vote Yes? "You can't abstain Larry... Larry, you can't abstain...) my favorite part of the event :-) Due to the work of Adventists in the area the previous three years, the boro council meeting (normal attendance at the time on a 'good' night was 15-20 people) was inundated with support from the community. Those we aided and those we stood beside aiding others. Note that the only Adventist speaker was myself, the Pastor. There may have been 10 Adventists in the entire room. 7 were employees of Adventist Community services-Greater Pittsburgh. The clip was created on the side by the volunteer of the city, that up until that evening, recorded all council meetings and turned them into comcast for airing. He also makes local commercials for comcast... he made a quick swing by his department to edit 6 hours worth of film into a moving 6 minute clip... then he dropped the film off to the proper department :-)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9S481jGfHs

This clip reflects the next stages of the aforementioned venture

We are no longer in the Pittsburgh region as we have moved on to Philadelphia to start what God is showing us to be our next venture: to explore and create an approach to Urban-Suburban Partnerships in our denomination. But I am proud and thankful to God that we replaced ourselves with another Adventist pastoral family that has since grown both the number and scope of social entrepreneurial projects as well as the church plant. (Pastors in our denomination with creativity, spirituality, and denominational affinity do exist...in abundance!) People we began relationships with over a half a decade ago are now being baptized. The process is not short, but it is incredibly rewarding. I am overwhelmed by the vision and perseverance of the Pennsylvania conference's true dedication to treating our state as a mission field. The project (7 years in) is just now starting to grow a church and reflect baptisms into the local, newly formed church body. The Conference still dedicates a full salary to the project each year as they realize reaching oppressed people groups without any religious backgrounds in our largest city metroplexes need to be prioritized.
I know that Kevin, the Ohio Conference, the Pennsylvania Conference and myself are not in a vacancy. I have read about, exchanged stories with, and witnessed first hand similar developments in Australia, Europe, and elsewhere in the US from the higher densities of LA on Hollywood Boulevard to the lower densities of Reading PA at Grace Outlet. Anybody with a heart transformed by God can find Him in a community and ask for His guidance. The work He has for so many of us do is much, much bigger than ourselves simply to definitively exploit who really is in charge.

Adventism has plenty of **People United by Love to Serve and Empower**. We need to educate, share stories with, dialogue with and most importantly, encourage one another. Why waste time dwelling on what we believe does not work? Save that energy on changing things. Life is too short and God is coming back too quick. I can not agree with Monte more, we can be involved if we want to. My conference will more than likely be looking for 20 Metropolitan Missionaries in the next 12 months and hope to raise that to at least 100 over the next five years. We are either part of the solution or part of the problem. Period.

I welcome a continued dialogue if you feel you truly want to do something and don't know where to start or if you have a movement you would like to talk about, or perhaps just need encouragement. agclark@paconference.org or feel free to find me on facebook.

Happy to be in the PULSE of God,
~Andy

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**William Noel**

1 week ago  

Prag,

Keep working as God directs. We few who are actually involved need to support each other more so the realities of our ministries don't get drowned-out by the roaring stadium-full of church members who think they're involved when they're just making noise in the nosebleed section.

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**Posting as Center for Adventist Research Andrews University**

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Atlantic Union College Insists It Still Has Plans to Reopen

Submitted Oct 19, 2011
By AToday News Team

By Karen Nugent TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

LANCASTER — While a planned merger with a fellow Seventh-day Adventist college fell through, Atlantic Union College will not close, according to church and college officials.

Donald G. King, president of the South Lancaster-based Atlantic Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, said talks have recently concluded with the state Department of Higher Education for plans to reopen. The plan has not yet been approved by the state agency.

Mr. King said there are no plans to sell the campus. “Instead, we intend to continue to improve the campus even as we prepare to restructure and reopen at a later date,” he said in an email. Read more...

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Gailon Arthur Joy

Again, I would suggest it is one thing to try and ressurect the college from the Atlantic Union institutional burial pile (three hospitals, three academies amongst them) but it is yet another to raise the start-up capital and the working capital to support an unsupported school by its two primary constituencies, Alumni and Atlantic Union members.

I have heard the King claim many a goal, including the raising of moneys that simply did not occur for AUC. And in the few cases when it did occur, in many cases the funds were "mis-appropriated". I will continue to predict that all the King's horses and all the King's cannot put humpty dumpty back together again and to do so will constitute a waste of time, money and effort.

The Atlantic union has lost its reason to exist and should look to merge.

G.Arthur Joy, AUReporter

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Elaine Nelson

Where is the necessary support for the school to reopen? Wishful thinking is not sufficient.
Dean Waterman 2 weeks ago  Reply

As with most things that are dying, we don't properly know how to euthanize, and put it out of it's misery. Many a church and school has been found barely with a pulse, and we don't know when to say enough.

It is sad that AUC is no longer, but put a period on the sentence, and invest in the unreached who are waiting to see the Gospel lived out in their part of the world.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago  Reply

When something dies, it should be buried.

Bill Cork 2 weeks ago  Reply

The faculty are gone. The students are gone. The alumni left long ago. The buildings have been crumbling for some time. The landscaping has been unattended to for years. Enough. Sell the property and use the proceeds for the evangelization of young adults at secular colleges and universities in New England and New York.

Steve Tanner 2 weeks ago  Reply

Speaking from this same thing happening here in the Kansas/Nebraska conference. I went to PVA all 4 years and sent all my boys there all 4 years. I have seen many put millions of dollars into this school. Now it has closed and is all bulldozed away and you can't hardly tell where it was by driving past. It is sad the support from people wanting to send students to SDA schools is not what it use to be. I feel this is a measuring system of something. Maybe I'm wrong. It could be the lack of funds to send our sons and daughters away. Looking back also it caused me to leave home at a very early age. It was a great sacrifice for my parents in many ways. Looking back the school should have closed before those spending millions trying to keep it open another year or maybe two. If the support is not there all should face the truth. It could be easier now than later.

Steve

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago  Reply

I went away to boarding academy at 14, far too young, IMO. I would never send my child away at that age. When our older daughter had two more years of high school, we chose to move only where she could be at home until ready for college. It may be a sacrifice for parents, but why is it not asking a child to also sacrifice home and the benefits, also?
Adventist Today: Atlantic Union College Insists It Still Has Plans to Reopen

http://www.atoday.org/article.php?id=893&action=print
As a denomination, Seventh-day Adventists may have, mistakenly, made a bad trade. We have held on to the law while leaving grace on the table. We give lip-service to grace, but the truth is we don’t trust it. That leaves us holding onto the law and the Old Covenant. We need something else. We need the (original) New Deal.

Let’s go right to the point.

Within the body of Christ, we (Adventists) have adopted the role of protectors of God’s Holy Sabbath. In anticipation of the prophesied final conflict between the image of the beast -- those who enforce worship by tradition and those who worship the Creator God, we have grounded our position regarding the 7th day Sabbath in the presumption that Sabbath worship is ultimately ratified by God’s law, written in stone. We, apparently, believe that we need the law to protect the 7th day Sabbath.

There is good reason to believe that the 7th day Sabbath needs protection. Since the time of Constantine (at least), there has been, among Christians, confusion about what day the Sabbath is, along with the debate about whether the specific day matters at all. The vast majority of Christians (including those who know that the 7th day is the Sabbath) observe Sunday out of tradition. Although this is not to be a point of judgment from those who observe that Sabbath on those who do not, Adventists believe that, at the time immediately preceding the advent of Christ, it will matter -- very much.

This law-based focus has led to a heavy emphasis on Sabbath-keeping as a sign of biblical enlightenment, commandment keeping, and as a point of differentiation. To this day, in many Adventist churches, when prompted to repeat our “affirmation of faith,” the congregation responds, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . .”

Funny, I always thought our faith was grounded in John 3:16. Really, it isn’t funny at all. It is sad that we so easily discount the most important, act of love, ever. For too many, the law has become the locus of their faith (Galatians 3:12).

What is more important, the tactic of establishing the true Sabbath by use of the Old Covenant law has led us to hold on to both covenants: the Old and the New. From a theological and practical standpoint, that simply cannot work.

Christ’s life and death ushered in the New Covenant and ended the Old (Hebrews 10: 1, 8-10). The New Covenant is defined by both the law of love and salvation by grace through faith. The Old Covenant law remains, defining sin. That law -- “the ministration of death, written and engraved in stones” (2 Corinthians 3: 7) -- applies to those who chose the way of the world and reject Christ. We who are in Christ are, in the New Covenant, no longer under the law as we have, through His blood, taken on the righteousness of Christ, which was shed for the remission of our sins. As such, the law does not apply to us (Galatians 4: 24-25, 28, 30-31).
When we hold on to both the Old and the New Covenants, we dilute the gospel. Reliance on the law of the Old Covenant is dangerous and burdensome (Galatians 5:4). It, effectively, nullifies Christ’s work on the cross and leads us to a dependence on our own works. By holding on to the Old Covenant, we repeat history -- the bad part of it. Like the Pharisees, we seek righteousness through the law and (inadvertently) uphold Moses, not Christ (John 9: 27-28).

For the sake of the Sabbath, we hold on to the law. However, there are plenty of “law-free” reasons to keep the Sabbath. The most obvious reason is that keeping the Sabbath is good for you (Mark 2:27, Hebrews 4:1). Second, as the Sabbath precedes the 10 Commandments (Genesis 2:2-3), its observance is not tied to the either the viability or obsolescence of the law. Another nontrivial point: Jesus kept the Sabbath -- although he was continually at odds with the Pharisees about just what that meant (John 9:16 Mark 2: 24-28, Mark 3: 5-6, John 7: 19-24). The New Testament specifies Christ’s intent for the continued observance of the 7th day Sabbath, even after His ascension (Hebrews 4: 4-10). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the 7th day Sabbath is a constant reminder that the God, who created this earth in 6 days and rested on the seventh, is the only one worthy of worship (Revelation 14:7). The Sabbath persists, without the need of laws engraved in stone. So, Sabbath-keeping and the New Covenant are not a mixture of legalism and grace.

The New Covenant is the turning point in the spiritual history of mankind.

Christ’s purpose in His first advent was to live a spotless life -- fulfilling the law (as no man had done, perfectly) and, then, to present himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Matthew 5: 17-18, Luke 24: 44, 46-47). If we take Christ at His word, He came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. The fulfillment of the law completed the Old Covenant and paved the way for the new, perfect, blood-bought, eternal New Covenant.

The point of the New Covenant is to replace the Old (2 Corinthians 3: 6-7, 11, 13). The New Covenant releases us from the death penalty of the written law, because it was impossible for sinful men, in their own power, to keep (Hebrews 12:20). The New Covenant writes God’s law in our hearts and empowers the Holy Spirit to fulfill the law of love in us (Galatians 2:19-20, Galatians 3:14). Under the New Covenant, even our commandment keeping is motivated by love (John 14:15). In short, our good works are to be motivated by love and our shortcomings are covered by grace.

Ironically, the complete embrace of the New Covenant is the most conservative theological position, as it depends on the Bible to define what the Bible means. Those who cite the writings of Ellen White as the basis of their interpretation of the Bible may, then, wish to consider her words, literally:

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.” TGC, page 595

"Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men satisfied with the light already received from God's word, rest there and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion…When no
new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what." (5T pp. 706-707).

The tendency to mix both Old and New Covenants keeps us in the uncomfortable and unnecessary position of rationalizing positions that the Bible (in my opinion) clearly contradicts. For example, the teaching that we, who accept Christ, are still subject to the law, is explicitly refuted in several Bible passages (Romans 2:19-25, Romans 3:19-24, Romans 6:14, Romans 10: 3-4, Galatians 5: 3-4, Galatians 6:14). Some avoid and discount these passages, hoping against hope that they will not be read in context. If these texts are read, they are, too often interpreted with a bias toward the law and against grace. Somehow, grace is positioned as a dangerous notion, to be taken in small doses only. The “spin” used to protect the law drains both power from the gospel of grace and credibility from Adventism itself. If we consider the possibility that these texts mean what they say, our world will be radically changed -- for the better.

The New Covenant is good news. It is irresistible (Hebrews 6: 4-5). It is the light burden and the easy yoke (Matthew 11:29-30). It depends on Him, not on us (Romans 5:17, Hebrews 9: 14-15). It is enacted through the Holy Spirit rather than by the works of the law. It is eternal, paid by the blood of the Lamb of God (Hebrews 9: 12, 14-19, Hebrews 10: 9-10, 14). It is simply better (Hebrews 8: 6-7).

The New Deal is liberating -- and salvific (Romans 8: 2-4). Who doesn’t want that deal?

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Ella M.

The most important part of Sabbathkeeping--it is a symbol of Christ. As we rest on the Sabbath from our labors, we rest in Christ from our works. Sabbath is a symbol that we cannot save ourselves through our works. I heard this idea first from a minister of another church--that Christ had replaced the Sabbath as our rest. But I asked him why wouldn't it be a reminder; he admitted it could be symbolic. I have heard this from Adventists too, but not enough. Sabbath reminds us not just of the creation, but our re-creation in the image of Jesus.

As one evangelist said (Jack Sequeira), the one who worships on Sunday yet has Christ as their rest is keeping the Sabbath more sincerely than the one who keeps the seventh day, yet does not enjoy or understand the rest of Christ. Therefore, the real "seal" of the end-times is not just a day, but Christ Himself. We are sealed in Christ. I think until we understand this truth as Seventh-day Adventists we will have no message on the Sabbath for the rest of the world. Isn't the "third-angel's message" righteousness by faith in verity as one writer called it? It is faith in what Christ has done for us that allows us to rest from our works. Call it the new deal or new covenant, the commandments are written on the heart and have a meaning far beyond a set of rules.

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Preston Foster
Ella,

I believe you are very much on point. I believe we are sealed (in Christ) by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), who leads us into all truth.

I have heard other evangelists (Adventist and other Christians) argue that the entire Bible is about Jesus -- if we would just see Him. I believe that the point of the Sabbath (in the very last days) is not about the day itself, but about the Man (Revelation 14:7) who sanctified the day. For some reason, we have, too often, lingered on the means to the end and not the end itself.

William Noel
3 weeks ago Reply

Preston,

Well said! You are gifted with both clear understanding and a descriptive pen for telling it.

As I read this I thought of Paul's admonition for us to grow beyond the law and no longer be under the "schoolmaster" whose role was to teach us how to live. The difference between keeping the law and living in the Holy Spirit is a question of degrees of separation from God. With the law we have a description of the character of God, but there is a degree of separation between us and God. When we are living in the Holy Spirit our regard for God's character does not change. The difference is the degree of separation is gone. It is like a young person who is physically separated from their lover and communicating by e-mail and tweets. There is love between them, but they are apart. But when they are together there is no longer a need for the e-mails and the tweets show the intimacy of understanding that comes when the separation is gone.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago Reply

Preston,

Thank you for a very clear explanation of the troubled Adventist message with law and grace. How one can claim to be under the new covenant and yet turn to the old one for doctrine is an impossible situation. Yet how many, after reminded of the NT texts showing that the law has now been replaced by Christ attempt to explain it away, always in an effort to rescue sabbath, which is the sine qua non of Adventism: where would it be without sabbath? When the commandments are spoken of it is always the Fourth, as if the others are minor.

"The tendency to mix both Old and New Covenants keeps us in the uncomfortable and unnecessary position of rationalizing positions that the Bible (in my opinion) clearly contradicts." It will always put Adventism in an uncomfortable position and illogical attempts at rationalizing it will never be sufficient. By continually emphasizing the sabbath, grace is relegated to the back pews.
Kevin Seidel

Perhaps, if we could view the Sabbath as a spiritual discipline like prayer, meditation, or fasting, we could embrace the new covenant without fear. Then Sabbath wouldn't be about keeping the law, but about entering God's rest, about fellowship with God.

Matt Britten

Thanks Preston for reaffirming the "new deal". This is something that has been an ongoing struggle for us as a movement to come to grips with. As a student many a years ago in Seminary, we worked through systematic theology. A couple of texts that I have yet to hear/find an honest and suitable explanation for come to mind once again whilst reading your article:

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (Col 2:16).

And the other:

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Rom 14:5).

I'd be happy to hear anyone's thoughts/reflectons on these texts in light of the new covenant deal that Christ initiated and bought with His blood.

Preston Foster

Thanks all.

William, I love your analogy regarding separation. For me, the difference between the Old and the New, is, as you point out, under the Old, because of sin, we are estranged from The Father. Under the New, because of Christ's blood sacrifice and the grace of God, we are reconciled to The Father --and at peace with Him.

Elaine, the challenge (and I believe the blessing) for Adventism is to embrace the New Covenant message of grace. As stated, I believe we have hold grace at a distance in order to protect the Sabbath with the authority of the law. Doing so dilutes the scope and power of the Cross and the liberty that is available through walking in the Spirit.

Kevin, a "New Covenant" approach to Sabbath-keeping might enable a "thou SHALT" approach to the blessings of the Sabbath. Imagine that!

Matt, buckle up. I, too, hope to hear an honest discussion about these and other issues. Hopefully, the discussion can stay focused on the ISSUE(S). We'll see.

Thanks again, to all of you, for your encouragement.
Elaine Nelson

We should not expect those texts to be discussed openly at either the seminary or at church. They are far too controversial and the contrived explanation often is an attempt to either cause more confusion or obfuscation. Never, in all my 70 years in Adventism have those texts been used in a Bible class or sermon. It is embarrassing for a theologian to be confronted with those texts and mumble and stumble in some rationalization why they don't really mean what they say.

Is there a theologian among these bloggers who will take the challenge to explain, what appears to be clear meanings of these texts?

How many Adventists have too late realized these texts were even in the Bible and lost faith in Adventism because these were ignored when they should have been primary?

pagophilus

Preston, you make a few errors in your article.

1. The Sabbath is established in the 10 commandments, not the Old Covenant.

2. The New Covenant does not do away with the law. What does the new covenant say? "I will write my LAWS in their minds". In other words, I will change their way of thinking so that they obey my law without even thinking about it. You don't have to prove you are not a legalist, or a NewCovenant, by breaking the law (or ignoring it).

And you forget there is more than one law.

Methinks you have been reading/listening to too many evangelicals.

There is nothing wrong with Adventist theology on this matter. It is watertight.

William Noel

Pagophilus,

Such arguments as you are pursuing totally miss the objective of the New Covenant. It has nothing to do with questions of ceremonial law vs. ten commandment law, how many times the law was given to man, or whatever other legalistic points you want to put into it. Instead, it is all about us growing into the relationship God wants to have with us by putting the Holy Spirit in each of us to teach, guide and empower us. When we embrace and accept that relationship the arguments you raise become moot because obedience to God becomes as natural as breathing. We no longer have to look at a written law because God is in us and guiding us to keep us from going astray. What is more, that relationship is so precious to us that we are horrified by the possibility of endangering it through disobeying our dearest friend.
Elaine Nelson

Please provide the texts showing there is more than one law. Is there ever a distinction in the Bible indicating two laws?

If there is only the difference between the two covenants ("I will write my Laws in their minds") that is no difference at all, as the Jews carried many of these laws in their minds already, and nothing new was added, according to this claim.

The New Covenant made the Old one obsolete, and what is obsolete is dying. Christ replaced the Law. The new Christians were never expected to abide by the Old covenant laws; the Old Covenant was made ONLY with the Jews, no one else. It cannot apply to Christians.

This is NOT from evangelicals, but from a clear reading of Paul's letters--the only ones addressed to Christians.

Are you contending that there is no difference in the Covenant made with Jews and Christians? Are Christians and Jews all alike? If Christians accept Christ, which the Jews did not, why are Christians expected to return to Judaism's laws and practices, all described in minute detail in the Torah? Do any apply to Christians today? Some? Which ones? What criteria is applied to select those?

Preston Foster

pegaohilus,

Perhaps it is your assumptions about what I am saying that has you seeing error. The article says:

- "The Old Covenant law remains, defining sin."
- "The New Covenant writes God's law in our hearts and empowers the Holy Spirit to fulfill the law of love in us (Galatians 2:19-20, Galatians 3:14)."

You are in error about the establishment of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was NOT established in the 10 Commandments. That is a bad tradition that CAUSES us to lean on the law to protect it. The Sabbath was established at creation (Genesis 2:1-2). In the 10 Commandments, we are reminded (and commanded) to remember the Sabbath (the 10th paragraph of the article outlines other reasons to keep the Sabbath).

The premise of the article is not that there is only one law. The premise is that we (Adventists) tend to hold onto the Old Covenant law in order to establish and protect the Sabbath. Doing so, inadvertently dilutes the New Covenant, as it requires a dependence on what was done away (2 Corinthians 3: 6-7, 11, 13).

No one has advocated or even hinted that it is okay to break the law (why does that assumption
work its way into every discussion on grace -- perhaps to protect the law?), Romans 6: 1-2.

The point is that the New Deal commandment is the law of love, not the ministration of death written in stones. The Bible says that keeping the law of love fulfills the whole law (Luke 10:25-28, Galatians 5:14). The specific point of the article is that the Sabbath persists, even without the law of the Old Covenant. The greater point is that, in the New Deal, if we are in Christ, we are under grace not law. (Romans 2:19-25, Romans 3:19-24, Romans 6:14, Romans 10:3-4, Galatians 5: 3-4).

Grace should not to be discounted. It is free, but not cheap. It cost the blood of the Lamb of God and the love of The Father.

Me thinks I have been reading The Word.

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**pagophilus** 3 weeks ago  Reply

Yes, the Sabbath was established at creation, but it was spelled out in the Ten Commandments.

Preston, you're inventing some airy-fairy and vague concepts here just like you did in your previous "nailed to the cross" article. Just like your reasoning that the law can somehow be nailed to the cross and yet still relevant, this time you maintain that the Holy Spirit fulfills the law of love in us. The law is not there to be fulfilled, it is there to be obeyed.

And where do you get this concept of the old covenant law? There is only the one law, God's law. It is composed of many parts. The old covenant was "we will keep all your laws" and they failed. The new covenant is "I will write the law in your hearts). Part of the law was fulfilled in Christ, pointing forward to all He would accomplish and His death, and therefore abolished in His death. It was to be kept until the time of the death of Christ, and Christ kept it until He died. The rest of the law stands just like it always had. The old and new covenants do nothing to the law. The law is and has always been and always will be the same.

Adventists don't establish the Sabbath on the old covenant. We establish it on God's law, because God said that it is His day and we should keep it holy. It is a mark of our acceptance of His authority, because otherwise there is nothing that differentiates the Sabbath from any other day. The only reason to keep the Sabbath is because God said so. There may be other benefits to it, but the reason we do it is because God said. That goes for many other things, some which we understand and some we don't, but we accept that God knows all and knows what is best even if we don't understand. This is faith.

Oh, by the way, when the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to be saved, Jesus replied "Keep the commandments". He wasn't being sarcastic in His comment and of course, more was to follow. But we should remember His response as an antidote to too much New Theology.
Is it blasphemy to wonder who stood by taking notes when the literal 24 hour/day creation week occurred? Is it, therefore, unreasonable to wonder who eventually learned to write, and inscribed those verbal legends on clay? When the 4th Commandment was delivered, was it not to the Jews? Perhaps it should read: "Six days shalt the world labor, and do all its' work." I'm not anti-Shabbat...I've marveled at watching Jews observing the Hebrew Day of Rest in Jerusalem.

I once worked in a mission field at which a Loma Linda doctor was criticized when her laundry was seen on the line Sabbath morning. She had been performing a series of life saving procedures in the hospital at Friday sundown, and most of the night as well. She'd have been deemed just as guilty if she'd attempted to retrieve the clothes next morning. Reminded me of Yeshua daring to 'reap' a few kernels of grain on Shabbat. Is this sort of thing really necessary?

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pegalophilus,

This is where your responding to a stereotype and and presumptions will have to confront the reality of what is actually written. I have (again) supplied texts to support what I am saying.

Somehow, you seem to think that I am anti-Sabbath keeping. I am manifestly "pro-Sabbath" as, I agree, in the end times, it will be a symbol of our alligence to the Creator God. I wrote this article, in part, to show that Sabbath-keeping both preceded the Old Covenant law and persists in under the New Covenant (thus the listing of "law-free" reasons to keep the Sabbath).

Why is this necessary? Because the New Covenant makes it clear that, in Christ, we are not under the law and that establishing the Sabbath to the law-only actually jeopardizes it (in theological terms).

The Bible says that by no works of the law shall a man be justified. So, I disagree with you. The purpose of the law is not obedience (Romans 2: 18-23), but to show us our need for a Savior and grace (Romans 3:20-22). By sinning (Romans 3:23), we have demonstrated that we cannot keep the law (Romans 3: 9-10), thus the need for Christ, His sacrifice, and God's grace. We can only approach living a sinless life through the power of the Holy Spirit and Christ living in us (Romans 7:19-25, Romans 8:1-2).

Regarding the "two (versions of) laws," I am simply referring to the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) of the Old Covenant and the Christ's Law of Love (Matthew 22: 37-40). If you don't believe the 10 commandments are part of the Old Covenant, you may want to re-read Exodus 34:28-29. Christ gave a "new commandment" (John 13:34-35) which is the law of love. The 10 Commandments and the Law of Love are not in conflict, as they both reflect the will of The Father. However, it is the Old Covenant Law that Christ came to keep (because no man could keep it perfectly), ushering in the New Covenant. When Christ said, "If ye love me, keep MY commandments" He was referring to the law of love -- the new commandment He gave.

The law of the Old Covenant has been "done away" (not voided, as it applies to those who reject Christ) for believers and followers of Christ (2 Corinthians 3: 11 KJV). The Bible says that the "ministration of death written and engraved in stones . . . which glory was to be done away," and "For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious," 2 Corinthians 3:6-7, 11. Verse 14 says, "But their minds were blinded: for unto this day remaineth the same veil, untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart, Galatians 3: 24, 30-31 again, specifically mentions Mount Sinai "which genderth to bondage." Under the New Deal, we are instructed to cast out the bondwoman and her son . . . we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

Again, I am not advocating lawlessness. I am advocating Bible-based freedom in Christ --
which cannot be at odds with God's law (Galatians 5:1). If, under the New Covenant, the law is written on our hearts, why is there need for the "ministration of death, written and engraved in stones?" (2 Corinthians 3:6-7)

Somehow, you seem to think that I am anti-Sabbath keeping. I am manifestly "pro-Sabbath" as, I agree, in the end times, it will be a symbol of our allegiance to the Creator God. I wrote this article, in part, to show that Sabbath-keeping both preceded the Old Covenant law and persists in under the New Covenant (thus the listing of "law-free" reasons to keep the Sabbath).

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Our church has partially grounded our beliefs in the Old Covenant.

The Law of God - SDA Fundamental Belief No. 19 (excerpt)
"The great principles of God’s law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the standard in God’s judgment."

I do not disagree that God's law is binding on those who are not covered by Christ's blood. But the definition of salvation is Christ's blood covering our sins (the breaking of the God's law). Christ kept and fulfilled the Old Covenant law, making our salvation possible. It is by His works, not our own (i.e., obedience to the law), that we are saved. His grace saves us. We can only be obedient to His Spirit (Galatians 5:18, 22-25).

I could disagree not with you more. You say, "The only reason to keep the Sabbath is because God said so. There may be other benefits to it, but the reason we do it is because God said. That goes for many other things, some which we understand and some we don't, but we accept that God knows all and knows what is best even if we don't understand. This is faith."

It is the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Deal. The Old is (flawed) obedience because "God said so." The New Covenant is obedience to the God out of gratitude and love. Faith says that Jesus died for me and paid for my sins. I accept that gift and, in gratitude and love, live to please Him and love others.

This is faith.
This theology is as old as The Cross.

Preston, you are engaging in double-speak. You want to have obedience without the law. Obedience to what I might ask? (His Spirit I see you have written above. That's very vague. I'm sure the Spirit will remind you of the law if you would be on the edge of committing adultery.) You want to have Sabbath without the law. You want also to still have the law but have it tied to the cross. In other words you want to have the law but not have the law.

Yes, the purpose of the law is to show us our need of a saviour, but it is to be kept. Otherwise it's not a law, it's a pretty poster of a motivational saying on the wall.

The Old Covenant wasn't flawed. God does not enter into flawed covenants. The covenant was broken because the people did not fulfill their part.

Not being under the law does not mean not being subject to the law. Otherwise I can go and do what I want. It has much more to do with not being subject to its penalties because Jesus paid the penalty that the law prescribed.

God's law is binding to all, including those covered by Christ's blood, except that those who are covered by Christ's blood are not subject to the law's penalties. Otherwise those covered by Christ's blood can go and do as they please. And then they would be lawless.

You cannot have it both ways. One of the reasons the Seventh-Day Adventist church was called into being was to draw attention to God's law which had been neglected for centuries.

What I'm not saying is that we are saved by keeping the law. We are not. But the law stands and we are subject to its requirements, whether we are covered by Christ's blood or not.

pagophilus,

I must say to you, as I have to Preston, it's the terminology, not the concepts that is somewhat problematic.

Whether you know it or not, your making Preston's point in real time about our penchant as SDA's to defend the law at all cost... especially grace. Where does it say in the NT that we are bound by God's law as Christians? How would you explain what Paul means
about not "being under the law, but under grace?" Romans 6:14 Or, to be "dead to the law... set free from the law?" How about, "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God in sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law, might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:3.4 What is Paul saying? He is definitely not saying that we are bound to the law?

If Christ paid the penalty for the broken law, the death sentence has been rendered, by accepting Christ's death as your death, the law has nothing else against you. Now here is where Preston's terminology gets sticky, at least to me. Yes we are no longer under grace, but under sin, but what does that mean? When you sin, if you are bound by the law, under it, you must pay the penalty that the law requires... death? Why are you still here to post on AToday. Because by the grace of Christ, he bears that which you should have suffered instead of you. It's true, the law (as the Holy Spirit's tool) still convicts the believer of sin under the New Deal (Covenant), and we must still confess / repent of the sin. But we have not lost our justification / redemption / salvation... That does not mean that a life of abject lawlessness will not lead one to perdition, it surely will. But grace is God's given means to establish the law of love / liberty in the heart / mind / experience of those who have chosen to follow Him. Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13.14.22-24; 1 Timothy 1:5

You want to talk about double speak: "What I'm not saying is that we are saved by keeping the law. We are not. But the law stands and we are subject to its requirements, whether we are covered by Christ's blood or not." What part does grace play in your scenario here? Cut it any way you want... salvation is based on obedience, because if you disobey, you're lost... that's the only implication I can draw here. This is the double speak that has caused SDA's for decades more problems in house then you can begin to imagine.

It's only by walking in the Spirit, by the grace of God, that you cannot honor God and His law while escaping the corruptions that is in the world thru lust. Galatians 5:16 New Testament law keeping is a matter of motivation / the heart... not performance... to say otherwise is to find oneself in the same situation the Galatians were in; "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:4-7 ESV)

The issue is obeying the truth. Romans 6:17-22 Being a slave to God is tantamount to law keeping... Genuine NT faith is accepted as obedience.

laffal

3 weeks ago  Reply

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laffal

A very necessary correction: in the place of Yes we are no longer under grace, but under sin, but what does that mean? It should read **Yes we are no longer under law, but under grace...**

That's a big ooopppppssssss.

laffal

Another oooppssssssssss.

It's only by walking in the Spirit, by the grace of God, that you cannot honor God and His law while escaping the corruptions that is in the world thru lust... should be...

**It's only by walking in the Spirit, by the grace of God, that you can honor God and His law while escaping the corruptions that is in the world thru lust.**

Preston Foster

pegaohilus,

Well, now you are just flat-out unbiblical (I've noticed your opinions are not accompanied by texts to support them).

- You say, "The Old Covenant wasn't flawed. God does not enter into flawed covenants. The covenant was broken because the people did not fulfill their part."
- The Bible says "For if the first covenant have been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault in them he saith, 'Behold the days come,' saith the Lord, 'when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not,' saith the Lord. 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' saith the Lord; I will put my laws in their mind and in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people'. . . In that he saith, A new covenant he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxed old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8: 7-10, 13 KJV.

- You say, "You want to have Sabbath without the law."
- Adam had Sabbath without the law, as did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob Enoch, and Noah. Not bad company.

- You say, "Not being under the law does not mean not being subject to the law. Otherwise I can go and do what I want."
- The Bible says, "But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law," Galatians 5:18 KJV. If I am led by the Spirit, I will do what as the Spirit leads. That can never be
in conflict with God's law, written on my heart.

- You say, "You want to have obedience without the law. Obedience to what I might ask? His Spirit I see you have written above. That's very vague. I'm sure the Spirit will remind you of the law if you would be on the edge of committing adultery."
- Christ says, "How be it when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth," John 16:13 KJV. If Christ said the Holy Spirit will guide us into ALL truth, is that vague? It is only vague if you do not have a relationship with the Holy Spirit and are not led by Him. The Bible says, "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster," Galatians 3: 23-25 KJV.

- You say, "You want to have obedience without the law. Obedience to what I might ask?"
- The Bible says, "And behold as certain lawyer stood up and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, 'What is written in the law? How readest thou?' And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thy self. And he (Jesus) said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right: do this and thou shalt live,' Luke 10: 25-28. Our obedience, in the New Covenant, is to the law of love, to the Holy Spirit, and to the laws written on our hearts. None of this is in conflict with the 10 commandments, but it is under a better covenant (of grace).

- Finally, you say, "But the law stands and we are subject to its requirements, whether we are covered by Christ's blood or not."
- Again, the Bible says, "But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law," Galatians 5:18.

I believe the Bible.

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pagophilus

3 weeks ago  Reply

Preston wrote: - The Bible says "For if the first covenant have been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault in them he saith, 'Behold the days come,' saith the Lord, 'when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Did you notice it said "finding fault with them" (the people), not the covenant nor the
law? That's what made the old covenant unacceptable. Not that God imposed a faulty covenant on them but not on us.

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And what does it say in Romans 6:14,15? 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

And what is the definition of sin? 1 John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And that is better stated in the King James: Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Sorry Preston, you can never remove keeping the law from living a life in Christ, nor from the Adventist faith.

Preston Says: Adam had Sabbath without the law, as did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob Enoch, and Noah. Not bad company.

So which law was it that Abraham kept in Genesis 26:5 "because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws."?

The law existed from the beginning. And the law is a transcript of God's character. I'm sure you can find the quote to match that assertion. (I don't quote many Bible texts because I usually squeeze a response in between waking up and going to work, or just before bed, and with an 8-month old child and a garden to look after and other responsibilities I don't have time for lengthy preparation (and I don't have scripture well-memorized).)

For people who are led by the Spirit (ie Adam before the fall) and who do not have a tendency to sin, you do not need to spell it out to them. Like with little children who are "innocent", you do not need to tell your 1 year old child "do not murder" because the tendency to do it is not there. But when the tendency is there, the law needs to be spelled out.

If it really was as simple as accepting Christ and living by the Spirit, why have the thousand plus pages of scripture. Maybe it's because we need an explanation of what accepting Christ and living by the Spirit really means in practice.

The other thing you are forgetting is the distinction between the ceremonial law and the moral law (10 commandments). This distinction becomes clear in context. For example Colossians 2:14, the handwriting of ordinances being against us, having its parallel text in Deuteronomy 31:24-26 24 It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, 25 that Moses commanded the
Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 26 “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.

Here you have a handwriting (Moses' book) of laws (ordinances) being a witness against the people.

In other parts of the NT this distinction also becomes clear through reading the context, but you probably don't see it that way. In fact, in Colossians 2:14 you probably read it as a certificate of debt rather than the plain reading.

It is this unwillingness to read what is plainly there and a willingness to see what you want to see that is causing you to fulfill the text in Mark 4:12 "so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

Keeping the law does not save us but breaking the law (and not repenting nor overcoming) will surely condemn us. No amount of law keeping will save us. Only Christ can save us through what He did. But He is not going to save unrepentant sinners. And sin is defined by the law (the mirror).

There's a paragraph on someone's website which make it quite clear: Think about it this way; Say you were found guilty of murdering someone, and the law of the land sentenced you to death. Can you "work" your way to freedom? No, because you are under the law and it demands your life. The only way you can be free, is if a judge has compassion on you and pardons you. Let's say that happens; A judge comes along and pardons you. You are now under grace and no longer under the law, which demanded your life. You are free!! Now, do you leave thinking, "I'm free!! I found grace with the judge, I'm free to go and commit more crimes, because I'm now under grace, not under the law!" Of course not. Any person with an ounce of gratitude would now go and KEEP the law the best they could. And anyway, does the law of the land now become void because you found grace from the judge? No, the law still stands. Do you see this truth with regards to being under grace, not under law?

Read the whole Bible in context, and remember Peter's statement in 2 Peter 3:16 that "His (Paul's) letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

I will say this and leave it there for you and others to consider, as, obviously, we
simply disagree.

"Preston wrote: - The Bible says "For if the first covenant have been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault in them he saith, 'Behold the days come,' saith the Lord, 'when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,'" Hebrews 8: 7-10, 13 KJV.

pegaophilus writes: "Did you notice it said 'finding fault with them' (the people), not the covenant nor the law? That's what made the old covenant unacceptable. Not that God imposed a faulty covenant on them but not on us.

- Either you are in denial, or you are not reading this objectively. It simply does not say what you says -- or want it to say. It is a simple sentence with a specific subject -- the (first) covenant: "For if the first covenant have been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." The reason given for the second covenant was that there was fault found with the first -- simple sentence. The fault with the first covenant was that it did not completely make provision for the pervasive faults of the people. The first covenant, paid for with the blood of animals, provided temporary forgiveness for past sins of men, and, significantly, provided no grace --- even for a faulty priest, who was interceding for the sinner(s). The New Covenant provided a perfect Lamb of God who paid for the sins of the world -- once and for all (Hebrews 10: 9-10).

- pegaphilus writes: "And what does it say in Romans 6:14,15? 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!"

- For some reason you want to believe that grace enables and even promotes sin. It does not. We have referenced these very texts in explaining this to you earlier. It seems that either you refuse to accept that we can live in peace with Christ without the law or that, in order to protect the law, grace must mean "I wanna sin!" The original article, and everything that has been written about the New Covenant and grace says that, if we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the law. Several times, we have referenced the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), which fulfills the law of love -- and against which there is no law (Galatians 5:24).

- pegophilus writes: "So which law was it that Abraham kept in Genesis 26:5 'because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.'?"

- Abraham was operating in faith (Romans 3: 6-10, Hebrews 11: 8, 17) -- being led by the Spirit, who led him to do the will of God -- without a written law. Walking in the Spirit is not "new theology," it is God's preference for communion with us. The law is intended to be a temporary substitute to bring us into communion with Christ (Galatians 3: 24-25).

By the way, since you are very conscious of the condemnation of sin by the law, you
may want to consider these texts as well:

- "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain," Galatians 2:21.

- "For the promise that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness by faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise of none effect," Romans 4: 13, 14 KJV.

- "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace," Galatians 4:21, Galatians 5:4.

- Ephesians 2:14-16
- Philippians 3:6-9
- Titus 3:5

Try to remember, being led by the Spirit, not by law, in no way equates or even approaches lawlessness. Assuming you are married, are you faithful to your wife only because adultery is wrong and illegal? No. You have no desire to hurt her and want to be with no one else. In other words you love her. Doing what she wants, even if not your natural inclination, comes easily and naturally. Knowing her, you anticipate her desires and, if you get it wrong, you apologize and quickly pivot to a place that makes her happy.

If we are led by the Spirit, we have similar motives. The law is not our motivation. Love leads us to live consistently with the law. But, even more than your wife gives you, God gives us grace to cover our shortcomings, which (as our wives will attest), despite our best efforts, are many.

I implore you to search the Scriptures in prayer. As we cannot be saved by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16) and we are saved by grace (Galatians 2:21), I ask you to consider the blessings and freedoms God has provided to us (Galatians 5:1).

Finally, I will be obedient to The Word: "Avoid . . . contentions and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain," Titus 3:9.

Peace, grace, and blessings.
CORRECTION: The first reference to Abraham's faith provided wrong text reference. The correct reference is Galatians 3: 6-11.

laffal 3 weeks ago  Reply

Preston,

I dare say you have heard it said that there are those who are "glutton's for punishment." I really do appreciate what you are setting forth... but you have surely put your self in a targeted position to say the least.

I'm not sure that I can wholly agree with the Old Covenant Law vs the New Deal (Covenant) Law as though they are inherently different. In my understanding the law is the same, it's just that the Old Covenant / New Deal motivations are not only vastly different, but irreconcilable. And I believe you illustrate my point in your statement about SDA's seeking to defend the law, while giving maybe a little more then lip service to grace, yet always leary and paranoid when the subject of the grace of God that brings salvation to all men is brought forth, yes we have been guilty of that. For some reason we are afraid that grace will lead us to perdition, when Paul says that grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness. Go figure.

Why on earth we are afraid of not being under the law, but under grace is a head scatcher to say the least. To be under law is to be under guilt / condemnation / the curse, with no way out... apart from grace. And why it is hard for us to get a hold of the fact that grace does not free us to do as we please, but is the heavenly means of writing the law upon our hearts as a practical means of experiencing what it means to be godly / loving / lawful people is equally puzzling.

As Sis White put it... the law is the gospel of Christ veiled, and the gospel of Jesus is nothing more or less then the law defined, showing it's far reaching principle. (RH 5/27/1890)

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago  Reply

Brother Preston,

In this new deal you so enticingly package and offer in this blog, (which I must say is done in incredible style befitting a true marketing pro), I have a question which came to mind when reading this mega Grace blog which seems to be ‘part two’ of your ‘nailed to the cross' blog. For that I give you credit Sir: Grace in Jesus Christ is a real big deal. So here's my question regarding the deal you have posed: "Where does obedience fit in?". In Gen 4:10 we see the promise of Messiah (Shiloh) and the resulting obedience of His people. This was before Sinai. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments wherever Grace is magnified, obedience is a part of this experience of Grace.

Also – if we’re not talking ceremonial laws here are we referring to the Ten Commandments? As you are aware that ‘we’ Seventh-day Adventist’s unambiguously believe that these types, symbols and ceremonies of the ceremonial law were fulfilled in Christ at the Cross. Jesus did say: “I you
love me, keep my commandments” which clearly refers to obedience (John 14:15). Then in terms of the ‘Indwelling Christ’ (Gal 2:20) (Rom 8:11) through the ‘Indwelling Holy Spirit’ one is transformed into newness of life because of God’s Grace in Christ (Messiah) (2Cor 3:18, Rom 12:2, 2Cor 11:15, Gal 6:15).

Jesus was obedient Heb 5:8, Rom 5:19 – so too are we in Him 1Pet 1:2 (note in this verse Grace is mentioned as part of obedience in Christ Jesus through His precious blood. Can obedience then be obfuscated by Grace or is it a relative part of this 'experience' God freely offers which you have nicely packaged on this blog as the 'new deal’?

PS. Pouncing on the Sabbath seems to be a giveaway...and limits the mega-Grace 'new deal' package somewhat, in my humble opinion, Sir.

♥T

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Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago  Reply

Oops - typo first text should be Gen 49:10.
♥T

Preston Foster 3 weeks ago  Reply

Brother Trevor,

Thanks for your kind words. I will respond in greater length later on. I just want to clear this up as soon as possible (although laffal's response is very close to what I believe).

You misunderstand my intent and perhaps my words. I am, in no way, "pouncing on the Sabbath," nor giving it away (as it I could!). Rather, I seek to ensure the protection of the Sabbath message by grounding it in both pre-law sanctification (Genesis 2:1-2) and New Testament intent (Hebrews 4: 3-10). In short, the Sabbath is as old as the world we know.

My point is, ironically, we (Adventists) inadvertently jeopardize the (theology of) the Sabbath by grounding it in the law of the Old Covenant (please see my earlier note to "pegolphilus").

Peace.

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laffal 3 weeks ago  Reply

Treavor,

I may not be speaking for Preston here, but I do believe you've stated the other issue with many of us SDA's when it come to "mega Grace", as mentioned the one is to defend the law and the Sabbath, the other is the big O... obedience.
First of Jesus obedience was as necessary as His death on the cross to meet the demands that God's law had upon us. Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:10.13 Our salvation is not based on our obeying as Christ did. That would minimize what Christ accomplished in His birth / life / death / resurrection as the Savior of all men. John 3:16; 4:42; 1 Timothy 1:15; 4:10; Hebrews 10:11-14; 1 John 2:1.2 As well as we would be found in a long line of those who Paul described as the Judaizers who dogged his steps / efforts to preach the gospel of grace... Romans 5:20.21; Galatians 5:4 And SDA's would be rightly identified as legalists.

There can be no true obedience on our part without the grace of God. Without grace you would not know how to, much less be able to obey God and His law. Titus 2:11-14 "Where does obedience fit in?" Obedience is the response of love born out of a heart of appreciation for what it cost Christ / God to redeem us. John 14:15; 1 John 5:1-3 Genuine obedience is the fruit of a surrendered life to Christ that has the Holy Spirit fulfilling the righteousness of the law thru those who are saved by faith, thru grace. Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8

Bro T., be careful not to pit law against grace, they are both given by God for the salvation of sinners. That's been an issue since the days of the Apostles, it's nothing new. If you go back and read all that Bro. Preston has been saying, (I personally have bantered with him about some of his terminology) you will not find that he is advocating a disobedient / lawless life for the redeemed believer. Quite the contrary, our brother has been stating that, as does Paul, the Bible teaches that the redeemed Christian (when the gospel is rightly understood) does not have to fear God and His law in terms of our obedience / faithfulness to Him / His law. Luke 1:68-75; Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 4:4-7 Why not? Because the righteousness of Christ as a free gift to all who would receive it is based on Christ's obedience as our representative. The believer is now free to serve God out of love / in the Spirit, and not out of fear / in the letter. Romans 7:4-6; 2 Corinthians 3:4-7 Nor can you show where our brother has clearly stated that grace does away with the Law of God. (read my last post on this blog)

Revelation 14:12 makes it clear that obedience is a sign of those who have the patience / endurance of the saints, but they also have the faith of Jesus... and Jesus Himself said, I can of myself do nothing, it is the Father who does the works in me... John 5:19.30; 14:9-11. And Jesus said... without me you can do nothing... John 15:5. Genuine, Biblical obedience is the fruit of the union between Christ and the believer who is receiving the much more abounding grace then the sin that abounds in the world... it's a co-operative endeavor between the Spirit and the follower of Christ... Grace is not only the unmerited favor of God giving us His Son to save us, it is also the power of God in the life of the believer to do what is pleasing to Him... Mega grace is a great term... Amen

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**Stephen Foster** 3 weeks ago

Matt,

As I understand it, what the two texts (Colossians 2:16 and Romans 14:5) you referenced are saying is that we, as Christians, are never to judge others or to be judged by a day that we observe, or do not observe.

This, of course, has profound religious liberty implications for those of us who take a historically
Seventh-day Adventist approach to eschatology. (If we never judge anyone in this regard, we would never advocate or countenance any civil law regarding a day’s observance.)

Preston,

As you know, Trevor’s questions and laffal’s observations with regard to grace are, as usual, nearly identical to mine (“What is ‘this Gospel of the Kingdom’ anyway?”).

Preston Foster

Stephen,

I don’t understand why this would change our religious liberty position at all. If we hold that the Sabbath was sanctified by the Creator God, codified in the 10 Commandments, persists (per Hebrews 4) even after (arguably) the Old Covenant has passed, and is the conviction of our conscience, why would we hesitate to protest against the state enforcing observance of another day (i.e., Sunday)?

Elaine Nelson

Has any government ever forced, by law, an observance of any holy day?

David

Elaine if ever you go to Lima Peru, visit the “wax Inquisition Museum”. I remember seen a “wax man” been tortured “Carbajal HEREJE for keeping the Sabbath” probably this poor man was a Jew that was punished by the inquisition

Elaine Nelson

David, I have been to the Torture Museum in Rothenberg, Germany where many of the torture machines were employed: iron maiden, screws, etc. These were used by Christians on Christians. When hasn’t it occurred? The powerful define "orthodox" and dissenters are "heretics."

BTW, millions have been sent to their death for believing in a religion, but to make a day the center of all persecution is to center everything on the worship of a day. Can a day even be worshiped? Or is the totality of one’s personal belief that should be considered? If, as Paul says, we are not to be judged on days, isn’t it about declaring that God is our Redeemer? If so, then all Christians who claim the same cannot be separated by a day.

Stephen Foster

Elaine,
Your attempts to avoid the possibility that Christians will again persecute Christians because of the differences of the day observed are fascinatingly obvious because you acknowledge that Christians have a history of persecuting those who have veered from “orthodoxy;” and you have acknowledged the dangers of intolerance. Nevertheless, you go to pains to dismiss any possibility that the doctrinal difference of the day observed (as set apart) could never catalyze such intra-religious persecution in the future.

I digress, of course, because this is besides the point of this particular blog.

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**Stephen Foster**

Preston,

This may be a “first;” in that you misunderstand me. These texts have religious liberty implications because whenever **others are in a position to judge Sabbath-keepers**, we can point to these biblical suggestions that Christians should never engage in such activity.

**Preston Foster**

Stephen,

You are right, of course. I only wish/hope that Christians will operate according to The Word.

The record on that is spotty, at best.

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**laffal**

Preston,

Amen...

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**Trevor Hammond**

*RE this comment above: "Has any government ever forced, by law, an observance of any holy day?"

The US of A perhaps. Trace back the 'blue laws' and you will see...

♥T
State governments have, in the past, prohibited certain businesses from operating on Sunday, but have any forced OBSERVANCE of any day as holy?

There is a great deal of difference. States may force liquor stores not to operate on Sunday, or certain other businesses, but if you can furnish evidence of any U.S. state or government forcing, "by law, an observance" of any day, please do so.
Many in the U.S. have a two-day weekend, but it may be used anyway we choose: church, sports, or other use of free-time.

Eliane,

On the Federal level, Congress, the setting aside of Sunday as a holy day was undertaken in / by the Blair bill in 1888, and once again in 1893 using the World's Fair as the nexus for the bill.

The reason for the defeat of each bill was by enlarge due to the efforts of an Adventist pastor... A.T. Jones who argued the merits of religious liberty before Congress in each case.

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. With Adventists and Orthodox Jews and the increased hesitance to allow such laws to reach the people, how might it occur if, particularly the Adventists who are so preprared for such a law, to have one quitey slip through?

Elaine,

Who knows?

You like to read broadly. Might I suggest the book "The Black Swan," which examines the dynamics of the improbable. The premise of the book is that history moves on a slow continuum -- until is doesn't. Unforeseen events, that only seem obvious in retrospect (i.e., 9/11 and its aftermath or, if you will, The Flood), move the arc of history in dramatic, inalterable ways.

Things change fast. Ask anyone who's been "renditioned."
Preston, I have not read the book you refer to but am aware of its thesis.

Currently, I am listening to the Teaching Company Lecture on The World's Great Events that Changed History. A fascinating overview of those events and people who dramatically affected our world. Yes, anything is possible; everything is not probable without massive changes in the world as we know it. As for the flood, I do not by any stretch of the imagination believed that it covered "the whole world" as the writers "whole world" as they knew it, encompassed a very small portion of the world in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates.

Far more momentous events than 9/11 have occurred: this century has seen massive earthquakes that killed more than half a million people. It's all relative.

In a 1961 case in which a Sunday law was tacitly approved by the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Earl Warren stated that Sunday Laws would always remain a violation of the First Amendment whenever it was demonstrated that their objective was "to use the State's coercive power to aid religion." (McGowan v. Maryland, 366 U.S. 420, 1961).

In 1924 a New Jersey court invoked a 1798 blue law and found it illegal to play a phonograph or listen to the radio on Sunday because this was "music for the sake of merriment." A Sunday-law "spy" peering into the privacy of a Baltimore home in 1926 and seeing a man pressing his pants on Sunday, reported the act and the man was brought into court and fined. In Pennsylvania, the "Pittsburgh Sabbath Association" had the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra arrested for performing a concert on Sunday. In Washington County, Virginia, in 1932, a deputy sheriff arrested two women--one a crippled mother who walked with crutches--for washing clothes in her home. In a Philadelphia suburb it is recorded that a policeman arrested a boy for kicking a football on Sunday. When the father protested, the . . . policeman shot and killed the father." This was 1931.

A partial review of court records reveals that in a one year period between 1895 and 1896, over seventy-five American citizens were convicted of Sunday law offenses and were sentenced after fines to jails, chain gangs, etc., and served a total of 1,144 days.

But on the state level, matters were different. Unshaken by the federal Bill of Rights, state after state passed Sunday laws, and for obviously stated religious reasons.

Roger Williams is called the "father of religious liberty." ...But then the courts accused him of not agreeing with the established religion enforced by the government. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, fined 10,000 pounds, and facially disfigured,—his ears being cut off, his nose slit, and his face branded with a hot iron.

"Captain Kemble, of Boston, was, in 1656, set for two hours in the public stocks, for his 'lewd and unseemly behavior,' which consisted in kissing his wife 'publicquely' " on Sunday morning on the doorstep of their home on his return from a three-year ocean voyage.

The first Sunday law in America required church attendance of all, and decreed death upon the third offense. This was a Virginia Sunday law of 1610.
Trevor,

Here's a little more that may help you understand my concerns.

First, to re-assure you of my motives, I believe the Sabbath is God's sanctified memorial of creation and the coda of creation itself. Further, I believe that, in the very end times, the Sabbath will be an indicator of alignment with and faith in the Creator God, as opposed to the traditions of man and the image or mark of the beast.

I believe that the Adventist reliance on grounding its defense of the Sabbath in the Old Covenant Law (e.g. the 10 Commandments) has led to only a partial embrace of the New Covenant (and a tepid relationship to grace) while causing us desperately hold on to bits of the Old Covenant. More importantly, holding on to the Old Covenant in any way, obscures and minimizes Christ, His sacrifice on the cross, and the grace of God (hence my problem with the 4th commandment being repeated as our "affirmation of faith").

As it is fairly easy for an objective Christian reader to understand that the Old Covenant has been done away, depending on the Old Covenant law only leaves the Sabbath vulnerable to the interpretation of those who take the Bible (when it is being literal) literally.

Establishing the Sabbath as the Bible has -- as being the sanctified, crowning act of creation, as being codified in the Old Covenant, as something Jesus observed, as a benefit for man, and as Christ's new testament intention for our worship after His death and ascension, in my mind ELEVATES the Sabbath more than does a simple reliance on the law of the Old Covenant as a raison d'etre.

The point of all of this is, again, that in the New Covenant, our worship and service are to be led by the Spirit and motivated by love. In my opinion, an over-reliance on law has produced, in too many places, its predictable fruit: self-reliance, judgment, bitterness, frustration, and hypocrisy, to name a few. If we learn to walk in the Spirit, He will not lead us contrary to the law, but our works will be seen as selfless, loving, and attractive. And, still, our works righteousness is as filthy rags.

Thus, the desperate need for amazing grace.

Correction: the penultimate sentence should read, "And still, our works OF righteousness ARE as filthy rags."

I just proved it!
Trevor Hammond

Brother Preston
The reason I am cautious when someone brings up BIG Grace is because so many times we tend as sinners to overlook the BIG sin problem which is why we have and need BIG Grace in the first place. I have heard many a person say that ‘as the Spirit moves’ or that when ‘moving in the Spirit’ then we are free which based on their fruits show that they interpret it as free to do as they please. This to me makes it seem as though some may presumptuously do the same that Israel did by adapting the Old Deal by adapting the New Deal - but this side of the Cross. Question is what ‘free’ do they refer to. If they would say free FROM sin then I would easily concur but to say free TO sin as though Grace will just keep covering presumptuous sinning is clearly off the mark. This brings us to the other extreme: cheap grace. We have to acknowledge the fact that the very purpose of both the Old and NEWer Covenants is Messiah. He is the common denominator.

“Matt 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people FROM their sins.” The very name Jesus signifies a Saviour. A Saviour who saves his people FROM sin. Sin is revealed by the Law and therefore the Law has a place in all of this 1John 3:4. This principle is found both in the old and new testament. Law; Sin; Obedience and Righteousness are all integrated into the NEWer Covenant too. Under grace doesn’t mean there is no sin and that is does NOT make void the law Rom 3:31, as you have previously pointed out, (but this seems to now be a virtual law of some sort in this new deal dispensation whilst still based on the written law of some sort). Again, as you mention even in the previous blog, faith does not make void the law. So just how do we define the law? Has it been watered down somewhat (by God) in the new? Is sin not as treacherous and evil as revealed in the Old deal? I also will have to ask also whether Grace is just used by some as an excuse for compromise.

One has to also remember that this article could easily be used by proponents of ‘cheap grace' or 'presumptuous sinning' as an alibi or license for reckless sinful living by some saying: “Oh well, Grace is more important. We should focus on the ‘nailed to the cross’ ξειρόγραφον imagery rather than the 'If you love me keep my commandments'.” So is what Jesus saying different from what Paul is saying, or are we missing something? John 14:15. John 14:12,17,21; John 15:10; Rev 12:17; Rev 14:12,13; 1John 2:4,5,6; 1John 5:2’3; John 14:21,23; Matt 19:17,18,19; Dan 9:4; Eccl 12:13,14; 1John 3:4,5,6. So even Jesus mentions the commandments: even some from the Ten. The Old Testament’s distinctive acknowledgment, respect and awe for God’s Law, is not in the least bit lessened in the NEWer covenant which by faith is written on our hearts. The SDA Church too, is full of many who have been saved and are been saved by Grace or the new deal. Just because we uphold the virtue of God’s word as summarized in the Ten, doesn’t and hasn’t lessened our NEWer Deal Grace of which too I (and you) are big recipients of. Praise God! The Law and Grace have their rightful place and they do not cancel each other out as it is Grace that put Jesus on the Cross just as much as the Law did. In my opinion of course.

Furthermore, I would also like to point my view that Grace was always the catalyst in terms of salvation even in the Old Testament AND the Old Covenant too just like in the New, albeit which fulfilled types and symbols in Christ. The Bible nowhere teaches salvation my human works alone. God is always in Christ (Messiah) offering the Promise and heralding the ‘Gospel of the Kingdom' throughout the Holy Bible. Noah Gen 6:8-9, Abraham Gen 17:1, David Ps 51:10-11, and then also Zechariah 13:1 which speaks of a fountain for sin and uncleanness, also pointing towards Messianic Righteousness by Faith. This obviously was God’s intention too in the Old
Covenant which was distorted by Israel not seeing this in the types and symbols and ceremonies which by Faith pointed to Messiah. They made this into a burdensome works orientated religion which Jesus abrogated (nailed) at the Cross when He fulfilled the types and symbols and ceremonies which were a representation of Him and nailed them χειρόγραφον at the Cross.

Brother Trevor,

Your concern is valid in the sense that the gospel rightly understood is dangerous from that standpoint of overreaching the freedom of Christ to mean we can now do as we please. So many of us Adventists jump on anything that we remotely think to be "once saved, always saved." The problem with this is that we have tended to throw the gospel baby out with the bathwater. And instead of experiencing / demonstrating / witnessing the freedom from sin... we defend doctrine / law / obedience to the extent that we short circuit our own freedom, while retaining some measureable portion of legalism, if only in the terminology of the defense itself.

If we don't learn to read / hear out carefully what one another has to say on these matters, we will continue to exercise ourselves to no real good purpose. Although I do appreciate your explanation of grace here. But we do waste so much time and energy chasing rabbits that really have nothing to do with what is actually being said / meant. It might be a good thing to ask questions pertaining to the articles / statements by which we can further the discussion / understanding together as opposed to assertions / standoffs that lead us to what?

Just to be clear, I share a great deal of concern with Preston in the point / purpose of his last few posts. We SDA's have any number of in-house issues that need to become clarified so that the necessary understanding and purpose of the gospel of grace may be experienced by all who will. The question is; how do we get there? Imagine what it was like for the disciples in the upper room after the ascension of Christ. I can see them as being brutally honest, yet filled with love for Christ and one another. That's when the unity came... and they were blessed with the out pouring of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord bless us to see / hear / understand / do likewise that we may receive the long awaited blessing.

Peace

Brother Trevor,

In my mind, if someone wants freedom TO sin, clearly, they are not walking in the Spirit. I see our mission less as defenders of the law and more as ambassadors of Christ. In the end, Christ will judge those who abuse the grace He has provided for our salvation. I will leave that to Him.
Grace can be abused. But we are also warned, in many places, about using the law to establish our own righteousness or for "bragging rights," (Ephesians 2:8-9) Dependence on the law can lead us away from dependance on Christ, His righteousness, and His grace.

If we are leading others to Christ, rather than to the law, HE does the work of converting the heart and emruing us with His Spirit.

If the law is written in our hearts as the Word says, it is MORE real than laws written in stone. It is a walk of faith. Abraham was given the promise, through faith from the start (Romans 4:2-13 KJV). We depend on what is written in stone only to be led to Christ. From that point on, we are to be led by His Spirit (Galatians 3:24-25).

Our discomfort with being led by the Spirit was addressed in my earlier article, "What Holy Ghost?" Our discomfort with the concept of not being under the law, I believe, comes from a lack of intimacy with the Holy Ghost which leaves us feeling unmoored and vulnerable to sin -- needing the law as our guide. In the New Covenant, the law remains the standard (as it is not made void), but it is not our guide; the Holy Spirit is (Galatians 5:18).

That, I believe, is the difference that is both most clear and most difficult to embrace, as it requires absolute faith ("evidence of things not seen").

We are saved by grace and not works of the law. Our good works are the evidence, the identifiers (the fruit) of our surrender to self and of the righteousness of Christ working in us. In short, our obedience is the end, rather than the means of conversion. The verse that is quoted to make opposing points, if read literally, actually explains "the order of service," if you will: "IF YOU LOVE ME, keep my commandments." Love comes first and is the premise of obedience.

And the law of love is the law of the New Covenant. What would change if we focused on keeping that law? Yes, Christ wanted works ("If ye love me, feed my sheep"). However, he commanded love-based works, in accordance with the new commandment He gave us.

If Christ is in us, and we in Him a change will be evident and convincing to others. That, I believe, is the witness of His Kingdom come to this earth.

Stephen Foster

I think I get it now…if you want the freedom TO sin and from its penalty, as opposed to freedom FROM sin and from its power, then you are not led by, or walking in, the Spirit; and are under the law.

The freedom from sin and its power is only available by grace through faith; in which case the law is inapplicable.
A few questions for reflection.

1. When Paul wrote about the Old Covenant at Sinai in Gal 4, was that Covenant primarily the Law? An agreement based on the Law? or both? Are the Law and the Covenant the same, or different? If so, what is the difference?

2. The passage about the Old and New Covenants in Heb 8 quotes from Jer 31:31-34. When Jeremiah wrote that God would write His Law on the hearts of His people, what Law was he talking about?

3. Are the Laws to be written on the heart (Heb 8) different from the Law in Jer 31? If so, what is the evidence, and what is the difference? In Heb 8, do the "laws" to be written on hearts under the New Covenant include the 10 Commandment Law, or are they clearly excluded? Are all included except the fourth?

4. The 10 Commandments are obviously more specific and detailed than the "law of love" mentioned above. Is there any other difference? Do they conflict in any way with the Law of Love? If so, which Commandment(s) is/are inconsistent with love? Did God want for any of them, including the Sabbath, to be observed for any other reason than love -- His love for His earthly children and their love for Him?

5. Is there any necessary conflict between the 10 Commandments and grace? Does grace include only justification, or is there such a thing as sanctification by grace? If so, does it include grace to live increasingly in harmony with the them?

6. What does Paul mean by writing that we are not "under law" but "under grace" in Rom 6:14? Under condemnation of the Law? Under jurisdiction of the Law? Under the law as a means of being justified? Are Christians "under" the law of love? If so, would that be any better or easier than being under the Law? If so, how so?

7. What does Paul mean by "under grace" in Rom 6:14? Is "under grace" as a means of being justified?

7. What does Paul mean in Rom 8:3, 4 by saying that the "righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit?" What law is he referring to? What does he mean by "fulfilled?" What does he mean by "walking" after the Spirit?"

Would short, thoughtful biblical answers to these questions be helpful? I would be especially interested in Preston's response.
Trevor Hammond

Reply 2 weeks ago

Just one more question perhaps, to add to those mentioned above.

Was Adam and Eve under Grace or under Law in the Garden of Eden when God said to them: "Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"? After all, God did establish a Law when He asked them to obey. [Gen 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.] Remember that this was even before the fall. A point to also note here is that the Sabbath (and union of man and wife in marriage) were established BEFORE the fall at Creation: In the beginning.

♥T

Elaine Nelson

Reply 2 weeks ago

Yes, God did tell Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He also gave the command to be fruitful and multiply. But it only says that God RESTED on the seventh day because he had completed his work, period. There is no command whatsoever for Adam and Eve to rest on that day, which was their first day of being, but the seventh day of God's creative acts. He gave them only two commands, mentioned above, but not one word about "rest" on a day. In addition, there is not one single record of anyone observing a day of rest until Sinai, despite Adventists constant claim it was given at Creation. Why is the Bible corrupted by such additions? Is the record insufficient without man's adding to it?

Trevor Hammond

Reply 2 weeks ago

...And that's why God didn't remind us to 'be fruitful and multiply' - we seem to enjoy obeying that one ☺; but have forgotten the Sabbath like Israel, hence His reminder to REMEMBER the Sabbath Day TO KEEP IT HOLY. Seventh-day Adventists are the called as 'proclaimers' of this truth and are called to also preach the Sabbath message to REMEMBER its significance which
bears the name and seal of God's authority, sovereignty and dominion as Creator, Ruler, Custodian, Blessed Redeemer and the Giver of true Rest. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation!

Another point to note regarding the pre-Sinai establishment of the Sabbath is found in Exod 16:28, 29, 30. And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

This was asked of them even BEFORE Sinai which comes later in Exod 19:1. This proves yet again that the Holy Seventh-day Sabbath found in the Decalogue and upheld and heralded by Seventh-day Adventists IS an Eternal Precept established right 'In the Beginning' by God Himself before the Fall of man: and who better to establish such - but the Almighty Creator Himself. Obedience to the Law of God IN CHRIST JESUS by His GRACE is our response to His working in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Now that is a really BIG DEAL!

♥T

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**Trevor Hammond**

2 weeks ago  Reply

An additional note to my previous post in response to Mrs Nelson's post that mentions God's command to Adam and Eve to be 'fruitful and multiply'.

I might as well add that the homosexual community won't be obeying 'the fruitful and multiply' part and would be the exception in this regard.

♥T

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**Ymous**

2 weeks ago  Reply

Elaine

Looks like this topic may have pretty much run its course, but if you check back in, I have a few short questions for you.

According to Genesis 2:3, when God rested (ceased) from His work of creating the world on the seventh day, He "blessed" and "sanctified" (set apart for a sacred purpose) the seventh day as the Sabbath.

1. For whom did He set the day apart for a sacred purpose? For Himself, or for human beings whom He had created? Or perhaps for both?

2. If it was for human beings, does it seem likely or unlikely that Adam and Eve were aware of what He had done?
3. If they were aware of it, does it seem likely unlikely that they would either assume or be told that He desired for them to observe it?

I would be interested in your answers to these questions if you tune in here again and have the time and inclination to respond. In the meantime, take care and Godbless.

Vernon P. Wagner
2 weeks ago

Assuming the creation story is semi-factual, perhaps the Creator's 'rest' meant a decision from on high to stop the creative process (I dare not say evolution) after Primates had been given thumbs?

Question #2 above is profound.
No idea as to what they knew, or when, because scribes had not been invented.

Question #3 can only be answered after answering #2.

Timo Onjukka
2 weeks ago

A note to the respondents; please refrain from adding blanks space below your posts. Helps keep the comments threads compact and easily readable.

Ymous, Seems subsequent canon suggests Sabbath was not just for God. It was for man, his servants, and animals, in perpetuity. However, worship of "the day" (and proving ones own perfect adherence to it) has apparently taken precedence in form of worship. Not to be confused with worship of Creator.

The second question entertains that a written form of language was requisite for accurately (and verifiably?) passing down prior knowledge. Even if scribes had existed and chronicled it in some form, our translation of their scratchings potentially fraught with broad misinterpretation. Note the seeming conflict between creation chronology between the first and second chapters.
Perhaps even oral communication developed and evolved, or did God merely download a "Rosetta Stone" into Adam, providing him non-experiential, non-contextual language? If so, what is the original pre-fall "native language" of humans? Perhaps man was (esp prior the ziggurat @ Babel) a wholistic vehicle of communication. Perhaps constraints of written (and spoken) communication by their very nature introduce more guile than provide veracity and certainty. But i diverge from the OT..sorry Preston!

On another note. Mr Hammond notes an oft-missed point. The one-flesh covenant (the first, and the "template" of forthcoming God-man covenant) was the first thing sanctified in pre-fall garden. Seems the next day may have been a celebration of relationship, a type of honeymoon, if you dare.

Elaine Nelson 2 weeks ago Reply

"Rest" has different meanings. Consider an attorney in court when he has completed his statements: "I rest my case," meaning it has been completed.

We have no record of a written language prior the Egyptian hierglyphics which have been dated ca 3,000 B.C. The first law code, Hammurabi's, ca. 1750 B.C. The Law received by Moses, ca. 1220 B.C. However, the earliest possible date for the Law, or Torah put in writing was no earlier than ca. 600 B.C., and that is known as the Priest's edition, as there are several different accounts of much of the Torah as demonstrated in the two creation stories, the two flood stories, and others.

It is inconceivable that these stories were orally passed down through so many generations exactly as originally told. There were interpretations of the story-tellers, editions and deletions, and of course, a great deal of hyperbole that defies credibility.

Not until the Law given to Moses was sabbath ever a command to humans. It was given in recognition of their former servitude as slaves and their exodus from the slave-holders, giving them a day free from work/ The Priests, responsible for writing the Law and the Creation story in Gen. 1 were intent on emphasizing the Israelites of the Law which was the reason for their captivity.

However, in the Sinai, the Israelites, former slaves, were a largely agrarian economy and the necessary chores required care for their animals every day; the priests also had to perform their duties as well; the women were not mentioned in the Fourth Commandment and they still had their usual chores. Was their a great deal of change on any day, given the agrarian economy in which they lived?

Steve Tanner 2 weeks ago Reply

Having taught Sabbath school class many years I have often asked the question..Ary you saved? I
never get much comment from that question. Some will say Yes, but...
Maybe we should preach on Grace and saved by faith in Jesus a lot more often so all will know weather they are saved or not.
My Bible says believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved. To me it's simple. Yes I am a sinner as we all are. I know Jesus paid the price for me. It gives me great peace. Prais God for what He has done for us all.
Steve

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Preston Foster

Ymous and Trevor,

My premise is not that the law of the Old Covenant is wrong. It is not. It is, according to the Bible, the Old Covenant that was imperfect (Hebrews 8:7-8, 13). Still, that is not the point that I am positioning here. The point is, again, that by grounding Sabbath observance (again, I am profoundly “pro-Sabbath”) exclusively in the law of the Old Covenant (see Fundamental Belief #19), which has (arguably) ended (2 Corinthians 3:6-7, 11, Hebrews 9:14-15, Ephesians 2:15), but not voided, we inadvertently risk the theological viability of the Sabbath -- particularly with Christians of other faiths, and, also, (by leaning on the Old Covenant) mitigate grace, which is the means of our salvation.

Now, regarding some of your questions:

*When Paul wrote about the Old Covenant at Sinai in Galatians 4, was that Covenant primarily the Law? An agreement based on the Law? or both? Are the Law and the Covenant the same, or different? If so, what is the difference?*

To me, it is clear, that Paul was referencing the law primarily, and, in the context of the allegory, the two covenants referenced in Galatians 4:24, the promise of the New Covenant, regarding freedom from the law (Galatians 4:30-31). In the introduction to Galatians 4, Paul references the purpose of Christ’s first advent -- “to redeem them that were under the law” (Galatians 4:5). Galatians 4:9, 21 provide the context of the allegory regarding the differences in the covenants: freedom vs. bondage. Clearly, Galatians 5 (the entire chapter), makes it clear, that it is the law that was the subject of Paul Galatians 4 allegory.

*The 10 Commandments are obviously more specific and detailed than the "law of love" mentioned above. Is there any other difference? Do they conflict in any way with the Law of Love? If so, which Commandment(s) is/are inconsistent with love? Did God want for any of them, including the Sabbath, to be observed for any other reason than love -- His love for His earthly children and their love for Him?*

From a layperson's perspective, one obvious difference between the 10 Commandments and the law of love, is that the world “love” appears no where in the decalogue (though God’s purpose in giving the to us was, if fact, love -- and, I believe, to prove to us that we, in our own power, can do nothing). Still, the absence of the word has led, I believe, to a sometimes unloving, judgmental, and works-based approach to law-keeping. The difference, in my mind, stems not from what God
and Christ said in the 10 Commandments and the law of love, respectively, but the conditions under which they apply. The law of the Old Covenant was given in response to a request for clarity (and, in my opinion, out of the fleshly assumption that man could do it). Christ had to come to earth and live the perfect life that no man could, to fulfill the law of God. Christ gave the law of love to us, to communicate the priority of His Kingdom

In my view, the conflict comes is arises in two places 1) how humans judge other humans in terms of the need for, the requirements, and specific application of commandment keeping (Romans 2:19-29), and 2) most importantly, the process and motives for commandment keeping; specifically law-keeping out of obligation and obedience to the law, or being led into with communion with the will of God by the Holy Spirit. Some believe the former constitutes legalism, while others believe the latter to be bordering on antinomianism.

What does Paul mean by writing that we are not "under law" but "under grace" in Rom 6:14? Under condemnation of the Law? Under jurisdiction of the Law? Under the law as a means of being justified? Are Christians "under" the law of love? If so, would that be any better or easier than being under the Law? If so, how so? 7. What does Paul mean by "under grace" in Romans 6:14? Is "under grace" as a means of being justified?

Being not under the law, I believe means that, in Christ and His righteousness, the requirements of the law have been satisfied (by His life and death on the Cross). The law is to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-26). If we are in Christ, we are lead by His Spirit (Galatians 5:18, Romans 8:9-10), which is our guide, not the specific, but limited requirements of the law, engraved in stone (2 Corinthians 3:6-8). Paul was speaking plainly (2 Corinthians 3:1-14). I see no hidden meaning. If we are in Christ, the law -- and its penalties do not apply to us (Romans 8:2-4, 2 Corinthians 1:9-10, 2 Corinthians 3:16-17). Not that the law is voided, but because, in Christ, our sins are covered by His blood. What else would allow Paul to say, with confidence, relatively unstructured things such as he did in Romans 14:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 10: 23?

Likewise, being “under grace” is, to me, straight-forward. We, who are in Christ and led by the Spirit, live and operate under grace through faith in Jesus. For me, the primary reason to rejoice in grace is that is, quite profoundly, how we are saved. Grace points to Christ, alone, and what He has done for us. The law points to us: our sin, our guilt, and our inadequate works (Philippians 3:9, 1 Timothy 1: 9-15). Being under grace says, to me, Christ is our righteousness (Titus 3: 5-7).

When the Father looks at us, because of His grace, He sees only Christ (, Ephesians 2:13-18, Colossians 1:12-14). We are, then, because of being under grace, reconciled to The Father (Colossians 1:19-22).

I believe we are, in all respects, under the law of love (1 John 4:8, 11, 15-17, 21).

Elaine Nelson

Preston,

You have given an admirable explanation of the two covenants. That they are still confusing to Adventists is most apparent. Do other Christian churches have such difficulty? If not, why not?
Could it be because so many Adventist doctrines are taken directly from the Old Testament? I believe that is one very important reason. When the distinctive doctrines of Adventism can only be shown from the Pentateuch, or the Old Covenant, it compounds the necessity for repeated explanations.

If one restricts his reading for doctrines of the Christian church (how can one find Christian doctrines from Judaism?) there will be no problems. Paul then becomes crystal clear: the Old Covenant was fulfilled at the cross and we are now living under the New Covenant. To live under the Old Covenant is to deny the efficacy of the cross. All the texts above simply reinforce this.

For the Jews sabbath was almost central; all life revolved around its proper observance; one can see this by the multitudes of activities that must be done or prohibited surrounding the sabbath. Paul rejected Judaism as a way to be accepted by Christ: he did away with circumcision—the first mark of a Jew—and with that, all other practices were also done away with. The very few remaining were given in several places in the NT and only involved food offered to idols, blood, and fornication.

He also put the Law in its proper place: to guide one to Christ and since He has come, we are no longer bound by the Law but freed from its demands. There is no other reason why Adventism has consistently since its birth been faced with difficulties in explaining this New Covenant is because of insistence that sabbath is still binding. There is nothing in the New Testament that Christians are to observe any day, thus the confusion and it will continue as long as the refusal to take Paul just as he is.

Timo Onjukka

Steve: Perhaps the question ought be posed, since your name is already scribed in the book, and salvation has been proven through firstfruits, are you LOST?

"I have made you son of promised inheritance; how long will you believe yourself an orphan?"

Preston Foster

Elaine,

Thanks for your kind words.

However, I disagree with your conclusion: "There is nothing in the New Testament that Christians are to observe any day, thus the confusion and it will continue as long as the refusal to take Paul just as he is."

Hebrews 4 does exactly that, with specificity regarding the 7th day, in the context of creation:

"I Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you"
be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.[a] 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,
   “So I declared on oath in my anger;
   ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”[b]

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'On the seventh day God rested from all his works.'[c] 5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

   “Today, if you hear his voice,
   do not harden your hearts.”[d]

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works,[e] just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[f] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

These passages, in addition to Genesis 2:1-2, Exodus 20:8-14, and Revelation 14:7 (along with multiple texts that document Sabbath-keeping), that, in my opinion, show the constancy of the Sabbath throughout the history of the world. In my opinion, that is the best approach to ground the Adventist belief in Sabbath observance.

I believe, the Holy Spirit will lead seekers to see the clarity of God's intent for the Sabbath, which spans covenants and lasts, I believe, into eternity.
Then note in my last post should read: "(along with multiple texts that document CHRIST'S Sabbath-keeping)."

Thanks.

Preston Foster

2 weeks ago

Elaine Nelson

Preston, that is almost invariably the retort when sabbath observance is questioned: Christ observed the sabbath.

Well, yes and no. Why was he accused of breaking the sabbath? Who judged him? Who decides proper Sabbath observance?

Jesus was born, lived and died a good Jew. He was never called a Christian, as Christianity was born following the Resurrection. Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew: was circumcised, observed the dietary rules, and all the other feasts and celebrations of Judaism. Should we observe all of them as he did? Where are Christians told to observe the Jewish feasts and festivals of which Sabbath is included in Lev. 23?

Where are Christians instructed to observe any day as holy? Why would Paul say that no man should be judged on the observance of days? Or that we are not bound by the Law but now freed from that which enslaved us? To what Law was he referring?

Adventists would not have known of the sabbath and its many rules from the NT. They had to add both the day and its many and proper rules from the OT. There was never a day for Christians to be considered holy and it cannot be shown from the NT which are the Christians guide, not the OT. If the NT is insufficient for Christian living and doctrine, what should a church be called if it is a mixture of both?

This is why Adventists have been called cults--neither fish nor fowl.

Elaine Nelson

2 weeks ago

Preston Foster

Elaine,

It would seem to me that the retort, "Christ observed the Sabbath," is non-trivial. In fact, as Christians and followers of Christ, it would seem that anything Jesus did would bear significance, including how Christ kept the Sabbath (including healing and helping).

The New Testament passage from the Apostle Paul (the original radical grace preacher), "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works,[e] just as God did from his," seems, to me to be all encompassing (i.e., "for the people of God, for anyone . . . ").

What is it about Hebrews 4 that is unconvincing to you on that point?
Elaine and to everyone,

Too many (from both sides of this issue) seem to fall into the same trap. That is (Side A) claiming either we are still under the law and obligated to keep the Sabbath OR (Side B, claiming without the law, there is no need to observe the Sabbath.

The "third way" is to be led by the Spirit into the will of God. This requires purposeful and continual submission of our will.

Paul saying that we should not judge others regarding their observance of days does not make our knowledge of the Sabbath a moot point. Observing the Sabbath is, to me, both a blessing to me and an acknowledgment of submission to God and my understanding of His will for mankind. As the Sabbath is a memorial to creation, observing it reminds me how all this (i.e., life on earth) began.

There have been and are many blogs on this site which prove why that is necessary.

Elaine Nelson

How is the New Covenant superior to the Old if all the rules and Law is still in effect as it was under the Old Covenant? What is new about it?

I agree when you say that "observing the Sabbath is, to me, both a blessing and acknowledgement of submission to God." Presuming that your belief is the correct one for everyone else does not submit to Paul's statement of "letting everyone be persuaded in his own mind." Does that infer that there is only one "mind" on this? To me, it flies in the face of his statement in more than one place about the Law and mentions special yearly, monthly and sabbath days. What are the conclusions that you draw from his statements? Was he referring to something other than the Jewish practice of the timing of the many special occasions? What is your take on these:

"One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind."

"Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second....When he said 'A new covenant;' He has made the first obsolete."

"He takes away the first in order to establish the second."

What are there differences between the former, or first covenant, and the new one, or second
covenant? If there is proof that the sabbath is necessary, what texts from the NT support that position?

Preston Foster

Elaine,

The New Covenant does not make us God's unto ourselves. We are to be led by the Holy Spirit, not the law, to live in the will of God. It is inconceivable to me that the Holy Spirit will lead us in a way that is contrary to God's will or law.

The difference between covenants is that in the New, we are, thru Christ, reconciled to God, by grace. We can speak directly to The Father, in Christ's name. If we confess our sins, they will be forgiven, and we will take on the righteousness of Christ, who is our perfection. The difference is that we are free in Christ, from the yoke of the law -- and its death penalty. We are saved -- if we accept Christ as Lord and Savior.

The key to the New Covenant is not freedom from the law. The key is being led by the Spirit -- which frees us from the law. Without the Spirit, we need the law, as we are sinful and willful (1 Timothy 1: 9-15).

The point isn't whether the Sabbath is "necessary." The point is, do we love God and seek to do His will? The point is whether we are in love enough to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us.

The New Covenant is superior because it is love-driven. Grace and the law may lead us to lead similar lives in terms of behavior. But, under grace, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, long-suffering, etc.) will flow through us.

If you (or anyone is not convinced) of the need and benefit of Sabbath observance, that is between God, the Holy Spirit, and you. I simply ask, again, what is it about Hebrews 4 that is unclear, burdensome, or unconvincing? It's not about law; it's about entering into His rest.

laffal

Preston,

These last few blogs are appearing more and more to be a spiritual catharsis of sorts for you, as you continue to unpackage the logic of the 2 Covenants. Your terminology and the attending logic is getting clearer by the response.

Elaine Nelson

Preston,
I also believe that Hebrews 4 is explaining the meaning of sabbath: we are to enter into God's rest. It is a relationship, not a day which is important. It is a new understanding brought in by Jesus, not realized in the original intent and meaning of the Fourth Commandment.

Elaine, 

Well, I'll let you explain that to my wife if I choose to arbitrarily celebrate a wedding anniversary of my choosing . . .

Celebrating our anniversary is done out of love not obligation -- but I'm sure she appreciates it (and believes I love her more) if I get the day right (especially if she reminds me).

Smiles.

Point made. Does sabbath have the same meaning in Exodus as it does in Hebrews 4? Is Sabbath of equal importance in the Old as the New covenant? Given the multiple times sabbath is referred to in the OT, is it of the same importance in the NT?

Is your marriage more important than the date of your wedding? If you had to be away (military service) for several years and unable to celebrate your wedding anniversary, are you still married? Millions of partners (usually men) forget their wedding date, but are they still married? Is the symbol more important than what it represents?

Help me to understand your interpretation of how sabbath is used and meant in Heb. 4.

Your questions about the Old & New Covenant will never find satisfaction as long as you use a model that is not Biblical. The only real differnce between the Old & New Covenant's is who makes the promise to keep the law for the salvation of the human family. The Old Covenant is Israel making the promise to do "all that the Lord has spoken." Exodus 19:8; 24:7  The New Covenant is God's promise thru His Son, Jesus Christ, to keep the law on our behalf.

God knew that Israel would fail to keep their promise to keep His law, so He had Moses institute the Sanctuary Service to teach the New Covenant to the Jews. Everything in the Sanctuary
Services pointed to one facet or another or Christ’s work of redemption for mankind, including the Feast Days.

So, if there is a difference between the law / Sabbath when it comes down to the Old and New Covenants, it motivation. The Old Covenant is based on the fear of punishment, and the desire for a reward. While the New Covenant is based on love and appreciation for the free of salvation purchased by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Sabbath keeping in the Old Covenant is resting for our works, as opposed to Sabbath keeping under the New Covenant which is resting in the completed work of creation / salvation / the hope of eternal restoration.

Peace

Trevor Hammond

Regarding Colossians 2:16:
This passage has been incorrectly been used as a license to eat pork, drink liquor and trample the Fourth Commandment, by some; and by others to argue against the Ten Commandments and our Health Message or even worse still, to the extent that ‘cheap grace’ or presumptuous sinning is advocated; to put it in a nutshell. Col 2:14 clearly refers to ‘Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances’ which was ‘contrary to us’. It was THIS that was ‘nailed to the cross’ thereby fulfilling them in the antitype Christ Jesus by His death on the Cross. These were ceremonies pointing to Him in the symbols and types of the Old Covenant.

Heb 9:1 reveals that the ‘first covenant’ had these ‘ordinances’ added to it in the form of symbolic ceremonies and types which pointed to Messiah. Here (Heb 9:1-9) we find that Paul begins his discussion of the law focussing rather, on the ‘ordinances which were added’ and NOT the Ten Commandments, which were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone (Ex 31:18). In these verses Paul makes no reference to the Ten. In Heb 9:10 he concludes by describing these ‘ordinances’ as ‘carnal’. The Law of God as seen in the Ten Commandments is NOT carnal but spiritual (Rom 7:14). He therefore speaks not of the spiritual Law (Ten Commandments) but of the carnal ordinances which were added to the law ‘because of transgressions’ (Gal 3:19). Col 2:20,21 states that if we are ‘dead with Christ’ then we are not ‘subject to ordinances’ and that we ought not to touch, taste and handle these which have been abrogated at the Cross. That is the ORDINANCES that were ADDED to the LAW and written by the hand of Moses (2Chron 33:8, Ex 24:4, Deut 31:24, Deut 29:21 – note: the CURSE of the law, Deut 30:10). Ps 19:7 calls the LAW of GOD PERFECT yet the ordinances on the other hand refer to the law of Moses as containing curses, the latter which was NOT placed in the ark with the Ten Commandments. To confute these two and assert that Paul made no distinction is not in line with ALL that Paul wrote.

I should point out at this stage that we seem to have zoned in on the CURSE of sin as a result of transgressing the Law and assume that it is the TOTALITY of what it stands for in this regard. This is not the way even the Old Testament writers viewed God’s Law and even the ceremonial laws for that matter which became a curse because of disobedience and rebellion, yet it was NOT only about curses, there were many good teachings and blessings associated with in these ordinances which came to an end, of course – at the Cross. This can be seen when we look at the broader picture like many OT writers. Therefore we need to look at who Paul writes to. Those
who caught up in attempting salvation by works by subscribing to ordinances of handwriting which after the Cross was a curse to those who still clung to it and not Christ only. Of course there are always those who will try to keep the Ten Commandments on their own but this does not negate the broader picture of a Holy, Righteous, Perfect, Honourable, Worthy, (Ex 24:12, Ps 1:2, Ps 119:1, Ps 40:8, Ps 119:18, Ps 119:29 – Graciously?, Ps 119:72, Ps 119:77, Ps 119:26 – make void?, Ps 119:42 – law is Truth?, Law. Ps 119:174 distinguishes the difference between salvation and the role of the Law. The first refers to ‘thy salvation Lord’ and then the Law is called ‘delight’. They are two separate doctrines. The Law cannot administer salvation; but salvation does not in turn make void the Law. Both have distinct functions: both come from God.

Heb 9:10 from verse one echoes these sentiments: “Heb 9:10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.” The handwriting which literally translates as ‘something written by hand’ on parchment (ceremonial law) in contrast to God writing the Ten Commandments on stone which Paul proclaims (Heb 8:10, Heb 10:16) and quotes from Jeremiah (Jer 31:3) that they are written on our hearts through Christ our Lord by virtue of His Grace through the Holy Spirit and the Gal 2:20 experience which, I might add, affords the believer the declaration of Righteousness (by faith).

♥T

Trevor Hammond

Oops some typo's:
Jer 31:3 should be Jer 31:33
Ps 119:42 should be Ps 119:142
Ps 119:26 should be Ps 119:126

Kevin Riley

But, if you follow the Biblical distinction between the 10 in the ark and the rest outside, then the ceremonial law includes much more than just the sacrifices and ceremonies. It is literally everything except the 10 commandments. It is much better to accept that what was nailed to the cross was our debt, not the law in any form.

Elaine Nelson

One cannot find the law against eating pork in the Ten Commandments. It comes from the 600+ rules found in the Pentatuech which was given to the Israelites. If these rules were no longer valid, how can the clean-unclean meats be considered valid? Or, has it been done on a "pick-and-choose" method with no discernable criteria? Why are the dietary or Kosher laws still valid but the clean-unclean period for both males and females is no longer valid? Please explain on the basis of biblical exegesis.
Trevor Hammond

Please explain with Biblical exegesis where Jesus ate pork! ...and where Jesus (as a Jew) did NOT follow the Kosher 'eating' laws...

Remember this is not in the context of what Paul addresses with the Gentiles in Col 2:16. I only said that some USE this verse as an excuse...

♥T

Preston Foster

Trevor,

I don't eat pork and don't recommend it.

How do you deal with these texts (Romans 14)?

1Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

2For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

7For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

10But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall
confess to God.

12So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

13Let us therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

14I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

16Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

17For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

20For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

21It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

22Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

laffal 2 weeks ago  Reply

Preston,

Romans 14:1-3 is talking about food offered to idols... not flesh food (beef, pork, chicken, or fish...etc.). In the time of Paul, the pagan priests would take the food brought to the temple for sacrifice, and the priest would take to the market and sell the food. So the issue is this, should a Christian refrain from eating food offered to idols. There were those that said... definately. These are those whom Paul identified as the weak. Then there were those that knew that the idol / temple / pagan priest could not effect perfectly good food simply because of how it got to the
priest / market. Paul identifies those as the strong.

The principle at issue then is that the strong are not to judge the weak because they are "fanatical" about what kind of food we should or should not be eating, or whether or not we want to observe the feast days. Romans 14 is about judging others who do not necessarily see like / agree with you on matters that are not essential to salvation. I have used vs 17 many times to back off those who were pressing me to be a vegetarian. Interestingly enough, when I notified them that I had finally went to the vegetarian diet, some 13 years ago, then they wanted to take some kind of credit for my decision making.

Judge not! That's what this passage is all about... we all have to stand before God in judgment... first things first...

Elaine Nelson

Trevor, please re-read my question which was for a biblical exegesis where the kosher laws were still valid in the NT after the Resurrection and with the first conversions of Gentiles. I did not ask for a text where Jesus ate pork! He was certainly not a vegetarian, but no good Jew ate pork then, and none to this day.

Preston Foster

laffal (and Trevor),

That is what I see in that passage.

A subtle, but dangerous enticement of a law-driven focus is to judge the actions of others and to compare their actions and motives with ours. What the Spirit has led us to and the path that we have taken may be (and is likely) different than others. Although the destination may be the same, God deals with us based on our hearts and His grace. Jesus is the only way.

This is why no works of the law are adequate for our salvation. Again, it is not the law that is problematic; it is us.

We have no righteousness of our own, only His. He is the only one righteous enough to judge, forgive, save, or convict.

Trevor Hammond

Remember that while men have been cautioned NOT to judge: God can and will.

♥T
Preston Foster

Trevor,

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son," John 5:22.

This is why it is imperative to be in Christ. Christ satisfied the requirements of the law by His life and death. The Father's law must be satisfied. Christ is our friend, our advocate, our judge, and our Saviour.

This is why the New Covenant and its provisions for grace are vital to our salvation. It is difficult if not impossible to have a loving, trusting relationship with a judge who holds the power of life and death over us. Even if a keep the law out of a spirit of fear and expected reward for my works, it is for nought. It is far easier and authentic to have a loving relationship, born of gratitude, with a Savior, advocate, and friend. We will seek to please Him from a heart of love, rather than fear.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:1.

It is very good news.

Trevor Hammond

Amen! Brother Preston, Amen! I'm with you on this one...

♥Τ

Trevor Hammond

Brother Preston

Sir, while I did fully concur with you last post I would like to make another comment which you have alluded to somewhat. Paul in Rom 4:13-14 [Rom 4:13 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. Rom 4:14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.], is quite clear regarding the 'promise' and Righteousness by Faith in the OT which would obviously teaches Grace in the OT. Christians today relate to that same promise rather than the issues Paul raises with the Galatians etc. While these NT admonishings may give us food for thought and direct our focus to the Provision God has provided in Christ instead of works orientated salvation, they have little direct significance to us who have NOT entered into such a covenant for it has been fulfilled in Christ at the Cross. By default, this side of the Cross, we enter into the Promise just the same but in Messiah Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Again, I say, that the fulfilled types and symbols of Messiah have been ABROGATED by His
death on the Cross and by his precious blood. His Righteousness is imputed and imparted to us and transforms our lives through the Spirit's working in us.

These verses of late have caught my attention and speak for themselves regarding the LAW of.....FAITH? ☺. Here they are:

**Rom 3:20** Inasmuch as, by works of law, shall no flesh be declared righteous before him,—through law, in fact, is discovery of sin.

**Rom 3:21** But now, apart from law, a righteousness of God hath been manifested, borne witness to by the law and the prophets,—

**Rom 3:22** A righteousness of God, through faith in [Jesus] Christ, unto all that have faith; for there is no distinction,—

**Rom 3:23** For, all, have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

**Rom 3:24** Being declared righteous freely by his favour through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:—

**Rom 3:25** Whom God hath set forth as a propitiatory covering, through faith in his blood, for a showing forth of his righteousness, by reason of the passing–by of the previously committed sins,

**Rom 3:26** In the forbearance of God,—with a view to a showing forth of his righteousness in the present season, that he might be righteous even when declaring righteous him that hath faith in Jesus.

**Rom 3:27** Where, then, the boasting! It is excluded. Through what kind of law? Of works? Nay! but through a law of faith:

In these profound writings of Paul I see the 'balance' and rightful place of God's law in all of this especially interms of the 'Promise' to Abraham. I have also found, out of interest, that BEFORE Sinai (about 3 months perhaps), but after leaving Egypt God taught the Israelites to observe the Sabbath in the experience of the 'manna' from heaven. So pre-Sinai, the Sabbath was still a binding part of those who follow the God of Heaven.

...And this was BEFORE Sinai.

**Exod 16:25** Then said Moses—Eat ye it today, for, a sabbath, is today, unto Yahweh,—today, ye shall not find it in the field.

**Exod 16:26** Six days, shall ye gather it,—but, on the seventh day, a sabbath, it shall not be therein.

**Exod 16:27** And it came to pass, on the seventh day, that there went forth some of the people to gather,—but they found not.

**Exod 16:28** Then said Yahweh unto Moses,—How long have ye refused to keep my commandments and my laws?

I'm not saying that you say the Sabbath is made void. I'm saying that we can't use Paul to detract from the obligation for the observance of the Law of God and the Sabbath. (Obviously all this in Christ and by His indwelling through the Holy Spirit)

♥Γ
Brother Trevor,

Where I disagree with you is the term "obligation for the observance of the Law and the Sabbath."

My understanding of the New Covenant is that "obligation and law" have been replaced with "freedom and love." Numerous times, already cited, along with the texts from Romans you've listed in your last post, we are reminded that in Christ, we are freed from the law -- written and engraved in stones (2 Corinthians 3:6,7) and that through no works of the law shall any flesh be justified (Romans 3: 20). The law of the Old Covenant can do nothing but condemn us to death. It is through Christ's blood sacrifice that I am freed from the penalty of death. I can do NOTHING to EARN my salvation. If that is true, of what value is "obligation" to the law?

As God's law is written in our hearts, we will serve Him out of love and gratitude, not obligation. The purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-26). Being led by His Spirit, we will walk in His way, not out of legal obligation, but through faith (like that of Abraham) that His way is best.

In Christ, I cannot, again, be bound by the yoke of the law (Galatians 5:1). To do so, in my mind, is to say that what Christ did for me on the Cross is not enough, but that it needs the "help" of my works (Galatians 2:21). In Christ, the law is not for me, but for the reprobate (1 Timothy 1: 9-15). Indeed, it will be by the law that all whose sins are uncovered by the blood of Christ will be judged -- and convicted. Why would I want any part of THAT?

The Sabbath predates Sinai is as old as this world. I keep it because I love God and the Holy Spirit leads me to believe it is God's good will for me. It also, we believe, has implications for our loyalty to God in the time of the end. Even that loyalty will not last (or, I believe, be acceptable to Him) if based on obligation (works of the law). I need something deeper and stronger than the law to hold me in the time of trouble.

Love, not law, is the strongest force in the universe.

JaNe

Look to the Sanctuary...There lies the answer. (As SDA's we should all know this).

In the outer court is Justice. In the inner court is Sanctification. And in the Most Holy Place is the Mercy Seat of GOD for the Judgement. Repentance is both asking & recieving forgiveness and changing your ways. Or as Revelation 22:11 puts it- and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. ....Notice the 2 things mentioned. Those who have passed their Judgement are both Righteous (Justified by the blood of the lamb) and Holy ( Sanctified by His Spirit into a changed life).

First comes the Grace, then as a result of the Grace comes the Law. As the Scriptures put it- If ye love me, keep my commandments. John 14:15

Or as John explains- For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his
commandments are not grievous. Notice, His Commandments are NOT grievous if we love Him.

We keep His LAW as a result of receiving His Grace. The two go hand-in-hand. One (willingly keeping His LAW) is a result of the other (receiving freely His GRACE). This is the test...

_Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city._ Revelation 22:14 ... Now how does one interpret this verse? Are we saved and have a right to the tree of life BECAUSE of commandment keeping? NO—but rather the commandment keeping is a result of getting your heart right with God as a result of Grace. As in the layout in the Sanctuary-Grace first, for there is no other way to be saved, but then the inner court comes next, a changed life.

A glimpse after Grace (1st compartment) into the 2nd & 3rd compartment from Isaiah 55:7-
*Let the wicked forsake his way,*
*and the unrighteous man his thoughts:*
*and let him return unto the LORD,*
*and he will have mercy upon him;*
*and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

**Look to His Sanctuary**- *Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary:* Psalm 77:13

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**Trevor Hammond**

Hey, Brother Preston

I appreciate your time with me on this one. I see it more as a difference in perspective with regards to our call to obedience to God IN CHRIST JESUS with love dominating this experience. You are right about God's Love. My perspective is that they (law and love) are both a part of who God is and playing down one over the other isn't really necessary as they (law and love) have distinctive roles in God's plan for all of us.

**Rom 13:8** Do not owe anyone anything—except to love one another. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law.

**Rom 13:9** For the commandments, “You must not commit adultery; you must not murder; you must not steal; you must not covet,” and every other commandment are summed up in this statement: “You must love your neighbor as yourself.”

**Rom 13:10** Love never does anything that is harmful to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the Law.

In [Lev 19:18] we see the ‘love your neighbour’ which comes as a summary [Rom 13:9] of the six commandments which deals with our fellow man. Note that NO ceremonial laws are mentioned specifically in the verses from [Rom 13:9] but those found in the Ten. Then also we have to consider that the word ‘law’ is the same word used in [Matt 5:18] when Jesus affirmed it, in his ‘heaven or earth will pass…not one jot or tittle’ words, regarding it. In the context of these verses he emphasizes that he has not come to ‘destroy the law’ but to fulfill [Matt 5:17]. In fact in the NT the word ‘law’ νόμος is used for all the ‘law’ references from what I have seen which includes the references Jesus and Paul make when speaking of ‘law’. In [Matt 5:19] Jesus uses the word ‘commandments’ ἐντολή entole when obviously referring to the Ten. There is a distinction
with regards to the Ten Commandments/Law usage in the NT New Deal and the Ceremonial law/Ten Commandments/civil/domestic/health laws Old Covenant combo. Although Paul makes no direct distinction between them, he does mention them separately in [Eph 2:15]: Law, commandments and ordinances. We know that all three references are not made 'void' but only the 'ordinances of handwriting' [Col 2:14] and the 'agreement' of the Old Covenant itself which was abrogated, clauses and all.

Again, I say, It is the ordinances pointing to Christ which was ‘nailed to the cross’ AND our debt as sinners. The only way I see it that the that the Law can itself be ‘nailed to the cross’ is, if Jesus is personified as the Law: which I have no qualms about. When someone is acquitted or found not guilty, the law which charges them still remains ‘the law’ and remains there for all to obey. HOW one is able to obey God IS what makes the difference. **Own works? No way! Christ's works? Hip Hip Hooray!** In other words, the OC or Old Deal had a Ten Commandment ‘clause’ included in its formulation which, although it predated Sinai, formed part of the legal transaction agreed upon by God and the Israelites at Sinai. The LAW reveals God’s character which is unquestionably dominated by LOVE and can rightfully be called the LAW OF LOVE or LAW OF LIBERTY. It is here perhaps where I would say that we see it in a different ‘perspective’, rather than where we disagree. I see love in the law of God and God’s love for us. WE OBEY because Christ Obeyed - because of Love. Are we saved by it? NAY! Is it the basis of what we are judged by, even for those who bypass the judgement stage of the judgement process by virtue of Christ's merits? YAY!

In [1Thess 4:1-2] he makes request on how we should please and walk with God and of the Commandments giving to them by Jesus. In the following verses Paul then expresses the sentiments of the Ten commandments in referring us our love for God and our love for man. Example – fornication is a sin which offends God [1Thess 4:3]. Then is [1Thess 4:6] he says let no man defraud his brother. This is in essence what the Ten Commandments express. Bottom line: the Law has NO redemptive attributes for us to be saved. The Cross has and does. Although I might as well add that Jesus obeyed the Law and it is His obedience or keeping of the Law or His 'works' that saves us. This cannot be avoided. It is critical to receiving His Righteousness and been 'declared' NOT GUILTY on His merits of course.

The Law upholds God’s Love and Justice and Righteousness. The Cross displays His Love and Justice and Righteousness. When one says: “God is Love”, it would by default include the Law as a part of His Love, which represents His Righteousness and Character. Lastly, we obey God in Christ Jesus and are called to keep the Commandments of God in Christ Jesus [Rev 12:17, Rev 14:12, John 14:15, John 14:21, John 15:10, ]. Note John 14:21 - Is this Love or what?

I will hopefully make another post on how I think we obey in Christ...(aka - imputed and imparted righteousness which actually from my perspective enhances His wonderful LOVE and LAW)

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**Preston Foster**

1 week ago  Reply

Brother Trevor,
This discussion is what I hoped the article would prompt. It is vital that we re-search the scriptures, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to understand what is intended.

For me it is, now, very straightforward. In the context of Matthew 5:17, Christ said that He came not to destroy, but to fulfill His Father's law. Until that was done, heaven and earth would pass before one jot or tittle would pass from the law (the 10 Commandments). On the cross, Christ declared, "It is finished," meaning the fulfillment of the law -- and the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God. In terms of works, everything necessary for our salvation had been (and is) accomplished. After His resurrection, just prior to His ascension, Christ said to His disciples, that He had done what He came to do: fulfill God's (Old Covenant) law -- which is not voided, providing the payment that law demands ("the ministry of death, written and engraved in stones," 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Romans 6:23), and, thus, a means of salvation for us (breakers of that law). We are called to keep Christ's commandments (the law of love, John 13:34, Galatians 5:14), to be "in Christ," who kept His Father's commandments on our behalf (John 14:15, John 14:21, John 15:10). Our salvation is by grace, through faith in Christ, who has reconciled us with the Father (2 Corinthians 5:18, Colossians 1:20).

I believe that, in the time of the end -- when the mark of the beast and his image is bestowed on those who worship a false God of tradition, the Sabbath will be an identifier of those who worship the creator God. A difference between the two groups will be those who honor the Sabbath (along with other identifiers such as not bowing down to idols, Exodus 20:4, Daniel 3:8-12), sanctified by the creator God at the close of creation (Genesis 2:1-2), consistent with the first angel's message: "Fear God and give glory to him for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him who made the heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters," Revelation 14:7. At the time of the end, when the mark of the beast is bestowed on false worshippers, true worshippers will be identified, in part, by those who are both in Christ and have chosen loyalty to the Father (Rev 12:17, Rev 14:12).

In short, at the time of the end, those worshipping the creator God are identified by having faith in Christ and keeping the commandments of the Creator (whose law Christ kept perfectly). Our commandment keeping, at that time, is an identifier. However, the means of our salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thanks for listening.

I believe that one of the identifiable problems with the concept of obedience comes from our interpretation of what it means to keep the commandments. We have tended largely to automatically define the term "keep" as "obedience." Why I believe that it is problematic is that, in terms of how God saves the sinner, one's relationship to the His law is everything.

God gave the law in stone for the most part, as a transcript of His character of love / holiness to convict sinners of transgression, and by extension the sense of it's penalty, condemnation. In the design was the purpose of developing a sense / need in the sinner for a Savior... Jesus... who would by God's oath / promise meet all of the demands of the law as the sinner's representative. Any
attempt to obey the law (our general understanding of keeping it) for the purpose of obtaining / sustaining / retaining / maintaining our salvation is doomed to fail, and bring us under the ministry of death... the curse of the law.

When the sinner accepts Christ and His righteousness as a free gift, which established the law on our behalf, the law itself comes in the person of the Holy Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit, obedience will be as natural as God loving us.

So what's the big deal about "keeping the commandments"? The general concept of the original Hebrew / Greek terms used was in the idea of possession for a purpose: 1) to attend to carefully, take care of 1a) to guard 1b) metaphorically to keep, one in the state in which he is 1c) to observe 1d) to reserve: to undergo something. The 10 Commandments to the redeemed are a safeguard from failure, they illustrate how the redeemed life is to be lived, with the assurance that as we walk in the Spirit the righteousness of the law will be fulfilled in them. "Here are they!"

- The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalms 19:7-11 ESV)
- Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble. (Psalms 119:165 ESV)
- For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life; (Proverbs 6:23 JPS)

William Noel

Laffal,

I like the way a farmer friend of mine described his relationship to God's law. It was like his livestock, he said. He gave them a huge pasture in which to live and graze. There were feeding stations with hay and supplemental foods that contained vitamin supplements and other things needed to keep them healthy. They had a large area within which to live as happily as cows can live. God's law was like the barbed-wire fence. Push against it and you get a small pain that warns you to stay inside. Push a lot harder and it breaks, allowing you to go outside where you are not protected and you become vulnerable to the dangers that await you out there. Like the cow I saw some weeks back that got out of the fence and stood for two days on an island in the middle of a raging, rain-swollen creek. It had nothing around to eat and bellowed so loudly you could hear it for a mile until the waters went down enough for it to wade out.

The way some Christians relate to God's law you'd think they were that cow on the island bellowing their blame at God for putting them there.
That works for me.
Once upon a time, the Kingdom of God was like, “like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field” (Matthew 13:44, NLT) found by careful search. Nowadays — we are told — the Kingdom of God can come to your home via satellite. In those days, the Kingdom of God was, “like a mustard seed planted in a field” (Matthew 13:31). Nowadays — we are told — it looks more like a television network, with the kingdom growing as household after household tunes in, the baptism-like initiation taking the form of the installation of the necessary technology, and the channel of choice becoming the new denominationalism.

Christian television and broadcasting does have its place. For those isolated by distance or limited mobility, Christian TV can be a source of encouragement and teaching. And there are those who have grown into a relationship with God, with God working through Christian television broadcasts as an influence in their decisions. But there is no such thing as satellite Christianity.

Commentators on the social phenomenon of television suggest we should adopt a ‘reality index’ to assess the unhealthy pervasiveness of TV on our lives. For example, we should ask how many times each day we laugh at jokes made by real people compared to how many times we laugh at the carefully scripted one-liners from comedy characters; or we should compare how many times we have sex with how many times the act is portrayed, hinted at or alluded to in what we watch. This, they say, can give us some measure of the artificial reality we experience via television.

When we come to religious broadcasting, we could adopt an analogous index. Perhaps we could ask how much we worship as compared to how many worship events we watch as spectators (and this does not just apply to TV), how many conversations we have about God with real people compared with how much time we simply watch other people talking about God and how much time we spend with our own exploration of the Bible and God’s world compared with how much we expect ourselves to passively absorb from the broadcast experience of others.

Reality TV is a myth. While aspects of reality can be packaged, in most cases there is reality or there is TV. Of course, there are better and worse examples of television content and presentation. But even the best-intentioned television presentation is influenced by the constraints of production, broadcast and audience. In the context of religious media, Brian McLaren terms this sometimes-subtle influence, “radio orthodoxy.”

According to McLaren, the voices of ‘radio orthodoxy’ are given credence by numbers: “Since he’s on the radio [or TV], he’s heard by thousands; he must be right.”[1] And, by circular effect, the pressure — professional, personal and financial — to hold that audience can impact upon the message.

Even if only by virtue of being in the form of TV, the even-more-passive-than-passive consumption of TV-style religion renders Christianity something less than it must be. Christianity should not be reduced to pre-packaged, ‘harmless’ entertainment or mere companionable background noise. Our acts of devotion and worship should not be governed by TV guide and remote control. We need to
check our religious ‘reality index’ and ensure we are not blunting our faith in the Christian ghetto of the electronically over-churched.

But perhaps my lack of enthusiasm for Christian TV is merely a generational thing. I find myself more easily identifying with a comment by Mark Joseph: “In the same way, the previous generation thought, ‘We have our own religious channel, isn't that great, 24 hours of Christian TV.’ This generation says, ‘Why do we want to be on the kooky channel. We want to be part of the cultural mainstream and have our ideas considered there.’ One generation was content with having their ideas available, albeit on the sideline. This generation is saying, we want our ideas up front and center, part of the consideration that all ideas have.”[2]

But whether generational or otherwise, perhaps if we collectively contributed to just one hour of “ordinary” TV each week, we would be better off. And with our schedules freed up to allow more real-world treasure hunts, we could more effectively connect ourselves — and others — with the Kingdom of God.


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**Brian McLaren, “Scared to Talk Politics in Church?”**, [http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj0409&article=040910](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj0409&article=040910)


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**Brother Nathan** with all due respect and in accordance with what Elder Wilson said at his sermon last year in Atlanta, we are to hold all our leaders accountable to Scriptures and Spirit of Prophecy. He made reference to not using or quoting any authority from the Emerging Church Movement. Brian McLaren is one of the most strongest proponents of that movement and by quoting him here, you give your readers the impression that we as an Adventist Church approve or support the Emergent Church Movement. In the future please be careful about who you quote as authorities on one your blogs. There are plenty of Biblical or SOP quotes (and plenty of SDA authors) you can use to support your positions without any of them. God bless...

**William Noel**

Nathan,

This may not have been your intent, but you have illustrated both the challenge of religious broadcasting and the future of particular ministries. I worked for several years with Faith For Today in the mid-80s. Oh, the things I learned there about the illusions and realities about
religious broadcasting!

One of the biggest things I learned was that very few people tune in a religious broadcast (radio or TV) to learn about God. Most do so to confirm and reinforce existing beliefs. Per new believer created (or believer who changes churches) they can be a terribly expensive way to spread the Gospel.

Another big lesson was that ministries have life cycles connected tightly to the lives of their founders. With Voice of Prophecy founder HMS Richards dead, people were identifying with HMS Richards Jr., but donations were declining. When health issues forced William Fagal to retire, Dan Matthews worked with great energy, but donations still dropped. The same has happened at every media ministry I have studied, whether Adventist or not. In virtually all cases the root cause was the same: Donors identified with the founder of the ministry more than the ministry itself. Plus, they were of similar age so when they retired and their incomes were fixed, they often did not have as much to give. This same factor has impacted virtually every Adventist media ministry. We need to recognize this lifecycle, quit fighting it and let aged ministries die their natural death.

Now, add that our younger generation is not attracted to such intensely doctrine-focused presentations and the future of Adventist broadcasting seems headed toward a death date pushed by the generational change. Yet this paints a neon picture of the future of the challenge before us: finding ways to communicate Gospel principles and themes to a generation that is turned-off by historic modes of presentation like sermons. I suggest that if someone want to see that future, they should rent the movie "Fireproof" or go see "Courageous." Where "Fireproof" is focused on marriage, "Courageous" is focused on the role of the father in the family. What more timely topics can we add to that list that are both Bible-based and critical elements of how God wants us to live?

Stephen Foster

3 weeks ago

Nathan,

While you are spot on with relation to the television’s limitations and shortcomings, it remains possible that more people continue to get more information on the widest range of topics from television than from any other single medium or data source.

This is undoubtedly rapidly changing with the interactive, ubiquitous, and pervasive natures and capacities of the internet; but for raw purposes of information dissemination television cannot be discounted.

This brings me to William Noel’s observations in which case, William, you may want to consider the history and effectiveness of Joel Osteen’s ministry; unless you consider it the significant exception that proves the rule.

William Noel

3 weeks ago

Stephen,
Media ministers vary in a number of ways but their ministries still have a lifecycle tied closely to the lifespan, or as in the case of Jimmy Swaggart and similar, until the collapse of their reputation. I've seen nothing in Joel Osteen's ministry showing it will be any different. That is because donors identify, not with the ministry, but with the ministry being done by the individual who leads it.

Stephen Foster

William,

You may not know that Joel Osteen has actually succeeded the Lakewood Church pastorate and television ministry from his father, the late John Osteen; yet Joel has taken it to the proverbial next level.

I would dare say that he may have reached more people with the biblical health message in one week than we have in our entire television ministry history.

Steve Tanner

I am a surfer on TV. Sometimes I find a great sermon to watch by different preachers. God uses them in many ways to many people. It's a blessing to listen to some of them with a message I need to hear at a particular time or day.

JaNe

Brian McLaren? Oh No.........
Thin Soup

Submitted Oct 18, 2011
By Ed Dickerson

C.S. Lewis remarked that the French divide all soups into two categories: the thick and the clear. He carried that distinction over into religion. Religions which emphasize the mystical and emotional aspects are thick; those which focus primarily on reason and pietism are clear.

In these terms, the Roman Catholic church of Luther’s day was quite “thick.” Luther experienced this first hand, when he trembled at performing the Mass. The idea that the bread and the wine became the actual body and blood of Christ overwhelmed him. If it were true, it surely would be an electrifying experience—thick soup indeed. The sacramental nature of Catholicism appeals to the human appetite for the mystical and numinous—a God-given appetite to experience His power and presence in a personal way.

In addition, Abbot Suget had provided the intellectual justification for the lavish furnishings and decorations of the churches of his day, adding to an already “thick soup” of religious experience. Beauty in the church: beauty in the art and the architecture and the music would “lift the senses upward to the heavens.” But this reasonable desire for beauty became an end in itself—columns and floors of marble; stained glass windows; decorations with gold and precious stones—eventually practically every inch of wall and ceiling covered with tapestry or paintings. Just as too much thick soup eventually overloads the senses and clogs the arteries, all this decoration overloaded spiritual perception, and fostered a sensuous religion, a sensuous clergy, and a corrupt church.

The Reformation changed all that. Luther was a professor, a creature of the University, so he nailed 95 theses, or debating propositions, to the door of Wittenberg church, hoping to stimulate a serious discussion of issues facing the church in his day. Luther also famously compared Christians to a drunk riding a horse. First the drunk falls off the horse on one side, and then, in an attempt steady himself, leans the other way and so falls off the other side of the horse. No doubt this comparison arose because of what Luther observed at the beginning of what became the Reformation. Luther had written against images, and so, during the “Peasants Revolution,” followers began defacing anything and everything artistic in the church, destroying statues, ripping tapestries, and marring paintings. The gorgeous gilded sanctuaries of the middle ages gave way to the spare lecture hall style churches of Luther and Calvin.

Having started as a debate within the one catholic—that is, “universal”—church, the Reformation quickly devolved into multiple arguments about finer and finer points of doctrine among an ever-multiplying number of denominations. The numinous and mystical experiences of a sacramental Catholicism were scorned, leaving congregations with highly abstract discussions of doctrinal and theological interest—thin soup, indeed. The clear soup of cognitive religion is nourishing, but not fully satisfying. And it is no advance to replace the corruption of the sensuous church with the arrogance and self-righteousness of the intellectual church.

When it comes to our religious experience, we need both the thick and the clear. Experiencing the overwhelming power, majesty, and beauty of God is an antidote to the self-righteousness and
self-sufficiency of the intellectual church. And a call to holiness based on an intellectual understanding of the Gospel serves as a curb on sensuality and corruption. We need both the thick and the clear. To change the metaphor, we need to stop falling off the horse, and regain a balanced position.

The charismatic movement arose, at least in part to feed the need for thick religious soup, for the mystical and numinous, for sensuous elements of worship, among Protestants whose religious soup had been too thin for too long.

Early Adventists had a “thicker” soup. After all, if a person suddenly goes into vision and ceases to breathe during a service, that rates pretty high on the “thickness” scale. Early Adventists went from a movement expecting the return of Christ at a date certain—a “thick” experience if there ever was one—to an environment in which competing visions, outbreaks of speaking in tongues, and other spiritual phenomena abounded. Even before that, Ellen Harmon had grown up as a “Shouting Methodist.”

Through the years Adventism has become highly cognitive and therefore very thin soup. This can be seen in both our appetite for and cynicism concerning new visions and other phenomena. In the NAC (Not an Adventist Center) areas, we have an uneasy truce with the arts. Visual art and music we allow, with varying restrictions. Even the mention of drama and dance will probably earn me another couple of web pages denouncing such “Satanic” influences.

At least part of the remedy is to make our soup thicker. We need to embrace all the arts, including the so-called lively arts. We need to integrate them into our services. We need to welcome change. The default in most of our churches is “No.”

The former pastor at one of our college churches told me of his six-month struggle to get the church board to approve removing one pew for one week so the college orchestra could participate in the church service. “You would have thought an angel from heaven came and instructed them to bolt the pew exactly there!” he said to me. That’s a church where the default is “No.” Unless we can find some direct authorization for something in scripture or Ellen White, the answer is “No.” There is one notable exception, where despite a direct command from God, we still say no (see Ps. 149, 150).

At our church plant, the default is “Yes.” Unless there is some obvious reason not to try something, then we let people experiment. Out of scores of new ideas, there is only one we rejected. And we have integrated the lively arts as much as budget, time, and personnel allow.

“But wait!” many will say. “That sounds very risky to me. Very dangerous.”

Dangerous? What most congregations are currently doing isn’t dangerous. Dangerous indicates an element of risk. What most congregations are currently doing isn’t risky, it’s suicidal. A recent study indicates that fully one fifth of our congregations have no infants, children or teenagers. None. We’ve been hemorrhaging energy, talent, and even money for decades. And it’s our own blood. Our own children, our own brothers and sisters, even our own grandchildren. How many generations must we lose before we recognize that not to embrace change, not to engage the whole person, not to satisfy every God-given appetite is deadly?

“Oh, but today’s young adults are spiritually weak,” many say to me. “They yield to temptation.” Of
course they do. Again, from C.S. Lewis, “The tempter always works on some real weakness in our system of values: offers food to some need we have starved.”

If we starve our young, we can hardly condemn them for finding food elsewhere. And evidence abounds that our young are starving. While we fantasize about evangelizing the world, we cannot spiritually feed the children we have. Perhaps we need to remember that the final message really is about “Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children.”

---

Timo Onjukka  3 weeks ago  Reply

Great analogy! Spare the gruel; we ought share the meat! Perhaps the meat of the gospel has been too-oft diluted into some artificial protein analog. The real sustenance; "Peter do you LOVE me? Then NOURISH my people..."

---

William Noel  3 weeks ago  Reply

Change is threatening, not because it is dangerous, but because our fear of danger itself causes us to see it where it does not exist and overlook the real and present potential for positive result. If we do not allow our churches to change so that all members can be fed, with particular focus on our children, then we have created the real danger of our churches dying.

---

Elaine Nelson  2 weeks ago  Reply

Much as I love the great organ, choir and orchestra for church, how many churches are you familiar with that are able to afford those amenities? Only the very few large churches at SDA institutions. I know of only one (there may be others) non-institutional churches who have these musical aids to worship. Can you name others?

---

Timo Onjukka  2 weeks ago  Reply

repost by columns editor, edited gratuitous non-germane reference.

---

DAVID READ

"Excellent piece. One note of caution: thickening the soup doesn't require a dumbed down liturgy. Just the opposite is true. If you want to borrow something from the Catholics, borrow the great organ, choir and orchestral music. Larding up the service with insipid "praise music" in the hope that it will keep the young people interested is not the way forward. You end up torturing the older people, and the younger people (removed line) see through the craven attempt to appease them."
Kevin Riley

Interesting POV. But in my church it was those who are now in their 60's and 70's who led the move to a contemporary service about 20 years ago. We still have a traditional service as well, but most weeks no one plays the organ because no one learns how to any more. How using a piano, or a group of musicians, rather than an organ 'dumbs down the liturgy' is beyond my comprehension. Is there evidence that organs somehow increase the effectiveness of worship, or that worshippers somehow become smarter or more spiritual from listening to an organ? It is the failure to take worship seriously, often indicated by the huddle 10 minutes before the service starts to work out who should do what, that leads to dumbing down the liturgy. Music style and the Bible version used - even the actual order of service - are so peripheral to any real issue in worship that we really should move on and talk about something that matters.

William Noel

Kevin,

If you study the use of various musical instruments throughout history you will find many curious parallels between the musical preferences of the ruling class and social concepts. I have to smile whenever I hear someone proclaiming that one instrument or another is more acceptable for worshipping God because of the history of instruments. What we know as the organ originated from people blowing disharmonic reeds to ward off evil spirits. The harpsichord and piano were first used to accompany the dances in the royal courts of Prussia and Austria.

Horace Butler

Innovation has been going on in our churches for several decades now, and, rather than improving the spiritual state of the church, the opposite seems to be the case. Young people are still leaving. They aren't stupid. If the church is offering them the same kinds of music and gimmicks that the world offers, why should they stay? The church has to provide something better than the world. I don't think the lack of "lively arts" is the problem, nor do I think we should be borrowing from the charismatic movement, which derives much of its "soup" from paganism. Aaron tried to liven things up a bit with his "alternative" worship service at the foot of Sinai. I think the death toll was several thousand. We need to have open minds, but not so much that our brains fall out. Skip the soup; let's have some meat, as Paul said.

Elaine Nelson

Paul said he would be all things to all men in order to win some to Christ. Why should there be limitations on presenting the Gospel if Paul felt he shouldn't be constrained? He also said that everyone could not handle meat, but milk for some.

The criticism of paganism is not realistic. So much of worship, even in Judaism was first practiced by pagans; and the same today. It is only "baptized" and then labeled "Christian" and
become appropriate. "Paganism" is everything that is not from Judeo-Christianity, and is a catch-all term that means only what the user means it to be.

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<tr>
<th>David Read</th>
<th>2 weeks ago</th>
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<td>My description of much contemporary Christian music was certainly germane, if perhaps too graphic.</td>
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<th>Timo Onjukka</th>
<th>2 weeks ago</th>
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<td>To dehydrate the soup, freeze-dry it, package it in neat little plastic acetic and salt-free (emblazoned with &quot;Old-time Original Grandmas Soup&quot; and a catchy nostalgic lyric) is to seize &quot;music&quot; as the enemy.</td>
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<td>Music is perhaps a symptom, mere barometer, the canary gasping in the coal pit. That this thread immediately clung to one of these concretions, non-nutritive clinkers in the stone soup we call our church perhaps not not surprising at all. Salacious allusions, immediate labels, tired denials ready trotted out...not surprising either. Nowhere in the OT is there any mention of such topical constriction.</td>
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<td>The mutual admiration society neatly rearranging the Titanics deck chairs, arguing about the music, and congratulating each other on their tidy ballroom and orderly pageantry...should we perhaps worry less why we struck the iceberg, admit we are all doomed, and man the lifeboats?</td>
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<td>Ellen White clearly writes that it will appear as if &quot;the church HAS failed&quot; (missional, not organizational). This thread grants small peek into the failure. Too quick with reasons the failures are someone elses, or denying even that an empty church void of a real-life love might even be able to fail (after all, look at all we DO). When everyone is in the deadly water, will God go around checking each iPod, to determine who is saved on basis of their music? What has happened to my church?</td>
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<td>Ed, thank you again. Radical love.... The prodigal father, profligate lover, loved both. One accepted the invitation to the wedding feast, and danced with daddy. The other? Father is waiting at the end of the driveway, robe in hand, for the elder, too. For a time longer...and then the midnite call.</td>
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<th>Kermit Netteburg</th>
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<td>I'm fascinated at the study that showed 20% of Adventist congregations have no infants, children, or teenagers. I'd love to know if that data was correlated with the size of the church, and the &quot;metropolitan-ness&quot; of the location of the church. My guess would be that most of those churches...</td>
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would be in rural, smaller towns - where the general population includes very few infants, children, and teenagers. I fear we overestimate the "gray-ness" of Adventism when we say the average age of Adventists is 50s or 60s, and the average age of Americans is 20s or 30s. We don't include the children of the church in the Adventist average age, but we do include the children of the country. We in essence compare apples with oranges - or perhaps raisins with grapes!

Kevin Riley 2 weeks ago Reply

I can't speak for anywhere else, but in Australia there are churches in country towns where there are no children or teens in the church, but the town is building more schools. Many churches are dying even in towns where the population is growing or steady. The loss of young people is also a problem for some city churches. I know of one 'ethnic' church that, after much anguish, changed the language of worship from their 'home' language to English to keep their children and grandchildren. So far they seem to have been successful. Other churches refuse to change the way they do anything, hoping their children will become 'spiritual' enough to see they are right. Most churches with no children or teens are small churches, perhaps because the things that persuade the young people that it is not worth staying have the same effect on adults as well.

Gailon Arthur Joy 2 weeks ago Reply

Pardon my cynicism or not, but when one opens with CS Lewis and ends with CS Lewis and not an ounce of “thus saith the Lord” in the entire article is suspect and the party writing the same of suspect theological grounding. CS Lewis is the epitome of hypocrisy virtually living in sin a large part of his theological life and admittedly struggled with this open failure to overcome this open sin.

I have seen no evidence that CS Lewis is worthy of sound theological judgment or worthy of quotation by any Seventh-day Adventist pastor or emulation by any SDA congregation.

Does the author not recognize the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Laodicean? And has he missed the cure? Read it and then preach it and maybe, just maybe, we will see a return to primitive Godliness. That is the real “soup” and is neither French nor British, but simply fundamental Christianity.

Every person makes choices that leads either to obedience or rebellion and the real “soup” is simply submission to the spirit and obedience to God’s calling in every aspect of life. I would submit that some are “thin” and some are “thick” depending upon the stage in their individual Christian experience. In Laodicea that is simply defined as “hot” and “cold” and lukewarm is spewn out.

And let me clarify that CS Lewis is nothing but warm water and should have been spewn out a long time ago!!! Particularly by our theologians.

G Arthur Joy
Elaine Nelson

Every Christian church known claims "thus saith the Lord." The Bible can, and has been used to support slavery, women's subordination, killing, polygamy, and more. Should we quote the Bible today as has been done to support such things? Is it just possible that the interpretation of the Bible that is so vastly different?

Trevor Hammond

RE: This comment by Mrs. Nelson: "The Bible can, and has been used to support slavery, women's subordination, killing, polygamy, and more."

I would prefer it been said this way: "The Bible can, and has been **ERRONEOUSLY** used **AND UNFAIRLY ACCUSED OF PURPORTING** to support slavery, women's subordination, killing, polygamy, and more. (emphasis mine)

♥T

Horace Butler

So, Elaine, you're blaming the Bible for murder, slavery, and polygamy? Could it be that the fault lies with fallen man and his perverseness, rather than with Scripture? It was the principles of the gospel, properly understood, that finally ended slavery and polygamy in most places. By the way, slavery and polygamy predated the Bible. If mankind wasn't so degraded, the principles in the Bible would have ended these institutions much earlier.

During WWII the Constitution was manipulated to allow for the illegal incarceration of loyal Japanese Americans, but the fault wasn't with the Constitution; it was with wild-eyed fear mongers who saw a traitor behind every Japanese face.

Timo Onjukka

Perhaps the cynical cannot pardon, hence may themselves be unpardoned.

I suppose we each can then be glad we are not like C S Lewis, and have no (or perhaps less open sins).

Apparently, in our unpardoning state, we are clearly neither lukewarm, nor hot. "I thank you God you did not make me a Catholic, or an atheist. Or living in (open) sin with a woman"

Another respondent forgot to mention that the bible is (perhaps less purportedly) also used to support that OTHER fatal sin (as opposed to murder and polygamy)-namely, a prideful and arrogant self-righteousness.

DO we see the irony behind the final of the above three posters? "(the bible is) manipulated to allow for the (rejection) of (other lost sinners) but the fault (isn't) with the (bible); it is with
wild-eyed fear mongers who see a (Jesuit or a sinner et al) behind every (non-SDA) face."

Finally, the certitude in telling us why slavery or polygamy were not "ended much earlier" errs grossly in that we still have, effectively, servitude, even in America, and "functional polygamy" certainly within our own church.

In the historic lens, we have only a little over a century of legislating free moral agency, not much longer than our total church history.

Perhaps the Bible is more concerned with the overarching broader principle of slavery in its broadest application, namely slavery to sin, and its consequent law and polygamy in the sense of "zanah". This is not to diminish the evil of slavery or polygamy, however it expresses itself in any particular age.

On a related note, it is interesting how Jesus first evangelic commission was to a woman (who, perhaps not coincidentally, was practising her own form of "serial polygamy"). Is there a difference between subordination of women, and denial of ordination?

I pray we all realize we are each unprofitable slaves (certainly irrespective gender/race/title/status/role etc), like Onesimus; thieving orphans stealing from our master, sent back to our chains and Philemon, for a time. There is one who has preached freedom, taught forgiveness, and brought healing....but for a time we are yet bound on earth.

When Elaine said, "The Bible can, and has been used to support slavery, women's subordination, killing, polygamy, and more." I certainly didn't take that as her blaming the Bible for such. There appears to be some who comment on these blogs who read something Elaine contributes, and automatically conclude the worst. I'll admit that she can be provocative a times, but some of the things Jesus said were too.

Yes, the Bible can and has been used (erroneously) for all kinds of strange things. Chain linking texts together to suit your own prejudice can lead to just about anything, with the perpetuator of such standing firmly on a "thus says the Lord" while they are doing it. Even SDA's have not been immune from that.

The Bible is even being used today in Adventism to deny women's ordination. The "here a little, there a little" lumping of texts together to prove a position is the way many of us were taught Bible doctrines. It seems that it is still practiced.

I realize that the topic is not WO, but I don't know how one can understand the Bible any other
way--unless one uses the historical critical method of interpretation to accuse Peter and Paul of being "culturally conditioned," which automatically accuses the Holy Spirit of having the same mentality. This is the same method that allows skeptics to throw out the most logical understanding of Gen. 1-11, so as to allow the evolutionary fairy tale to be promulgated within the church. Oh what a tangled web we weave . . . .

Elaine Nelson

The historical critical interpretation is essential if one is to understand much of scripture. It was neither written in a vacuum or prescient into the future. All people live within their culture and time and space. To suggest otherwise is to give everything ever written as having equal importance.

The Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost because there was receptivity; the Holy Spirit spoke to Saul on the way to Damascus. Would he have been receptive a few years earlier? As a child? The Holy Spirit does not operate willy-nilly but at the appropriate time and place. What may have been appropriate for an earlier time should not be considered equally valid for all time. People wrote the Bible and lived within the boundaries of their perceptions.

Horace Butler

Spoken like a true believer in "higher criticism." Have mercy!

Elaine Nelson

What is "lower criticism"? If you don't interpret the Bible, you are one in a million. Everyone sees it through their own set of glasses. Isn't context part of "higher criticism"? What is your rubric?

Horace Butler

Higher criticism="historical/critical method," as opposed to the historical grammatical method--which includes context as a very important element. The latter method was the one used by the reformers and, until recently, by most SDA's. The former method is what has led to so many far out interpretations of the Bible--such as the idea that Genesis 1-11 is merely allegorical. Maybe the decalogue is, too, and I can keep the "spirit" of the law and ignore the letter--since Paul (who was merely a product of his times) says that the letter kills. Using the HC method of interpretation I can make the Bible mean whatever I want it to mean.

Tom

Lower criticism? Hmm. Could that mean rebuttals that are sort of hit below the belt? I tend to
look at the general theme of the Bible, and the reason something is stated as it is within it, the
times it was written as well as context and see how it should be applied in a contemporary sense.
"Line upon line, precept upon precept" should be the byword when searching the Scriptures for
answers to today's issues. Times change, but principles remain the same. It was never in God's plan
that there be slavery, polygamy, or that women be subjugated by men. The men were to be the
key authority figure in the household, yet exercise it as to the Lord, not be a slavemaster over her.
Just because our society has everything upside down these days is no reason to turn the Bible
on its head and disregard what is clearly meant both in word and principle. We are not to follow
a neutered version of the Word.

"When it comes to our religious experience, we need both the thick and the clear. Experiencing the overwelmong power, majesty, and beauty of God is an antidote to the self-righteousness and self-sufficiency of the intellectual church." By Ed Dickerson

The last time I was flying, was to attend my Aunt's funeral. Travel necessitated that the flight was arriving into Florida, as the sun was going down, Friday night... For at least an hour, I could see the ravishing, dark reds and purples, oranges and pinks, deeply displayed as God put one long, slow stroke at a time on His magnificent display of passion, love and art into the sky... I was taken aback, stunned, stilled, smallled into the realization that this God is amazing, He is brilliant, He is loving, He is lavish... even at the beginning of His Sabbath, He is painting. My, oh my. Who am I, that He is mindful of me? My children are not attending church... but they are attending God. They are daily talking, praying and leading others to Him. Somewhere in the Bible, it says that if we do not tell of His love, the rocks and the mountains will cry out... The rocks and the mountains, the skies and the seas... God uses whatever it takes, to reach to our children. Oh, that I would be the kind of person He could use, to reach my children... but I know that He does not need me to do this, because He is doing it, inspite of me.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5AkNqLuVgY&NR=1

Horace and Tom,

It is easy to get lost in discussions about "higher" and "lower" criticism and lose sight of the fact that there is very little direct instruction in scripture. The majority of the Bible is telling the stories of people in their relationship with a loving God. Likewise, the primary basis for my faith is not my adherence to specific and detailed instruction from God, but my relationship with Him that empowers me to become victorious in my battle with sin and to share His love with others. Along the way I discover from time to time that the old temptations that used to ensnare me no longer...
have the same power over me that they once did because I've been focused on living in God's love and He has been transforming me.

Jan,

Thank you for sharing that scene. It is so refreshing to be reminded that, no matter what railures and troubles surround us, God is still God and worthy of our praise.

JaNe

6 days ago

Horace Butler seems to be one of the few on here who makes any sense.
Moses came down from Sinai and the people were worshipping - not Jehovah who had miraculously delivered them, fed them and led them in a fiery pillar from the bondage of Egypt - but a golden calf – a lump of powerless metal that had done nothing for them. It was gross rebellion. Israel was in the middle of a desert with dangers on every side. Without God’s protection wild beasts could ravage their children, snakes and scorpions would overrun their camp and nations were poised to annihilate this small band of travelers. This apostasy, leaving God for the golden calf, left Israel without protection and an easy prey to all these dangers. They would never survive to inherit the land of Canaan God had promised them. They would all perish unless . . .

“Moses, stand aside. I’ll wipe them all out. If I don’t, something else will. Step aside and I’ll start all over. I’ll make a new nation from your seed, from your children.” What a power trip! These were the children of Israel. They were the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He, Moses, had the opportunity of a lifetime. God was ready, right now, to make them the Children of Moses, the Seed of Moses. Yet Moses, like never before (Not when he boldly stood before Pharaoh, not when he led Israel across the Red Sea), demonstrates what a real leader is. “Oh this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book which thou hast written.” (Exodus 32:31, 32) A real leader is one who leads with God to forgive His children. But we’re not talking a shallow, mediocre prayer for God to give them another chance. Here was a leader that knew his sinfulness. He knew his own rebellion. He knew he was no better. He had no claim to any goodness that made him deserving to be the father of any nation. “So, God, if you can’t forgive them, blot me out too. I’m just as bad.”

We can never lead God’s people unless we somehow grasp our own sinfulness and the forgiveness of God. For where are we to lead God’s people? To great churches with memberships of 5000? (Not that there’s anything wrong with large churches.) To great doctrines and standards? (Ditto) If God’s people are to make it to the heavenly Canaan, they must be led to the cross, by someone who’s been there. Someone who can tell the prostitute, the pedophile, the homosexual, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the adulterer, the thief, the glutton, the proud, the hypocrite, “If God cannot forgive you, then let him blot my name off His books as well for I’m just as bad.” The world is perishing for the lack of a Moses - Someone who knows God’s love, someone who knows God forgives and someone who intercedes with God on the sinner’s behalf.

You can be that Moses – in your church, family, or neighborhood. You don’t have to be a preacher, a prophet or an eloquent speaker, but be a Moses defending sinners before God and the church. When the church is critical of those who never dress up, never bring food to potlucks, never use deodorant, mouthwash, and breathe in your face, lift them up, serve them seconds, and give them great big hugs and kisses, because, in the presence of God, we stink too and our righteousness is like filthy rags. When someone pulls you aside to share some juicy gossip, pull them aside to the prayer chapel and pray for that person who has fallen and been wounded by sin. Defend the poor because you are poor before God. Defend the prisoner, because you too are in bondage to sin. Defend the sinner because we are all patients in the hospital of the great Physician. And forgive the murderer because we have all crucified our Lord.
After all, where is it you want to lead the people around you, if not to the cross? For, it is at the cross that we behold the kind of mercy we all desperately need. Be leaders who forgive because they know they are forgiven.

Frank Allen

I think you have missed the point of what a great leader is today. Moses had unquestionable authority to speak on God’s behalf, which no leader has ever matched. He had perfect political control to decide everyone’s future or pay the consequences. Moses had ideal religious control, as God’s voice and through his brother as High Priest given as an inheritance to his family line.

Moses is not a good model for leadership in all things; his praying to spare Israel, children and women, from a holocaust, may increase his reputation, but at the expense of God who is pictured as angry and frustrated.

Today good leadership will:

1. Provide full transparency in finances (tithe, offerings, and annuities) for Church, Conference, Union, and Division. Good leadership is accountable for the use of charity funds.
2. Provide an on line forum for youth or adults to sound their concerns and offer suggestions, and stream all church functions on line.
3. Presents a good news gospel, with hope in a forgiving, creator God.
4. Share devotionals, new insights, with member participation via U-tube.
5. Provide open forums for the religious skeptic who struggles with serious Biblical issues, moral absolutes, or EGW inspiration. Create a safe place for spiritually confused, the progressive or the conservative. Reaches out to Muslims, Buddhist and Hindus.
6. Deal with issues that cause congregational dysfunction, such authority and control over others (the Moses complex).
7. Encourage hospitality, compassion, forgiveness, and being fair minded, as descriptive of commandment keepers.
8. Care for the community; assist with medical and dental expenses of the uninsured through vouchers. Minister in crime hot spots; low rent trailer parks, undocumented aliens, find out what their needs are. Make a difference among those that have created their own problems. Speak out, through frequent press conferences, on community issues taking a stand for underprivileged. Offer free internet in churchyard. Provide community panics on holiday occasions. Offer free music lessons for young children from the trailer park. Love the community.

Gailon Arthur Joy

There is a lot of reference to asking God's foregiveness, but no reference to the key role of Mosaic leadership which was to bring the motley mass into obedience to the law and the testimony. And it was fraught with what is best described as multiple rebellions that required Moses "inspired" intervention and in some cases resulted in the final death for some...foregivness does require
obedience and a change in loyalties. Otherwise, one may achieve the unpardonable sin and die without the Blessed Hope of Redemption and Eternal Life.

G. Arthur Joy
AUReporter

William Noel 2 weeks ago Reply

Don,
I'm puzzled. Are you encouraging us to become leaders in our local churches, or to learn how to lead others into a saving relationship with Jesus? Both require that we each first become dedicated followers of the Holy Spirit while the first should be a special calling by God based on how we have been empowered and have grown in ministry.

Jon Speyer 2 weeks ago Reply

Thanks for putting First, First (not first things first)...the best way to become a truly great leader.

The "highest point we can attain is (indeed) at the foot of the cross" and praying the Lord's prayer ("forgive us our sins...") until the second coming is truly a prerequisite for being great leaders.

It seems to me that just as Moses unlearned many lessons of Egyptian trained dictatorial arrogance in the wilderness before the burning bush encounter with God, so the best of leaders are really those who recognize they are, at best, animated mud. The fact that Moses takes his unbelieving father-in-law's advice at Sinai (Jethro), also proves that he was still teachable and not full of himself. (How tempting would it have been to tell Jethro to take a hike since, afterall, he was talking directly to God?) (See Ex18.)

Anyway, keep raising up our Savior. It is only at the cross that we see our falleness AND our great value. We need an understanding of BOTH to influence others (lead) rightly.

Because of Him,
Jon

Ervin Taylor 2 weeks ago Reply

I hope many of us are impressed by the 8 point list of characteristics of a modern church leader that Mr. Allen has suggested. It has the great virtue of being explicit and specific in contrast to the rather mushy suggestions that are often made. I must agree with his note about the "Moses complex." What is being advocated is not easy to pull off inside traditional Adventist communities. I know of one Adventist Church where all of the elements are working rather well. I hope there are a number. An important characteristic is providing a "safe place" inside the church for both conservatives and liberals. That's an especially hard one to bring off.
Gailon Arthur Joy

The "safe place" concept requires a definition of conservative and liberal. If one or the other or both do not adhere to the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church, there is no basis for a safe haven for open sin and rebellion within the church and should be dealt with as directly today as it was in the Mosaic period.

G. Arthur Joy

Elaine Nelson

Please explain the different varieties of sin. What is "open sin" or "closed sin"? Does the Bible or the church have such lists?

Trevor Hammond

Ted Wilson, (like his dad Neil C. Wilson), among others, are quite admirable and fine examples of God-fearing Seventh-day Adventist Church Leadership.

♥T

William Noel

Trevor,

If Ted Wilson is such an admirable leader, why are his sermons focused so much on obeying a prophet who told us to not use her works as the basis for any teaching or practice and zero priority on discovering the Holy Spirit? God has taught me not to follow such people, but to run away from them because the faith practices they advocate are what almost killed me spiritually.

Trevor Hammond

Dear Brother William Noel

Sir, while I acknowledge, (with regret), your candour in declaring the counsel of Ellen White as 'zero priority on discovering the Holy Spirit', who is in fact, the actual Agent of inspiration in her writings of counsel to the church, teaching others to do so is careless. Moreover, it is not rocket science to point out that there is a faction within Adventism who have sadly neglected or even entirely disregarded the counsels of Ellen White, whom we as a church, have accepted as a messenger of the Lord and of which IS clearly the Gift of Prophecy and one of the identifying characteristics of the 'remnant' church (remaining ones - KJV: other, which remain, remnant, residue, rest) of Rev 12:17.
Freedom in the Spirit is most often abused by many who interpret this to mean freedom to eat, drink, dress, believe, whatever, whenever, however, by adding a culturalistic view mixed with a humanist approach, thereby even misrepresenting God's love for the sinner to mean God's love for the sin. I'm not saying that in your denial of the Gift of Prophecy, that you believe this; but there is the risk of self-righteousness in this other extreme approach as well, at least in terms of the self-righteous 'lukewarm' condition we ALL have are in, of which God offers remedy in Christ [Rev 3:18]. Receiving the Spirit is a result of deep repentance and a Gal 2:20 experience. Gal 5:13, 1Cor 8:9, 1Peter 2:16, John 8:32.

All of our successful leaders have, as far as I know, accepted the Gift of Prophecy for what it is and have been blessed in their leadership even under some trying times which we as a church have been through, including factionalism within the church.

♥T

William Noel

Trevor,

A clarification. I did not mean to imply that there was zero emphasis in Ellen White's writings about discovering the Holy Spirit. To the contrary, she encouraged all believers to seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and to find their empowerment in Him. Further, she specifically directed that we should never, under any circumstance, use her writings in sermons or as the basis for any teaching or belief.

In contrast with that, the priority I have heard most often from Ted Wilson is that we should be studying and obeying the EGW writings. He quotes freely and extensively from her writings in his sermons.

My issue with how we use the writings of Ellen White is that we have focused so exclusively on her prophetic gift as the proof of the Adventist church being God's chosen end-time church that we have corporately closed our minds to the continual and ongoing empowerment of the Holy Spirit. One of the gifts of the Spirit is prophecy. Having a contemporary prophet in the church was a great blessing because of the guidance that God provided about how to deal with specific situations. As a society today we are dealing with issues that did not exist a century ago. How badly do we need such current guidance directly from God today?

Trevor Hammond

Hey - Brother Noel
Here is her take regarding those who called her a prophet:

No Claim to the Title “Prophetess.”—During the discourse [at Battle Creek, October 2, 1904], I said that I did not claim to be a prophetess. Some were surprised at this statement, and as much is being said in regard to it, I will make an explanation. Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to
designate myself. Those who boldly assume that they are prophets in this our day are often a reproach to the cause of Christ. {3SM 74.2}

My work includes much more than this name signifies. I regard myself as a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for his people.—Letter 55, 1905 (In Selected Messages 1:35, 36.). {3SM 74.3}

Kevin Riley
2 weeks ago

Trevor

You might want to look in the history books and check out James White's opinion on this issue. He is undoubtedly one of our best leaders, and he refused to publish his wife's writings in the Review while he was the editor. He seemed to think, at least when dealing with the public, that our beliefs could be justified solely from the Bible. I am sure you would not accuse James White of not believing in his wife's gift. Many conservative SDAs who have read and benefitted from Ellen White's counsel do not believe she should be used in the way that she has been. It is not a matter of not believing in her gift, but of believing it is being misused. She at times said the same thing herself, sometimes very bluntly.

Tom
2 weeks ago

EGW herself admitted she was the "lesser light leading to the greater light", greater light being the Bible. She also mentions a people who "stand on the Bible and the Bible alone" as the source of all truth. Leaders like Ted Wislon have turned her into a SDA version of a pope.

Kevin Riley
2 weeks ago

No, not the pope, just as 'church mother' to equal the church fathers of the catholic tradition. I see her works (apart from the issue of inspiration) as providing the clearest exposition of SDA tradition. Even were she not inspired, that would still be a significant contribution to the life of the church.

Trevor Hammond
2 weeks ago

This line: "It is not a matter of not believing in her gift, but of believing it is being misused." is a favorite used by Ellen White detractors to side track from acknowledging their own rejection of her writings and use instead as an excuse for their unbelief even to their own detriment and peril. Traditional Adventism, (Ellen White and all), has never advocated extremism in any of its forms. To accuse those who make use of her writings of 'misusing it' in order to discredit them and her is just but a weak strawman and one can see right through it.
No president of the United States since Warren G. Harding has a closer family connection to the Seventh-day Adventist Church than Barack Obama. A recent book by BBC journalist Peter Firstbrook documents these connections. It is entitled *The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family* and the story is illustrative of the increasingly multicultural reality of America and the Adventist movement.

A key player in the story is President Obama’s grandfather, Onyango Obama. The family is still centered in Kendu Bay on eastern shore of Lake Victoria, today part of the nation of Kenya. They are part of the Luo people.

In 1906, Onyango was nine when Adventist missionaries arrived in the area. The missionaries were led by Arthur Carscallen, a Canadian. The first thing the missionaries did was start a school where literacy in English was taught as well as Bible.

“An accomplished linguist, Arthur Carscallen soon mastered the Dholuo language [and] went on to create the first written language and dictionary for the Luo people. He even imported a small printing press, which he used to produce a Luo grammar textbook, and spent several years translating parts of the New Testament into Dholuo.” [p 126]

The missionaries also began medical work and public health promotion. “Adventists... stress the importance of good diet and health” and started “a free clinic where they treated malaria, cholera, and other diseases. They even made house calls.” [p 126]

Firstbrook describes how the arrival of the Adventist missionaries brought change to the Luo community. It was not without conflict, but it also resulted in economic development. “Carscallen was joined by his fiancee Helen...an accomplished seamstress [who was] troubled by the lack of any clothing worn by the locals. Determined to change the situation, she began to grow cotton, and made her own fabric.” He quotes a memoir of an aging resident of the area who says that the missionaries “tried very hard to get people to wear [European clothes] by giving us sweets and sugar. But people refused.” [p 126]

The Adventist missionaries’ “focus on corporeal as well as spiritual matters brought them into conflict with some of the local traders,” writes Firstbrook. He quotes Richard Gethin, the first British businessman to settle permanently in the area, who complained that the Adventist mission got involved in trading buffalo hides and provided competition to Gethin’s commercial enterprise.

For Onyango “the arrival of the white missionaries provided an exciting diversion from the monotony of village life.” He was later described by relatives as a serious child whose curiosity drew him to the new religion. Many of the residents of this area were baptized as church members, and Onyango was among the first wave. He went off to an Adventist boarding school and “after several months’ absence... returned...dressed like a white man [in] long trousers and a white shirt.” Onyango’s father was convinced that he had broken a strict taboo against circumcision and told the
family to ostracize him. [p 127-28]

Onyango adopted the ways of the missionary more fully than did most of the Luo people at the time. This resulted in the family ostracism and eventually further change. He traveled to another town in the region and during World War I, Onyango converted to Islam. This “was anathema to his family back home, who were adopting Christianity under the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventists.” [p 142]

“Like many Africans at the time” he found it difficult to reconcile “the Christian message of love and compassion toward all men...with the white man’s apparent willingness to go to war.” That is one reason Islam appealed to him. He also “appreciated the structure and discipline it brought to his life.” [p 142]

Members of the family also say “he had a liking of the Muslim ladies... he knew how to treat them...The Christians...believed that polygamy was wrong. But Muslims...gave you the assurance that you can have even five wives.” [p 142]

Today the Obama family in Kenya is split between Adventists and Muslims. Firstbrook reports he spent the inauguration celebration with the Adventist side of the family while most of the international press was with the Muslim side. He was in the town of K’obama. The K in front of the family name means that the literal translation of this town is “home of Obama.”

He tells of the feast celebrating the new president. They slaughtered “a cow and several goats, and they welcomed my offer to bring a dozen crates of soft drinks, but definitely no beer, as they were all Seventh-day Adventists.” A small generator was brought out and television sets were rented so they could watch the official ceremony half way around the world. [p 8]

Firstbrook enjoyed his time with the “wonderfully diverse mix of people, from six-year-old schoolchildren to great-grandmothers in their eighties,” noting that the young are becoming more and more educated and the quality of life is improving even in this rural area of a developing nation. He also reports that he suspected “that some of the revelers were not conforming to the strict lifestyle expected of Seventh-day Adventists.” It appeared to him that some had local beer secreted on them. He was unsure of which individuals were actual relatives and which were neighbors attracted by the party.

Connections that span the globe; inter-religious relationships; ethnic diversity; education, new technology, and change. The world in which the Obama family and other Adventists live today is so different from the world a century ago in which the Harding family celebrated one of their own becoming president of the United States.

Note: The page references are all cited from The Obamas by Peter Firstbrook published 2011 in the U.S. by Crown Publishers, a division of Random House in New York City. It is distributed by the major bookstores and online booksellers. You will save money if you get your copy from a used book store.
Wow, what an amazing story. Seventh-day Adventists have directly or indirectly without fanfare, fuss or hoo-hah, made an undeniable significant difference on this planet. Thank God for all those remarkable brave men and women like who (just like Hanna More) had grasped the mandate and vision to carry the gospel across the oceans. The awesome magnanimity and the selfless sacrifice by these admirable men and women will always be noted as they testify of God’s providence, grace and mercy for all mankind. To the many unsung missionary heroes who left North America and Europe and those who gave willingly to fund such ministry to carry the Third Angels Message across the globe, I salute you all for giving to the Lord.

By the way, God is sending the fruits of this labor back to America and the First World in the form of Seventh-day Adventist immigrants and workers who bring back the message of truth hope and salvation to a secular society which has lost its way.

I was elated to hear that Obama won the US presidency and even bought Ford motor vehicles for my wife and me ☺ … Viva Obama viva!
♥TI

Reminding us of Warren Harding's affiliation with Adventism also reminds us that he was probably one of the worst presidents this nation has known.

Leave it to you, Elaine, to be the fly in the ointment. I will admit, however, that I'm not comfortable with the penchant for "name dropping" and horn tooting in the SDA Church. When I pick up the Review, I'd rather read about missionaries and their adventures; or about how the truth is being distorted in many of our churches, and how we can guard against it; rather than about a famous person visiting one of our institutions, or about how much aid ADRA gave to victims of the latest disaster.

By the way, I thought Dubya was the worst president we've ever had. That's what my customers keep telling me.

There were many "Harding" physicians: one, a classmate of my husband, another was president of LLU at one time. Most never discussed their president relative, and for good reasons.

I agree that Dubya was at least one of the worst presidents. Isn't it interesting to see all the complaints laid at Obama's feet that he initiated? How soon people forget. I regularly receive (and delete) emails telling of his getting us into the two wars, and most other ills in the American society for the last 50 years!
George Tichy 4 weeks ago  Reply

In the last debate, Rick Perry (aka DybyaII) had the nerve to say that it's Obama's fault that in the past 30 (or was it 50?) years the salaries of the middle class stayed basically stagnant, while the rich's salaries increased over 350%.

Apparently Obama started his plot at a very young age....

And many will certainly still vote for the Texan cowboy...

Trevor Hammond 1 month ago  Reply

Well here's a Warren Harding quote I came across: "It is my conviction that the fundamental trouble with the people of the United States is that they have gotten too far away from Almighty God."

Maybe that's why some didn't like him, huh! (...and probably because he was a republican too, limited govshop and all)

♥T

Elaine Nelson 1 month ago  Reply

I was born only a year after he died, but I just finished reading about 7 pages about him, and he was probably the most corrupt president ever. Ever hear of the Teapot Dome? A number of his appointees were indicted and imprisoned for graft, and he was also involved in bootlegging. As for Adventist ties, it was entirely unmentioned in the lengthy biography.

Claiming God is still done today as it guarantees vote with all the other Christians. Notice the problem that some are beginning to have in the Deep South about Romney. If the Repubs can't carry the South, they know they will never win.

Trevor Hammond 1 month ago  Reply

"A number of his appointees were indicted and imprisoned for graft, and he was also involved in bootlegging.

See what happens when you leave the Church! ♥T

Elaine Nelson 1 month ago  Reply
Some of those involved individuals (Folkenberg) were re-invented, redeemed, and reinstated in SDA positions, while others continued working in the church.

Evidently you are unaware of the many similar incidents in SDA history: The Folkenberg affair; the children's video program initiated in the Columbia Union where the SDA church lost several million; the Davenport Affair in which the SDA conferences were heavily involved; the "secret funds" donating money to several G.C. officers wives, and more. Those are just the tip of the iceberg. Of course these were all active in the SDA church!

Elaine,  
The "people upstairs" must love your memory!!! kkkkk

One doesn't necessarily have to be out of the church to leave the church. There are many non-believers and unconverted souls right within the church, who are one in spirit and song with those embracing worldly sinful living. These too have left the church but just don't know it. Just take a look at many 'atoday' commentors and see how many have left Adventism and embraced Badventism and the level to which they have stooped. ♥

It must be very assuring to be in a church where all the sinners are either outside or should be. Who is left in the church that has no sin?

Wow , that is a nice history . Elaine , you also know your history . Are you a history teacher ?

Simply a student of history.

Seminary Student - Sir,
There is a huge difference between history and malicious gossip.
♥T

George Tichy 4 weeks ago Reply

That's true and correct, they are hugely different. Isn't it so sad, though, that what some people try to label as "gossip" is just mere history?

Elaine Nelson 4 weeks ago Reply

It is not malicious gossip when it is true. Have you not read of these events? How long have you been an SDA member? These were widely known when they occurred and only the non-member of those who could not read, nor did not personally lose lots of money would not know about these. Do a little research and report back.

Folkenberg was forced out for conduct unbecoming a church officer. He received preferential treatment for selling his house in Georgia and he was involved in a scheme to get Adventists to switch to MCI long distance so he could get a commission.

Pastor Folkenberg was involved in a situation where it was unclear whether or not he had inappropriately used his position as GC president in order to influence people in a way that financially benefited him. Pastor Folkenberg chose to resign as GC president rather than allow the church to be dragged further into a scandal and/or into a lawsuit.

Read more: http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Why_did_Robert_Folkenberg_quit_as_president_of_the_General_Conference_of_the_Seventh-day_Adventist_Church_in_1999#ixzz1abs2IVAh

[Trevenport affair](http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/.../CUV19820915-V87-18__C.pdf)

Check the Harris Pine Mill Bankruptcy to see how the church, given a 5,000,000 business was able to run it into bankruptcy in a very short time.

Trevor Hammond 4 weeks ago Reply

Many INDIVIDUALS within Adventism too have erred in judgment or have inadvertently made choices that have not been acceptable especially as representatives of Christ. Many of us (sinners) have been guilty of dishonoring Christ at one time or another. So to use isolated incidents, even if some of the facts are true, is still malicious gossip when these misdemeanors are used to discredit...
Adventism (or used for a secondary purpose to discredit or cause hurt or shame). The Lukewarm Laodicea 'condition' spoken of in Rev 3:16 makes no claim that the Christian Church and in particular the Seventh-day Adventist Church are full of 'perfectionists' ready for heaven. As I have mentioned above, the church has many a sinner from all walks of life who come to the 'hospital of Christ' for salvation. Trying to make the Folkenberg incident look like a Jimmy Swaggart saga only shows (in my opinion) an attempt to engage malicious gossip against Adventism. While one may seek put allegations and gossip column news on the front pages of Adventist History one can very well also put them in the pages of the History of Sinners Book to. Truth can be used very well to rub salt in wounds and also like I have said be used as malicious gossip when trying to discredit Adventism or the individuals concerned. A mountain out of a molehill is malicious gossip in my opinion...

I can mention another malicious gossip attempt which someone alluded on another blog regarding the Rwandan Pastor and Son convicted of been participants in the terrible Genocide atrocities committed in Rwanda by trying to associate their actions as been part of the Adventist Church. Here again truth used as malicious gossip. In keeping with topic I would suggest that most people would have some sort of ‘dirt’ in their family history but yet still their story remains a remarkable one like the Obama’s. The Adventist Church membership is no exception…

♥T

Horace Butler

So Elaine has proved . . . what? That mankind has a fallen nature and people do stupid things. Big deal. Peter denied Jesus, Judas betrayed Him. It is all irrelevant as it relates to one important fact: truth is still truth. The fact that professed Christians do foolish, and sometimes evil, things does not change the truth as it is revealed in Scripture. I'm not a Christian because the church is composed of perfect people; I'm a Christian because of Jesus, who was and is perfect. He is my standard of morality, not any pastor, leader, or other church member. Until we can look beyond the failings of our fellow church members to the Source of truth, we will continue to be disappointed and cynical, and maybe even lose our way.

Elaine Nelson

It's your money, pay it for whatever you choose; but one should have a little interest in how his money is used; otherwise, simply give it and trust it will be used as you wished.'

Edwin A. Schwisow

Monte: I was fortunate to grow up in a missionary Adventist family, and our circle of friends continues to include many fellow missionaries, including several who have served in Kenya and taught members of the Obama family. One of the most virulent criticisms leveled against the current American president is his apparent tolerance for the coexistence of Muslim and Christian, Muslim and Jew—that somehow he surely must be a Marxist Liberal Reactionary Muslim—a subversive several times over. Conversely, perhaps America is fortunate to have a
president, at this time, who understands that followers of Islam and followers of Jesus need not view religicide as the natural will of God during times of crisis.

George Tichy
4 weeks ago  
Adventist roots??? WOW... and I thought he was a Muslim... (just kidding, of course!)  

Vernon P. Wagner
3 weeks ago  
As usual, Elaine remembers history well...many do not.

I was a short-term student missionary in 1964. It was there that I discovered my unfitness to be a 'missionary.' What I experienced appeared to be a vestige of colonialism with a heavy dose of subliminal racism.

A well-known pastor once said, "Show me a Youth Pastor, and I'll show you a pedophile." He was a volunteer counsellor to abused youngsters at the county jail.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago  
It's amazing how some Adventists will strain credulity to find a public figure who "may" have some Adventist ties. The article fails to demonstrate anything worth reporting.

Horace Butler
3 weeks ago  
It is so rare that you and I agree on anything, Elaine, that I could not refrain from saying that I do agree with your first sentence above. I find it embarrassing (not that we agree, but that some go to great lengths to find a SDA connection to the rich and famous).

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago  
Horace, there are more that we likely agree on, we just haven't explored all the possibilities yet!

George Tichy
3 weeks ago  
You guys remind me of the ongoing "negotiations" we see happening in Washington.... kkkk

Trevor Hammond
3 weeks ago  
RE: Adventist roots??? WOW... and I thought he was a Muslim... (just kidding, of course!)
No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.

E.G.W. (Prophets and Kings, cp. 31, pg. 369)

Such a profound EGW statement which I think would include those from the Muslim community as well.

John Mark

I found the story quite interesting and those of you embarrassed by Adventists pointing out connections to famous people seriously just need to chill. Nobody's saying this is the most important story in the world... it's just interesting trivia and history, that's it. Such negativity... Spectrum or Adventist Today could post a YouTube clip of kittens or rainbows and it wouldn't be long before some of you drew a connection to Adventist corruption and how you’re embarrassed to have ever been an Adventist.

Elaine Nelson

This is like "six degrees of connection" which shows that anyone in the world could be connected to another by only six individuals. Anyone here could do the same and be connected to Obama, or any movie star.

John Mark

Not really. Half the story is talking about his grandfather, which is two degrees of connection. I imagine the Obama's in Kenya celebrating his election would beg to differ that their connection is irrelevant. Also the story wasn't written by an Adventist but by a BBC reporter. Are you suggesting that he got paid by the church to put this in his book. Of course it's not like it matters it's just an interesting piece of trivia, but some of you think everything written must be ever so important...

Ella M.

John Mark, A mature response--I agree with you. It's an interesting bit of trivia and kind of nice to know. What I get from the story--written by a reporter--is that Christians and Muslims can live together and be found in the same family. I think that is hopeful and I like hearing about it. It is also
interesting to know the influence Christians could have had on the family.
Elaine, I can't really believe you are this disagreeable, but a very smart, well-read lady who likes to debate.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

If disagreeing with someone makes them disagreeable, then that's me. I am not someone who always agrees simply to be agreeable. Debate? Isn't that what blogs are for?

John Mark
3 weeks ago

But do you always disagree simply to be contrarian? That's the question. I just don't know why you would be offended by an innocent piece talking about Obama's Grandfather and Adventist missionaries. I found it interesting and if someone else doesn't then they don't have to read it. But whatever...

Richard Worley
3 weeks ago

Elaine, as an 87 ("born a year after Harding died") year old iconclast, I admire you. However, you need more balance on Harding. He has been significantly rehabilitated. True, it will be a long time before he gets off the bottom rung of presidential rankings, however, he pardoned E. V. Debs--when Wilson let him rot in prison, he got an 8 hour day for steel workers, showed strong leadership in disarmament (contrary to the isolationist image tacked on him), established the federal budget. His morals probably can be compared to several USA presidents and for scandals, some like Teapot Dome were pretty small beans compared to other presidential scandals. As for bootlegging
--he should not have had spirts in the White House--if you watched the recent Burns production on "Prohibition" you would not put this too high on the list of presidential misdeeds. Perhaps fact that the Adventist Review trashed him (and his sister) influenced you?
Harding's real sin was to die just when the scandals came out. His handlers weren't around to use the presidential office to defend him. Lincoln in contrast died just when he was recognized as a great man and became a demi-god. Timing is important. Finally, don't misinterpret the Harding family's handling of Harding's history. They were, last I knew still giving the name WGH to progeny--II, III, VI (?)--and why would they talk about him--most people only know the bad stuff.

Elaine Nelson
3 weeks ago

Comparison to later presidents was not a factor when Harding was evaluated.

Yes, the series on Prohibition was a very informative historical documentary, Ken Burns is always excellent.

Harding's tenure pales in comparison with some later renegades, notably Nixon. All had a great facade and hidden secrets usually stayed in the walls of the White House. No longer is that the
case where every move is scrutinized, something impossible a few years ago. Harding was probably blessed to die BEFORE the scandal broke.

No, I never knew of a Review article on Harding, only what I learned from history, and all history is biased, although there are some excellent historical scholars who have written on presidents.

I knew several of the Harding generations, and he was one seldom mentioned. The Harding family name was known both before and after the president. One was president of LLMC for a time, his wife, Florence was also a physician, and several generations have always had a physician, also.

The apparent urgency of the Review or other Adventists to associate a prominent person with the church is because they want to appear very respectable? This might have been the reason years ago, but the article seemed to be going to extremes to find a small bit of information that tied Obama's family to Adventists.

Maybe we should return to all the many missionary stories about the all-Adventist island: Pitcairn. Seldom mentioned today.

---

Truth Seeker 3 weeks ago  
"Leave it to you, Elaine, to be the fly in the ointment. I will admit, however, that I'm not comfortable with the penchant for "name dropping" and horn tooting in the SDA Church. When I pick up the Review, I'd rather read about missionaries and their adventures; or about how the truth is being distorted in many of our churches, and how we can guard against it; rather than about a famous person visiting one of our institutions, or about how much aid ADRA gave to victims of the latest disaster."

Emphasis supplied by me! Good points, my friend.

---

John Baptist 3 weeks ago  
Thought this an interesting page of the book also, page 127...

The New Imperialism
Richard Gethin, the first British trader to settle permanently in Kisii, in south Nyanza, complained that Carscallen and his other missionaries were "more interested in trading in buffalo hides" than in saving souls. He also claimed that their mission houses, far from being havens of spiritual devotion and learning, were used mainly to store skins and other trade goods for export:

Preaching of the Gospel was conspicuous by its absence. Carscallen would see an old Jaluo [Luo] native asleep in the shade of a tree. He would approach him, put his hands on his head and if he still slept, give him a kick on the backside saying, "Son you are saved and you can thank the Lord it is me who has saved you; if it were one of the others you would be condemned to terrible torture when you died." With this, the convert would be roped into carrying a load on the next safari.36
For the young Onyango Obama, the arrival of the white missionaries provided an exciting diversion from the monotony of village life. Onyango was only eleven when Carscallen established his first mission in Gendia, but according to Onyango's last wife, Sarah, he was fascinated by these white strangers from the beginning. Sarah says that Onyango was always different from the others, even as a young boy. As a child he would wander off by himself for days on end and nobody would know where he had been nor would he tell them anything when he got back. He was always very serious as a child; he never laughed or joked around, or even played games with the other children. He was, and would always remain, an outsider.
End of the Road for Atlantic Union College

Submitted Oct 12, 2011
By Atoday News Team

A statement from Washington Adventist University yesterday (October 10) announced that WAU is no longer involved in plans to operate a campus in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, on the former campus of Atlantic Union College because the AUC board has voted to break off these arrangements. The agreement had been developed last year and finalized early this year with approval by the decision-making bodies of both institutions. It was the result of a decision by the New England regional accrediting body to end the accreditation of AUC due to the lack of financial sustainability.

The plan was for WAU's South Lancaster campus to begin operation this fall and take on all or most of the AUC faculty and staff, providing continued classes for all of the students enrolled there. Authorities postponed the approval of this arrangement forcing the opening to be delayed and a number of the students ended up transferring to WAU's campus in Takoma Park, Maryland. WAU had early on provided a method by which the academic credit for class taken in South Lancaster last school year was assured under WAU's accreditation in Maryland.

There is no indication at this point as to the reasons for this latest decision. It does appear that it will be difficult if not impossible for AUC to regain accreditation and continue to operate in any form. The faculty and staff were all let go on July 1 and several have already accepted jobs at other institutions, including some who are now employed at WAU.

The full statement as published by the Columbia Union Conference magazine The Visitor is republished below.

Statement: Update on WAU Branch Campus at Atlantic Union College
Published 10/10/2011

After several months of talks with Washington Adventist University (WAU) in Takoma Park, Md., to operate a branch campus at Atlantic Union College (AUC) in South Lancaster, Mass., the Board of Trustees for AUC in a meeting on Wednesday, October 5 voted to suspend any further negotiations at this time after the institutions were unable to reach an operating agreement.

The talks with WAU began when AUC was informed by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges that its accreditation would be discontinued for financial reasons.

AUC and its constituents will now look at other ways to maintain the mission of Seventh-day Adventist Christian higher education in the Atlantic Union Conference territory, which includes the New England states, New York and the island of Bermuda.

Washington Adventist University will continue to honor the arrangements in place that have facilitated the smooth transition of the former AUC students enrolled at the university. Both institutions remain committed to providing Adventist Christian higher education to their students.
WAU wishes AUC well in its efforts to continue to provide an Adventist Christian higher education in the Atlantic Union Conference.

Gailon Arthur Joy 3 weeks ago Reply

The end for Atlantic Union College was really written when Dr Lawrence Gerrity left 20 plus years ago. With the forced elimination of Dr. Virginia Jean Rittenhouse, a woman known for her “Pursuit of Excellence” and higher standards, the words were written ever so succinctly on the walls of every building on campus: Mene, mene, Teakal Upharson!!!

Gerrity heard the message loud and clear and left to save, or infect, a more financially salvageable university. Despite mighty efforts, and in some cases no effort at all, no administration was really able to stem the tide.

The institution has been paralyzed by the Adventist Apartheid for nearly three decades and despite the best efforts of a number of administrations, and the worst efforts of other administrations, for those of us who have observed and reported on this process, it has not been a question of whether it would fail, but rather WHEN IT WOULD FAIL, as in run out of money and students.

It is an institution that somehow thought it could survive the lowering of moral standards that lead to the alienation of a constituency that once built the institution in “The Holy City” of South Lancaster, Mass. Founded by Haskell, academically improved by Ivy educated Prescott and managed to prosperity by so many others, it is not the destiny anyone deliberately chose but slowly slipped into cross-purposes with Atlantic Union conservatives who really have Faith in Adventism, the literal Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

To add insult to injury, with the demise of the musical Icon, Dr Virginia Jean, by the Gerrity administration, the alumni simultaneously turned their back and with parental endorsement, more than 150 students left AUC... many of them to WAU, the new home away from home for Dr Rittenhouse. It has NEVER recovered from that blow and loss of support, despite the efforts of all the King’s Horses and all the King’s Men (and even all the King's purported financial support).

I doubt it will EVER re-open as the debt is formidable and the deferred maintenance unsustainable. Just the power plant would require a million dollar plus overhaul and upgrade and there is very little, if any support, from AU constituents or AUC alumni. The sum of the parts FAR exceeds the value of the whole!!!

I could itemize a host of issues that compounded into failure and we could argue the cause and effect for another decade, but never have so many known, for so very long, despite the desires of so few, known that “It was dead, just not buried”.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUResporter
Ivan Campos

Gailon, would you please share why Dr. Virginia Jean Rittenhouse and then Dr. James Bingham were forced out of AUC?

Horace Butler

Having grown up in another area of the country I had not followed the history and fortunes of AUC until I relocated to their "backyard." But my eyebrows were raised a number of years ago when I found out that they were offering sports scholarships. It was clear to me at that time that they had lost their way. For an institution that was originally dedicated to educating young people to "finish the work," to descend into the trivia of the sporting scene was a symptom of poor leadership. It was only one part of the equation, of course, but it was an ominous sign of things to come.

Trevor Hammond

I'm so glad that Traditional Adventism as a whole did not succumb (so far) to the 'influences' from within and without which are perpetrated by certain elements...

Truth Seeker

"But my eyebrows were raised a number of years ago when I found out that they were offering sports scholarships. It was clear to me at that time that they had lost their way."

Today's culture, unfortunately, is obsessed with sports including many in Adventism. Money could be saved both in SDA and public schools if the addiction to sports were cured.

Kevin Riley

Considering the obesity 'epidemic', perhaps we should not give up entirely on sport. I agree that focusing entirely on competitive sport - and winning - is not healthy, but a good program of physical activity can be a valuable part of a school program.
Salina pastor arrested on sex charges

By Chris Durden

KWCH 12 Eyewitness News

4:46 p.m. CDT, October 7, 2011

SALINA, Kansas

Police in Salina arrest a pastor on several sex crimes charges. Investigators say the 54-year-old is the pastor of Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The pastor was arrested Thursday night. He was booked into the Saline County Jail on charges of rape, aggravated indecent liberties with a minor and aggravated criminal sodomy.

Eyewitness News is not naming the pastor until he is formally charged. That is expected to happen early next week.

Story published here:

Salina, Kansas Seventh-day Adventist Church website

Elaine Nelson 1 month ago Reply

This probably is indicative of much wider reporting being accepted. In past years, the victims were hesitant to accuse a pastor for fear of not being believed. This is a change in respecting the story of victims.

PleaForJustice 1 month ago Reply

As with all of these scenarios involving these types of allegations, the Pastor's trial by media coupled with his leadership status in the Christian Community will send him down in flames prior to his ever stepping foot into a court room. And then, the Judicial system, often far more concerned with high conviction percentages than with justice will finish him off. I set as a juror in one of these “rape, aggravated criminal sodomy, and aggravated indecent liberties with a child kangaroo courts” and, as a man, the manipulation of DNA evidence and testimony towards a conviction scared me to death. Men everywhere (Seventh Day Adventists, Catholic Clergy and even atheists, alike) should be ever vigilant and genuinely frightened as, in this paranoid, “hang ’em high” society, just the slightest whisper of an accusation from a child who possesses no awareness of or even any concern for consequences may indiscriminately send any innocent one of us to the “big house” for a very long and horrific time. And, even if by some bizarre turn events a man is not convicted for these dreadful charges, the accusation and media attention would still destroy his life
forever.

William Noel 3 weeks ago Reply

Situations such as this present us with the challenge of truly representing God by working for the redemption of the individual charged. This is far more than demanding repentance and letting him become spiritual roadkill when we see no obvious or lasting change. It is a test of those who know the person charged and if they understand the process of redemption enough to keep ministering God's transforming power over time.

Elaine Nelson 1 month ago Reply

Any man who teaches K-12, pastor, or health specialist is especially apt to face such an accusation once in his life. It is a tragedy for the accused and possible victim. Once accused, his profession has essentially been destroyed.

OTOH, many victims previously were ignored and feared to reveal the truth. There are no winners. But the older individual is responsible when dealing with younger individuals as they are often in a position to take advantage of an immature person who looks to an older person with trust.

Alle 4 weeks ago Reply

But wait...there's more...not posted in any other known SDA websites: Dateline Arkansas or Georgia?

Pastor arrested on sex charges! FRIDAY AUGUST 5 2011 Archive (13107)

Friday, August 5, 2011

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Chapman

#A pastor at a Jonesboro church was arrested this week on child sex charges, and is being held without bond in the Clayton County Jail.
#Samuel Walsham Chapman, 58, of Decatur, was arrested Thursday and charged with child molestation, solicitation of sodomy and enticing a child for indecent purposes.
#According to Clayton County Magistrate Court records and the church's web site, Chapman is a pastor at Riverdale Seventh-Day Adventist Church, in Jonesboro.
#Church officials could not be reached for comment, Friday.
#Warrants allege that Chapman took a 15-year-old boy to the parking lot of Tara Stadium in March, and performed a sexual act in front of him. Chapman allegedly asked the boy to perform oral sex on him, but the boy refused, according to an arrest warrant in the case.
#The boy told his mother and grandmother about the alleged incident, May 4. Officials conducted
a forensic interview with the boy, which included a matching description of Chapman's genitals, according to arrest warrants. Charges were filed Aug. 1.

#Chapman made his first appearance, Thursday, in Clayton County Magistrate Court. He was given a bond of $5,000 on the solicitation charge. Bond was considered, but denied on the other two charges.

His next court appearance is an Aug. 18 preliminary hearing.

Kathy Jefcoats

Elaine, you are right, there are NO winners. The innocent accused become guilty, the guilty are guilty. The victims are ruined. Sad.

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Alle

4 weeks ago

Sorry the picture didnt come thru. He's black FWIW if anything. Looks a bit like Pipim... do all black SDA pastors cut their hair the same way??? Is there a standard pastor look these days per culture? There used to pretty much be when I was growing up SDA. How would I know now? I wouldn't. That's why I asked. The ones on tv pretty much do.

---

Gailon Arthur Joy

3 weeks ago

I can say that in New England, pastors have always met their match and have been reported and dealt with. In many cases, the pastor has also been redeemed and moved on to make significant contributions to society.

I would propose it is a question of acceptable church standards by the constituency. Zero tolerance leads to exposure and zero career, and even some jail time. Unfortunately, similar cases from our "more tolerant" western constituencies have frequently resulted in payment of claims and transfer of the problem, unresolved.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AUReporter

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Vernon P. Wagner

3 weeks ago

If this allegation is true, Pastor Chapman needs psychiatric care. Performing a solo sex act in front of a 15 year old boy in a parking lot is more bizarre than a Congressman in an airport restroom.

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Trevor Hammond

3 weeks ago
What if he is gay? Then perhaps he could say that he was 'born that way'?

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

Careful, it may begin to sound like self-hatred.

Trevor Hammond 3 weeks ago Reply

Ellen White warned about the dangers of 'self abuse': the habit of which Cultural Adventists have been very touchy and fond about. Now just see where it can get you! What a sicko thing to do to!

Kevin Riley 3 weeks ago Reply

Trevor

Is there anything in the church you can't link to the 'evil' of not being a traditional SDA? Just what positive contribution to the church do you hope to make by constantly pointing out that the non-traditional SDAs are wrong about everything? Ellen White also warned about criticising fellow church members. That seems to be a cause few in the church from any side are willing to take up.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

People who eschew anything sexual have been called "Adventist nuns" or Adventist monks--who took vows of celibacy. At least they are safe from sexual accusations, or are they?

justew 3 weeks ago Reply

Salinas Pastor Charged and named:

Birger Draget, 54, was charged with 21 different counts which include indecent liberties with a child, rape and sodomy.

http://www.atoday.org/article.php?id=871&action=print
Hey Mr Riley

RE: "Is there anything in the church you can't link to the 'evil' of not being a traditional SDA?"

Mate, I didn't mention the word 'evil' Sir. It is a known fact that, even right here on this website, many cultural Adventists have expressed dismay with regard to EGW's counsel on 'self abuse' which they in turn then entirely dismiss her as a messenger of the Lord, just based on this alone! Traditionalists do not. The church faces a number of dangers as a direct result of First World cultural Adventism which is regressive in my view in terms of spiritual growth as a Church and as individuals for that matter. Those who reject the 'self abuse counsel' will generally reject IJ etc. Anyway, it is Traditional Adventism which is insulted most of the time here on these blogs. I'm just saying that cultural Adventism has major issues...

♥

Tom

Trevor, are you ever taking a far reach when you state that those who "reject the self abuse (masturbation) counsel will generally reject the IJ (Investigative Judgement)." I added the words in parenthesis so everyone will know what we are talking about.

For starters, claiming that, to use EGW terminology, "self abuse" was what caused this pastor to do the outrageous thing he did is ridiculous. I'll do more than express dismay at what EGW said about it back then. She was a contemporary of her time, and held views on the subject not out of step with religious beliefs of that day. Kellogg was obsessed over the subject and even wrote a book on how to tell if a boy is doing it. While EGW and Kellogg were close on issues of health until their fallout later, she never endorsed that book even though she expressed a similar position.

On this one she has been proven wrong. But of course there are those who, constantly looking backwards into the wrong end of the telescope, will use such antiquated counsel, and jump to all kinds of conclusions. Falls right in line with equating anyone gay with pedophiles, adulterers, murderers, and the like.

Vernon P. Wagner

Maybe we need more of those chastity devices designed by Dr. Kellogg. I hear iron spikes worked well to inhibit a 'stirring of the loins.'

Alle

The governing authority over a local church congregation has publicly decried the Aug. 4 arrest of one of its members on child sex charges.

Samuel Walsham Chapman, 58, of Decatur, is being held without bond in the Clayton County Jail on child molestation and enticing a child for indecent purposes charges. He has a $5,000 bond for solicitation of sodomy in the same case.

Chapman told police he worked at Riverdale Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Jonesboro. At the time of his arrest, Chapman was identified as one of the pastors on the church's web site.

However, church officials said, Thursday, that Chapman was a volunteer and has been removed from that position. Elder William L. Winston, executive secretary for the South Atlantic Conference, said the church's governing authority is cooperating with the police investigation.

"The South Atlantic Conference does not condone child abuse in any form," said Winston. "At the time of his arrest, Mr. Chapman was not an employee of, or selected for his volunteer position by the South Atlantic Conference. Mr. Chapman has been suspended from volunteering any further with the church."

Warrants allege that Chapman took a 15-year-old boy to the parking lot of Tara Stadium in March and performed a sexual act in front of him. Chapman asked the boy to perform oral sex on him, but the boy refused, according to the warrant.

The boy told his mother and grandmother, May 4, about the alleged incident. Officials conducted a forensic interview with the boy, which led to the filing of charges Aug. 1.

Winston said families should continue to feel comfortable reaching out to their church for support and guidance.

"The conference wholeheartedly encourages families to talk about child abuse, and to rely on the church for support, love and spiritual guidance in dealing with these very serious issues," he said. "As such, the South Atlantic Conference provides counseling services through our children's and families' ministries to encourage healing through faith in Jesus Christ."

According to court records, Chapman is being represented by Atlanta attorney J. Kevin Franks. Franks did not immediately return a call Friday seeking comment.

Not real sure why this turned into a discussion of masturbation when its a pedophile issue but, as hopefully 90% of men know, and what is the latest figure? 60% of women know, it's not. No matter what an anally eccentric 19th century doctor (whose medical education was about one year) and a 19th century woman with a third grade education and a legendary head injury thought. Oh I forgot, there's a pedestal involved.

Elaine Nelson

And the recommendation for females caught in this "terrible sin" the physician recommended carbolic acid! Genital mutilation here in the U.S.!

Andreas Bochmann

I read with interest - as I am dealing a lot with the topic professionally - until I read the name.... I know Birger and are in dismay, no matter whether he is guilty or has been framed. And - he will.
remain on my contact list, whether he is guilty or has been framed, either way he needs support and help.

A couple of general points though:

- To mix the issue with the topic of masturbation and/or homosexuality is quite obscene in my view, these topics have nothing in common. Neither are masturbating man (read Archibald Hart's statistics on the practice among Christian married men!) prone to acts of sexual violence, nor are acts of sexual violence of males against boys ("sodomy") usually due to homosexual inclination.
- Whatever happened, the victims need to be believed and helped.
- Having said that, an accused person needs to be presumed innocent unless otherwise proven (oh, by the way - see the blog on death penalty in this context)
- Last but not least... at least in my home country the percentage of perpetrators among Adventist ministers I am aware of (when it comes to child sexual abuse), is higher than the known percentage of Catholic priests guilty of that crime. The celibacy myth sometimes put forward is just that! However, our preoccupation with sexual sin may be a clue to some explanation, why these things tragically do happen - even among the saints.

Thanks.

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**Elaine Nelson**  
3 weeks ago  
Reply

The most effective and usual method for ridding the SDA denomination of its trusted employees is to accuse them of "sexual immorality." Regardless of the undisclosed reason, this accusation has been used almost since Adventism began. Many powerful men have been sent to the Siberia of Adventism by this accusation. Once accused, there is no amount of evidence that removes the stigma. See David Dennis, Jiggs Gallagher, even back to the 30's a union president was summarily dismissed because of this accusation, often on the flimsiest reasoning.

There can be misuse of funds, "insider trading" and collusions with the highest SDA officials for profit, but sexual immorality seems to be the worst of all sins.

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**Andreas Bochmann**  
3 weeks ago  
Reply

Elaine, I agree that is tragic (I am aware of some details of the Gallagher case). Yet, this talks about our difficulty to deal with sexuality... It is at least equally tragic that many female victims (they are the majority) are not believed, ostracized, disfellowshipped if they go public, while pastors, elders, pathfinder directors (all perpetrators I have personal knowledge of are/were in some kind of leadership position - except one) remain in their office. It is a complex issue, and complex issues usually suffer in simplifying public debate.

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**robert hieb**  
3 weeks ago  
Reply

i am saddened by the news about pastor draget, i have heard him speak on several occasions he seems to be a decent committed christian pastor, if this true about him i can only imagine the
years of struggle he has gone thru, we still know so little about what makes this happen, obviously we need to protect our children but it would really be wonderful if there could be diagnosis and treatment before overt acts occur.

Elaine Nelson 3 weeks ago Reply

We do not have all the facts, but it is very troubling, considering the many Catholic priests and their bishops keeping "mum" for years. Adventists have had this trouble for decades, but there seems no easy method to prevent, except all adults working with children should have other adults present at all time which may be a deterrent.

Maybe if there were more female pastors this would be far less likely? It would certainly be much more rare.

Jan Schuleman 2 weeks ago Reply

We need to keep this pastor and his family in prayer. I have known him and his family for years and remember his very first sermon just fresh out of seminary. The devil is working overtime, as he knows his time is short and he will do whatever it takes to take God's people down. We need keep all of our pastors-lay workers in prayer as they go into homes to study with people. Maybe it would be safer to them never to go alone, but with someone. God is still trying to get us ready to go to heaven and we need to pray more diligently. This incident is unfortunate and only God knows all the details and is always there to hear the cries of our hearts and to forgive us. We all sin and fall short of the Glory of God and I am grateful his love and forgiveness is unconditional.
Salina pastor charged with more than a dozen sex crimes involving children

By Chris Durden

KWCH 12 Eyewitness News

4:54 PM CDT, October 10, 2011

(SALINA, Kan.)

Authorities in Salina have charged a pastor with multiple counts of sex crimes. 54-year-old Birger Draget was charged Monday with four counts of Aggravated Indecent Liberties, two counts of Indecent Liberties with a Child, four counts of Rape, three counts of Aggravated Criminal Sodomy, two counts of Criminal Sodomy and six other charges.

He'll be in court again on the 17th of October.

Draget is the pastor of Seventh Day Adventist Church. He was arrested on Thursday and booked into the Saline County Jail.

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