Caught Up in the Rapture: How Bad Theology Hit the Big Screen

A new *Left Behind* movie opens today. Find out why Bible scholars of many denominations are criticizing the theology behind it.

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Caught Up in the Rapture: How Bad Theology Hit the Big Screen

Seth Pierce

Here we go again. Just when we thought the *Left Behind* series had finally been…well…left behind, we are greeted with a remake of the movie version. Did we need a remake? For fans of the novels, probably—the first movies were abysmal. For popular preachers seeking converts, definitely. Rapture theology has become as effective as hell in terms of exciting, and scaring, people into the pews and baptisteries.

Now let me just say that I think the idea of disappearing before things get ugly on Planet Earth is a fun idea. Wouldn’t it be amazing to have it occur just as you lose your job, or get rejected while asking someone out on a date, or mess up a speech in front of hundreds of people?

Poof! Gone.

As delightful as it is to imagine vanishing out of awkward moments, the rapture doctrine raises a number of problems for Bible students wanting more truth than fiction in their theological worldview. When this idea got some firepower under the creative pens of Pentecostal authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, people assumed its biblical basis and preached it from pulpits far and wide.

However, as we’ve gained some distance from the novels, scholars of every tradition have weighed in on the teaching of the “secret rapture” and found it extremely wanting…and even dangerous.

So where did this idea come from? Well, it didn’t begin in a series of novels, that’s for sure. In a weird way, it began in the Bible…even though it wasn’t biblical. What follows is an incredibly quick overview.

The Antichrist Disappearing Act

When Martin Luther turned up the heat on the papacy by calling it the antichrist, the church commissioned a torrent of scholarship to recast Luther’s (as well as John Calvin’s) application of Bible prophecy, which singled out the pope as the sum of all evil. One of the theories, created by a Jesuit named Francisco Ribera in his 1585 commentary, *Sacrum Beati Ioannis Apostoli, & Evangelistiae Apocalypsin Commentarij*, suggested that every prophecy pertaining to the antichrist would be fulfilled in the future.

According to this view, a gap of time should be inserted into the 70-week prophecy described in Daniel 9. By inserting this gap, Ribera stopped the historical unfolding of the prophecy and catapulted it to some distant time in the future. Instead of the 70th week pointing to Jesus’ earthly ministry and the early church’s efforts to reach the Jewish people, it pointed to the final seven years of tribulation that would occur after Jesus rescued the church.

So you see (the thought went), since God’s people haven’t been rescued yet, we can’t possibly be witnessing the antichrist. Ribera’s theory made an impact but didn’t topple the biblical view that prophecy moves in a straight, continuous line into the future.

Then came Darby.

John Darby’s Prophetic Time Warp

John Nelson Darby was an Irish Anglican clergyman in the nineteenth century who became familiar with Ribera’s work. He developed it further, using an extreme literalist interpretation of the Bible. He believed all Scripture is
“inerrant” (basically dictated by God) and should be interpreted literally at every point.

While that might sound like a good idea, it fails to consider the literary genres of the Bible. Scripture is full of poetry, history, parables, proverbs, and, of course, prophecy. While we view them all as inspired, we know to interpret them differently based on their intent.

Darby's rigid reading of the Bible led him to the idea that God had several “dispensations”—ways He dealt with humans. There were seven total, and they go as follows:

- Innocence (Gen 1:1–3:7),
- Conscience (Gen 3:8–8:22),
- Government (Gen 9:1–11:32),
- Patriarchal Rule (Gen 12:1–Exod 19:25),
- Mosaic Law (Exod 20:1–Acts 2:4),
- Grace (Acts 2:4–Rev 20:3),

In addition to these dispensations, Darby’s literalistic and legalistic interpretive method led him to believe that God had two plans of salvation: one for Israel and the other for the church. In his mind, the church was a kind of “parenthesis” (during the gap between the 69th and 70th week of prophecy) in the plan of salvation, never meant to replace the nation of Israel. The church, in one scholar’s words, existed in a “mysterious prophetic time warp” (Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, p. 20).

Darby also came up with the concept and coined the phrase “secret rapture” to describe what would happen to the church before Daniel’s final week of prophecy (a literal seven years) was carried out on earth. During this time Israel, the Jews, would repent, and then Jesus would come.

Darby and his followers presented their ideas in Europe. They held that most of Revelation, save its first few chapters, contained events that had not yet come to pass—earning their theology the name “futurism.” This was in stark contrast to the majority of Christians, who believed basically the opposite.

Those who disagreed with Darby’s secret rapture idea were thrown out of his group and considered “deceivers.” Once he had his allegiances intact by 1840, he turned his sights on North America, which was ablaze with prophetic fever. Interestingly enough, scholars note that no one taught the secret rapture theory prior to 1830 (Matthew K. Thompson, *Kingdom Come*, p. 41).

Through various Bible and prophecy conferences, strong personalities like James H. Brookes and evangelist D.L. Moody began to popularize Darby’s dispensationalism. Baptists and Presbyterians were particularly drawn to their ideas. But these men’s efforts paled in comparison with the ultimate champion of Darby’s doctrines—a man named Cyrus Scofield.

**Scofield’s Notes Eclipse Scripture**

Converted in 1879, mentored by Brookes, and having no formal theological training to teach him otherwise, Cyrus Scofield was grafted into the dispensationalist family. As he grew under his mentor’s influence, Scofield became a popular lecturer. In 1909 he completed his magnum opus—The Scofield Reference Bible.

At this time “liberal” theology (which denied the inspiration of the Bible, or at least its inerrancy) had caused panic among the faithful. As a reaction against this encroaching threat, they began to look at Scofield’s Bible as completely inerrant, including the notes he had put in the margins offering his dispensationalist interpretation of
prophecy.

Since school was expensive, and graduate school was suspect in people's minds due to liberalism in higher education, Scofield's Bible with commentary became for many an infallible, portable seminary. And woe to you should you question his interpretations—after all, they are in the Bible.

See the problem?

Israel Returns

The upheavals of two world wars brought a colorful cast of characters to the forefront of prophetic prognostications. Candidates for antichrist came and went, and the constant shifting of geopolitical boundaries seemed to indicate that the time of Jesus' return was near.

But when Israel regained sovereignty in 1948, dispensationalists went bananas. After all, they believed God would restore and save Israel during the last seven years of prophecy. Prophetic predictions ran rampant across the theological landscape—and still do whenever anything significant happens to Israel. A large portion of the evangelical world looks to Israel as the locus of prophecy as much as Adventists look to the papacy.

From Lindsey to Left Behind

Moving into the contemporary arena of pop theology, the greatest kick in the pants to the secret rapture doctrine, outside of the Scofield Bible, was administered by Pentecostal author Hal Lindsey and his book The Late Great Planet Earth. Published in 1970, it is a condensed version of classical dispensationalism that manages to squeeze current events into its very readable prophetic schema.

By 1990, 28 million copies had been sold.

It's a lesson to those writing in the area of eschatology that the more understandable, and practical, you can make even the most difficult of subjects, the greater the impact.

The huge success of Lindsey's little book sent tremors through the evangelical world and eventually inspired Pentecostal theologians Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins to craft their bestselling Left Behind novels. The books' popularity provides another illustration to dry academics that the prize of people's hearts goes to the one who can tell the best story, not necessarily the one holding onto dry facts…true as they may be.

Dan Brown, author of The Da Vinci Code, would reiterate that lesson for the church again in 2003.

Disappearing Disciples: The Biblical Evidence

So what texts are typically used to support the secret rapture? What verses have dispensationalists found to fit into their arsenal of proof texts? I submit to you a few favorites.

The typical go-to verse in favor of vanishing disciples is found in Matthew 24. The portion people use as proof reads as follows: "Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left" (Matt 24:40-41, ESV). Well—there you have it. Looks as if we do, in fact, have a disappearing act at the return of the Lord.

But, if we are honest, these two verses don’t tell us much other than that not everyone will experience the same fate at the end of time. And, when couched in their context, they paint the opposite picture that rapture enthusiasts would like you to believe. The section begins like this:
But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Matt 24:36-39, ESV).

Notice who gets “swept away” in the Flood (in some translations it reads “took them away”)—it isn’t the good guys.

As the verses unfold, we see a parallel between the wicked in Noah’s day and the wicked in the days before Jesus comes. Luke’s version even adds a little bonus. After Jesus describes how some will be taken and others left, someone asks where the people are “taken.” Jesus replies, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (Luke 17:37, ESV). In other words, they’re taken to the “great supper” described in Revelation 19:17-18, where birds of prey feast on the bodies of the wicked.

This means that being “left behind” is a good thing—unless you like to feed the birds.

Another image that rapturists enjoy latching onto is that of a thief.

In Peter’s second epistle, he writes, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Peter 3:10, ESV). Aside from the obviously explosive second part of the verse, indicating the visible nature of Jesus’ return, a quick comparison with Matthew 24 reveals the nature of the thief metaphor.

Jesus says, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into” (Matt 24:43, ESV). In other words, Jesus’ coming as a thief isn’t so much about snatching people away secretly as it is about arriving at a time not expected by those who aren’t looking for Him.

Not only does the term “rapture” not occur in the Bible, but those verses people claim allude to it fall apart upon closer inspection. And Christians have been inspecting.

**Critiques of the Rapture**

As popular as this doctrine has become in the pews, scholars of various backgrounds have been quick to refute it as unscriptural.

Pentecostal scholar Matthew K. Thompson comments, “Many (if not most) contemporary Pentecostal academics lament the Pentecostal acceptance of classical dispensationalism. It is the selling of a birthright for evangelical respectability” (*Kingdom Come*, p. 51). His words are surprising given the popularity of the rapture among Pentecostals.

Lending his voice to a growing number of academics disinclined toward *Left Behind*’s theology, preeminent New Testament scholar N.T. Wright says, “I believe some future event will result in the personal presence of Jesus within God’s new creation. This is taught throughout the New Testament outside the Gospels. But this event won’t in any way resemble the *Left Behind* account” (“Farewell to the Rapture,” *Bible Review*, August 2001).

Many scholars demonstrate the danger of embracing what is now known as “Scofieldian Dispensationalism.” Numerous voices have pointed out the problems of God essentially having two different plans of salvation (for Jews and Gentiles), the church being a sort of afterthought, the carving up of Scripture so not all parts apply to all people, the implication given by dispensations that God’s plan has been constantly shifting instead of naturally unfolding, the arbitrary throwing of the 70th week into the future, and finally, the minimizing of the doctrine of the new earth (see...
Rev 21) that calls us to be stewards of our “great planet earth” instead of simply looking for a way out with “escapist fiction” theology.

Paul Has the Final Word

The Bible paints the best picture of what will actually happen when Jesus returns. And it does involve a rapture of sorts.

The Apostle Paul, speaking of the hope Christians have, and making the only biblical reference to being “caught up” (which is what “rapture” means), says:

We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thes 4:15-18, ESV, italics supplied).

For Paul—and more importantly, Jesus—the return of the Savior is a literal, visible event. No secret about it.
Christ has said: “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.” The duty of searching the Scriptures is enjoined upon every son and daughter of Adam. Jesus says, “And they are they which testify of me.” The Father was revealed in the Son, and in studying Christ we shall learn of the Father. Then let us come to search the word of God with softened, subdued hearts, and read the testimony concerning our Lord and Master. Shall we not with intense interest seek to catch his spirit, copy his example, and breathe in the atmosphere of his presence, which is light and love? How eagerly should we study every lesson that fell from his divine lips! How should we cherish his instruction! How ardently we should seek to imitate his character and life, and press on to know more and more of the heavenly truths he taught. If we would but practice the truths he has given, we should perfect an experience that would be of the highest value to us, and to the world.

Jesus presented new views of truth to his disciples, and how much deeper was the meaning of his utterances than the meaning of any lesson ever taught by human lips! “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

As we take up the study of God’s word, we should do so with humble hearts.

How shall we search the Scriptures? Shall we drive our stakes of doctrine one after another, and then try to make all Scripture meet our established opinions, or shall we take our ideas and views to the Scriptures, and measure our theories on every side by the Scriptures of truth? Many who read and even teach the Bible, do not comprehend the precious truth they are teaching or studying. Men entertain errors, when the truth is clearly marked out, and if they would but bring their doctrines to the word of God, and not read the word of God in the light of their doctrines, to prove their ideas right, they would not walk in darkness and blindness, or cherish error. Many give the words of Scripture a meaning that suits their own opinions, and they mislead themselves and deceive others by their misinterpretations of God’s word. As we take up the study of God’s word, we should do so with humble hearts. All selfishness, all love of originality, should be laid aside. Long-cherished opinions must not be regarded as infallible. It was the unwillingness of the Jews to give up their long established traditions that proved their ruin. They were determined not to see any flaw in their own opinions or in their expositions of the Scriptures; but however long men may have entertained certain views, if they are not clearly sustained by the written word, they should be discarded.

Earnest supplications went up to heaven that God would help us to see eye to eye, that we might be one, as Christ and the Father are one.

Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions for investigation and criticism, and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed. This was the spirit cherished among us forty years ago. We would come together burdened in soul, praying that we might be one in faith and doctrine; for we knew that Christ is not divided. One point at a time was made the subject of investigation. Solemnity characterized these councils of investigation. The Scriptures were opened with a sense of awe. Often we fasted, that we might be better fitted to understand the truth. After earnest prayer, if any point was not understood, it was discussed, and each one
expressed his opinion freely; then we would again bow in prayer, and earnest supplications went up to heaven that God would help us to see eye to eye, that we might be one, as Christ and the Father are one. Many tears were shed. If one brother rebuked another for his dullness of comprehension in not understanding a passage as he understood it, the one rebuked would afterward take his brother by the hand, and say, “Let us not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus is with us; let us keep a humble and teachable spirit;” and the brother addressed would say, “Forgive me, brother, I have done you an injustice.” Then we would bow down in another season of prayer. We spent many hours in this way. We did not generally study together more than four hours at a time, yet sometimes the entire night was spent in solemn investigation of the Scriptures, that we might understand the truth for our time. On some occasions the Spirit of God would come upon me, and difficult portions were made clear through God’s appointed way, and then there was perfect harmony. We were all of one mind and one Spirit.

When clear light revealed the points of truth, we would weep and rejoice together.

We sought most earnestly that the Scriptures should not be wrested to suit any man’s opinions. We tried to make our differences as slight as possible by not dwelling on points that were of minor importance, upon which there were varying opinions. But the burden of every soul was to bring about a condition among the brethren which would answer the prayer of Christ that his disciples might be one as he and the Father are one. Sometimes one or two of the brethren would stubbornly set themselves against the view presented, and would act out the natural feelings of the heart; but when this disposition appeared, we suspended our investigations and adjourned our meeting, that each one might have an opportunity to go to God in prayer, and without conversation with others, study the point of difference, asking light from heaven. With expressions of friendliness we parted, to meet again as soon as possible for further investigation. At times the power of God came upon us in a marked manner, and when clear light revealed the points of truth, we would weep and rejoice together. We loved Jesus; we loved one another.

It is necessary that our unity today be of a character that will bear the test of trial.

In those days God wrought for us, and the truth was precious to our souls. It is necessary that our unity today be of a character that will bear the test of trial. We are in the school of the Master here, that we may be trained for the school above. We must learn to bear disappointment in a Christ-like manner, and the lesson taught by this will be of great importance to us.

We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.

We must not trust to others to search the Scriptures for us.

Could those who are self-sufficient see how the universe of God regards them; could they see themselves as God sees them; they would behold such weakness, such manifest want of wisdom, that they would cry to the Lord to be their righteousness; they would want to hide from his sight. The apostle says, “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” When our schemes and our plans have been broken; when men who have depended upon our judgment conclude the Lord would lead them to act and judge for themselves, we should not feel like censuring, and like exercising arbitrary authority to compel them to receive our ideas. Those who are placed in authority should constantly cultivate self-control. I am thankful
that God is a wise ruler, and every one who is a true disciple of Christ will be humble, lift his cross, and meekly follow where the self-denying, self-sacrificing Jesus leads the way. Disappointment may prove to be the greatest of blessings to us. We must learn that others have rights as well as we have, and when any of our brethren receive new light upon the Scriptures, he should frankly explain his position, and every minister should search the Scriptures with the spirit of candor to see if the points presented on a new subject can be substantiated by the inspired word. “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” Every soul must look to God with contrition and humility, that God may guide and lead and bless. We must not trust to others to search the Scriptures for us. Some of our leading brethren have frequently taken positions on the wrong side, and if God would send a message and wait for these older brethren to open the way for its advance, it would never reach the people. These brethren will be found in this position until they become partakers of the divine nature to a greater extent than ever they have been in the past. There is sadness in heaven over the spiritual blindness of many of our brethren. Our younger ministers who fill less important positions must make decided efforts to come to the light, to sink the shaft deeper and still deeper into the mine of truth.

I call upon every minister to seek the Lord, to put away pride, to put away strife after supremacy, and humble the heart before God.

The rebufke of the Lord will be upon those who would be guardians of the doctrine, who would bar the way that greater light shall not come to the people. A great work is to be done, and God sees that our leading men have need of greater light, that they may unite with the messengers whom he shall send harmoniously to accomplish the work that he designs they should. The Lord has raised up messengers and endued them with his Spirit, and has said, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” Let no one run the risk of interposing himself between the people and the message of heaven. The message of God will come to the people; and if there were no voice among men to give it, the very stones would cry out. I call upon every minister to seek the Lord, to put away pride, to put away strife after supremacy, and humble the heart before God. It is the coldness of heart, the unbelief of those who ought to have faith, that keeps the churches in feebleness.

I would rejoice with all my heart to see all who have been connected with the work, take their places to hold high the banner of Jesus, that when their work shall be done, they may say as did Paul, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

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How to Engage Engineers in Ministry: Do’s and Don’ts

Josephine Elia Loi

In an ideal church, all whose hearts have been touched by God's love will volunteer and dedicate themselves to serve God and His people, no matter how big or petty, difficult or easy the tasks are. But most churches operate by the 10-90 rule, where 10 percent of the people do 90 percent of the work. The other 90 percent may be viewed as dead weight, but a better alternative is to see them as untapped resources, with potential to be unlocked.

Engineers, I believe, are a major untapped group in Adventist churches and ministries. During the past 10 years in the ministry circuit, I have encountered many engineers who wish they could use their skills for God. The musicians can perform at church, the elocutionists can preach, the school teachers can teach, the doctors can do health seminars, but what can the engineers do? “Engineering is so unrelated to ministry,” many of them lament.

At the same time, these engineers are actually itching to work for God’s kingdom. Many may be involved in church life, perhaps by helping out with children’s program or housekeeping tasks on Sabbaths, but this is not where their highest potential is realized. Engineers’ primary gifts are in design, building systems, and problem solving. When these gifts are matched with real needs in God’s kingdom, the effect can be explosive.

If you’re a pastor/elder/ministry leader and you have trouble motivating the engineers in your congregation or group, here are some tips on how to make ministry more palatable to engineers.

1. Engineers like to work on defined projects.

Engineers work in terms of projects. If you want to get the engineers’ attention and participation, frame your ministry efforts as projects. This is not just a verbal maneuver. Projects mean that you have specific goals, a clear starting point, and a clear ending point. Projects need to have success factors—a list of criteria that determine whether the project is finished or not. When all the points are accomplished, then you can say, “This project is finished.”

This means that if you have a lofty goal like changing the world, you need to break that down into smaller, accomplishable projects. What you don’t want to do is to put engineers on maintenance tasks—the type of work that will never be done. These tasks actually suck the life out of engineers and burn them out quickly.

For example, you may task an engineer to build your church’s website, which is a finite activity—it can be finished. Maintaining the website, however, is another story; there will never be a stopping point to this activity. Ideally, you’d want to move the engineer to another project and get someone else to maintain the website and generate the content consistently.

DO: Put engineers on specific projects.

DON’T: Put engineers in ongoing maintenance jobs.

2. Engineers need clear specifications.

When you put an engineer on a project, you need to be ready with clear specifications. These include what you want to be done, what (finite) scope the project encapsulates, what resources are available, what the constraints are, and what the deadline of the project is. Things like, “Just build it; we’ll worry about the detailed features later” just don’t make sense to engineers. They’re not wired to work in abstract terms. What is it that you want them to build? If you don’t specify the requirements up front, whatever they build may not be suitable later on, and they’ll have to rework their project. This is inefficiency and waste: an engineer’s nightmare.
Preplanning is key. Make sure you’ve given the project a lot of thought, and be ready with some “napkin sketches” of your vision. You may even recruit an engineer to help you formulate the problem before you set the project in motion.

**DO:** Plan ahead; define specifications.

**DON’T:** Leave the requirements vague.

### 3. Engineers thrive on teamwork and focus.

Engineers like to work in teams. They can **split the work** into pieces and join them together in an iterative manner. Teammates also serve as error-checkers and personal motivators. The people you put in the team, however, matter.

When engineers work, they can **focus on one thing** for many hours. They need to be **left alone**, because they don’t want to break that train of thought, which, once lost, will take a long time to get back to. They also tend to **work sequentially**, meaning that they will finish one task before going to the next one.

Some people can work by jumping from one task to another without finishing one thing first. If the work gets done, this method of working is just as viable. But, for the sake of everyone’s mental health, you don’t want to put these individuals in the same team as the engineers. They will only distract each other, which will drive everyone crazy.

**DO:** Let engineers focus.

**DON’T:** Team them up with multitaskers.

### 4. Engineers prefer work hours rather than meetings.

Engineers like working on things, not talking about working on things. If you want the engineers to engage, minimize the meetings and teleconferences. Schedule work hours instead, which are **portions of time in which all the teammates are working simultaneously**. They may be working individually on their own parts, but the fact that everybody’s working together gives a certain excitement and synergy to the work. At the end of the work hours, everyone can give brief updates on their stopping points and tasks done, and everybody leaves feeling productive and energized.

During these work hours, it is crucial that team members can communicate with each other quickly. If your project can be done remotely, require everyone to be online in one way or another (e.g., Gchat, Google Hangout, or email) so that each person can get feedback on their work or get information from a teammate instantaneously. Interactions are mostly casual, as long as the job gets done, which promotes creativity in problem solving and design. The team not only accomplishes tasks, it also becomes a kind of think tank that can spew out other creative projects later on.

**DO:** Schedule work hours.

**DON’T:** Schedule unnecessary meetings.

### 5. Engineers want actionable items.

If you must hold meetings, have a clear **agenda** (clear reasons why you need to meet) and **talking points**. These points should be topics that cannot be resolved unless everyone meets in this way. Prevent nebulous tangents. For less important or non-team items, use other means of communication.

One comment on status updates: keep these short. The purpose of meetings is for the team to move forward to the next task items, not to review past work. Some updates are key, but detailed updates should be done via email.
beforehand. Also, some updates are not relevant to all team members, in which case team members should communicate with the team leader at another time.

These meetings also need to end with actionable items—what each person will do by a certain time. Avoid vague language. For example, while a sentence like “Let’s all work together to advance God’s kingdom and be a blessing in our communities” may be technically true and get a lot of amens, there is no actionable item contained in that statement. It’s too vague. You don’t want to end meetings this way. What does “working together” mean? Are we going to split some work? Instead, a sentence like “Let’s meet at the church at 9:00 a.m. next Sunday to shovel snow from people’s driveways” is actionable since everyone knows what to accomplish.

DO: Define meeting agenda and actionable items.

DON’T: Use vague language.

6. Engineers like getting things done.

When engineers set their minds to a project, all they want to do is to get it done. Anything that hinders that goal is seen as waste and inefficiency. Thus, do what you can to minimize bureaucracy and politics. Add a person in the team who can deal with administrative and political matters so the engineers can stay on their tasks.

Another problem that projects tend to have is creeping scope. At first you want five things, but as time goes on the five becomes seven, then 10… Instead of continually expanding the scope of the project, do iterations or stages. Let the team finish the first project (with maybe a few additional items), then start another project (version 2.0) to address the other needs. You can’t expect two or three times the number of tasks to be done in the same amount of time. (See this article for more about effective projects.)

There is a euphoric feeling when something is finally built or a problem is solved. Multiple small projects that are finished are better than one big project that is never-ending. Even Jesus said, “It is finished.”

DO: Minimize bureaucracy. Let projects finish.

DON’T: Think that small changes are easy. They’re mostly not.

Following these tips means you are playing to the engineers’ strengths and making it easier for them to want to work. When you can’t follow these tips, for whatever reason, they are pointers to the risk factors and potential sources of frustration when engineers are involved. So give them some thought, and enlist the engineers in your church!

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“Gay Gene” and Transgender Surgery Lack Scientific Backing

Valmy Karemera

Besides Biblical reasons against homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-11; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; etc), there appears to be no conclusive evidence for the existence of the so-called “gay gene.”

Earlier this year, the gay-friendly newspaper The Guardian reported on the latest findings of a study by psychologist Michael Bailey:

A region of the X chromosome called Xq28 had some impact on men’s sexual behaviour – though scientists have no idea which of the many genes in the region are involved, nor how many lie elsewhere in the genome.

Another stretch of DNA on chromosome 8 also played a role in male sexual orientation – though again the precise mechanism is unclear. . . .

The gene or genes in the Xq28 region that influence sexual orientation have a limited and variable impact. Not all of the gay men in Bailey’s study inherited the same Xq28 region. The genes were neither sufficient, nor necessary, to make any of the men gay.

Bailey adds, “We found evidence for two sets [of genes] that affect whether a man is gay or straight. But it is not completely determinative; there are certainly other environmental factors involved.”

Similarly, the American Psychological Association noted, “There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation.”

But some experts obscure these facts. Writing for the Washington Post in June of this year, Australian geneticist Jenny Graves claimed there is “evidence of a ‘gay gene’”:

This year, a larger study of gay brothers, using the many genetic markers now available through the Human Genome Project, confirmed the original finding and also detected another “gay gene” on chromosome 8. This has unleashed a new flurry of comment.

But why such a furor when we know of gay gene variants in species from flies to mammals? Homosexuality is quite common throughout the animal kingdom. For instance, there are variants that influence mating preference in mice, and a mutation in the fruit fly makes males court other males instead of females.

Despite the lack of evidence that particular genes determine whether a person will be homosexual, Graves quotes the article cited in The Guardian. Articles such as these tend to mislead the public into believing that homosexuality is an unchangeable genetic condition.

Enter the Transgender Debate: “Sex change” is biologically impossible
Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist in chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital, penned the most devastating critic of the transgender agenda to date. He writes,

> Policy makers and the media are doing no favors either to the public or the transgendersed by treating their confusions as a right in need of defending rather than as a mental disorder that deserves understanding, treatment and prevention. This intensely felt sense of being transgendersed constitutes a mental disorder in two respects. The first is that the idea of sex misalignment is simply mistaken—it does not correspond with physical reality. The second is that it can lead to grim psychological outcomes.

> The transgendersed suffer a disorder of “assumption” like those in other disorders familiar to psychiatrists. With the transgendersed, the disordered assumption is that the individual differs from what seems given in nature—namely one’s maleness or femaleness.

He continues,

> A 2011 study at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden produced the most illuminating results yet regarding the transgendersed, evidence that should give advocates pause. The long-term study—up to 30 years—followed 324 people who had sex-reassignment surgery. The study revealed that beginning about 10 years after having the surgery, the transgendersed began to experience increasing mental difficulties. Most shockingly, their suicide mortality rose almost 20-fold above the comparable nontransgender population. This disturbing result has as yet no explanation but probably reflects the growing sense of isolation reported by the aging transgendersed after surgery. The high suicide rate certainly challenges the surgery prescription.

Finally, he makes this astounding conclusion:

> At the heart of the problem is confusion over the nature of the transgendersed. “Sex change” is biologically impossible. People who undergo sex-reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa. Rather, they become feminized men or masculinized women. Claiming that this is civil-rights matter and encouraging surgical intervention is in reality to collaborate with and promote a mental disorder.

It is very surprising to see that despite the ambiguity and absence of irrefutable scientific evidence surrounding the “gay gene” and transgendersed claims, gay and judicial activists keep pounding on the public to accept homosexuality as normal. More saddening is the forthcoming study from Duke University that shows a growing number of churches accepting gays and lesbians in their leadership structures. How shall we stand?

A Bible-based church such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church must point to the Bible and Jesus Christ—the Bible as a guide in these complex matters of mortals and morals, and Jesus Christ as the only One able to deliver, heal, and transform us from the power of sin and Satan.