The Church Is in Good Hands

"The church is going to split. The next thing to happen will be gay marriage in the church. After that, the Sabbath will not matter."

You've heard the dire predictions about the women's ordination vote. Could the doomsayers be forgetting something?

Read now!
Don't Miss These Articles:

Declining American Christianity: Where Does Adventism Fit?

Diet and Mental Health: Ellen White's Statement Confirmed

How Adventism Ended the Gospel Wars

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The Church Is in Good Hands

Jamey Houghton

I’ve heard it all. The church is going to split. The next thing to happen will be gay marriage in the church. After that, the Sabbath will not matter. Conferences will leave the fold. Tithe might be garnished to stay within a conference if women’s ordination doesn’t pass.

Add to those much-gossiped fears a few varieties of creative theology, and you have a snippet of what is being forwarded via e-mail, posted on Facebook and Twitter, published in magazines and books, and produced in movie format.

With a sense of foreboding and fear, many people have approached me wondering if the women’s ordination vote this summer at the General Conference session is going to split our church right down the middle like a hot knife through soy butter. Some of the conversations have been so dismal that the idea of any united church surviving San Antonio seems doubtful.

But, fellow Seventh-day Adventists, let me remind you whose church this is. If you have ever heard Elder C.D. Brooks preach his sermon “Does God Have a Church?” you have heard him quote Matthew 16. Jesus is talking to Peter and says, “Upon this rock I will build MY CHURCH” (Matt. 16:18, NASB).

Which church is that? The one that keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus! Do you know which church that is? That’s our church, friends!

If you are a Seventh-day Adventist with any interest in the topic to be discussed at the General Conference, you know this to be absolutely true. We are God’s remnant church tasked with spreading the gospel of Jesus throughout the entire world. God has one church, not a split church. After San Antonio, God will still have one church.

Those who are spreading fear about the future of God’s church lack faith that God can lead His people. Listen to what Ellen White says in regard to this:

> There is no need to doubt, to be fearful that the work will not succeed. God is at the head of the work, and He will set everything in order. If matters need adjusting at the head of the work God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong. Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port. (Selected Messages 2:390 [1892])

So what happens if God leads our church in a direction that is different from what I have concluded on this topic in my studies? I have read the books, articles, and blogs. I have come to a conclusion of what I think should be voted based on my study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, just like everyone else.

But sometimes God doesn’t listen to my advice, and for good reason. He’s wiser than I am. He sees a bigger picture than I do. He’s all-knowing; I know very little in comparison. That’s why I trust Him. My Bible says to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6, NASB).

I may not understand what God is up to, but I trust Him to lead His church no matter what happens. I will continue to tell as many people as I can about the hope I have in Him. I will continue to be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I will continue to return my tithe to God’s church. I won’t trash church leadership based on the
results of this decision. I won’t accuse anyone of conspiracy. I will continue to be a faithful Seventh-day Adventist—no matter what. Why? Because I believe this is God’s church, and there is no doubt in my mind that He is leading it.

So until our world church congregates in the hot Texas summer, don’t waste your time lobbying people for a vote. Instead, earnestly pray for our delegates—not that they vote in accordance with what you think about the subject, but that God moves on their hearts and minds as to the direction God’s church needs to go. Because whatever direction that is, that’s where I want our church to be. Let our prayers be, “Yet not my will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42, NASB).

This article was originally published at http://franktown.netadvent.org/pastors-page.

[Photo: San Antonio, Texas, will host this year’s General Conference session.]
Declining American Christianity: Where Does Adventism Fit?

Valmy Karemera

Recently the Pew Research Center published a report on the state of American Christianity. This extensive survey found out that

> the Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing, according to an extensive new survey by the Pew Research Center. Moreover, these changes are taking place across the religious landscape, affecting all regions of the country and many demographic groups.

The graph below highlights some of the ongoing changes happening to Christianity at large. From 2007 to 2014, the 6.7 percent increase among the unaffiliated group raises questions about the relevance of Christianity in America today.

Whereas the diversity among American Christians continues to increase along ethnic and racial lines, the Pew survey shows that mainline Protestants and Catholics are the two main groups behind the 7.8 percent decline among American Christians.

The Roman Catholic Church is losing more members than any other church. As further reported by Crux, “For every one Catholic convert, more than six Catholics leave the church. Taken a step further, Catholicism loses more members than it gains at a higher rate than any other denomination, with nearly 13 percent of all Americans describing themselves as ‘former Catholics.’”

On the brighter side, the Pew report indicates that evangelical Protestants are faring better than mainline Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church. The survey indicates that “one big reason evangelical Protestants have not declined at the same rate as other major Christian groups is that they are gaining new converts at a greater rate than they are losing people who were raised in the tradition.”

Adventists Lose Half Their Children

Currently the Seventh-day Adventist Church holds between 1 and 2 percent of the U.S. population. Just over half of children raised in an Adventist home are likely to remain Adventist in their adult life.
Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.

- Evangelical Protestant: 25.4% (Change: -0.9)
- Unaffiliated: 22.8% (Change: +6.7)
- Catholic: 20.8% (Change: -3.1)
- Mainline Protestant: 14.7% (Change: -3.4)

- Non-Christian faiths*: 5.9% (Change: +1.2)

* Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
## Christians Decline as Share of U.S. Population; Other Faiths and the Unaffiliated Are Growing

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Change*</th>
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<td>Christian</td>
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*The “change” column displays only statistically significant changes; blank cells indicate that the difference between 2007 and 2014 is within the margin of error.

**The “other world religions” category includes Sikhs, Baha’is, Taoists, Jains and a variety of other world religions. The “other faiths” category includes Unitarians, New Age religions, Native American religions and a number of other non-Christian faiths.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% and rounded figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Declining Number of Catholics

70 MILLION

65

60

55

50

45

40

35

30

25

20

15

10

5

0

2007

2014

54.3

53.2

50.9

49.6

Estimate

Range, given margin of error

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Number of Evangelical Protestants Growing

75 MILLION

70

65

60

55

50

45

40

35

30

25

20

15

10

5

0

2007

2014

59.8

58.6

62.2

60.8

Estimate

Range, given margin of error

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Among Protestant Denominational Families, Nearly Six-in-Ten of Those Raised Baptist Still Identify as Baptists as Adults

% of adults raised in each Protestant denominational family who...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Among those raised</th>
<th>Still identify with childhood denominational family</th>
<th>Now identify with different denominational family</th>
<th>Now identify as Catholic</th>
<th>Now identify as other faith</th>
<th>Now identify as unaffiliated</th>
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<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>39%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Lutheran</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adventist</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>31%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NET All Protestants</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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<td>Episcopalian/Anglican</td>
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<td>8%</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This raises an important question: Has Adventism (and American Christianity at large) become intellectually challenging or intellectually challenged?
Diet and Mental Health

Valmy Karemera

In 1905, Ellen G. White said that “diet materially affects the mind and disposition” (Adventist Home, p. 252). Given her level of education and lack of scientific background, few people paid attention to her statement. It would take another century before we could fully appreciate her timeless words.

The Surprising Connection Between Brain and Gut

In 2004, a groundbreaking study found a strong correlation between postnatal gut bacteria colonization and brain plasticity. Researchers noted that these bacteria play a critical role in several areas, such as the immune system, digestion and absorption, and overall physiological response to pathogens.

In 2010, Stephen Collins, MD, and his team at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, embarked on “a systematic investigation of the ability of intestinal bacteria to influence the brain and behavior” in mice. A recent Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) reports:

Subsequent animal experiments in Collins’ laboratory bore out the researchers’ initial observations by demonstrating through both antibiotic perturbation and fecal transplants that intestinal microbiota can influence anxiety-like behaviors (Bercik P et al. Gastroenterology. 2011;141[2]:599-609). Mice treated with oral antibiotics showed a reduction in anxiety-like behavior. What’s more, swapping intestinal microbiota of mice also switched their behavioral phenotypes, where a once anxious mouse adopted the less anxious behavioral phenotype of the donor mouse and vice versa.

While these microbes seem to use various means to interact with the brain and the nervous system, JAMA highlights another team of scientists that “found that the neurochemical and behavioral effects required an intact vagus nerve, implicating this nerve as important in communicating changes in the gastrointestinal tract to the brain."

In humans, JAMA says,

One clinical study recently looked at the potential effect of probiotics on the human brain. Gastroenterologist Emeran Mayer, MD, who has worked to understand signaling between the gut and the brain, and his team at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that giving a probiotic cocktail in a fermented dairy drink to healthy female participants could bring about changes in brain activity as measured by functional MRI (fMRI) compared with control participants (Tillisch K et al. Gastroenterology. 2013;144[7]:1394-1401).

The women carried out a face-matching attention task while they underwent fMRI before and after the 4-week intervention. They were shown pictures of human faces displaying fear or anger that normally trigger increased activity in areas of the brain involved in processing emotion. Brain activity was monitored during a resting state and while participants identified the emotions associated with human facial expressions. While executing this task, the group taking the probiotic showed less activity in brain regions involved in anxiety relative to control groups, suggesting that the brain’s reaction to negative emotional stimuli had changed.
“This was a positive proof of concept that shows if you manipulate the gut microbiota in a very subtle way, you can pick up a fairly robust brain signal that affects multiple brain regions,” said Mayer.

*JAMA* concludes by noting that

> While the evidence is mounting that the gut microbiome is important in mental health and development, the field is still in its infancy, and there remains healthy skepticism as to whether recent work may have translational potential for treating anxiety and depression in humans.

**Diet and Gut Microbes**

The importance of a healthy human intestinal microbial ecology cannot be stressed enough. In 2010, the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* published a study that examined the role of diet in the formation of gut microbiota. The paper ended with this insightful finding: “Our results suggest that diet has a dominant role over other possible variables such as ethnicity, sanitation, hygiene, geography, and climate, in shaping the gut microbiota.”

While researchers have not determined what type of diet is most beneficial to gut microbes, growing evidence suggests that a plant-based diet offers many health advantages. The benefits of such a diet include lower risk of colon cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and type 2 diabetes. A plant-based diet also helps people to lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. Moreover, combining a plant-based diet with berries, especially blueberries, has been linked to a slower rate of cognitive decline and a lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease.

It should not be a surprise to anyone that both celebrities and politicians are joining a growing population that recognize the role of diet in our health, particularly cognitive functioning. We can truly say that Ellen G. White was a pioneer and far advanced for her time when she penned that “diet materially affects the mind and disposition.”

*[Photo from Science Prose, “Gut Microbes Regulate Weight Gain”]*
How Adventism Ended the Gospel Wars

Mike Manea

You might think that, although Christians disagree on a lot of topics, they at least agree on the central theme of their religion: the gospel. But no such luck. You have Calvinism on the one side, Arminianism on the other, and an entire spectrum of options in between. And that’s just within Protestantism. The Catholic and Orthodox churches as well as the various Christian cults have still other views.

The Protestant Reformation introduced one important central concept that has stood the test of time as a beacon of hope amidst the doctrinal confusion: Salvation is by grace through faith. Although even this simple statement means different things to different people, all true Protestants acknowledge that when sinners turn to Jesus, they are accepted entirely through Christ’s merits rather than through any merit of their own.

The Salvation Saga of Jimmy and Sam

Consider the following case study as an illustration:

Jimmy grew up in a broken home and got most of his early education on the streets. He started getting into trouble early on and spent much of his teens in and out of juvenile detention. By the time he was a young adult, his conscience was troubled by a long list of cruel and sinful acts that he knew to have been harmful to others and offensive to God.

Sam, on the other hand, was raised by good Christian parents who made sure to “train up a child in the way he should go.” He never got into any kind of trouble growing up. As a young adult, he in all honesty couldn’t remember having ever done anything particularly bad.

Both of these young men happened to be sitting on a plane beside a minister, who began to share the gospel with them. He walked them through the following points:

1. They were sinners.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, KJV).

Now, Jimmy didn’t require too much convincing on this point. He well knew he was a sinner, as did everyone else around him.

Sam, on the other hand, was offended. Why would the minister place him on the same level with a guy who had spent most of his life in jail? Didn’t his exemplary life mean anything to God? What was the point of resisting temptation and staying out of trouble—of not enjoying life like everyone else?

The minister explained to him that there was much value in the wholesome life he had lived up to that point. But, making reference to God’s law and to the fulfillment of this law in the life of Jesus Christ, he helped Sam more fully understand God’s ideal for his life. Even though he had not done many of the things Jimmy had done, he nonetheless had taken his privileged life for granted, had not shared his blessings with others in need, and had even despised people like Jimmy who were less fortunate. In this Sam had fallen far short of the ideal God had for him.

2. They could not change themselves.

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

The minister explained to him that there was much value in the wholesome life he had lived up to that point. But, making reference to God’s law and to the fulfillment of this law in the life of Jesus Christ, he helped Sam more fully understand God’s ideal for his life. Even though he had not done many of the things Jimmy had done, he nonetheless had taken his privileged life for granted, had not shared his blessings with others in need, and had even despised people like Jimmy who were less fortunate. In this Sam had fallen far short of the ideal God had for him.
Having understood their condition as sinners and the implications for their eternal destiny, both young men determined to make a reformation in their lives—to change those things that were against the will of God. The minister, however, explained that even this would not be good enough. God is interested in more than just the external actions; He is interested in service stemming from the heart.

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.… For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:33, 34).

He used an illustration to bring the point home:

"A serial child molester was finally caught and imprisoned. After several years it came to his attention that, because of budget cuts, certain inmates of exemplary behavior would have the opportunity to be released on parole. From that time on this man became the nicest, kindest inmate in that prison. And, sure enough, when the time came for the hearing, he was released for good behavior."

The minister then asked, "Would you be comfortable allowing this man to babysit your children?"

It is very much possible, he explained, for us to change our behavior without ever changing who we really are. But even though we might understand our own sinfulness and make efforts to change on the inside, our motivations for this would still proceed from a desire for gain or self-preservation. To be genuine, the change would need to come from a pure heart, and changing our own hearts is like trying to pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4).

Recognizing the dilemma, both Jimmy and Sam began to wonder if there was any hope for them to be saved.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

3. They could be saved only by grace through faith.

Sensing that the young men were finally ready, the minister explained that it was because of this very inability to save themselves that God was offering them salvation as a gift.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Sam and Jimmy discovered that God wasn’t waiting for them to become better persons before accepting them but was offering them forgiveness and acceptance then and there if they were willing to embrace it by faith. He was more than willing to accept them as His own like the father in the story of the prodigal son.

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:4-7).

Having understood their own condition and desperate need, Jimmy and Sam were now being offered salvation as a gift. Were they willing to receive this gift? Did they want the pardon and acceptance of God? If so, would they take God at His word and believe that God did in fact accept and forgive them then and there?

**The Kernel of the Gospel**

You might wonder why I have spent considerable time on something so basic. But recognize that while Protestants
disagree on many things when it comes to the gospel, they do hold these three elements in common:

1. We are sinners.
2. We cannot change ourselves.
3. Salvation is offered to us as a gift that we accept by faith.

I call this the kernel of the gospel because, while there are many other important elements, these three concepts are the bare minimum that a person must understand to be saved. Without these elements, understanding everything else is not enough. (Take a look at a paper Martin Luther wrote just five years after the 95 Theses to see how well these points were understood so early in the Reformation.)

It is an experiential understanding of these three concepts that makes the new birth possible, that restores the severed bond between the individual and the Holy Spirit. When this bond is restored, God can work in a person’s life in ways He could never do before, even if their theology might still be off in some respects.

To say it differently, it is only after the sinner grasps by faith the promise of God's forgiveness and acceptance, only after he experiences the peace and security of being reconciled with God, that the power of Christianity kicks in and the life is transformed as well.

Therefore, as you interact with other people who hold a different view of the gospel than yourself, consider the following:

- Whatever the theological disagreement, if they grasp this kernel of the gospel, you are speaking with someone who is more deeply linked with you through the bond of the Spirit than even your earthly relatives. Discuss accordingly.
- A person who agrees with you theologically but lacks the actual experience has less in common with you than someone who has the experience but differs theologically.
- If it is evident that someone who disagrees with you theologically also lacks an experiential knowledge of the gospel, you can use their own theological tradition (assuming they are Protestant) to bring them to Christ first before attempting to correct their theology as well.
- If the person you disagree with grasps the essence of the gospel and also happens to be a conservative Adventist (which I define as someone who agrees with all 28 of the church’s fundamental beliefs, including the inspiration of Ellen White), the nature of your disagreement is in most cases of such a nature that it should not prevent you from pressing forward in unity.

**The Gospel Wars: Assurance vs. Presumption**

With that in mind, let’s take a look at the conflicts over the gospel within Protestantism and at how Adventism provided a resolution.

Less than a century after the death of Luther, Protestantism was polarizing into Calvinism and Arminianism. The difference revolved around the question of whether the individual possessed a free will. Calvinism’s position was summarized in five points, known by the acronym TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. Arminianism rejected each of these points at least in part. (Take a look at this table for a more detailed explanation of the two contrasting views.)

Today, while we still find denominations representing each of these two views, we also find groups that borrow from both. For example, some groups might reject the first few points of Calvinism but accept the last one, thus believing only the doctrine of “once saved, always saved.”

It is beyond the scope of this article to give a detailed account of the theology and history of Calvinism, Arminianism,
and the in-between traditions. Instead, let’s return to the kernel of the gospel as described above—the part of the gospel that all true Protestants agree on—and take a look at how each of these traditions proceed from there.

**Jimmy and Sam: What Happens Next?**

Let’s imagine that our friends Jimmy and Sam above both accepted the minister’s invitation, repented, surrendered, and believed the gospel. In their newfound faith their lives were completely changed. Jimmy was unrecognizable, while Sam now found the service of God a joy rather than a duty. Sins and habits they had failed repeatedly to overcome were now easily cast off and forgotten. For weeks and months they continued on in this new experience. Had this been a fairytale, they might have lived like this “happily ever after.”

But instead, it happened. Sometime down the line, during a moment of weakness, a temptation from the past found its way back into their life, and they fell. Some sin they didn’t think they would ever commit again overtook them, and now they were left to wonder if it was all over, if their newfound walk with God had come to an end.

The differing views within Protestantism revolve not around how a person is initially saved but around what happens to them afterward. I would propose that, at least in part, the reasoning that eventually led to Calvinism stemmed from the practical experience of wrestling with sin and doubt as an already born-again Christian. It unfolded as follows:

1. It was not by our own works that we were initially saved, and it was not until we first gained the full assurance of God’s acceptance that we were able to live a victorious Christian life.
2. Because we still have a sinful flesh, we are prone to fall again.
3. When such failures happen, unless we retain that assurance of God’s full acceptance, we will lose the source of our strength, and this will lead us deeper into sin rather than back to God. Therefore, no matter what happens, we must continue to believe that our salvation is secure.

Arminians, on the other hand, felt that this reasoning could lead to presumption; that people would come to excuse sin, thinking they would be saved regardless.

And, in a sense, both camps were right. Each group, while attempting to avoid one ditch, ran the risk of falling into the other.

While trying to protect themselves from a false sense of security, Arminians wrestled with their standing before God. When failure came, they wondered if God was still extending mercy to them or if they had gone too far and were now under condemnation. And this sense of uncertainty regarding God’s favor did make sin that much more difficult to resist.

Calvinists, on the other hand, did not have this problem, but they were more likely to take God’s grace for granted and to overlook sin.

**The Sanctuary Solves the Conflict**

In the midst of this confusion about the gospel, Adventism came on the scene. Although Adventism was very much Arminian in its DNA, it did provide a new framework that made it possible to take the positives from Calvinism without the negatives, while retaining only the positives from Arminianism. That framework was found in our sanctuary doctrine.

In our study of the heavenly sanctuary we came to understand that Jesus holds two distinct offices, that of Mediator and that of Judge. We also realized that these two offices are separated in time and do not overlap. Yes, a person who had experienced a true conversion could still be lost in the end. But this was not something that heaven would look into until their case came up in the investigative judgment after their death. For as long as the person was alive,
Jesus would relate to them as a Savior, extending them unlimited grace and mercy without judgment or condemnation.

If it is not yet clear how this makes a difference, consider that under the Adventist view a person could have as much assurance of their acceptance with God as any Calvinist ever could, but without the presumption. Knowing that one’s case will eventually be judged prevents a person from taking sin or grace for granted. But knowing that this judgment will not take place until after death and that while the individual is still alive Jesus’ only focus is on saving makes it possible to come boldly to the throne of grace no matter what the sin or how great the fall.

Take a look at the following graphics illustrating the various theological perspectives:

**Calvinism**
(perseverance of the saints or once saved always saved)

![Calvinism Diagram](https://mikemanea.com)

While they can derive great benefit from an assurance of God's acceptance, Calvinists' theology puts them at risk of discovering only in the judgment (too late) that they are lost.

**Arminianism**
(once saved NOT always saved)

![Arminianism Diagram](https://mikemanea.com)
While Arminians’ theology does not allow them that false sense of security, the constant roller-coaster ride often makes for a miserable Christian experience, while the unnecessary sense of condemnation makes sin harder to resist.

The sanctuary doctrine makes it possible to have full assurance of God’s acceptance without taking our salvation for granted. The key element to remember here is that anytime we doubt God’s approval of us because of sin, we are prone to commit more sin.

Our view of the Great Controversy helps us to understand that God has to balance several factors:

1. He loves all sinners and wants to do everything possible to save them while He still can.
2. He loves the redeemed (those who will spend eternity with Him) and wants to protect them from the possibility of anyone starting another rebellion after the Second Coming.
3. He has the utmost respect for each individual’s freedom of choice.

The way God is balancing these three elements is by showering every grace imaginable on each person while they are alive, no matter what they do or how many times they take His grace for granted. Once they have died and there is nothing more that can be done to save them, God examines their life to determine if they are safe to have among the redeemed.

Now this is not to imply that God might not at times choose to discipline us if that is what is needed to save us. But
everything God does is for the purpose of saving us and not in condemnation or as punishment. Also, there definitely is power in the gospel to overcome our sins. But this power comes only as we grasp by faith the reality of God’s acceptance.

Some might wonder how this applies to those who are still alive at Christ’s coming, since for them the investigation cannot take place after their death. While this is a question that would require an entire article to address, what we can be sure of for now is that in dealing with this group of people, God will continue to do everything in His power to save them while protecting the welfare of the redeemed as well. Having witnessed the grace of God toward His people thus far, we can be sure that He will not put anyone at a disadvantage in the future.

**The Sanctuary: A Cult Doctrine?**

I want to briefly explain how to respond to the accusations of those either inside (ex. Desmond Ford) or outside the church who feel the sanctuary doctrine makes us a cult:

1. Ask if they are Calvinist or if they believe in “once saved, always saved.”
2. If so, ask if they consider all Arminians a cult (keep in mind that informed Calvinists are careful not to label mainstream Arminians as a cult). If they do, tell them their problem is not with Adventists but with Arminians in general.
3. If they don’t consider other Arminian groups a cult, then the burden is on them to prove that our brand of Arminianism is different enough to make us a cult. (All Arminians believe in some form of investigative judgment, since a person who was once saved could still be lost).
4. Using my explanation of the sanctuary above, show that our version of Arminianism is the closest to Calvinism, and therefore, if they consider us a cult, they must consider all Arminians a cult.

**Why Adventists Still Fight About the Gospel**

In closing, notice that I named this article “How AdventISM [not AdventIST] Ended the Gospel Wars.” This is because, unfortunately, while our church was given the theological framework to help put an end to the centuries-old conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism, we not only have failed in doing this but have allowed similar conflicts over the gospel within our own denomination. We argue about whether the emphasis should be on justification or on sanctification, whether to emphasize the assurance of salvation or to stress that people should “take heed lest [they] fall,” when, all along, God has given us the sanctuary doctrine as a framework to bring all these elements into their proper balance. More than this, because we have a much bigger list of “dos and don’ts” than most Arminian Christians, we experience an even more traumatic roller-coaster ride in our Christian walk and inevitably end up a discouraged and generally unhappy group of people.

My hope, however, is that we will learn from the sanctuary doctrine a balanced view of the gospel that will help us in our own personal experience and resolve the disagreements amongst our own people, as well as bridge the divide within Protestantism as a whole.

*This article was originally published at* [http://mikemanea.com/conversations/how-adventism-ended-the-gospel-wars/]
Ellen White 100 Years Later

Rachel Cabose

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Ellen G. White’s death on July 16, 1915. Her writings are still read and loved by many around the world, yet she also has critics both inside and outside the church. Some Adventists ignore her counsels, while others tend to uplift her writings above Scripture.

One hundred years after her death, what is Ellen White’s role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What should it be as we move into the future? How can we understand and use her prolific writings for our personal and corporate edification?

The Compass Magazine will reflect on the centennial of her death over the next few months with a series of articles on Ellen White’s legacy and significance.

Our first articles explore how inspiration works. Ellen White’s experience as a prophet in recent history gives us insights into questions that also impact our understanding of Scripture, such as:

- Can prophets make mistakes?
- When prophets give counsel, are they expressing their personal opinion, or do they speak with divine authority?

This year the world church will also emphasize Ellen White in several ways. In April the Ellen G. White Estate opened its revamped visitor center, which features exhibits on Ellen White’s life and ministry. The White Estate has planned several special events for this year, including the release of extensive collections of correspondence by Ellen White and her family members.

Photo: Ellen White’s gravesite with the original funeral flowers. Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.
Can Prophets Make Mistakes?

Juan Carlos Viera

In conveying His message, God uses not only human beings but also human language. And both are imperfect. How do these imperfect vehicles affect God’s perfect message?

1. An Imperfect Messenger

The fact that prophets were called "holy men of God" (2 Peter 1:21)* neither means they were sinless nor prevents us from recognizing their weaknesses as human beings. Any attempt to make the Biblical prophets “perfect” will be confronted by the Bible record itself. Think of King David. Though he was a prophet, he committed gross sins. When his relationship with God was broken by sin, God sent another prophet to correct His servant (2 Sam. 12:1-13). After David’s repentance the way of communication was once again open, and he was inspired to write the beautiful psalm of confession (Ps. 51).

We should not build our confidence in the Biblical prophets on the basis of the prophets' perfect record. Neither should we do so with a modern prophet—the authority of the prophetic word is not based upon a perfect life or perfect behavior. Ellen White never claimed perfection or infallibility. “In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His Word is true, and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning” (Selected Messages, book 1, p. 37). From her diaries and personal letters, we know that sometimes she was discouraged; sometimes she had disagreements with her husband; many times she had to ask forgiveness; she made mistakes.

2. A Mistaken Prophet

In the Biblical record we find instances in which a prophet had to be corrected because of preconceived ideas. The apostles first believed that only the Jews could be saved. The Holy Spirit had to correct that idea if the gospel was to be carried to all the world. A vision in Peter’s case (Acts 10, 11) and special revelations in Paul's case (Eph. 3:3-6) enlightened the apostles and thereby the whole church.

In the Advent movement we also find instances when the prophet had to be corrected because of preconceived ideas. Our pioneers were greatly limited in their comprehension of mission by a theological error carried over from the Millerite movement—the shut door doctrine, the belief that the door of mercy was closed. Even Ellen White accepted it. In successive visions, the Spirit corrected the idea, first in her mind and then, through her, in the entire movement (Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 63, 64).

The fact that the Holy Spirit corrected any mistaken doctrine related with global mission in the minds of Peter, Paul, and Ellen White gives us the assurance that the Spirit is in control of the inspired message.

In other instances a prophet had to be corrected because the counsel or suggestion was different from the Lord’s plan. Thus we find Nathan the prophet first approving David’s plan to build a house for the Lord, but the Lord corrected that idea.

We find parallels in Ellen White’s ministry. In 1902 the publishing house operated by Seventh-day Adventists in the South of the United States was struggling financially. The leaders of the church sought inspired counsel. After some consideration Ellen White endorsed the decision of the leaders to close the publishing house. But during the following night God corrected His messenger. She had to write a different message (Letter 208, 1902, in Spalding and Magan Collection, p. 282).

Again, all the New Testament writers believed Jesus’ return was near. Although we cannot follow the exact
chronological manner in which the Holy Spirit dealt with this issue, we know the apostles received further information. For instance, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul gave the impression that he expected to be alive for the Lord’s coming (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). However, additional information between the two letters led him to caution the church not to expect the Lord to come immediately (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

Likewise, John was convinced he was living in “the last hour” (1 John 2:18). Further visions gave him the opportunity to tell the church, surely with sadness, that many things would happen—including fierce persecution—before the coming of the Lord. Undoubtedly, the book of Revelation was the answer of the Spirit to many questions arising in the mind of the beloved apostle.

All the believers in the Advent movement, the Lord’s special messenger included, shared the conviction that the Lord’s coming was near. We do not need to be embarrassed by the fact that Ellen White expressed her expectations, as did Paul, Peter, and John in Biblical times. Once again the Holy Spirit had to correct some ideas and give additional information to guide the church in the right direction.

In 1856 Ellen White was shown that some believers attending a meeting would be alive until the coming of Jesus (See Testimonies, vol. 1, pp. 131, 132). In the years that followed, the Lord gave her an extended vision of the great controversy with additional information about the journey that was still ahead. It also was revealed that “we may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years” (Evangelism, p. 696).

3. Imperfect Language

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe in verbal inspiration (the idea that God dictates the exact wording to the prophet). With the exception of the Ten Commandments, all the inspired writings are the result of the combined efforts of the Holy Spirit, who inspires the prophet with a vision, an impression, a counsel, or a judgment; and the prophet, who begins to look for sentences, literary figures, and expressions to convey God’s message accurately.

More on this topic: 6 Ways God Communicates through Inspired Writers

God gives the prophet freedom to select the kind of language he or she wants to use. That accounts for the different styles of the Biblical writers and explains why Ellen White describes the language used by inspired writers as “imperfect” and “human.”

Because “everything that is human is imperfect” (Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 20, 21), we must accept the idea of imperfections and mistakes in both the Bible and Ellen White’s writings. This means at least two things: 1. The prophet uses his or her common, everyday language learned from childhood and improved through study, reading, and travel; there is nothing supernatural or divine in the language used. 2. The prophet can make orthographical or grammatical mistakes, as well as other kinds of language imperfections such as lapsus linguae (a slip of the tongue) or lapsus memoriae (a slip of the memory), which need to be corrected by an editor before the text is ready for publication. The editor corrects not the inspired message, but rather the noninspired language.

We find a lapsus linguae in Matthew’s Gospel, when he quotes Zechariah but mentions Jeremiah in connection with the 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 27:9, 10; Zech. 11:12, 13; Jer. 32:6-9). For a person who believes in verbal inspiration, this raises serious questions; but for those who accept that the Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, this illustrates how the divine message reaches us through an imperfect language.

The following statement of Ellen White, when she quotes Paul but mentions Peter, is similar: “The love of Christ constraineth us,” the apostle Peter declared. This was the motive that impelled the zealous disciple in his arduous labors in the cause of the gospel” (Review and Herald, Oct. 30, 1913; see Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:14). Fortunately, we have enough evidence in the Bible, as well as in the history of the Advent movement, to show us that the Holy Spirit always corrected His messengers in matters important to the church.
The Lord surprises us with His marvelous and sometimes strange ways. In communicating with His people, He has selected human beings, dedicated but faulty, using an imperfect human language, as His instruments to convey His message. We must be grateful to our heavenly Father that He did not select a “superhuman” language understood by only a few select persons, but chose to use our own imperfect, common way of seeing and understanding things.

In accepting His ways, we also must be careful not to confuse the content with the container. We must not discard the “treasure” inside just because the “vessel” is imperfect and sometimes unworthy (see Selected Messages, book 1, p. 26).

*Bible texts in this article are from the New King James Version.

Personal Opinion or Inspired Judgment?

Ellen G. White

“Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy” (1 Cor. 7:25; see also v. 40).

Are some of Paul’s counsels in 1 Corinthians 7 uninspired because he did not receive a direct revelation from God on those subjects? Or was Paul’s “judgment” supernaturally enhanced?

Ellen White gives a case study on this question, comparing her own experience with that of the apostle. In the following article she outlines the impact of God’s revelations on the prophets themselves and asserts the impossibility of separating the divine from the merely human in a prophet’s utterances.

Some have taken the position that the warnings, cautions, and reproofs given by the Lord through His servant, unless they come through special vision for each individual case, should have no more weight than counsels and warnings from other sources. In some cases it has been represented that in giving a testimony for churches or individuals I have been influenced to write as I did by letters received from members of the church. There have been those who claimed that testimonies purporting to be given by the Spirit of God were merely the expression of my own judgment, based upon information gathered from human sources. This statement is utterly false. If, however, in response to some question, statement, or appeal from churches or individuals, a testimony is written presenting the light which God has given concerning them, the fact that it has been called forth in this manner in nowise detracts from its validity or importance. I quote from Testimony 31 a few paragraphs bearing directly upon this point:

How was it with the apostle Paul? The news he received through the household of Chloe concerning the condition of the church at Corinth was what caused him to write his first epistle to that church. [See 1 Cor. 1:11.] …

Paul was an inspired apostle, yet the Lord did not reveal to him at all times just the condition of His people. Those who were interested in the prosperity of the church, and saw evils creeping in, presented the matter before him, and from the light which he had previously received he was prepared to judge of the true character of these developments. Because the Lord had not given him a new revelation for that special time, those who were really seeking light did not cast his message aside as only a common letter. No, indeed. The Lord had shown him the difficulties and dangers which would arise in the churches, that when they should develop, he might know just how to treat them.

…The reproof he sent them was written just as much under the inspiration of the Spirit of God as were any of his epistles. But when these reproofs came, some would not be corrected. They took the position that God had not spoken to them through Paul, that he had merely given them his opinion as a man, and they regarded their own judgment as good as that of Paul. So it is with many among our people who have drifted away from the old landmarks and who have followed their own understanding. [Testimonies for the Church 5:65, 66 (1882).]

When this position is taken by our people, then the special warnings and counsels of God through the Spirit of prophecy can have no influence with them to work a reformation in life and character. The Lord does not give a vision to meet each emergency which may arise in the different attitudes of His people in the development of His
work. But He has shown me that it has been His way of dealing with His church in past ages, to impress the minds of His chosen servants with the needs and dangers of His cause and of individuals, and to lay upon them the burden of counsel and warning....

Ellen White: A “Dull Scholar”? 

For the last forty-five years the Lord has been revealing to me the needs of His cause and the cases of individuals in every phase of experience, showing where and how they have failed to perfect Christian character. The history of hundreds of cases has been presented to me, and that which God approves, and that which He condemns, has been plainly set before me. God has shown me that a certain course, if followed, or certain traits of character, if indulged, would produce certain results. He has thus been training and disciplining me in order that I might see the dangers which threaten souls, and instruct and warn His people, line upon line, precept upon precept, that they might not be ignorant of Satan’s devices, and might escape his snares.

Am I no more intelligent in regard to the duties and perils of God’s people than are those before whom these things have never been presented?

The work which the Lord has laid out before me especially is to urge young and old, learned and unlearned, to search the Scriptures for themselves; to impress upon all that the study of God’s word will expand the mind and strengthen every faculty, fitting the intellect to wrestle with problems of truth, deep and far-reaching; to assure all that the clear knowledge of the Bible outdoes all other knowledge in making man what God designed he should be. “The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” With the light communicated through the study of His word, with the special knowledge given of individual cases among His people under all circumstances and in every phase of experience, can I now be in the same ignorance, the same mental uncertainty and spiritual blindness, as at the beginning of this experience? Will my brethren say that Sister White has been so dull a scholar that her judgment in this direction is no better than before she entered Christ’s school, to be trained and disciplined for a special work? Am I no more intelligent in regard to the duties and perils of God’s people than are those before whom these things have never been presented? I would not dishonor my Maker by admitting that all this light, all the display of His mighty power in my work and experience, has been valueless, that it has not educated my judgment or better fitted me for His work.

When I see men and women taking the very course, or cherishing the very traits, which have imperiled other souls and wounded the cause of God, and which the Lord has reproved again and again, how can I but be alarmed? When I see timid souls, burdened with a sense of their imperfections, yet conscientiously striving to do what God has said is right, and know that the Lord looks down and smiles on their faithful efforts, shall I not speak a word of encouragement to these poor trembling hearts? Shall I hold my peace because each individual case has not been pointed out to me in direct vision?...

Light from Heaven or Human Wisdom?

Now if those to whom these solemn warnings are addressed say, “It is only Sister White’s individual opinion, I shall still follow my own judgment,” and if they continue to do the very things they were warned not to do, they show that they despise the counsel of God, and the result is just what the Spirit of God has shown me it would be—injury to the cause of God and ruin to themselves. Some who wish to strengthen their own position will bring forward from the Testimonies statements which they think will support their views, and will put the strongest possible construction upon them; but that which questions their course of action, or which does not coincide with their views, they pronounce Sister White’s opinion, denying its heavenly origin and placing it on a level with their own judgment....
The instructions that I have given by pen or voice have been an expression of the light that God has given me.

God has given me a marked, solemn experience in connection with His work; and you may be assured that so long as my life is spared, I shall not cease to lift a warning voice as I am impressed by the Spirit of God, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. I have no special wisdom in myself; I am only an instrument in the Lord's hands to do the work He has set for me to do. The instructions that I have given by pen or voice have been an expression of the light that God has given me. I have tried to place before you the principles that the Spirit of God has for years been impressing upon my mind and writing on my heart.

And now, brethren, I entreat you not to interpose between me and the people, and turn away the light which God would have come to them. Do not by your criticisms take out all the force, all the point and power, from the Testimonies. Do not feel that you can dissect them to suit your own ideas, claiming that God has given you ability to discern what is light from heaven and what is the expression of mere human wisdom. If the Testimonies speak not according to the word of God, reject them. Christ and Belial cannot be united. For Christ's sake do not confuse the minds of the people with human sophistry and skepticism, and make of none effect the work that the Lord would do. Do not, by your lack of spiritual discernment, make of this agency of God a rock of offense whereby many shall be caused to stumble and fall, "and be snared, and be taken."

This article is excerpted from the chapter "Influence of the 'Testimonies,'" Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 683-691. Headings have been added.

Photo by Rachel Cabose