W  hile the world media has been asking for directions to Waco, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been determinedly trying to find a way out of the town whose name has become synonymous with the word “cult.” Confronted publicly with the embarrassing association of being the “great-grandparents” of the Branch Davidians, the church has found itself faced with the same nagging questions and frenzied press coverage as has the grandmother of David Koresh.

International society has been both fascinated and horrified by the recent events in Waco. Reason and sanity demand explanations for the madness displayed there. How could seemingly normal, balanced people be drawn into the Ranch-Apocalypse mindset? Who or what was responsible for the mass cremation of innocent children? Someone must be held responsible. Can the seed for such unbalanced thinking be traced back to the group’s “grandparents”? Can any clues be uncovered by following the roots of such fanaticism to their origin? And what, in the name of clear thinking, are the lessons to be learned from this tragedy?

We have dedicated this issue of Our Firm Foundation to addressing these questions. In order to avoid the mistakes of those who in Waco gave their lives for a cause that was not worth dying for, it is imperative that we clearly identify the reasons behind such fanaticism. More importantly, these questions demand answers from a church whose message is supposed to dispel fanaticism as does the sun the early morning frost.

In a world and in a church where fanaticism is becoming epidemic, many are wondering where the sun has gone. It seems to have disappeared behind the clouds allowing the frost to freeze many young, tender, innocent plants. What and where is that distinctive message which is perfectly calculated to address a lost and dying world and to detoxify an intoxicated Babylon? Where, as we ask, is that truth which will bring to reality the prophecies depicting God’s remnant church advancing with truth as a company of soldiers, marching in perfect order?

Certainly this description does not fit our church today. Never in its history has there been in the Seventh-day Adventist Church such a spirit of confusion, disillusionment and discontent. Every day, it seems, another star that has been admired for its brightness, goes out, leaving the church members more disenchanted than before. With every wind of doctrine blowing the greatest challenge facing church administrators appears to be trying to hold together our increasingly pluralistic denomination.

Caught in the midst of a tossing sea of distrust and disillusionment, our leaders hold heated discussions over who is responsible for the tempest and what it will take to calm it. Editorials and magazines like this one are considered by many to be the primary cause for the waves of discontent. “After all,” they suggest, “the purpose for such publications as Our Firm Foundation is to find something wrong with the brethren in order to encourage support for their own organization. And with that kind of literature constantly stirring things up, it should come as no surprise that there is widespread disunity, distrust and disillusionment in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

But what does God through the Spirit of Prophecy state is the primary cause for the disunity and fanaticism that threaten our church? And more importantly still, what does He hold out as the cure? Does He not give a prescription that is perfectly designed and calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul? And if both the cause and the cure are identified in Inspiration, should we not turn there to determine who and what is responsible for disunity and fanaticism in the church?

In Early Writings, page 63, we find the following insightful statement: “I saw the necessity of the messengers, especially, watching and checking all fanaticism wherever they might see it rise. Satan is pressing in on every side, and unless we watch for him, and have our eyes open to his devices and snares, and have on the whole armor of God, the fiery darts of the wicked will hit us. There are many precious truths contained in the Word of God, but it is ‘present truth’ that the flock needs now. I have seen the danger of the messengers running off from the important points of present truth, to dwell upon subjects that are not calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul. Satan will here take every possible advantage to injure the cause.

“But such subjects as the sanctuary, in connection with the 2300 days, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, are perfectly calculated to explain the past Advent movement and show what our present position is, establish the faith of the doubting, and give certainty to the glorious future. These, I have frequently seen, were the principal subjects on which the messengers should dwell.” Emphasis supplied.

God has not left us to guess the cause of or remedy for our current dilemma. Instead He showed His prophet that disunity would be the result of “the messengers running off from the important points of present truth.” And He did not leave us to speculate about what constitutes present truth. Rather, He listed clearly the subjects involved and showed her “frequently” that these were the principal subjects on which the messengers should dwell.” It is dwelling upon these subjects that will “unite the flock and sanctify the soul…explain the past Advent movement and show what our present position is, establish the faith of the doubting and give certainty to the glorious future.”

Can anyone deny then that the presentation of these subjects is our greatest need today? What pastor or church administrator would not want to see the flock united and its members sanctified?

Continued on 27
It is the mission of Hope International and the editors of Our Firm Foundation to clearly present Christ and His truth. The days that yet remain of this world are few, and what we do we must do quickly. We must boldly proclaim the historic truths of Adventism that place us on so firm a foundation in the midst of this troubled world.—EDITORS

Editor—Ron Spear
Associate Editors—Bob Bresnahan, Clark Floyd, Kenneth Hodges, Preston Monterrey, Vernon Sparks, Harvey Stock
Production Manager—Harvey Stock
Editorial Secretary—Mary Floyd
Contributing Editors—Colin Standish, Russell Standish
Art Director—Bob Bresnahan
Art—Joel Allen
Circulation—Lois McGaughey

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Overseas (surface mail) US$24.50
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Hope International publications may be obtained from the following sources:

Hope International
P.O. Box 940
Eastville, WA 98328
USA (206) 832-6602
Monday–Thursday 9:00–5:30
Friday 9:00–12:00 Pacific Time

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Australia

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Table of Contents
Vol. 8, No. 6 June 1993

Articles

Lessons From Waco
The Waco tragedy—what should be our response? Colin D. Standish 4

Issues, Issues, The Issue
What is the most important issue? Jim Hohnberger 8

Losing Our First Love
Is the candle of our first love growing dim? Ellen G. White 11

Waco
Insights into the Davidians Preston Monterrey 14

Loyal or Disloyal
In whom can we place our trust? Ellen G. White 18

The Remnant Church’s Response to Apostasy
Who is accountable to whom? Vernon Sparks 20

Cast Out
“All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Clark Floyd 25

The Dangers of Following Man
Will your house stand when the storm breaks upon us? Ron Spear 29

Departments

Editorial ................. 2

Hope International is a special ministry assisting in the God-given work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We believe this Remnant Church of Bible prophecy has been brought into existence by the calling of the Lord, and we look for its final triumph in purity at the second coming of Christ. That the church does not now perfectly reflect the will of our Lord is cause for sorrow, but not for discouragement. The Word of God stands pledged that all within her borders will be sifted and tried, and though the greater portion will fail the test, there will yet remain a remnant to honor the Lord by their obedience to all His commands. Therefore, Hope International urges upon all the duty of supporting the Seventh-day Adventist Church in every way possible, insofar as is consistent with the principles of the government of God and the leading of His Holy Spirit upon the heart.
Lessons From Waco

Numerous columnists from the world press, radio, and television have attempted to analyze what led to the tragic human disaster today known simply as Waco. In its April 22 edition, USA Today captioned one of its articles "Looking for Paradise, They Met a Fiery Demise." We are prone to assume that those who died at Ranch Apocalypse were wide-eyed extremists, revolutionaries, or men and woman of unbalanced minds. And yet many of the personal profiles provided by USA Today of those who died in the fiery inferno do not fit that description.

The group was not bound by common heritage. Besides Americans, there were British, Australians and New Zealanders. Along with whites, there were blacks, Pacific Islanders, and Asians. It is obvious that there will be no simple answers. It is almost certain that no single factor brought all these diverse people together.

But there is one aspect that is troubling to us beyond the discomfort we feel because the name Seventh-day Adventist was widely associated with the Branch Davidians. We must face the reality that the majority of those who perished in Waco were either members or former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This fact leads us to two very serious questions. How could anyone who had a background in the Seventh-day Adventist Church ever be led into a group that would see its role as being called to be the destroyers recorded in Ezekiel 9? You will remember that in Ezekiel 9 the call is made to go through the midst of Jerusalem and place the mark (seal) upon the foreheads of those who sigh and cry for the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. The destroyers are then told to begin destroying, beginning with the ancient men, meaning those who are unfaithful leaders.

Rumors have been circulating for years, that a certain group which split from the original Shepherd’s Rods are convinced that they have the responsibility to destroy unfaithful ministers and members within the Adventist church. Some, who appear to know the situation well, claim that two dates in 1993 had been set when members of the group were planning to go into a large number of churches, and gun down Seventh-day Adventist Church members as they sat in divine worship.

If this rumor is true and the Branch Davidians of Waco had plans to commit such mayhem, it would be consistent with the huge supplies of guns, automatic and semi-automatic weapons, and large quantities of ammunition which they had accumulated. Again, if such was their plan, then God was gracious to His people; preserving them from a horrible holocaust. What a warning such an eventuality has for God’s people, for if that had happened, many who were not ready for eternal life would have closed their probation outside the kingdom of heaven.

What a wonderful God we have who has long suffered the impenitence of His people, the carelessness and the unpreparedness of this final generation! But that is the kind of God described in Scripture. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9.

There is another consideration. God has frequently shown mercy to his rebellious people for the sake of a small, faithful minority. We cannot forget that God would have spared the Sodomites had the city contained even ten just men. In the time of the prophet Isaiah, the Lord
said, “Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.” Isaiah 1:9. The reasons that God has once again preserved His people from disaster are twofold: first, He has done so for the sake of the remnant who are faithful to Him; second, He is giving extended probationary time for those in the church who are not ready for death or for the return of Jesus Christ.

In trying to find answers to the puzzling questions raised by the circumstances at Waco, I spoke with a friend who is a faithful Seventh-day Adventist. This friend lost a brother, a sister-in-law, and a niece in the conflagration. I asked him, “Why did your brother join the Koresh group?” His explanation was simple. His brother had been attending one of our colleges in North America (though he was not a North American). He claimed disillusionment with the church as the result of his experience in that college and he was on the verge of leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church when he was introduced to the concepts of the Branch Davidians. He had been attracted to them for a number of reasons which included: (1) the apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (2) the Branch Davidians seemed to be fervent and deeply convicted of their beliefs. There was nothing uncertain, half-hearted, or indifferent in the way they presented their message. He saw an earnestness and a sincerity largely lacking in mainstream Adventism; (3) they offered what he saw as a biblical solution to this apostasy.

It is always dangerous to extrapolate the experience of one man to that of all persons involved in a given situation, including those at Ranch Apocalypse. It is almost certain, however, that the church members who supported David Koresh were disillusioned by the doctrinal apostasy, worldliness, and sin prevalent within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They would be among those members who are looking for something better, something authentic.

It is my firm belief that there is only one way to avoid further such deceptions and incidents taking place, and that way is for every worker in God’s church to preach the everlasting gospel, the pillars of our faith, and Christ our righteousness with the authenticity by which these doctrines were delivered to our pioneers. It will be noted that almost everyone in Ranch Apocalypse was recruited from North America, Europe, or Australasia. Even though their races are different, these areas have become fruitful recruiting fields for such dangerous offshoots, because the Seventh-day Adventist message has been almost lost in these nations.

There is widespread disillusionment, uncertainty, and disgust at what is taking place; and there is a failure of pastors and leaders alike to redress the situation by going back to “the old paths, where is the good way.” Jeremiah 6:16. The majority of those thus disillusioned tend to leave the church, often never to return. We need to realize, however, that that is not going to be unique at the end of time. We think of the Chamberlain case in

If there is a major lesson that we as Seventh-day Adventists can learn from Waco, it is that now is the time for earnest, pointed presentations of the great pillars of our faith.

Lesson 1

If there is a major lesson that we as Seventh-day Adventists can learn from Waco, it is that now is the time for earnest, pointed presentations of the great pillars of our faith: the sanctuary message, righteousness by faith, the law of God, the second coming, the state of the dead, and the Sabbath. These messages are only casually known by most of our members and are not deeply riveted in their minds or hearts. Such preaching, under the power of the Holy Spirit, will lead to repentance, reformation, and revival in our ranks. Above everything else, this is the number one lesson that we must learn, and learn rapidly, from Waco.

Lesson 2

We have been variously shocked, angered, ashamed, and embarrassed by the frequent association of our beloved church with the events in Waco, and though we may trace the group to an offshoot, of an offshoot, of an offshoot; still we have been extraordinarily burdened by our name being mentioned in such an unfavorable context.

We need to realize, however, that that is not going to be unique at the end of time. We think of the Chamberlain case in

Australia in which the little baby, child of one of our Adventist ministers, was apparently taken by a dingo. The greatest media coverage of any single event in Australia took place over that situation, again in the context of generally unfavorable publicity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I think especially of the situation in Great Britain. More than twenty English citizens were in the Waco commune. One thing is now certain: almost every British citizen will know the name Seventh-day Adventist. Prior to this happening, Seventh-day Adventists were not well-known in Great Britain. I have personally sought out people in the common walks of life in Britain, and rarely did I find anyone who had heard the name Seventh-day Adventists, yet all knew the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I remember years ago speaking to an officer of the British Union and asking him about this situation and he put it down to the undesirable activities of the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses going door to door and in effect making a nuisance of themselves.

But one thing was certain; not only were they well-known, but both were increasing their memberships at a dramatic rate. They may have been considered nuisances by the majority of the British, but obviously there was a significant minority who loved their message and adopted their aberrant interpretations.
groups together. We have been so anxious, and rightly so, to distance ourselves as Seventh-day Adventists from the Branch Davidians, that we have not always been careful in separating the Branch Davidians from other groups of Davidians, or from the Shepherd’s Rod. While I am clear that the Shepherd’s Rod and other groups of Davidians also have followed a divergent pathway from that of true Seventh-day Adventism, it is hardly fair to put them together with the Branch Davidians, for not all of these groups take the extreme positions taken by the Branch Davidians in Waco.

Lesson 4

It takes only one error accepted to begin a pathway that can lead to terrible destruction. As soon as we move one step away from revealed truth, we are on Satan’s territory, and though we may seem very close to truth, we are indeed on a road that will lead to eternal destruction.

The experience of Cain is a classic example. He did almost everything that God asked him to do. He built the altar. He gathered the inflammable materials. He brought the very best that he had, but he did not bring a blood offering. And by that, he lost the favor of God. Moses, on the other hand, when asked to supply water to the children of Israel, did everything that God asked him to do, but he went beyond the word of God and struck the rock. That error kept him out of the Promised Land.

God has shown that there is no place for eclecticism and pluralism in His church. Unadulterated truth must be accepted, believed, and lived if we are going to share it with the inhabitants of this globe. While not everyone who moves out in apostasy is going to end up in a belief system like that of the Branch Davidians, nevertheless, millions of our people are in eternal jeopardy because they have taken at least one step away from truth.

Lesson 6

One of the great lessons to learn from what happened in Ranch Apocalypse is that we must never put our trust in one human being. It seemed that David Koresh had become the messianic leader of the group. We have been warned by the servant of the Lord against a centralized, domineering form of church governance. Yet today we see the strongest efforts being put forth to encourage men to follow other men, rather than to place their trust in God and His Word. Efforts to show special appreciation of the pastor, such as the Aaron and Hur societies, are little more than efforts to urge total reliance upon the authority of the pastor, rather than upon the Word of God.

It seems inherent in the mental makeup of many people to want either to rule others or to be ruled by another, but God’s ideal is for the individual to be self-ruled by a sanctified will. See Testimonies, vol. 4, 235. Seventh-day Adventists tend to be falling into the same trap, the same concept, that led Israel to crave a king. The servant of the Lord warned many times against kingly power and the rule or ruin mentality. See Testimonies to Ministers, 93, 380, 477, 488. Because they ignore these warnings, both those who want to be ruled and those who want to rule are responsible for the display of kingly power in our midst.

Unfortunately, many of those who are dissatisfied with what they are seeing in mainstream Seventh-day Adventism are disassociating themselves from mainstream Adventism. Yet their mentality is such that, too, want to be ruled, so they merely exchange the domination of a denominational pastor or leader for that of a similar individual who may be preaching what they believe to be a more basic Adventist theology. While there is much counsel to respect pastors and leaders, there is nothing in God’s Word that would support blind following of any individual. If we follow any man, even if he is preaching the truth, we will still fall short of the kingdom of heaven because we followed man rather than God.

Lesson 7

We must be cautious, exceptionally cautious, to accept any new or innovative concept. We are warned that every wind of doctrine will be blowing in our church. See Testimonies, vol. 5, 81. I am alarmed by how readily some of our people accept new ideas. Yet nearly all of these new,
innovative concepts are not of God. Many concentrate on the statements Sister White made concerning more light coming to God’s people as we come to the end of time, but they forget her warnings against accepting new concepts that cause the rejection of light already given.

Lesson 8

In this age of confederacies and consolidations it is easy, even for those within our church, to think salvation is secured by belonging to a particular group. This group can be the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole, or some group within or outside of the church. Belief in this concept may be due to the fact that Jesus declared that His sheep would be in “one fold” and under “one shepherd.” John 10:16. But this union results when God’s saints are united by truth and righteousness. No one will belong to this fold other than those who have wholly surrendered their will to Jesus Christ. Once again, that security is in Christ and not in any individual or group. While it is true that the church is God’s designated agency upon earth for the proclamation of His truths, simply being a member of the church does not give one the assurance of heaven.

Unfortunately, some, becoming disillusioned with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, have separated from it to form another group in which they hope to find the assurance they are seeking. Not infrequently they are soon as disillusioned with the new group as they were with the old and often are vulnerable to leaving God’s message altogether.

God has raised up self-supporting groups not to separate from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, but rather to complement the efforts of faithful denominational workers in working for the “purifying of the church and the warning of the world.” Testimonies, vol. 5, 187.

In another context the servant of the Lord wrote, “Every man must at last stand or fall for himself, not according to the opinion of the party that sustains or opposes him, not according to the judgment of any man, but according to his real character in the sight of God. The church may warn, counsel, and admonish, but it cannot compel any to take a right course. Whoever persists in disregarding the Word of God must bear his own burden, answer to God for himself, and suffer the consequences of his own course.” Testimonies, vol. 5, 247–248.

Lessons for Self-supporting Workers

As a self-supporting worker, I have considered the lessons of Waco as they relate to Hartland Institute and to other like self-supporting ministries. A number of warnings ring clear to me, including all the previous eight to which I have referred in this article. Other lessons, especially for self-supporting groups include:

Lesson 1

It is important for self-supporting ministries, and especially for those in their leadership, to counsel widel; not just within the core of their own ministry, but with other faithful denominational and self-supporting workers. This interchange of thought will protect against the likelihood of extremism or fanaticism or of falling into doctrinal errors which would eventually lead into the bosom of Satan.

Lesson 2

We must not be driven by a desire to present the sensational, for as soon as we get into that modality, we will become increasingly sensational in order to retain the attention of our hearers and readers. In the end, this course inevitably leads into apostasy and imperils the eternal salvation of those who give credence to our human speculations.

Lesson 3

The center of our presentation should always be the everlasting gospel. While it is essential for us to continue to warn God’s people against apostasy and worldliness, that should not be the major emphasis of our presentations. Our first goal must be to lead our hearers and readers to the words of eternal life, to the full commitment of their lives to Jesus, and to the preparation for the crises ahead.

Lesson 4

We must never see the issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a battle between self-supporting and denominational workers. Rather, we should see them as a struggle between faithful and unfaithful workers. Doing the above will help to keep our focus on the fact that we are faithful Seventh-day Adventists seeking to faithfully carry out the mission that God has given to our people.

Lesson 5

We must strictly avoid flattery and praise, for they are likely to lead us away from the purpose for which God has divinely ordained self-supporting work. They can lead to the exercise of kingly power and to concepts that come from our own wisdom rather than from the wisdom of God.

Lesson 6

We must daily examine our own lives to make sure that we are humble servants of Jesus, following in His footsteps and guided by His life.

Just as Satan is able to derail the ministry of denominational workers, just so can he derail the ministry of self-supporting workers. The moment we feel we are immune to the assaults of Satan and his deceptive devisings for our lives, we are in troubled waters. These are treacherous times. If it were possible, Satan would deceive the very elect. Matthew 24:24. Deep, earnest prayer, continual Spirit-filled study of the Word, daily vigilance, and deep, constant sharing of God’s Word will help to protect us in the final tests just ahead.
CAN present-day issues actually keep us from “The Issue” of life? I not only believe they can, but also know they actually do. Many sincere Christians are being constantly and continually distracted from the “The First Issue” God is waiting for all of us to take hold of, the Issue of having our hearts fully and completely surrendered to Him and continually and constantly kept through a living faith in a present Saviour.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, admonished us in all places and at all times to “keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” Proverbs 4:23. You see, the greatest issue in the Christian life is to surrender the heart fully to God. This “Issue” is generally being lost sight of among the other issues of the day. There are, unfortunately, many who are doing battle over issues, but who have not won the battle in their own hearts, for their spirit gives evidence that they are not fully surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. They seem to find their “religion” in defense and debate over issues, rather than in a life that is truly “hid with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:3. Their spirit of argumentation, controversy, control, unreasonable censure and reproof gives evidence that they know not a present Saviour who is able to keep them from “self.” We might then ask, What do they really have to offer?

The greatest difficulty after the heart has been fully surrendered is the actual, moment-by-moment, “now” experience of keeping the heart “hid” with Christ in God. Herein lies the very next “Issue” in true religion, once the heart has been fully and completely surrendered to Christ. This issue truly makes the way of life a narrow way, and the gate a strait gate indeed, and we are told “few there be that find it.” Matthew 7:14.

Did Christ have to face the problem of religionists wanting to sidetrack and entrap Him into debate and controversy over issues? He most certainly did, and let us briefly touch on how He handled some of those issues.

In Luke 20:1–8, we find Him facing the issue of authority. Here Jesus is preaching a saving gospel when the leaders of the church approach Him and try to draw Him into controversy by asking, “By what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?” Now authority is indeed a most important issue, but Christ knew that unless these leaders’ hearts were in a fully surrendered condition, unless they were desirous of entering into a full surrender, it would do no “saving good” to discuss with them by what authority He was teaching and preaching the saving gospel.

Instead of answering them, Jesus therefore asked them a question designed to bring introspection into their own hearts and lives. When it was evident that they would not be honest in their own hearts, He said unto them, “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

In this situation Christ refused to enter into their issue, for it was evident their motive was only to discredit His life and work. We might well ask ourselves what we would have done. Most of us, I believe, would have debated the issue. But Christ knew it would amount to no “saving good.” He saw that their hearts were only evil toward Him and knew that silence was the best defense. We all might do well to follow His example and learn that silence. In most situations it is the best defense, unless of course the inquirers are sincerely searching for truth and understanding.

Jim Hohnberger and his wife Sally, of Restoration International, live in Polebridge, Montana, and they have dedicated their lives full-time to reaching all people with the practical gospel.
Many of us may have good intentions in acquiring theoretical knowledge about all these peripheral issues, yet all the while we may be unfit for the kingdom of heaven and the society of holy angels.
The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul.

While this person may have had "light," his treatment of me and others who were not seeing this issue his way was antagonistic and unchristian. His "truth" was not keeping "self" from rising up and crucifying others who did not see things his way. Self was being manifested in religious issues, and there was no evidence that he had brought the truth into practical life. In the same quotation we are told, "Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heaven-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world." This man's truth was not bearing testimony that he had a present, living, vital connection with the Author of truth.

Friends, the orientation of both of these men to religion was equally dangerous. In my perception neither of them in their contact with me was constantly looking to Jesus for His orders, as a servant looks to his master, and inquiring what He would have him do with me. They both seemed to miss the point of the whole gospel which is "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 13:14. Neither of them in their contact with me revealed a present experience of being "swift to hear, slow to speak." James 1:19. Each was performing his supposed Christian duty in the power...
NEVERTHELESS I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hast kept the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:4-7.

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” Thine is a decay, a declension in holy zeal—not forsaken is the object of it, but lost is the fervor. The first affection of the convert to Christ is deep, full, and ardent. It is not necessary that this love should become less as knowledge increases, as the more and increased light shines upon him. That love should become more fervent as he becomes better acquainted with his Lord. God sees that there is not heart service, a love for Jesus, an earnest zeal in His work.

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” How much need there is for the people of God at this time to consider the words of the Majesty of heaven, and carefully review the ground over which they have traveled, and see and understand where the very first step was taken in the wrong path! Absence of zeal and devotion, of earnest willing service in the cause of God, shows how indolent many professed followers of Christ are, how destitute of earnest, heartfelt effort. They might have been going on from strength to strength, from light to still greater light. They might have become strong in faith had they walked on from step to step, thinking more of Christ than of themselves.

The Lord has a right to expect more of His believing children than they give Him. Every individual Christian is indeed the light of the world. Christians connect with Christ. They reflect the character of Christ. They have been intrusted with great treasures of light; the oracles of God have been given to them, and in these they have been thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Every provision has been made, and why have the individual members of the church wearied of their Lord? Why does he who professes to love God refuse to obtain from the Source of light and power the oil of grace that he may be a bright and shining light? The church has had great opportunities, great privileges, and why is the light growing dim? Why does it not shine to the world? His church whose individual members are advancing, growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, is the elected means of the Redeemer’s system for enlightening and saving the world. Christ lived and suffered and died to establish a church capable of doing this noble work. He bought her, He cleansed her with His own blood, and clothed her with the garments of His salvation. He laid the cornerstone upon the blood-stained rock of Calvary. He made His church the depository of His precious law, and transferred into her hands in a high and holy sense the work of carrying out His holy designs; that the church should take the work when He left it, and carry it forward to its consummation.

The Lord of righteousness is walking amid the golden candlesticks. And He watches every dim burning lamp of His individual believers, and says, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:5, 7. Could mortals find language more impressive, more to the point, than these words of Christ—words of Him who says, “I know thy works”? Revelation 2:9. He presents the necessity of obtaining all the zeal and

Ellen G. White
earnestness and energy that has ever glowed in the soul. And those who have cast off responsibility, and are content to have their light flickering and dim, Jesus would arouse to a sense of their obligation to let their light shine. He tells them that if they do not repent of their falling away from their first love, He will come suddenly, and remove their candlestick out of its place. As in the case of the unfruitful tree, the command will be given, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” Luke 13:7.

God will accept nothing less than the whole heart. Happy are they who from the commencement of their religious life have been true to their first love, growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sure result of their intercourse and fellowship with their beloved Lord, will be to increase their piety, their purity, their fervor. They are receiving a divine education, and this is illustrated in a life of fervor, of diligence and zeal. They have that faith constantly becoming stronger which works by love and purifies the soul. Theirs is a childlike devotion, developing itself into activities of holiness, giving proof by the most expressive outward act of their inward gratitude, the heartfelt joy and devoted attachment to Jesus their Redeemer, the divine Restorer.

Those who have been growing in harmony with the world in custom, in practice, in thoughts, are not growing in grace. Their prayers become less and less fervent and intelligent. They seem lifeless, and cold, and dead. They must repent. They are called upon to be inwardly grieved and ashamed and confused before the Lord for their want of love. They should blame themselves, and humbly confess before God, and condemn themselves. They must come back, retrace their steps, and do the first works; take hold again firmly in faith where they let go, recover their first zeal, their conscientious, tender love for God and His precious truth. They must pray as earnestly, and watch as diligently, as when the light of Christ’s forgiving, pardoning love first fell upon their souls. A severe threatening from God follows if this work is not done. “I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.”

If we, like Chorazin and Bethsaida, are exalted to heaven in point of privilege, and, notwithstanding the abundant mercy and loving, tender compassion of God, indifferently regard His great privileges and are not responding to the light and opportunities bestowed, He will come in judgments for impenitence of His churches, and remove the light, and let darkness take its place. Those who are connected with Christ, bearing the yoke of Christ, and lifting His burdens, will be constantly self-denying partakers with Christ of His suffers. They will be one with Christ, in deep sympathy with Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, that He might bring us to His side in heaven. This is the religion that is earnest, deep, firm, and far-reaching, and insures rest, and peace, fullness of joy.

The only way to grow in grace is to be interestingly doing the very work Christ has enjoined upon us to do—interestingly engaged to the very extent of our ability to be helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them.

The only way to grow in grace is to be interestingly doing the very work Christ has enjoined upon us to do—interestingly engaged to the very extent of our ability to be helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them. This is the only way we can grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christians who are constantly growing in earnestness, in zeal, in fervor, in love—such Christians never backslide. They are becoming more closely identified with the Saviour in all His plans. They are partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Their wisdom is increasing, their ability how to work. They seem to comprehend the largest plans. They are ready to engage in the most stirring enterprises, and they have no room for slothfulness; they cannot find a place for stagnation.

Those who are ever pressing a little closer to the world, and becoming more like them in feelings, in plans, in ideas, have left a space between them and the Saviour, and Satan has pressed his way into this space, and low, worldly-tainted, selfish plans become interwoven with their experience. God’s voice is addressing this class, which are not few: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” It is of consequence that you hear attentively and obey. Come into close relationship with Christ. Keep your souls in constant contact with the world, and its customs will become your customs, its practices will become your practices, if you place yourselves where you will see and hear and feel and act as they do.

“Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean.” 2 Corinthians 6:17. Turn quickly to Jesus Christ. Yield your pride, your self-love, your selfish aspirations, your love of the world, which are death to spirituality. Repent quickly. Delay not in deciding, lest you be too late. Elevate your soul’s aspirations to higher spheres of action in Christian activities. Those who do this are the only class in our churches that will grow. They will speedily attain the highest moral efficiency and the clearest spiritual perceptions. They will have unusual vigor and steadiness of faith. They will know how to pray and be persevering and earnest in prayer. And all those who are deeply and interestingly engaged in the salvation of others, are the more surely working out their own souls’ salvation with fear and trembling. The piety that does not reveal itself in working interestingly for others, will become a form, strengthened, bigoted, self-conceited. Coming in contact with souls for whom Christ has died, seeking to bring them to repentance, and evidencing a love for their souls, will call them out of themselves, so that they will not be exclusively engaged for their own selfish interests, either in temporal pursuits or in spiritual things. God has shown it to be our duty not to live for ourselves. Christ pleased not Himself.

The times of ignorance God winked at, but now, with the blazing light of truth shining all around us, with warnings, with reproofs, with increasing light if we will but open our eyes to see it, there is no excuse for any, even the weakest child of God, that they should not disperse light to the world. The four angels are holding the four winds that a special work may be accomplished: the saints of God are to be sealed in their foreheads. Brethren, how long before you will be ready for the seal of God? Every step you advance upon the path which God forbids, toward your own pleasure and in
sin, is a step nearer your destruction. Every act of disobedience to the Word of the Lord is exposing you to irreparable loss. Every moment of ease, of self-indulgence, secured by you in neglecting the divine admonitions and call to duty in earnest work for the Master, is placing you under the power and control of the prince of darkness. Your candlestick may at any moment be moved out of its place.

Four mighty angels are still holding the four winds of the earth. Terrible destruction is forbidden to come in full. The accidents by land and by sea; the loss of life, steadily increasing, by storm, by tempest, by railroad disaster, by conflagration; the terrible floods, the earthquakes, and the winds will be the stirring up of the nations to one deadly combat, while the angels hold the four winds, forbidding the terrible power of Satan to be exercised in its fury until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. Get ready, get ready, I beseech you, get ready before it shall be forever too late! The ministers of vengeance will pour all the terrible judgments upon a God-forsaken people. The way of obedience is the only path of life. May the Lord help you to see it in time to open your ears, that you may hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

What is my duty? What shall I do to save my children and to save many souls from the coming tempest of wrath unmixed with mercy? God claims every power, every capability of action to be invested in the doing of His work. Talents, possessions, everything that is great and noble in man He calls to be exercised in His work. Duty admits no rival, enters into no compromise with any opposing powers. The most precious friends and relatives must not step in between your duty and your God. The voice of duty is the voice of God in our souls. Obedience to its claims brings us into living personal agreement with the highest law in the universe—brings man into alliance with God.

Let the churches be aroused. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." This message concerns all our churches. You can never employ your faculty of hearing better than in hearkening to hear what the voice of God speaks to you in His Word. There is a rich and abundant promise to those who overcome. It is not enough to enter upon this warfare, we must pursue it to the end. We must know nothing of yielding. We must fight the good fight of faith to the very end. To the overcomer is promised the triumphal victory. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Whatever was lost in the fall of Adam is more than restored in redemption. He that sitteth on the throne saith, "Behold, I make all things new." Revelation 21:5. Let us look closely and critically to ourselves. Are not the vows we entered into at our baptism violated? Are we dead to the world and alive unto Christ? Are we seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God? Is the cable cut which anchored us to the eternal Rock? Are we drifting with the current to perdition? Shall we make no effort to press and urge our passage up stream? Let us not hesitate longer, but vigorously apply the oars; and who are evil, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, who are sensual, who are controlled by the master-worker in all evil, who will have to be separated from the church.

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." Revelation 2:2. This labor of purifying the church is a painful work, but one that must not be neglected, if the church would have the commendation of God. But repent, because thou hast left thy first love. Here is plainly presented before us our work as members of the church of Christ. If we are faithless,

Whatever it is that has been petted and cultivated until it has become strong and overmastering, make determined efforts to overcome, else you will be lost.

let us do our first works ere we make hopeless shipwreck.

It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love. Is it worldliness? Is it selfishness? Is it the love of self-esteem? Is it striving to be first? Is it the sin of sensuality that is intensely active? Is it the sin of the Nicolaitans, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness? Is it the misuse and abuse of great light and opportunities and privileges, making boasted claims to wisdom and religious knowledge, while the life and character are inconsistent and immoral? Whatever it is that has been petted and cultivated until it has become strong and overmastering, make determined efforts to overcome, else you will be lost. It is these cherished sins, abhorrent to God, that make enfeebled moral courage, and leave you to choose to walk apart from God, while you retain a miserable, heartless, outward form. Once the soul was all aglow with love for Jesus; but all this is changed. The great Head who moves in the midst of His candlesticks will never be without a church. There will be faithless ones who will go out from us because they were not of us. There will be apostasies. But "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2 Timothy 2:19. There will be those we shall lose the crown of life and another will take it; for in the dropping out of the faithless the places are supplied by the faithful. If we refuse to let our light shine for the Master, if we do not do the works of God, others will do that very work which we might have done and could have done, but refused to do.

When we cease to fulfill our mission, when the candlestick refuses to reflect light, and the great truths committed to us individually in trust for the world, are not given to them, then the candlestick will be removed. "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place." Another will be placed in his stead and will shine. Let prayer be ascending now without delay to Him who walketh in the midst of the golden candlestick. Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." Psalm 51:7, 10–13. □

Review and Herald, vol. 2, 143–144 (June 7, 1887)
Insights on the Davidian Movement - I

ONE of the deadliest days in U.S. law-enforcement history.” Thus began the Newsweek magazine, March 15, 1993, report on the terrible confrontation between the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents (ATF), and the followers of Vernon Howell, known also as David Koresh. After 45 minutes of gunfire exchange, a skirmish that even forced two National Guard helicopters to land after being hit by the heavy weapons that the Branch Davidians illegally possessed, “four ATF agents were dead, 15 others lay wounded and Koresh was holed up inside the compound with more than 100 followers, including 38 young children, and enough guns and ammunition to wage a little war.” Ibid., 54. News of this painful event has traveled around the world, followed by myriad religious and political manipulations of the incident, designed to favor the particular viewpoints of those interpreting this tragedy.

The news media also reported a link between the Branch Davidians (a splinter group) and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For many respectable United States citizens, who are Seventh-day Adventist church members as well, this deplorable event has become an embarrassment as they attempt to answer the inquiries of an angry society.

Our church leaders have rightly and boldly defended our religious reputation by presenting the fact that the founder of the offshoot and fanatical group of which the Branch Davidians are a splinter was dropped from church membership in November of 1930.

The editorial staff of Our Firm Foundation and Hope International agree with and support the noble endeavors of our denominational leaders to clearly answer all questions raised by the general public over the Waco incident. We abhor not only the Branch Davidian theology but also their behavior in possessing illegal arms and trying to establish by means of violence, force, and death, the kingdom of God. Christ Himself, the Prince of Peace, never appealed to any of these methods. He rebuked, at His betrayal, those who attempted to defend Him with swords. Those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes must follow in His footsteps.

With the vast and reliable information in the Scriptures and in the Spirit of Prophecy, how did the Davidians miss the mark? How did they become entangled with so much error and heresy? These are valid questions which we must address if we are to avoid going in the same track, a track that combines both truth and error, as we will see.

Victor Houteff, founder of the Shepherd’s Rod, (an offshoot from Adventism) believed as is stated in Newsweek, “that the Adventists had become lax. He believed that the return of Christ was imminent but that it could not happen until there was a purer church that could receive Christ.” Ibid., 57. Compare with Christ’s Object Lessons, 69. This last statement is truth, if we honestly examine it in the light of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. The fact that a person may also preach heresies does not invalidate the truth. It only makes truth more difficult to retain when we must sift out of it offensive teachings having no solid foundation in the Holy Writ. Therefore, let us avoid overreacting and let us keep in mind that “the track of truth lies close beside the track of error.” Review and Herald, vol. 4, 565. Lord, grant us divine wisdom to discern Your truth.

I believe that we can indeed arrive at correct answers regarding the Branch Davidians’ biblical misunderstandings and deplorable actions. But we must look beyond the present symptoms still being analyzed by the reporters, sociologists and politicians and go to the root of the problem. It is a problem that is complex by nature, for many factors are involved. Among them:

Preston Monterrey

14 Our Firm Foundation June 1993
1. The failure to learn lessons from our past history.
2. Faulty methods of Bible and prophetic interpretation.
3. Insufficient knowledge of our historic Adventist message, both spiritually and intellectually.
4. Unfounded or ungrounded isolation from the main body of the church.
5. The overemphasis of personal biblical viewpoints nonessential for the salvation of mankind.
7. Perhaps a martyr complex associated with bitterness.
8. Futurism, and, to be more specific, time setting.
9. The loss of confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy and the neglect to follow its clear instructions.

It is not the intention of the author to minimize the validity and importance of the first seven points mentioned above; we will discuss them in a future issue. However, in this article we will analyze the dangers of time setting and of the neglect of Spirit of Prophecy counsels. You may ask, Why start with these topics? Let me respond:

Man is a creature of emotions. The Lord "planted" these emotions within our hearts and minds. They have their place in the dimension of human existence, including in religion. In the Scriptures themselves are well documented the association of religion and human emotions, both positive and negative. Nevertheless, the enemy of our souls knows this fact and he uses all possible means to snare people for his hellish ends. No one can deny that time setting is a tool to stir people's emotions with a sense of "excitement," often leading them to different forms of fanaticism.

Also, this type of excitement has a magnetic effect in keeping its adherents together as they share a common "prophetic destiny." Our prophet tells us:

"The Lord is soon to work in greater power among us, but there is danger of allowing our impulses to carry us where the Lord would not want us to go. We must not make one step that we will have to retrace. We must move solemnly, prudently, and not make use of extravagant expressions or allow our feelings to become overwrought. We must think calmly and work without excitement; for there will be those who become easily wrought up, who will catch up unguarded expressions and make use of extreme utterances to create excitement, and thus counteract the very work that God would do. There is a class of people who are always ready to go off on some tangent, who want to catch up something strange and wonderful and new." Testimonies to Ministers, 227. All emphases in Spirit of Prophecy quotations are supplied by the author.

Undoubtedly, both Houteff and Koresh can be included in this class. One of their "wonderful and new" things was time setting. Victor Houteff believed that Christ's kingdom would be established after 1260 literal days (reinterpretation of prophecies). Houteff's wife and her followers understood that this period extended from November 9, 1955 to April 22, 1959. But when the long-awaited day came and nothing happened, they experienced a bitter disappointment. Their ship of the "futuristic" interpretation of the 1260-days prophecy crashed against the reef of reality and history. "They were looking for some sign that the kingdom would be coming—a war in the Mideast or some other signal of cataclysm. Alas, the Lord didn't come and the failed prophecy shook the Davidians to the core." Newsweek, March 15, 1993, 57. After this "shaking" and disappointment, the Shepherd's Rod moved.

"As the end draws near, the enemy will work with all his power to bring in fanaticism among us. He would rejoice to see Seventh-day Adventists going to such extremes that they would be branded by the world as a body of fanatics." Gospel Workers, 316. This end result seems to be already realized as a high-ranking church official stated that "In one Northwest conference, pastors report that attendance at evangelistic meetings is down and directly traceable to the association of Adventism with the Waco debacle." North Pacific Union Conference Gleaner, April 5, 1993, 4.

Yes, dear reader, time setting is one form of fanaticism that has caused the loss of many souls to the kingdom of God, and has created confusion and despair for Adventists since the beginning of the movement. And we still are facing the same problem today.

The enemy of our souls time after time has seduced some believers to become time setters. "Many who have called themselves Adventists [as the Davidian Adventists] have been time setters. Time after time has been set for Christ to come, but repeated failures have been the result. The definite time of our Lord's coming is declared to be beyond the ken of mortals."

They experienced a bitter disappointment after their ship of the "futuristic" interpretation of the 1260-days prophecy crashed against the reef of reality and history.

Testimonies, vol. 4, 307. The Lord's words have proved to be right over and over again.

At some point in the history of the Davidians they forsook their trust, at least on the issue of time setting, in the guidance of the Spirit of Prophecy, which clearly and unequivocally stands against such dangerous practices. The servant of the Lord tell us, "If you lose confidence in the testimonies you will drift away from Bible truth." Testimonies, vol. 5, 98. Sadly, this rejection of the testimonies of the Spirit of the Lord, which degenerated into fanaticism, became a factor in leading the Branch Davidians down the road to Waco. We cannot afford to lose confidence in the
Testimonies; if we do, we also will drift away from Bible truth, and find ourselves facing dire consequences.

These are the words of the prophet on the dangers of time setting: “This is the testimony I have ever borne since the passing of the time in 1844: ‘Time after time will be set by different ones, and will pass by; and the influence of this time setting will tend to destroy the faith of God’s people.’ ... The First-day Adventists have set time after time, and notwithstanding the repeated failures, hour, day, or year of Christ’s appearing has taken up a yoke and is proclaiming a message that the Lord has never given him.” Testimonies to Ministers, 61.

Ellen White states: “I was shown that we should not have another definite time to proclaim to the people. All who are acquainted with me and my work will testify that I have borne but one testimony in regard to the setting of the time.

“I have been shown that our disappointment in 1844 was not because of failure in the reckoning of prophetic periods, but in the events to take place. The earth was believed to be the sanctuary. But the sanctuary which was to be cleansed at the end of the prophetic periods was the heavenly sanctuary and not the earth as we all supposed. ... I have been repeatedly urged to accept the different periods of time proclaimed for the Lord to come. ... The time-setters have pronounced the curse of the Lord upon me as an unbeliever who said, My Lord delayeth His coming. But I have told them that the books of heaven would not make my record thus, for the Lord knows that I loved and longed for the appearing of Christ. But their oft-repeated message of definite time was exactly what the enemy wanted, and it served his purpose well to unsettle the faith in the first proclamation of time, which was of heavenly origin.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 10, 269-270.

“Our position has been one of waiting and watching, with no time-proclamation to intervene between the close of the prophetic periods in 1844 and the time of our Lord’s coming.” Ibid. And just as Ellen G. White was “urged to accept the different periods of time proclaimed for the Lord to come,” in like manner many well-meaning brethren write to Our Firm Foundation attempting to sway us to their futuristic, and distorted prophetic interpretations, and desire that we publish their views. This is a request to which we can never accede.

The pen of Inspiration plainly tells us: “I want you to see that it is not in the providence of God that any finite man shall, by any device or reckoning that he may make of figures, or of symbols, or of types, know with any definiteness in regard to the very period of the Lord’s coming.” Ibid., 272. Among the devices used by the Davidians, as well as by other subgroups of the Shepherd’s Rod movement, have been parables, messianic prophecies, and reinterpretation of proven and historically fulfilled biblical prophecies.

“You may say, ‘I have expected it [Christ’s second coming], and I have waited a long time, and the Master has not come yet: and this long time of waiting makes me think that He is not coming.’ Just so those foolish virgins began to think. They did not have any supply of grace to enable them to stand the test or trial.

“Yes, it takes time, and God knew it: and He takes time to test us and to prove us, to see who has the real, genuine righteousness of Christ, and He will test us to see if we can bear with patience, waiting and watching, and working as well. We may be waiting, but not in idle expectancy. ... If the Lord is coming, we want to work with the more diligence to uphold and to gather the Lord’s sheep and to bring them into the fold.” Ibid.

Though it will be the Lord Himself, and not man, who will announce the moment of His coming, it will not happen until probation has closed, the plagues have fallen, and God’s people are ready to be liberated. See The Great Controversy, 640; and Early Writings, 285. Since 1844, the setting of any date has not been a test and will never be. See Early Writings, 75. The sure Word of God tells us that “the message of the third angel must go, and be proclaimed to the scattered children of the Lord, but it must not be hung on time. ... The third angel’s message is stronger than time can be ... This message can stand on its own foundation and needs not time to strengthen it.” Early Writings, 75.

Over and over God clearly indicates that we must avoid setting the day and hour of His appearing. Why is God so firm on this point? Is there some powerful reason behind this divine secrecy? Is God fair in hiding this information?

It is not an arbitrary act of our wise and loving heavenly Father to withhold this knowledge from His creatures. “The times and the seasons God has put in His own power. And why has not God given us this knowledge? —Because we would not make a right use of it if He did. A

Why is God so firm on this point? Is there some powerful reason behind this divine secrecy? Is God fair in hiding this information?

they have gathered courage to set new times. God has not led them in this direction. Many of them have rejected the true prophetic time, and ignored the fulfillment of prophecy, because the time passed in 1844, and did not bring the expected event. They rejected the truth, and the enemy has had power to bring strong delusions upon them that they should believe a lie. The great test on time was in 1843 and 1844; and all who have set time since then have been deceiving themselves and deceiving others.” Testimonies, vol. 1, 72-73.

In the light of the preceding paragraph, the Davidians were deceived (at least partially) by Satan’s tool of futurism, just as were the First-day Adventists in the beginning of our movement. Lamentably, some conservative and well-meaning Adventists are now using futurism (particularly time setting and reinterpretation of prophecies), to create false excitement and invalid expectations. According to Inspiration, “There will never again be a message for the people of God that will be based on time. We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.” Selected Messages, book 1, 188. This statement does not say that we cannot have an understanding of the nearness of His Second Coming.

But, “Anyone who shall start up to proclaim a message to announce the
condition of things would result from this knowledge among our people that would greatly retard the work of God in preparing a people to stand in the great day that is to come. We are not to live upon time excitement. We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed.” Selected Messages, book 1, 189.

Here are some of the dangers that we face by not obeying the Lord’s counsels:

1. **Time setting diverts people from the truth.** “Satan is ever ready to fill the mind with theories and calculations that will divert men from the present truth, and disqualify them for the giving of the third angel’s message to the world.” Ibid., 186. See also Maranatha, 136.

2. **It causes confusion and unbelief.** “There will always be false and fanatical movements made by persons in the church who claim to be led of God—those who will run before they are sent, and will give day and date for the occurrence of unfulfilled prophecy. The enemy is pleased to have them do this, for their successive failures and leading into false lines cause confusion and unbelief.” Selected Messages, book 2, 84

3. **It closes many doors.** “One fanatical streak [such as time setting] exhibited among us will close many doors against the soundest principles of truth.” Testimonies to Ministers, 228.

Jesus did not come to astonish men with some great announcement of some special time when some great event would occur, but He came to instruct and save the lost.” Selected Messages, book 1, 186–187. It is imperative for all of us to teach the whole plan of redemption to this generation and be careful lest we promote pet ideas that “will make us lose present opportunities.”

Therefore, dear reader, “Instead of exhausting the powers of our mind in speculations in regard to the times and seasons which the Lord has placed in His own power, and withheld from men, we are to yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit, to do present duties, to give the breadth of life, unadulterated with humans opinions, to souls who are perishing for the truth.” Ibid., 186.

The inspired testimony of God gives us the following admonition: “Today you are to give yourself to God, that you may be emptied of self, emptied of envy, jealousy, evil surmising, strife, everything that shall be dishonoring to God. Today you are to have your vessel purified that it may be ready for the heavenly dew, ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement. It is our work today to yield our souls to Christ, that we may be fitted for the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord—fitted for come. Satan will move mightily from beneath, and will delude the world, while the Lord God Omnipotent will move from above and prepare a people to stand in the great day of His wrath.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 10, 269.

“In consideration of the shortness of time we as a people should watch and pray, and in no case allow ourselves to be diverted from the solemn work of preparation for the great event before us. Because the time is apparently extended, many have become careless and indifferent in regard to their words and actions. They do not realize their danger and do not see and understand the mercy of our God in lengthening their probation, that they may have time to form characters for the future, immortal life. Every moment is of the highest value. Time is granted them, not to be employed in studying their own ease and becoming dwellers on the earth, but to be used in the work of overcoming every defect in their own characters and in helping others, by example and personal effort, to see the beauty of holiness.

“God has a people upon the earth who in faith and holy hope are tracing down the roll of fast-fulfilling prophecy and are seeking to purify their souls by obeying the truth, that they may not be found without the wedding garment when Christ shall appear.” Testimonies, vol. 4, 306–307.

The fruits (words and actions) of David Koresh revealed that he was not covered with this wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness, neither was he “helping others, by example and personal effort, to see the beauty of holiness.” And what about futurism, and specific time setting? Time setting is a plague that we must firmly reject, because it does not bring any profit to the progress of God’s cause on earth. May we be protected from this plague by obeying the counsels given in God’s Word and in the Spirit of Prophecy. Only thus will we be able to avoid fanaticism, both outside the church, as in the case of the Branch Davidians, and even more important, within our own boundaries.

The grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be with you today and forevermore. Amen. □

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**Time** is granted them, not to be employed in studying their own ease and becoming dwellers on the earth, but to be used in the work of overcoming every defect in their own characters and in helping others.

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4. **It promotes infidelity.** “Those who so presumptuously preach definite time, in so doing gratify the adversary of souls; for they are advancing infidelity rather than Christianity.” Testimonies, vol. 4, 307. As the world beholds the bizarre ideas of fanaticical people, they close their minds to religion altogether.

5. **It makes us lose present opportunities.** “Instead of living in expectation of some special season of excitement, we are wisely to improve present opportunities, doing that which must be done in order that souls may be saved... the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” The Review and Herald, vol. 2, 554.

Friend, the coming of the Lord is nearer than we think. Let us not forget that He “is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9.

The servant of the Lord declares: “There have been plainly set before me events of great and thrilling interest, which must transpire before Christ will

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June 1993 Our Firm Foundation 17
I AM in great travail of soul for our people. We are living in the perils of the last days. A superficial faith results in a superficial experience. There is a repentance that needs to be repented of. All genuine experience in religious doctrines will bear the impress of Jehovah. All should see the necessity of understanding the truth for themselves individually. We must understand the doctrines that have been studied out carefully and prayerfully. It has been revealed to me that there is among our people a great lack of knowledge in regard to the rise and progress of the third angel’s message. There is great need to search the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation, and learn the texts thoroughly, that we may know what is written.

The light given me has been very forcible that many would go out from us, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. The Lord desires that every soul who claims to believe the truth shall have an intelligent knowledge of what is truth. False prophets will arise and will deceive many. Everything is to be shaken that can be shaken. Then does it not become everyone to understand the reasons of our faith? In place of having so many sermons there should be a more close searching of the Word of God, opening the Scriptures, text by text, and searching for the strong evidences that sustain the fundamental doctrines that have brought us where we now are, upon the platform of eternal truth.

Charmed by Spurious Holiness

My soul is made very sad to see how quickly some who have had light and truth will accept the deceptions of Satan, and be charmed with a spurious holiness. When men turn away from the landmarks the Lord has established that we may understand our position as marked out in prophecy, they are going they know not whither.

I question whether genuine rebellion is ever curable. Study in *Patriarchs and Prophets* the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. This rebellion was extended, including more than two men. It was led by two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation, men of renown. Call rebellion by its right name and apostasy by its right name, and then consider that the experience of the ancient people of God with all its objectionable features was faithfully chronicled to... pass into history. The Scripture declares, “These things are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” 1 Corinthians 10:11. And if men and women who have the knowledge of the truth are so far separated from their great Leader that they will take the great leader of apostasy and name him Christ our Righteousness, it is because they have not sunk deep into the mines of the truth. They are not able to distinguish the precious ore from the base material.

Read the cautions so abundantly given in the Word of God in regard to false prophets that will come in with their heresies, and if possible will deceive the very elect. With these warnings, why is it that the church does not distinguish the false from the genuine? Those who have in any way been thus misled need to humble themselves before God, and sincerely repent, because they have so easily been led astray. They have not

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**Ellen G. White**

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18 Our Firm Foundation June 1993
distinguished the voice of the True Shepherd from that of a stranger. Let all
such review this chapter of their experience.

For more than half a century God has
been giving His people light through the
testimonies of His Spirit. After all this
person of Christ, and apparently working
the works of Christ? What will hold God's
people from giving their allegiance to
false christs? "Go not after them." Luke
17:23.
The doctrines must be plainly under-
stood. The men accepted to preach the
fraternize with those who represent
Barabbas. "By their fruits ye shall know
them." Matthew 7:20.

I write this because many in the
church are represented to me as seeing
men like trees walking. They must have
another and deeper experience before
draw the snares spread to take
them in the net of the deceiver. There
must be no halfway work done now. The
Lord calls for stanch, decided, whole-
souled men and women to stand in the
gap, and make up the hedge.

"And they that shall be of thee shall
build the old waste places: thou shalt raise
up the foundations of many generations;
and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the
breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.
If thou turn away thy foot from the
sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my
day; and call the sabbath a delight,
the holy of the Lord, honourable; and
shall honour him, not doing thine own
ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor
speaking thine own words: then shall thou
delight thyself in the Lord; and I will
cause thee to ride upon the high places of the
earth, and feed thee with the heritage of
Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the
Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 58:12-14.

There is a decided testimony to be
borne by all our ministers in all our
churches. God has permitted apostasies to
take place in order to show how little
dependence can be placed in man. We are
always to look to God; His word is not
Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen. □

Selected Messages, book 2, 392-395

Issues
Continued from 10
of the flesh, rather than in the power of the
Spirit. So what in essence did either have
to offer me? Much less to offer the world?

We are admonished in 2 Timothy 3:5
that from those "having a form of godli-
ness, but denying the power thereof: from
such turn away." I will not turn away from
them as persons, but I must turn away from
their form of religion and turn to a
practical gospel that gives me power to
live above self and sin, as well as to
understand the pertinent issues of the day.
In times of crisis it will be necessary to
stand for truth, but we can do so in a
Christlike manner only as the greatest
issue is settled in our personal lives.

The parable of the five foolish and the
five wise virgins provides a good caution
for all of us today. The foolish virgins had
a theoretical knowledge of the truth (is-
sues) but the wise virgins had brought
the truth into practical life. They had gained
the power and the grace that come
through sanctification by the truth.

Many of us are yet unbalanced; we
profess faith in present truth, but we hold
these present truths in unrighteousness. Let
us go beyond just dealing with issues and
let us enter into "The Issue," which is a
settling into the truth both intellectually and
spiritually. That is indeed "The Issue." May
God help us to see it and live it! □

June 1993 Our Firm Foundation 19
In our last article of this series ("Man's Responses to Apostasy," Our Firm Foundation, April 1993) we studied how God wants us each to respond to the long-term and broad-based disobedience of God's remnant people to His directives for operating the branches of His work. We also searched out God's plan for how we are individually to relate to our church, which for at least four decades has been promoting or tolerating a pluralism of doctrinal beliefs. In this present article we will discuss God's will for us—laity and leaders alike—as organized church bodies, in relating to our prolonged and generalized insubordination to Christ, the Head of the church.

What decisions and actions should the committees and business sessions of our churches, conferences, unions, divisions and General Conference be making regarding our deep-rooted disobedience—apostasy—which has delayed Christ's return to earth these many decades? What should be the humble attitude and the diligent work of our organizational boards and leadership in light of our stiff-necked rebellion, which has resulted in the tragic world wars of this century and the ongoing, untold suffering of millions due to poverty, pestilence and power-hungry men? How does God want us as a people to deal with persons and institutions among us who persist in disobeying His divine directives as to how to live and work for Him?

Wrongs by a fellow brother against us personally are to be settled according to Matthew 18. Public wrongs, however, affecting the prosperity of the church and the cause, are to be dealt with openly. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." 1 Timothy 5:20; see Testimonies, vol. 2, 15. Disobedience to Christ in the operation of His institutions and in the feeding of His flock with poisonous doctrines is to be reproved and corrected as broadly as has been the injury to His cause. See Selected Messages, book 2, 152. In dealing with the disobedience and the apostasy which have delayed the latter rain (see Jeremiah 3:1-3) and the loud cry we are to be more pointed than was John the Baptist. "In this fearful time, just before Christ is to come the second time, God's faithful preachers will have to bear a still more pointed testimony than was borne by John the Baptist. A responsible, important work is before them; and those who speak smooth things, God will not acknowledge as His shepherds. A fearful woe is upon them." Testimonies, vol. 1, 321. We are to deal as directly with specific sins and sinners as did the forerunner of Christ.

Through our representative form of church government we each have a voice in the election of our leaders from the local church to the General Conference level.

"Every member of the church has a voice in choosing officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conferences, and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conference. By this arrangement every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities in the General Conference." Testimonies, vol. 8, 236-237.

We, individually and corporately, are acting or not acting through the actions and/or inactions of church officers and leaders. See Patriarchs and Prophets, 495. God holds us church members responsible for the worldwide quality of work of those we have elected to serve and to represent us on the local church, state, union, division and General Conference levels. When leadership does not take decided measures to remove organizational or individual sins from the camp, the entire body is held accountable. God's frown rests upon the church as a whole until the wrongs are searched out and put away.

"In the case of the sin of Achan, God has shown how He regards sin among those who profess to be His commandment-keeping people. Those whom He has especially
honored with witnessing the remarkable exhibitions of His power, as did ancient Israel, and that will venture to disregard His express directions, will be subjects of His wrath. God would teach His people that disobedience and sin are exceedingly offensive to Him, and not to be lightly regarded. He shows us that when His people are found in sin, they should at once take decided measures to put the sin from them, that His frown should not rest upon all His people. But if those in responsible positions pass over the sins of the people, His frown will be upon them, and the people of God, as a body, will be held responsible for the sins that exist in their midst. God, in His dealings with His people in the past, shows the necessity of purifying the church from wrongs that exist among them. One sinner may diffuse darkness which will exclude the light of God from the entire congregation. When the people realize that darkness is settling upon them, and they do not know the cause, then they should earnestly seek God in great humility and self-abasement, until the wrongs which grieve God's Spirit are searched out and put away from among them." Review and Herald, vol. 1, 133.

The chronic disobedience to Christ's directives in the operation of the branches of His work and the more recent permitting of doctrinal confusion and division have delayed and are delaying Christ's second coming for all of us. When there is open and known disobedience to God—apostasy—among us and we do not do all in our ability to expose and remove it, we as a body are held accountable for that apostasy. We have no biblical or Spirit of Prophecy basis for trying to skirt the issue by acknowledging that there is apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not in apostasy. God would not have delayed entrance into the Promised Land for His remnant church if we were not in apostasy. We need to humbly acknowledge and repent of our turning back from following Christ rather than to persist in denying that our operation of His institutions after the pattern of the world, and our changing of our doctrines to reflect those of fallen Christianity, are disobedience, rebellion, insubordination and apostasy. Our continued presence in this sinful world is stark evidence that we indeed know not that we are spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. See Revelation 3:14–17.

We are cautioned that stubborn refusal to acknowledge and confess our sins of disobedience can make our case as hope-

less as was that of King Saul. "It is not safe to do as did Saul—walk contrary to the Lord's commandments and then say, 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord,' (1 Samuel 15:13) stubbornly refusing to confess the sin of disobedience. Saul's stubbornness made his case hopeless. We see that others are following his example. The Lord sends words of reproof in mercy to save them, but they will not submit to be corrected. They insist that they do not have wrong, thus resisting the Spirit of God. The Lord declares through Samuel, 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.' 1 Samuel 15:22–23. The stubborn heart is thus presented in the case of Saul to warn every soul who is in danger of doing as he did." Manuscript Releases, vol. 15, 173.

It is stated of Christ's remnant people that they "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17. This statement means that our personal lifestyles, our religious beliefs and our methods of doing the Lord's work are to all be in harmony with Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. Those who join God's church are committing themselves to diligent and ongoing study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to enable them to indeed, by Christ's enabling power, measure up to God's definition of His remnant people. Those who accept positions of responsibility in Christ's body are committing themselves to being specialists in what God has said in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy for their area of work. Only at the peril of his soul will anyone accept a position of leadership in God's church and not soon do all that he can to acquaint himself with all that God has said regarding his area of work. Once one has learned God's will for his branch of the Lord's work he will do all that he can to bring that area of the Lord's work into full harmony with His directions. Anything less is to cause Heaven's blessing to be removed from God's people.

Doctrine

In the 1950s, adherents of what has become known as the New Theology began teaching new-to-Adventist doctrines through our official church publications. See "God's Plan Misused," Our Firm Foundation, vol. 7, no. 12. These doctrines, reflecting those of fallen Christianity, were falsely presented as being those of Adventism. Over the years many Seventh-day Adventists have come to believe the teachings of the New Theology regarding the nature of Christ, the nature of sin, the completion of the atonement and the moment of victory over sin. Today many church leaders and church members assume that the once foreign-to-Adventist New Theology beliefs are based on Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy and that they are indeed historic Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. To an alarming extent we have become confused as to true Adventist doctrine. All of this changing of our beliefs was accomplished by not following the counsels of the Lord regarding so-called new light.

"There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.' Proverbs 11:14." Testimonies, vol. 5, 293.

Knowing that Satan is out to deceive if it were possible even the very elect, we should accept no new doctrine affecting the landmarks or pillars of our faith. See Counsels to Writers and Editors, 30–31. The
There are fearful woes for those who preach the truth, but are not sanctified by it, and also for those who consent to receive and maintain the unsanctified to minister to them in word and doctrine.

If the church is not to support those ministers who, in spite of teaching the truth, are not obedient—sanctified—to it, how much more are we not to support those who teach that sanctification—victory over sin—is not required nor even possible to attain before Christ comes again to earth!

Methods of Administration

We have previously discussed the increasing tendency of church leaders to rule God’s people rather than to serve them. We have discussed the evils resulting from this method of church administration. See “God’s Plan Misused—Part 2,” Our Firm Foundation, January 1993. The servant of the Lord tells us that leadership is also to be accountable to the laity for their methods of administration.

“Men have walked contrary to the light. They have extinguished their light, and yet have dictated with their strong spirit how matters should be, as if God had given them special control over all His heritage, to forbid or sanction, to oppress, to speak proudly, to put forth the finger unto vanity, to walk in a false show as mighty men. Shall not God judge for these things? Is prosperity to come to God’s institutions and work by building upon the ruins of truth, of righteousness, of justice, of all that is pure and holy?

“Do those who know the truth and have a knowledge of God suppose that men who have turned away from truth and righteousness and are filled with a sense of their own importance, can invent safe methods for carrying on the work? This is what it means, and the sooner this bubble blown by Satan is burst, the better it will be for the healthfulness of all our institutions. When the very heart of the work is diseased, its action must be uncertain, fitful, unreliable. It is time we had an investigation before as many people as possible. All who are helping to sustain the work should get together and understand its inward workings.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 17, 232.

Those who persist in operating with kingly power are to be removed from office by the people. “I am instructed to say that when a man swells to large undue proportions, the people should assemble and in the name of the Lord release that man from office, and put some one in who will not suppose that he is sufficient in wisdom to define how every branch of the work shall be conducted, but one who will seek to find out what is his duty. It is the privilege of the conference president to say, ‘I have this responsibility. If I lose the sweet spirit of Jesus Christ, with its softening, subduing influence, that is to constitute me a light amid the moral darkness, then I must no longer hold this sacred office.’” Loma Linda Messages, 324.

Those who will not hear God’s voice through Inspiration and follow its directives are to be separated from the work. “If those connected with the work of God will not hear His voice and do His will, they should be separated entirely from the work. God does not need the influence of such men. I speak plainly; for it is time that things were called by their right name.” Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, 1573.

Only those who labor to implicitly obey the Lord’s commands in every branch of His work are to be retained in His service. “Throughout the ages, God has been particular as to the design and the accomplishment of His work. In this age, He has given His people much light and instruction in regard to how His work is to be carried forward—in an elevated, refined, conscientious manner; and He is pleased with those who in their service carry out His design. Only those who, feeling their own inefficiency, obey implicitly the Lord’s commands, can be retained in His service.” Review and Herald, vol. 5, 167.

When we approve of or condone the leadership of those who are disobedient to the Lord, we are weakening our own faith in God.
“I call upon God’s people to open their eyes. When you sanction or carry out the decisions of men who, as you know, are not in harmony with truth and righteousness, you weaken your own faith and lessen your relish for communion with God.” The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, 1336.

Church Discipline

The parable of the wheat and tares, which are to grow together until the harvest, was given by Christ to help His church to know how to relate to its members—leaders and laity alike. We are to bear long with one another. When the erring one acknowledges his wrongs and manifests continued desire to obey and follow Christ, he is to be given another opportunity. We obtain some idea of the seventy-times-seven principle by Ellen White’s dealing with church members who continued to use tobacco: “Some have taken a position that those who use tobacco should be dealt with and turned out of the church. In all of our experience for many years not a case of this kind has thus been treated by us. We have borne with them and labored with and prayed with them for years, and if after a time they did not reform they became lax in other things, and causes of a grievous character occurred which required an action on the part of the church. But then the responsibility was not assumed by merely the resident elder, the deacon, or any church member, but the church waited in patience for help, for wise counselors, and then moved with the greatest caution.” Manuscript Releases, vol. 12, 286.

We need great wisdom from God to know how and when to discipline. In our zeal for God’s cause we must not attempt to judge character—thoughts and feelings (see Testimonies vol. 5, 310)—or motives. Our desire and efforts to remove sin from the camp must always include laboring for the restoration of the repentant sinner. We must clearly love the sinner, while at the same time hate the sin. By the parable of the wheat and the tares we are reminded that the grace of Christ is able to transform any and every repentant sinner into harvest-time wheat. This parable, though, was never given to condone open sin or to prevent the censuring or disfellowshipping of those who persist in disobedience to God.

“Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church, but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive. He knows our nature too well to entrust this work to us. Should we try to uproot from the church those whom we suppose to be spurious Christians, we should be sure to make mistakes. Often we regard as hopeless subjects the very ones whom Christ is drawing to Himself. Were we to deal with these souls according to our imperfect judgment, it would perhaps extinguish their last hope. Many who think themselves Christians will at last be found wanting. Many will be in heaven who their neighbors supposed would never enter there. Man judges from appearance, but God judges the heart. The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest; and the harvest is the end of probationary time.” Christ’s Object Lessons, 71.

Clearly those who refuse to repent are to be disfellowshipped. “The names of those who sin and refuse to repent should not be retained on the church books, lest the saints be held accountable for their evil deeds. Those who pursue a course of transgression should be visited and labored with, and if they then refuse to repent, they should be separated from church fellowship, in accordance with the rules laid down in the Word of God.” The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, 1096.

When the erring acknowledge their disobedience they are to be forgiven and are to continue in church fellowship. Even if they have been censured or disfellowshipped they are to be restored. “If the erring one repents and submits to Christ’s discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God’s servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves lest they also be tempted.” Testimonies, vol. 7, 263.

The Adventist Dilemma

As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church we need to understand that we cannot continue to deny the great dilemma that we are in. We are denominated (chosen and named) to be God’s remnant people who are to be identifiable by our obedience to all of God’s law and by our being guided by the Spirit of Prophecy. In reality we possess the knowledge of the Ten Commandments and the Spirit of Prophecy, but in practice we are not obedient to many of the Lord’s directives. We possess the truth physically, but we do not possess it in our hearts, nor is it manifested by our actions. We have not let Christ and His truth into our individual and corporate hearts, and thus we are not sanctified (made holy) by obedience to the truth. See 1 Peter 1:22. We have a knowledge of the gospel, but we are denying the power thereof. See 2 Timothy 3:5. We are unrighteous (lacking

Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church, but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive.

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Our dilemma is that in this untransformed condition we are attempting to give to the world the three angels’ messages, messages of full obedience—sanctification—to God. To this point in history God has not found it possible to use us to our fullest potential to give to “every nation, kindred, tongue and people” a message which we have not understood nor experienced. As did ancient Israel, we can serve as an inefficient reservoir of the oracles of truth, but without being transformed by that truth, we remain unsaved by it. Solomon also had the delusion that, even though he was disobeying the Lord in relating to the surrounding nations and their religious
beliefs, he could win them to the truth—to obedience to God. The servant of the Lord refers to this as a "fatal deception." See Prophets and Kings, 54. Unsanctified (disobedient) Laodiceans must awaken to the reality that we cannot give to the world a message of heart sanctification—the third angel's message in verity—for we cannot fully give that which we do not fully possess.

As we awaken to our spiritual condition of "in verity" being full-blooded Laodiceans, we must not despair. We must not pull apart and turn our backs on the larger body, and presume that God will make of us, without them, His great nation. See "Man's Responses to Apostasy," Our Firm Foundation, April 1993. Until God reveals it to us through a new, proven prophet, or deep study shows that previously given prophecy actually indicates that probation has closed for a person, institution or an organization, we must never cease to work to restore them, as well as ourselves, to full obedience to God's will, and thus to His favor and blessings.

God's plan for Laodicea's chronic disobedience to His directives in operating the branches of His work, His solution for our doctrinal confusion, and for our tendency to rule rather than to serve God's people, is the same as it was for the apostasy of King Josiah's time. In that day the faithful "were questioning whether God's promises to ancient Israel could ever be fulfilled. From a human point of view the divine purpose for the chosen nation seemed almost impossible of accomplishment." Prophets and Kings, 384. Repentant Josiah led the people into an in-depth study of the neglected Spirit of Prophecy of their day. The king called a solemn convocation in which God's neglected counsels were shared. The reformer king proposed that "those highest in authority unite with the people in solemnly covenanting before God to cooperate with one another in an effort to institute decided changes. 'The king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.'" 2 Kings 23:3. The response was more hearty than the king had dared hope for: 'All the people stood to the covenant.' 2 Kings 23:3." Ibid., 400-401.

Recognizing how far they had strayed from the Lord's directives, the people joined with Josiah in purging open sin from the camp. False methods of worship and unrepentant teachers of doctrinal error were put away. See ibid., 401.

Laodicean modern Israel needs holy convocations like that of Josiah's day. See "The Role of Leadership in Revival and Reformation," Our Firm Foundation, December 1991. The sins of the rulers and of the people need to be pointed out by a study and presentation of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. We need to put away our disobedience in the operation of the branches of the Lord's work. We need to give a "Thus saith the Lord" for truth and against doctrinal error. We must not continue to halt between two or more opinions.

It was and is God's plan for His church that its appointed men and women of responsibility lead His people into a full keeping of the commandments of God and into a faithful obedience to the Spirit of Prophecy. We need to remove from positions of responsibility those who persist in open and rebellious disobedience to a "Thus saith the Lord."

In referring to the revival of Josiah, modern Israel is given the following instruction: "Is not this our work today? Our fathers have transgressed, and we have followed in their footsteps; but God has opened the book of the law, and backslidden Israel hear the commandments of the Lord. Their transgression stands revealed, and the wrath of God will be upon every soul that does not repent and reform as the light shines upon his pathway." Review and Herald, vol. 2, 182.

In future articles we will study what God reveals to us regarding the fate of Laodicea. Will Laodiceans repent and be cleansed of the filthy rags of their own ways of living and working for the Lord? Will Laodiceans be spewed out and replaced by another organized movement, containing the wheat and the tares until the harvest? What is God actually doing for His church that will eventually purify it and prepare it to receive the latter rain and to give the loud cry? Will we know when that purification is being accomplished or is completed? May the Lord help us as we seek to know His plan for us personally and for us as His organized people.

Hope International Camp Meeting Dates:

Calistoga, California: July 8–11
Eatonville, Washington: July 28–August 1
Yucaipa, California: September 22–26

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Cast Out

Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.” Isaiah 66:5.

Through the centuries, the constant threat of oppressive men within the church has been to cast out from the membership thereof those who do not come totally into line with their way of thinking, even though the moral integrity of those cast out cannot be impugned. This casting out has often not been based on a “Thus saith the Lord,” but rather on man-made rules.

Such a practice was true in Isaiah’s day as seen from the introductory scripture. It was true in Jesus’ day. It was true in Ellen White’s day, and sad to say, it is being repeated in certain instances in our own beloved Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day.

In John, chapter 9, we have the story of a man “which was blind from his birth.” Verse 1. Jesus, in His great love, and “that the works of God should be made manifest,” (verse 3) restored sight to this man. Of course, such a miracle was immediately noticed by the neighbors of the formerly blind man. The news spread quickly. The man was taken to the church leaders, the Pharisees, and they quizzed him as to how this miracle had taken place. The “blind” man explained what had happened and offered the thought that the One who had healed him was a Prophet.

The Pharisees, not believing that such a miracle could take place, now called upon the parents of the “blind” man to question them. The parents were very reluctant to answer any questions beyond acknowledging that their son who was born blind could now see. The Scriptures say, “They feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that [Jesus] was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.” Verses 22–23. “The great work wrought for their son had brought conviction to the parents”; yet “they shifted all responsibility from themselves to their son; for they dared not confess Christ.” The Desire of Ages, 472–473.

There were even those among leadership who refused to stand for truth. "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." John 12:42–43.

Ellen White comments, “They were convinced; they believed Jesus to be the Son of God; but it was not in harmony with their ambitious desires to confess Him. They had not the faith that would have secured for them the heavenly treasure. They were seeking worldly treasure.

“And today men are eagerly seeking for earthly treasure. Their minds are filled with selfish, ambitious thoughts. For the sake of gaining worldly riches, honor, or power, they place the maxims, traditions, and requirements of men above the requirements of God. From them the treasures of His Word are hidden.” Christ's Object Lessons, 106.

The son, on the other hand, was willing to stand for truth, and was given “grace and utterance” by Jesus, “so that he became a witness for Christ.” The Desire of Ages, 474. His answers to the questions of the Pharisees were a rebuke to their unbelief. Therefore “they cast him out.” Verse 34.

Jesus, upon hearing of this man’s being cast out of the church, searched him out and inquired only about his belief in the Son of God. Jesus said nothing about the loss of church membership. The only question was in regard to his relationship with the Son of God. Heaven is built upon relationship, not
membership. That is not to say that we should treat our church membership lightly, but it does say that salvation is not based on church membership, but upon a close personal walk with Jesus Christ.

Ellen Harmon White, and her family too, had to face being cast out of church membership. In the years of the Millerite movement, the Bible had clearly revealed that Jesus was coming again soon. The Harmon family, devout Methodists, recognized the truths of Scripture being preached by Millerite pastors. They attended meetings and Bible studies offered by those proclaiming the second coming of Jesus. They were not regular in attendance at the Methodist meetings, although Ellen's family were strong participants in the activities of the Methodist Church. The Harmon family often witnessed to their hope of the Second Coming, a witness not always appreciated by their Methodist brethren.

Finally, they were approached by the leader of the church, who admitted that the Harmon's were morally impeccable, but the brethren wished them to come more into line with the Methodist Church. The church rules that the family "had departed from."

Ellen White tells it in her own words: "Our family were all deeply interested in the doctrine of the Lord's soon coming. My father had stood as one of the pillars of the Methodist Church... However, the Methodist minister made us a special visit and took the occasion to inform us that our faith and Methodism could not agree. He did not inquire our reasons for believing as we did, nor make any reference to the Bible in order to convince us of our error; but he stated that we had adopted a new and strange belief that the Methodist Church could not accept...

"Not long after, we were notified to be present at a meeting to be held in the vestry of the church. There were but few present. The influence of my father and his family was such that our opposers had no desire to present our cases before a larger number of the congregation. The single charge preferred was that we had walked contrary to their rules. Upon asking what rules we had violated it was stated, after a little hesitation, that we had attended other meetings, and had neglected to meet regularly with our class...

"It was asked, if we would confess that we had departed from their rules, and if we would also agree to conform to them in the future. We answered that we dared not yield our faith or deny the sacred truth of God... My father in his defense received the blessing of God, and we all left the vestry with free spirits, happy in the consciousness of the approving smile of Jesus..."

"The next Sunday, at the commencement of the love feast, the presiding elder read off our names, seven in number, as discontinued from the church. He stated that we were not expelled on account of any wrong or immoral conduct, that we were of unblemished character and enviable reputation; but we had been guilty of walking contrary to the rules of the Methodist Church. He also declared that a door was now open, and all who were guilty of a similar breach of the rules would be dealt with in like manner." Life Sketches, 50–53.

He stated that we were not expelled on account of any wrong or immoral conduct, that we were of unblemished character and enviable reputation; but we had been guilty of walking contrary to the rules of the Methodist Church.

Sister White indicates that some, in fear of losing their membership, came into subjection to the church, while others stood boldly for their faith.

Brothers and sisters, we are today facing a similar challenge in our own Adventist Church. People, who have done nothing morally wrong, are being threatened with censure and the possibility of being disfellowshiped because they are attending meetings not approved by the church, reading literature not approved by the church, being "divisive" as defined on a subjective level, and in general, walking contrary to man-made rules of the church. Isn't much of this activity also contrary to the church manual? Yes!

Ellen White comments in The Desire of Ages on man-made rules: "In the commission to His disciples, Christ not only outlined their work, but gave them their message. Teach the people, He said, 'to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught. That which He had spoken, not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is here included. Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these is Christ's servants to teach. 'The law and the prophets,' with the record of His own words and deeds, are the treasure committed to the disciples to be given to the world. Christ's name is his watchword, his badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing that does not bear His superscription is to be recognized in His kingdom." The Desire of Ages, 826.

As a people, once thought of as "the people of the Book," can we now truly accept or participate in this man-engineered way of bringing people into
Editorial
Continued from 2

Why then should it be deemed an unconstructive criticism to point out a correlation between the absence of these three subjects being taught in many of our churches and the presence therein of disunity and confusion? Is it not safe to conclude that if conditions exist in the church, which Ellen White was shown would result from not presenting present truth, then we must, as never before, dust off this truth and present it to the people?

In the light of this obvious fact, one cannot but wonder why there is such an outcry for more pluralism and diversity of thought within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The recent *Issues* book published by the North American Division pleads with certain private ministries to be more tolerant of the many winds of doctrine blowing in the church. "There's room for all of us," they say.

*The News-Leader*, a local newspaper in Collegedale, Tennessee, quoted Elder Robert Folkenberg in their April 15, 1993, paper as saying: "'Christ. That is the buzz word. We are not leading people to a unique set of beliefs and doctrines. It's too long we have been putting that which is different and distinctive as the front line of approach. Ridiculous!' he exclaimed."

In fairness to Elder Folkenberg, we know first hand after reading the North American Division *Issues* book, how easy it is to be misquoted and misunderstood. I pray that such is the case here. I would like to believe that he at least went on to share how Adventism's unique truths offer an understanding of Christ that the evangelical world is yet waiting to perceive. And while the mark of the beast and seal of God issues regarding the Sabbath and the law of God, may seem as unnecessarily peculiar and irrelevant as I am sure Noah's message seemed to the antediluvian world, they are nonetheless "present truth," and as such are to be presented "as the front line of approach," even though in doing so we will be thought to be as extreme and unbalanced as was Noah by his contemporaries.

I am led by the preceding to an important question: Do we Seventh-day Adventists really understand our own message? Do we see that "present truth" is indeed absolutely "unique"? If it is not, what then can we offer our Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Roman Catholic friends who have already confessed Christ as their Saviour? Do we have anything that can justify our asking them to leave their present fellowship and join ours? Yes, Christ is the "buzz word." But is it Christ in the holy place or in the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary? As cultic, and radical as it may initially sound, there is a biblical difference of eternal significance between the two, and a fearful warning is pronounced by God through our prophet against those who are found worshiping they know not whom in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary after Christ's place of mediation changes to the most holy place. See *Early Writings*, 56.

Even among some of our evangelists there seems to be a lack of clarity regarding Adventism's unique, distinctive, life-saving messages. If these subjects are not clear to us, then how can we explain them to the world along with "the past Advent movement" and the implications of 1844? And also, how can we know what "our present position" is, or for that matter, what it should be. Without these understandings we cannot offer Babylon the solution to its confusion. Lacking these understandings, we are instead bringing Babylon's confusion into our own remnant church.

These statements are not meant as a blanket criticism. We recognize that many honest efforts are being made within our denomination to share the three angels' messages with a lost and dying world. Nor is the intent of these statements to undermine any leader's credibility or to make his or her job more difficult. Neither are they

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There is only one God-given formula for avoiding fanaticism and assuring unity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This formula is to preach and follow present truth as described in *Early Writings*, 63. *Our Firm Foundation* is dedicated to promulgating Adventism's unique, life-changing, world-saving message. Here are several ways you can share this message with your family and friends through the pages of *Our Firm Foundation*.

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June 1993 *Our Firm Foundation* 27
made to create support for this organization by causing discontent with the organized church or its leadership. If Hope International should cease to exist because our Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole has once again dedicated itself to proclaiming the present truth contained in Adventism’s unique messages, we at Hope would be among the first to say, “Praise the Lord!”

Our Firm Foundation is, and has been since its inception eight years ago, dedicated to challenging each of its editors and readers to seriously consider God’s true purpose in raising up the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This magazine is dedicated to urging us all to study and proclaim diligently the subjects that are “calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul... such subjects as the sanctuary, in connection with the 2300 days, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” It is also dedicated to urging us each to bring our lives into conformity with the high calling of “present truth.” In this conformity lies our only safety against the fanaticism of Waco and the intoxication of Babylon. It in also lies our only hope of true unification.

If you, dear reader, share this dedication we plead for you to help us broadcast this message far and wide so that we as a church can prepare to receive the latter rain, which will empower us to finish the work in righteousness. Despite tremendous pressures to change the content of this magazine, we want to here publicly affirm that we will continue as we always have to utilize this tool to promulgate to the Seventh-day Adventist Church the truths encompassed in the three angels’ messages. We believe this is why God allows this magazine to exist, and to compromise would be to disobey.

We also here publicly affirm that we will continue to proclaim this unique present truth to the world by printing and promoting the inspired writings of Ellen White which were especially prepared by God to detoxify an intoxicated Babylon. The job of reaching the church and the world with these precious truths is bigger than any of us. We therefore must work together for its accomplishment.

If you also are convicted that there is something unique, vital and indispensable about the message entrusted by God to this His remnant church of prophecy, then will you join us in distributing this magazine to others within the Seventh-day Adventist Church? And will you also become involved in our Great Controversy distribution program? Please prayerfully consider today how you can help; then fill out and return the commitment card below.

Kenneth Hodges—ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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The Waco tragedy of a few weeks ago began in the deranged mind of a man who once called himself a Seventh-day Adventist. David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians, said he was Jesus Christ returned the second time as a sinner, ignoring all the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy statements concerning Christ’s sinless character and the manner of Christ’s return. Koresh’s followers were recruited from our churches in England, Australia and America.

These people were mesmerized, yes, hypnotized by this demonic son of Satan. Jesus said that false christs and false prophets would come, and if it were possible, would deceive the very elect. See Matthew 24:24.

David Koresh added his name to those who have and are fulfilling this prophecy. He was an impostor, a deceiver, and his followers were cremated with him in the fires at Waco. They followed a man, not the messages so clearly given to God’s remnant people.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah 8:20.

The end of this world will come very suddenly. Inspiration tells us that probation will close unexpectedly. See The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, 989. And when it closes only that which has been established on the law and the testimony will stand.

“When the storm of God’s wrath breaks upon the world, it will be a terrible revelation for souls to find that their house is being swept away because it is built upon the sand. Let the warning be given them before it is too late. . . . “There is a special power in the presentation of the truth at the present time; but how long will it continue? Only a little while. If there was ever a crisis, it is now.

“All are now deciding their eternal destiny. Men need to be aroused to realize the solemnity of the time, the nearness of the day when human probation shall be ended. Decided efforts should be made to bring the message for this time prominently before the people. The third angel is to go forth with great power. Let none ignore this work or treat it as of little importance.” Testimonies, vol. 6, 16.

The alpha of apostasy appeared in our church at the turn of the century with the pantheistic teachings of Dr. Kellogg. But it was defeated by the leaders of the church standing with the prophet. They met and destroyed the iceberg of the alpha. But we are told that in the very end of time another iceberg will appear, the omega. It will be of a very startling nature and many Adventists will be deceived by it. See Selected Messages, book 1, 197–208.

How can such a deception occur? We have more than fifty volumes of inspired counsel. Yes, we have millions of words from God to help keep this very last apostasy from overwhelming us. Now the iceberg has appeared and we are in the omega of apostasy. Yet only a few are crying out, Meet it! When they do, these brave people are immediately categorized as fanatics, troublemakers or divisive; they are released from church offices, told to be quiet in the Sabbath School class and some are even disfellowshipped. What a tragedy! How have we come to such a crisis, such an emergency? Ellen White gives the answer:

“I have been shown that unbelief in the testimonies has been steadily increasing as the people backslide from God. It is all through our ranks, all over the field. But few know what our churches are to experience. I saw that at present we are under divine forbearance, but no one can say how long this will continue. No one knows how great the mercy that has been exercised toward us. But few are heartily devoted to God. There are only a few who, like the stars in a tempestuous night, shine here and there among the clouds.” Testimonies, vol. 5, 75–76.

Ron Spear

June 1993  Our Firm Foundation  29
Very few Seventh-day Adventists are now able to defend their beliefs from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. What a fearful misfortune! Many members listen to one man preaching error, meet him at the door of the church on Sabbath, say that was a good sermon and go home to eat a sumptuous meal and go to sleep. The next Sabbath they may hear another sermon from a different pastor preaching the three angels’ messages and the straight testimony. They also tell him at the door that it was a good sermon, but perhaps a little too strong. The tragedy is that many of our people do not know the difference between truth and error because they do not seek to know the truth with all their hearts and souls.

"Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes obedient to the path marked out for them in the Word of God." The Review and Herald, vol. 1, 162.

"All who gain the ranks of Sabbathkeepers should become diligent Bible students that they may know the pillars and groundwork of truth. They should study prophetic history, which has brought us down point by point to where we are at the present time." Letter 98a April, 97.

"Those who place themselves under God’s control, to be led and guided by Him, will catch the steady tread of the events ordained by Him to take place.” Testimonies, vol. 7, 14.

Unfortunately, the majority of Adventists will be lost because they did not diligently seek to know the will of God and then do it.

How could we get so far off track? By not studying the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy to find the way of the Lord. We have leaned on the arm of flesh to guide us and have been led to nearly forsake the way of the Lord.

error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the Word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.” The Desire of Ages, 671.

"The track of truth lies close beside the track of error, and both tracks may seem to be one to minds which are not worked by the Holy Spirit, and which, therefore, are not quick to discern the difference between truth and error.” Selected Messages, book 1, 202.

The Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians because they searched the Scriptures daily and received the truth with all readiness of mind, and then by the power of God lived the truth. See Acts 17:11.

Only the Bereans’ diligence will gain for us the Holy Spirit’s guidance into all truth.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” Hosea 4:3–6.

"The godly need not to be deceived if they are students of the Scriptures and

In closing, I must refer again to the great tragedy in Waco, Texas; to the fiery death of the Davidians and their children. These people were ex-Adventists. Although some still had their names on the church books, they were no longer Seventh-day Adventists. They perished in the flames because they followed a man and not God. They did not compare scripture with scripture and study the Spirit of Prophecy for themselves, or they would have proved David Koresh to be a false christ. They would have discerned he was an impostor who used impure language, drank strong drink and misused children and women. He will have to answer in the judgment for the lives that perished with him.

There are insidious innuendos now being made in high places in our church, that those who attend the meetings of independents could one day end up in a Waco situation. The British Union Messenger of April 2, 1993, has stated that there is a “significant overlap” between Firm Foundation and the Waco situation and that the union president had evidence of such an overlap. However, upon further questioning by one church member, the union
The trials of the children of Israel, and their attitude just before the first coming of Christ, have been presented before me again and again to illustrate the position of the people of God in their experience before the second coming of Christ.

We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world. Unbelievers have a right to expect that those who profess to be keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, will do more than any other class to promote and honor, by their consistent lives, by their godly example and their active influence, the cause which they represent. But how often have the professed advocates of the truth proved the greatest obstacle to its advancement! The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan’s devices.” Selected Messages, book 1, 122.

We are promised that those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. See 1 Timothy 3:12. Men of pleasing address who once embraced and loved the truth, but who have apostatized, will be accusers of the faithful, loyal and obedient saints of God.

“As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel’s message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.” The Great Controversy, 608.

Such a picture is difficult to dwell upon, but as the words of the prophet have proved true in the past, so they shall in the future. As we approach the close of our probation and the commencing of the little time of trouble just before us, may God help us to study to show ourselves approved unto Him, to pray, and to prepare for that day, is our prayer.

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Special Testimonial

By Bill Stringfellow

If you have not already read this amazing account by well-known Seventh-day Adventist writer and speaker Bill Stringfellow, we urge you to do so as soon as possible. In it Bill tells about his shocking discovery of the changes occurring in our beloved church, changes he had never realized because he was so busy working for the Lord that he had no time to notice them. Learn what he is doing about these discoveries and how they have changed his life and ministry.

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As usual, there will be no charge for staying on our campus, but we cannot provide either lodging or food except in very unusual circumstances. Please do not take it for granted that we will be able to provide special services for those who need them. Instead, please call and let us know what your needs are. We will do our best to accommodate all who desire to attend, but, unfortunately, there are limits to what our staff can undertake during the hustle and bustle of camp meeting.


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First Meeting
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