

# NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

*"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."*

March/April 2008



## CHRIST'S GREATEST WISH

*Looking at the Second Coming Through God's Eyes*

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## NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

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## Strange Mark, Sure Message

by Shawn Brace

For centuries, students of the Bible have been debating the significance of a strange mark that shows up in the middle of Ezekiel's book. As if Ezekiel wasn't maligned enough, the prophet, who was a contemporary of Daniel and Jeremiah, has been called anything from schizophrenic, to psychopathic, to clairvoyant.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the book leaves the reader baffled. We encounter such things as wheels with eyes, a valley full of dry bones, and a prophet who cannot grieve over his wife's death.

But perhaps the most intriguing scene of all takes place when God instructs a man clothed in white linen to go around Jerusalem and place a mark on the foreheads of all those who cry over Judah's abominations.<sup>2</sup> The imagery should sound familiar to us, of course—eager heralds of John's apocalyptic message. But what is not entirely clear, however, is just what the mark signified. If one were to look in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, for example, it would become evident that the authors of that series conclude that this mark is the Sabbath—that most important sign which has epic meaning in the end times.

Fair enough. As faithful stewards of God's Ten Commandments, we believe that the seventh-day Sabbath has unique and important significance in the latter days. There is little doubt that God has placed supreme value on this crowning achievement of His creation week.

Yet, as important as the Sabbath is, Ezekiel's passage takes us another direction.

The Hebrew of the text literally has God instructing the man to "mark a *taw*" on people's foreheads. *Taw*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, would have been written a little differently in Ezekiel's day than in ours. The Hebrew alphabet, as it is presently written, was not introduced until the third century BC, nearly 300 years after Ezekiel's ministry. In his day they used an archaic script that is now labeled paleo-Hebrew.

And how would a *taw* have been written in paleo-Hebrew? As a cross. God's people—even in Ezekiel's day—were marked by the cross. Most scholars are fairly well agreed on this. (What they do not agree upon, of course, is its significance.)<sup>3</sup>

It would be hard to make the argument that Ezekiel understood the symbolism 600 years before Christ's crucifixion. Who knows, maybe he did. But, as one author offers, "There can be little doubt that this is one of the many examples where the Hebrew prophets spoke better than they knew."<sup>4</sup>

For those of us who live on the other side of Calvary's glorious event, we can appreciate the reality of God's burden for the cross. As important as the Sabbath is, as important as the health message is, or any other doctrinal pillar, these things are only an outworking of the reality of the cross in our lives—both on our foreheads and in our hearts.

The truth is, God is trying to mark all of us with His cross. He can't wait for that grand event when He can show the whole universe a group of people who have finally allowed Him to make the cross a

part of their lives. Well would it be for us to, as Ellen White encourages, "gather about the cross."<sup>5</sup> I'm sure Ezekiel would agree with that.

### (Endnotes)

1 See E. C. Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality," *JBL* 65 (1946): 277-92. Holding a high view of Scripture, we, of course, cannot conclude this.

2 See Ezekiel 9:4.

3 For a discussion of this, see Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 307-314.

4 H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 44, quoted in Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel*, 313, n. 64.

5 Ellen White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1956), 103, 104.

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# Christ's Greatest Wish

by Barry Kimbrough

Millions of Christians believe in the Second Coming of Christ. They have good reason as no fewer than 318 specific Bible texts predict the event, not to mention the many other passages that speak of things in connection to it, such as the afterlife. The promises are breathtaking. We read of resurrection, reunion with loved ones, the end of suffering, golden streets, and celestial mansions.<sup>1</sup> Who wouldn't look forward to that? Yes, the return of Christ is truly a "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

Because of these promises, it is easy to center our attention on what we get at the Second Advent, or on what we need to do to be spiritually prepared for it. Rewards and preparations are both important, but we miss an even greater truth if we focus on "us" alone in connection to the Parousia.

The grandest fact about the Second Coming is not bonuses and belief. It is about the One who comes. And why He comes. We have rarely thought about the return of Christ from His viewpoint. What does it mean to Him? What kind of feelings and thoughts does He have as He anticipates it?

Many Scriptures touch on this, but one in particular sums up His motivation and is found in His prayer for His disciples: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which you have given me; for You loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).<sup>2</sup> Christ's greatest wish was for the presence of His disciples. He longed for the day when that would happen. This original prayer gives us an idea as to what He has been praying for as our Intercessor over the

centuries since that time.

Beyond the circle of the twelve, Jesus craves reunion with all of His believers. "I do not pray for these alone," He said, "but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). This particular appeal appears to show that as He made His requests, His eyes pierced the dark veil of the future, revealing to Him the history of His church. As He read the life details of each tested-and-tried follower, He pleaded for a final gathering. So great is His hunger for human fellowship that even while suffering the unspeakable torture of crucifixion, His mind was on this heavenly meeting, and He extended the invitation to the very worst of humanity, redeemed by His grace. We note His words to the dying thief: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Though we know the truth about death, I suggest that we don't need to move the comma this time because the thief must have surely felt a little bit of paradise at the moment he heard the promise!

Christ looks ahead to this day with such intense delight that He plans to serve *us* at the first heavenly banquet. In the parable of the expectant steward, He said: "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when He comes will find watching." Then He made this amazing statement: "Assuredly, I say to you that He will gird Himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

Picture the scene in your imagination. We are sitting at the huge dinner table in the New Jerusalem Banquet Hall. In comes the Lord Himself, carrying trays of heaven's dishes which He has prepared Himself. Face aglow, He makes His way to each person, serving with the biggest

smile you've ever seen, asking what we would like. "Lord, this is backward; we should be serving you!" a young woman protests. But He is so thrilled to have us that He doesn't even hear her objection. Presently He stands at the head of the table and addresses us in a warm and powerful voice that reaches every corner of that gigantic hall: "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29, 30).

We will enjoy that day, to be sure. But He will have the greatest joy of all. To be once-for-all reunited with the church He died for—that will be His ultimate happiness.

We understand reunion. Army officer Captain Kevin McNamara looked forward to it. Stationed in Iraq, he called his wife and children regularly, but when he got a special assignment to return to his New Jersey military base for one week to train his replacement, another mission formed in his mind. He got permission to take one day of the trip to visit his family. He would surprise his children by showing up at their school unannounced. With feelings only a father can have, he made arrangements with the school teachers for this surprise stopover.

Finally the moment arrived when he strolled into his son's classroom. Five-year old Nathan stared, sucked in air, sat up straighter in his chair and raised his hand as if waiting for his teacher to grant him permission to run into his daddy's arms. But he didn't wait for permission. He ran across the room and "buried his head in the soft folds of his father's uniform." His face was enveloped in the Army green, and he sobbed until his daddy asked him in a tender voice if he'd like to introduce him to the class.

# We have rarely thought about the return of Christ from His viewpoint. What does it mean to Him?...

## We will enjoy that day, to be sure. But He will have the greatest joy of all. To be once-for-all reunited with the church He died for—that will be His ultimate happiness.

A few minutes before this, McNamara had surprised his ten-year old daughter, Shannon, in the same way. Later that day, he astonished his wife, Denise, as he showed up at home with the children.<sup>3</sup>

If a father could wish to see his family that much, what about the One who created fathers? In the book of John alone, God is called our Father over 100 times. His Son's prediction reveals His heart: "I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

Christ's wish has yet another reason than just having us all together with Him. He wants to show us something: "That they may behold My glory which You have given Me" (John 17:24). Does this simply mean that we will see the brightness of His person? What does "glory" mean? We get a clue from the use of this word in the Old Testament. After Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he asked them to go back home and get his father: "So shall you tell my father of all my glory, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hasten and bring my father down here" (Genesis 45:13). How the days must have dragged as the prime minister of the great world power looked forward to this meeting with his long-lost father. What preparations he must have made. And what a tour of the glories of Egypt he surely gave after brothers and father finally arrived.

In the same way, our Lord waits with earnest desire for the day when He can take us on a trip to see the vast wealth and wonder of His created universe. Our

"oohs" and "ahhs" at seeing things we have never dreamed of will fill His heart with an ecstatic joy that only He can fully know.

I experienced a trace of this pleasure recently when I bought a car for our family. The old one gave up the ghost. We had to get a replacement. After talking about options, looking at different makes and models, and comparing prices, the final choice was left to me. I made my way to the car lot. With the help of the salesman, I picked out the best looking one I could find in our price range, paid the fees, and signed the papers. As I drove away, it felt more like I was flying on cloud nine.

But I was not so happy for myself in getting a better car. My greatest delight was anticipating how glad my wife, Olena, would be when she saw it for the first time. Sure enough, as I rolled into the driveway of our home, she was waiting. She came outside and began to walk around it, inspecting each feature with a smile. It was "super white" and sparkled in the brightness of that summer day.

Later I thought of the spiritual lesson we gained from this experience. If I could get so excited about presenting a used car to my wife, how much more enjoyment will Jesus Christ feel when He unfolds to us the grandeur of His kingdom that beggars description? Such a thought transforms my previous ideas of the Second Coming. Jesus is not a God to be feared, but a Friend to be loved who has gone to infinite pains to

secure our company forever. His wish expressed that day so long ago has not diminished. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Christ's greatest wish is for our presence. His greatest joy will be in revealing His wealth to us. And as our High Priest, He continues to pray that we will one day be with Him. May our hearts beat in unison with His as we wait in hope for that great day. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

(Endnotes)

1 Cf. John 5:28, 29; Matthew 8:11; 17:3; Revelation 21:4, 21; John 14:2.

2 All Scriptures are from the *New King James Version*.

3 Stephanie Heinatz, "Military dad pays a 'special' visit," *Daily Press*, January 15, 2008, A1, [http://www.dailypress.com/news/dp-news\\_surprise](http://www.dailypress.com/news/dp-news_surprise) (accessed January 15, 2008).

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## The Sabbath: A Royal Delight *by Jo Ann Davidson*

As a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, I have had great appreciation

for the Sabbath as a student, and now as a wife and mother. This affection for the Sabbath increased impressively when our family had the privilege of living in Israel and I became aware of the profound love of the Sabbath that the Jewish people express. After all, four generations of Sabbath-keeping in my family is nothing compared with the thousands of years that the Jewish people have been celebrating the glory of the Sabbath. Through their influence, even the preparation for the Sabbath on Friday has come to have a special joy. I resonated with their suggestion that the Sabbath starts coming in all Friday afternoon, and by sundown it is all here. Even this expression helped to enhance the anticipation for Sabbath's royal arrival.

Right at sunset, Jewish families gather to enter sacred time together. The mother lights the Sabbath candles and prays a blessing over her family. The husband blesses his wife, reading or singing to her from Song of Songs or Proverbs 31:10 and following, reminding his wife of his appreciation and affection for her. The wife blesses her husband with the words of Psalm 112 and expresses her joy in his large affections. The father then prays a blessing on the children, while surrounding them with his arms or by placing his hands on their shoulders or head. Every Friday night as the Sabbath begins, after a busy week of complex schedules and work patterns, the family leaves that all behind and renews their family bonds. Deeply moved by exposure to these centuries-

old traditions, I grew in the awareness that the Sabbath is much more than not Sunday! And I came to welcome its arrival with much more joy!

All week long, one continually juggles unrelenting responsibilities and demands of work. Time almost becomes an "enemy" as deadlines and obligations keep piling up. Yet, though Friday presents additional tasks to prepare for the Sabbath, these are blessedly different, for they remind me that Sabbath is just ahead, a day when I can luxuriate in time rather than fight

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it. Instead of being chained to a busy, demanding routine, I will soon be able to break loose and breathe freely again. I like the way Francine Klagsbrun states it: "The freedom of Shabbat comes from the potential it holds to control time, perhaps the most far reaching form of freedom anyone can experience."<sup>1</sup>

The Sabbath also reminds me of my origin from the hand of God Himself,

and that He has bid me and all His human children to celebrate His grand creation with Him (Exod 20:8-11). Thus the preparations for Sabbath take on a remarkable flavor of preparing for the "royal delight" of the Sabbath—as God Himself expresses it in Isaiah 58:13. The house is readied, the meals are prepared, and aromas of favorite foods fill the rooms, reminding the whole family that the Sabbath is nearly here. Not just any dishes on the table will do in this "Palace in Time." Only our best china and crystal, along with fresh flowers and candlelight, would be elegant enough to capture the regal nature of the glorious Sabbath hours.

And then, right before sundown, the phone is turned off, so its incessant ringing, which is necessary all week, cannot interrupt the peaceful atmosphere of Sabbath time, as God draws near and fulfills His promise to dwell with us. Sabbath candles are lit and shed their golden ambience. And our family gathers to again renew warm fellowship that is so hard to come by during a busy week.

Thus, each week of work ends with a magnificent climax. Sabbath is more than a day to collapse and recuperate. Rather it is the zenith of living. It is the gift of our Creator to this weary world: the opportunity to enter His royal "palace in time," as the renowned Jewish author Abraham Heschel describes it.<sup>2</sup>

God has also promised to restore the resplendence of the original Eden at the end of time. Thus, each royal Sabbath, coming at the end of six days of work, becomes a welcome weekly foretaste of heaven itself. In fact, Ellen White reminds us that all we have left from the Garden of Eden is marriage and the Sabbath. And each Friday evening, as the Sabbath begins, God draws us back to the Garden of Eden to bask in the initial

gifts He gave to humanity.<sup>3</sup>

I had always thought that the Sabbath was something I did for God. But I am learning that the Sabbath is much more than thinking about what I cannot or should not do. Rather, it is an extraordinary gift of hallowed time from my Creator. My work will never be done. But every Sabbath I can cease worrying about my work and all the clamor to get things done during the past six days, and rest in God's "finished work." I can truly rest because the "government is upon His shoulders" (Isaiah 9:6). Think of the radical declaration the seventh-day Sabbath proclaims. God "commands a blessing!" He doesn't want us to work incessantly, desiring that we rest a seventh of our lives! As a "creation ordinance," it comes anew each week to all mankind. When the "Lord of the Sabbath" later walked on earth, He reminded us again that "the Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). Perhaps Adventists have been slow to recognize the tones of tenderness in God's voice as He extends His Sabbath invitation.

(Endnotes)

1 Francine Klagsbrun, *The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day* (New York: Harmony Books, 2002), 38.

2 See Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 12-24.

3 "There were two institutions founded in Eden that were not lost in the fall,—the Sabbath and the marriage relation. These were carried by man beyond the gates of paradise. He who loves and observes the Sabbath, and maintains the purity of the marriage institution, thereby proves himself the friend of man and the friend of God" (Ellen White, "The Creation Sabbath," *The Signs of the Times*, February 28, 1884, par. 11). See also: "The Sabbath commandment is placed in the midst of the Decalogue, and it was instituted in Eden at the same time that God instituted the marriage relation. God gave the Sabbath as a memorial of his creative power and works, 'for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.' He made its observance obligatory upon man, in order that he might

contemplate the works of God, dwell upon his goodness, his mercy, and love, and through nature look up to nature's God. If man had always observed the Sabbath, there would never have been an unbeliever, an infidel, or an atheist in the world" (Idem., "The Test of Loyalty," *The Signs of the Times*, February 13, 1896 par. 7).

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## Smelling Like the Sheep *by Mike Ortel*

At an office staff meeting a few years ago, my Conference President was leading a discussion about leadership. He had just read a book in which the author had made a leadership symbol. “In today’s ministry, the pastor doesn’t smell like the sheep anymore.” That idea took me by surprise. My mind reflected on Jesus’ ministry and wondered if that model was relevant for today.

Biblically, it states that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. His Sheep knew His voice and followed Him. Jesus was known as one who “mingled with men as one who desired their good.”<sup>1</sup>

In much of our training for ministry, there is a mentality that promotes pastoral leaders as CEOs. It suggests that as a teacher or organizer, the pastor remains a distance from his congregation, doesn’t get too close, and primarily operates in a supervisory mode. Mingling is not a part of the ministry that is highly promoted or taught.

Perhaps with today’s society and a fear that exists to allow our parishioners to really know us, a safe and comfortable position is to stay our distance, to be a bit aloof for protection and the good of our profession. I wonder, though, if God had another idea. I wonder if our God, who knew our world would be technologically sharp, prepared us from the beginning to be relationally sensitive.

Returning to the shepherd/sheep concept, we remember how intensely involved the shepherd was with his sheep. Let’s face it, they, the sheep,

were helpless and the shepherd knew what, when, and how their needs were to be met.

When Jesus did ministry on this earth, He did a phenomenal thing. He understood the mindset of the day, the exclusiveness which caste promotes; He understood the misrepresentation people had of His Father; and He committed to demonstrate to us how to do ministry. He actually left the comfort zone of His familiar culture and mingled among men and women and children! If He had an office, a computer or a cell phone, He could have easily hidden behind that technology and served. However, Jesus mingled. He smelled like His sheep! He didn’t mingle with people just at the synagogue on Sabbath. He took the initiative and went where the people were during the week. He made Himself available. In fact, He went out of His way to relate. He was intentional about being with people. He was intentional about being available—knowing His people.

When Jesus mingled, He did so after spending meaningful time with His heavenly Father. He saw that people

needed to experience His Father’s friendship, too. He saw how lonely, sad, or harried people were. He mingled with them to show them a better way.

Recently I heard of a pastor who, although in a conference position, started visiting in the homes of members at a church which had been without a minister for many months. Visit after visit, the members shared how much they appreciated a pastoral visit. “It has been years since any pastor has been in our home.” One member stated she “never saw the pastor or any other church member in her home once she was baptized.” Attendance at the church increased; tithe went up; participation and a sense of family began to emerge. The visiting pastor even knew what the needs of the congregation were so he could prayerfully prepare his sermons week after week. All profited.

There are all types, sizes, and styles of churches in the Adventist denomination. Perhaps the pastor is called for a particular purpose or need that a church may circumstantially have at a particular time. However, smelling like the sheep, leaders mingling with members, seems to be part of the Good Shepherd’s plan of sharing the gospel.

How have we been smelling lately?

(Endnotes)

1 Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1905), 143.

*Mike Ortel is president of the Northern New England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He and his wife, Lynn, live in Falmouth, Maine. Among other interests, the Ortels have a burden for marriage and family enrichment, and have led numerous retreats on this subject.*

***However, Jesus mingled. He smelled like His sheep . . . He took the initiative and went where the people were during the week.***





## How Do We Stand? *by Ellen G. White*

Today let the question come home to the heart of every one who professes the name of Christ,

“Dost thou believe in the Son of God?” Not, “Do you admit that Jesus is the Redeemer of the world?” Not to soothe your conscience and the consciences of others by saying, “I believe,” and think that is all there is to be done. But do you believe with all your heart that Jesus is your Saviour? Do you bring him into your life, and weave him into your character, until you are one with Christ? Many accept Jesus as an article of belief, but they have no saving faith in him as their sacrifice and Saviour. They have no realization that Christ has died to save them from the penalty of the law which they have transgressed, in order that they may be brought back to loyalty to God. Do you believe that Christ, as your substitute, pays the debt of your transgression? Not, however, that you may continue in sin, but that you may be saved from your sins; that you, through the merits of his righteousness, may be re-instated to the favor of God. Do you know that a holy and just God will accept your efforts to keep his law, through the merits of his own beloved Son who died for your rebellion and sin?

You may say that you believe in Jesus, when you have an appreciation of the cost of salvation. You may make this claim, when you feel that Jesus died for you on the cruel cross of Calvary; when you have an intelligent, understanding faith that his death makes it possible for

you to cease from sin, and to perfect a righteous character through the grace of God, bestowed upon you as the purchase of Christ’s blood. The eyes of fallen men may be anointed with the eye-salve of spiritual comprehension, and they may see themselves as they really are,—poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. They may be brought to realize their need of repentance toward God, and

**You may say that you believe in Jesus, when you have an appreciation of the cost of salvation. You may make this claim, when you feel that Jesus died for you on the cruel cross of Calvary;**

faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

The plan of salvation is not appreciated as it should be. It is not

discerned or comprehended. It is made altogether a cheap affair; whereas to unite the human with the divine, required an exertion of Omnipotence. It was necessary that a great condescension should be made on the part of God in behalf of fallen man, who had transgressed the unchangeable law of Jehovah. Christ, by clothing his divinity with humanity, elevates humanity in the scale of moral value to an infinite worth. But what a condescension on the part of God, and on the part of his only begotten Son, who was equal with the Father! All this had to be done because God’s law had been transgressed.

So great has been the spiritual blindness of men, that they have sought to make of none effect the word of God. They have declared by their traditions, that the great plan of redemption was devised, in order to abolish, and make of none effect, the law of God; when Calvary is the mighty argument that proves the immutability of the precepts of Jehovah. The fact that God had to give his only begotten Son to die for a race condemned by the law, is sufficient to prove that the law could not be altered one jot or tittle. The professed Christian world is indeed in need of eye-salve, that they may see the character of God and his law. Their prayer should be as was David’s of old, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

*Ellen G. White was a prophet in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her ministry spanned over 60 years in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This excerpt was taken from an article in the July 24, 1888 issue of the Review and Herald.*



# The In-Christ Motif: Objective and Subjective Dimensions

By Clinton Baldwin

Some New Testament scholars claim that the *in-Christ* motif is the center of Paul's

theology.<sup>1</sup> Paul used the term *en Christo*, (Greek), *in Christ*, and other related terms such as, "in the Lord," "in Him," "with Christ," "through Christ," dozens of times throughout his writings.<sup>2</sup> Paul's use of these words so far outnumbers other New Testament writers that these concepts could practically be labeled a distinctive Pauline formula.<sup>3</sup>

His employment of this theme can be seen against the background that throughout the New Testament, the Christ event, that is, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is the definitive lens through which all of God's communication with humanity is filtered (John 5:39-40; Heb 1:1-3). Not only does all of God's communication with humanity now refract through the Christ event, but all of humanity's actions with God are now defined and empowered through this reality. Whereas in Judaism a person's relationship to God and society was measured by his faith relation to the *Torah*, with the advent of Christ, all of a person's vertical (God-ward) and horizontal (person-to-person) dealings are measured and defined by his relationship to Christ.<sup>4</sup> As the writer of Hebrews articulates, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" (Heb 1:1-2, NIV).

Thus, the *in-Christ* experience could be summarized in part as, "The Christian's new environment. It is analogous to the air. As we are in the air and the air is in us, so we are in Christ and Christ is in us."<sup>5</sup> This *in-Christ* experience can also

be described as a mystical union between Christ and the believer, which is a concrete reality. Two principal dimensions to this reality that can be derived from the New Testament are the objective and the subjective dimensions.

## The Objective Dimension

An objective reality is one that exists irrespective of our knowledge of, appreciation for, or contribution to that reality. Gravity, the sun, and the air are

**Simply put, we are not saved by our acceptance of Jesus. Our acceptance of Jesus is our acceptance of that which causes us to be saved.**

some common objective realities. In many places, Paul presents the Christ event as a unilateral action of God. That is, a doing of God that is not dependent on our participation in those actions. Those actions are commonly referred to as, "what God did for us," or "what He has, or is doing outside of us." (The corollary of course, is what He is doing in us—the subjective reality.)

Justification and redemption have been accomplished *in Christ* (Rom 3:24). We have been foreordained and chosen *in Christ* before the foundations of the world (Eph 1:4, 7). The totality of salvation is *in Christ* (2 Tim 2:10). The ideal mind

to imitate is *in Christ* (Phil 2.5). There is a love of *Christ*<sup>6</sup> from which we cannot be separated (Rom 8:35). In most of the above passages, the objective dimension of the *in-Christ* motif has to do with salvation.

A key passage that probably could be seen as a comprehensive summary of the objective *in Christ* formula, particularly where salvation is concerned, is 2 Cor 5:18, 19. "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was *in Christ* reconciling the world to Himself and not counting their trespasses against them" (ASV).<sup>7</sup>

This passage teaches that the reconciliation was an act accomplished unilaterally by God through the instrumentality of the person of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on the subject of reconciliation Raoul Dederen stated it most succinctly:

Primarily, reconciliation is not a change in man's attitude towards God. Rather reconciliation is first of all an event, an objective event, accomplished by God for the salvation of sinners. God's love manifested in reconciliation is not focused on the moment when the individual sinner believes in Christ and finds his attitude towards God changed from enmity to love. God's love manifested in reconciliation took place long before, "while we were enemies," of God, in the objective historical event of Christ's death. Love towards God evoked in the hearts of sinners by the revelation of God's wondrous love towards us on the cross does not constitute, but is the acceptance of the reconciliation already effected by the cross before sinners heard of it and responded to it.<sup>9</sup>

Put another way, before God saved us in ourselves, He first saved us objectively in the person of Jesus. Jesus relived all of humanity's history and in the process fulfilled all the terms of the covenant.<sup>10</sup> He was humanity in one package, and what happened to Him through the biblical principle of co-operate personality also happened to us (Rom 5). To use Richard Davidson's words: "We were there,"<sup>11</sup>—two thousand years ago in the historic event of the Christ person. Therefore, when He lived right, we lived right (Rom 5:18, 19); when He died, we all died (2 Cor 5:14); when He was resurrected, we also experienced a resurrection (Eph 2:6; Col 3:1).<sup>12</sup> As certainly as God came to be with man in Christ, so certainly has man gone to be with God in Christ.

Thus, in another affirmation of what God has accomplished in Christ, Paul states that the believer sits with Jesus in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). In Col 3:3, Paul asserts that "you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." In other words, Jesus is not just the one who gives us salvation, but He is our salvation. He is not just the one who gives us redemption or justification, but His person is our redemption and justification. He is not just the one who gives us bread, water, light, or shows us the way, but His person is our bread, water, light, and way. All that He seeks to give us, His physical person *is* firstly, that reality for us.<sup>13</sup>

Again, all this reflects what God accomplished for us without our asking, repenting, confessing or even accepting. Simply put, when we think of our salvation, our first thoughts should not be about what God is accomplishing in us through our faith relationship with Him; but what He has accomplished outside of us, through the faithfulness of Jesus (Rom 3:21-25).<sup>14</sup> Without doubt, Jesus' faithfulness to God existed, and continues to exist, whether or not we accept or acknowledge it. There is indeed a dimension of the gospel which is a finished, completed reality that no effort of

ours can add to or diminish.

However, in order for this objective reality to become effective in our lives, it requires our acceptance. Thus, the New Testament also speaks subjectively regarding the *in-Christ* reality. Please note that our acceptance of the objective reality does not cause it to exist in the first place, no more than our sitting in the sunlight causes the sun to exist. Receiving should never be confused with achieving.

### The Subjective Reality

The subjective dimension of the *in-Christ* motif describes our response to, acceptance of, and participation in what God has accomplished for us in Christ. Thus, the peace of God guards the hearts and minds of those who are in Christ (Phil 2:1). Encouragement resides in Christ (Phil 2:1). The churches of Judea are in Christ (Gal 1:22). Believers are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Believers are regenerated, renewed, and justified by the Spirit of Christ (Titus 2:5-7). By uniting together, believers are one body in Christ. Urbanus is "our fellow worker in Christ" (Rom 16:9). In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

The subjective response also bespeaks the fact that there is a mystical union between Christ and the believer that translates into Christ-like actions. This we often refer to as what God is doing in us. In this union the believer's actions are motivated, empowered, and defined by the indwelling Christ (2 Cor 5:14; Gal 2:20). No longer is the law just a code, but, more importantly, it is now a person.<sup>15</sup> In Christ, the Christian does not have a road map; he has a personal guide. This guide not only directs according to the principles enunciated in the Bible, but whereas no rule book can prescribe every twist and turn in life, Jesus is also present through His other self, that is, the Holy Spirit, to instruct in the myriads of life's details not explicitly outlined in the Bible.<sup>16</sup> Christ is not only the gift of God (grace), He is the demand of God (law). Thus the grace of

God teaches us to obey (Titus 2:11, 12). Again, the *in-Christ* motif encapsulates the "Christian's new environment."<sup>17</sup> We indeed live and move and have our being in Him (Acts 17:28).

Without the subjective experience of being in Christ, God would be obligated to save everyone irrespective of his or her attitude towards Him. However, this is not the case, as wherever there is a gift, there must be acceptance, lest strictly speaking, the gift becomes irrelevant. However, the problem with us as humans is that we tend to focus more on our acceptance of the gift, namely, our faith response, and tend to invest it with meritorial value, where salvation is concerned. Needless to say, the *meritorial* cause of salvation is not what God is doing in us, but what He has done for us objectively in Christ.

Unless this important distinction is made, we will be left with a Christ-centered legalism—a salvation that is partially dependent on what God has done for us, and partially on what we do in response; namely, acceptance, faith, confession, good works, etc. Paul reminds that we are not only justified by the faithfulness of Jesus, but by the faithfulness of Jesus *apart* from works of law (Gal 2:16; Rom 3: 20-25). Works here includes even those works that are accomplished through the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Simply put, we are not saved by our acceptance of Jesus. Our acceptance of Jesus is our acceptance of that which causes us to be saved. We can only but accept our acceptance in Christ.

This registers a solid assurance of salvation. As long as we are in this sinful body, it means that God's doing in us, is incomplete, imperfect, and mingled with our human frailties. However, because of this objective *in-Christ* formula, we can also have a perfect assurance of salvation, as, objectively in Christ, we are always complete. God's action in Christ is complete, perfect, and meets all the conditions for salvation. In this assurance we stand firm in Christ.

# Unless this important distinction is made, we will be left with a Christ-centered legalism—a salvation that is partially dependent on what God has done for us, and partially on what we do in response.

(Endnotes)

1 One of the most articulate proponents of this position was Albert Schweitzer, who, using the metaphor of a volcano, described Paul's *in-Christ* motif as the main crater and justification by faith as a subsidiary crater, formed within the rim of the main crater. Albert Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1953), 224, 225. For a brief survey of other leading scholars who expose this position, see James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 390-393.

2 For example, he used the phrase "*en Christo*," approximately 84 times.

3 For example, 1 Peter 3:16; 5:10, 14 is the only other place in the New Testament that the phrase *en Christo* is used.

4 See Deut 1-5; John 3:16-18; 16:9; Col 3:1-3; Matt 5-7; Rom 14:23.

5 A. Deissmann, *St Paul, A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. Lionel Strachan (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 140, 142, as referenced in George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 523.

6 Although this phrase is not *in Christ*, the Greek *tou Christou* "of Christ" certainly describes the objective love of Jesus.

7 See also Rom 5:8-12.

8 Another passage that communicates this reality most forcefully (although without the explicit use of the term *in Christ*) especially

as seen from the Greek is Romans 5:8-10.

9 Raoul Dederen, "Atoning Aspect In Christ's Death," in *The Sanctuary and The Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Theological Studies*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner (Washington: Review and Herald, 1981), 302. Emphasis his.

10 For an elaboration on this see my, *Justification by Faith: More Than a Concept, a Person* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Dikaioma Publishers, 2002), 57-64; 79-119.

11 Richard M. Davidson, "You are There," *New England Pastor*, Jan/Feb (2008): 9.

12 Baldwin, *Justification*, 85-86.

13 See Luke 1:69; 2:30; Jer 23:6; 1 Cor 1:30, 31; John 6:35; 7: 37; 8:12.

14 The genitive term translated "faith in Jesus" can also be translated as "faith of Jesus." The former signifies our faith response to Jesus; the latter signifies Jesus' faithfulness to God independent of our faith response to Him. While the exact translation of some of these passages is debated, most scholars hold that theologically, we are justified/saved/reconciled, etc., not by our faith *in Jesus* (our subjective experience), but by the faithfulness *of Jesus*, the independent and objective reality accomplished by God through the atonement of Jesus.

15 Baldwin, *Justification by Faith*, 182-192.

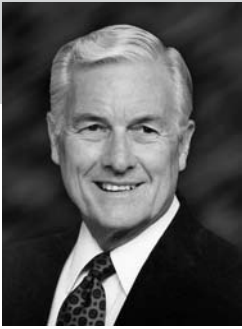
16 Understood from another angle, this

is the fulfillment of the new covenant promise to have the law written on the heart (Heb 8: 7-13).

17 Ladd, *A Theology*, 523, 524.

18 Paul's epistles were written to Christians—people who believed in works empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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## Does John 3:16 mean what it says? *by Herbert E. Douglass*

Probably the best known text in the Scriptures is also probably the most

misunderstood! The Grecian world who read John's Gospel got the point immediately. However, for most of the world since, this text has contributed to a gross misunderstanding of the gospel.

First, it contributes to a misunderstanding of the character of God, and secondly, it turns upside down God's salvation plan.

Here is a literal translation of verses 15 and 16 (note the difference between KJV in verse 15): "That everyone who continues to have faith in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved [*agape*] the world that He gave once and for all His one and only Son that whoever continues to have faith in Him shall not commit spiritual suicide [that is, destroy himself] but have everlasting life."

My translation of "shall not commit suicide" is based on John's use of the second aorist middle voice of the verb, *apollumi*. The Greek middle voice, in contrast to the active voice, describes the subject as participating in the results of the action. While the active voice emphasizes the action taken, the middle voice stresses the agent; it refers back to the one who does the action. *Thus, he who does not make a habit of trusting God will destroy himself.*

In other words, God is willing, sad to say, to give everyone exactly what he or she wants! It is God's

plaintive cry in Hosea 11:8: "How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" And Paul's laser grasp of this basic truth: "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts" (Romans 1:24, NKJV).

**Jesus was given to the whole world, to the good and the bad, not only to those who would choose to accept His gift.**

The thrust of John 3:16 is on the character of God, on His fairness as well as His mercy. Note the simple steps in God's Plan of Salvation:

1) The Godhead *gave* Jesus to this rebellious Planet, He did not merely give Him to us for 33 years! That is, Jesus will be forever a human being, even as He is now our wonderful High Priest in the Heavenly Sanctuary (Hebrews 2:17. 3:1; 4:14-16).

2) Jesus was given to the

*whole world*, to the good and the bad, not only to those who would choose to accept His gift (Romans 5:18; John 17:4; John 4:42).

3) God continues to reach out to every person ever born, telling us that He does not condemn us for being sinners (John 3:18-21). His condemnation rests on those who resist the light of truth that lights "every man [or woman] coming in the world" (John 1:9).

4) He is the Shepherd who makes the first move to find His lost sheep; He does not wait for the sheep to find Him. His front door is always open, forever standing with His arms wide open. It is this "goodness" that draws us to "repentance," not the other way around. In other words, God doesn't wait for our repentance before He opens the front door!

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## The Cross and Seventh-day Adventist Preaching

by Bill Brace

**N**o one should be able to preach the cross like a Seventh-day Adventist!

Now that may sound rather boastful at first glance; however, let me explain what I mean. Well, first of all, let me explain what I *don't* mean. I don't mean that a Seventh-day Adventist is better equipped to describe all the "blood and guts" (pardon my expression) that are a part of the crucifixion. Let's leave that to those who believe the more graphic you are, the more you can impact the senses of the recipient of the description—be it a movie-maker or a preacher.

No, I have made my initial statement in the context of what has been given to this remnant church as the gospel message in the setting of the Most Holy Place ministry of Jesus. To be honest, I'm burdened about this and have been for years.

Maybe a little story can illustrate my stated concern. About two decades ago I had a visit one Sabbath in my church from a woman who had been a schoolmate of mine far too many years earlier. She shared with me that she had been away from the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a period of time but during the interim had attended the services of another Christian denomination. Her next comment left me saddened. She observed, "I had to go to another denomination to discover the gospel, and now I'm back."

Her words immediately impressed me to begin a self-examination of my sermons. That not so coincidental meeting occurred just about the same time I was beginning to feel that God had bestowed

upon my denomination and yours a uniqueness of message. I was growing in my conviction that we were more than just a voice in the wilderness attempting to get the world to listen to the truthfulness of the Sabbath, the state of the dead, or the health message. (Those truths are important, mind you!) No, the gospel had not been left solely to the Billy Grahams of the Christian community and then later to the evangelical spokespersons from the mega-churches. (Let them preach what they have.) No, the greatness of the gospel, and in its fuller and fullest bloom, had been bestowed upon the most unlikely of people—the little flock of Seventh-day Adventism who had been given the sanctuary message.

About that same time I came upon a statement from the Spirit of Prophecy that I had probably read dozens of times but never noticed its significance. It is a simple sentence that says, "The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries."<sup>1</sup> (Yes, Ellen White is a theologian *par excellence!*) All right, but what is the mystery of the cross? With this question in mind, I began to more earnestly study the cross; again, not so much from the context of its physicality but from its meaning, its significance and, especially, its accomplishments for both us and the Godhead in light of the universal Great Controversy.

Let me further mention just one example as a partial explanation of what I mean: our understanding of the second death brings a richness and depth to the sacrifice of Jesus that is without parallel in our modern Christian world. It is the

full revelation of God's *agape* love. Such a truth has a power within it to cause our own hearts to be "strangely warmed" and, consequently, to incite us to proclaim the cross as it has not been preached since the disciples of the first century. In addition, it gives broader meaning to every doctrine we teach. It is not intended to lift up Christ to the depreciation of the doctrines as some have perhaps thought and taught lately. It is the message, the significance, and the accomplishment of the cross—the gospel—in every doctrine.

Friend, I commend unto you the cross. And then preach it, not as others do in a limited way, but in a manner that will prepare a people, not for death, but for translation and for the final vindication of the character of God!

(Endnotes)

1 Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1911), 652.

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