BUILT UPON THE ROCK

E.H. "Jack" Sequeira

Preface

Christians doctrines live and bear fruit only while connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ.

John 15:1-5

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

He is the sum of the everlasting gospel. All biblical truths must be proclaimed in the light of the gospel — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christ Himself says in the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:18-20

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples [followers] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The apostle Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid [past tense], which is Jesus Christ.

He uses building materials of his day as metaphors for the church’s teachings:

1 Corinthians 3:12-13

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

Ellen G. White expresses this same truth:

Gospel Workers, pg. 315

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary.

Sons and Daughters of God, pg. 259

As Christ's ambassadors, they [His followers] are to search the Scriptures, to seek the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other — Christ our righteousness.

Preached outside of the gospel context, doctrines promote legalism; that is, they become requirements for salvation. So Jesus' followers must proclaim all the fundamental beliefs in the context of the everlasting gospel, the truth as it is in Christ. This is especially true regarding unique beliefs (in the case of Seventh-day Adventists, for example: the seventh-day Sabbath, the Investigative Judgment, and the State of the Dead).

Adventists (for example) are often accused of teaching salvation by works of the law (legalism), of being trapped in a subtle form of legalism, similar to that of the Galatian believers in Paul's day. Unfortunately, the charge is often well-founded, for it proposes that salvation comes by grace plus law-keeping or faith plus good works.

Galatians 3:1-3

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Indeed, many Adventists have been brought up to believe, "I must do my best, and Christ will make up the rest." Such legalism is not biblical.

The Valuegenesis survey of Adventist youth in the North American Division, conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, confirmed that the vast majority had no assurance of salvation. Almost all believed that they were lost in sin, because their conduct failed to measure up to God's requirements. Analysis of the findings shows that this uncertainty is a product of Adventist homes, churches, and schools.

In chapters to come, we will examine the fundamental doctrines and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the light of the everlasting gospel cited in Revelation 14. God has indeed raised up the Advent movement to fully restore and proclaim the everlasting gospel, along with neglected doctrines vitally linked to Christ, our righteousness.

When this everlasting gospel is presented, in context of the full panoply of Bible doctrines, the global mission will be fulfilled. Then the prophecy of Matthew 24 will come to pass:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

May that day come soon.

Chapter 1

The Holy Scriptures

Fundamental Belief #1: The Word of God

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.

[2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 119:105; Proverb 30:5; Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12]

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

In one of the last letters he ever penned, the apostle Paul reminded young Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:15-17

...And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Adventists believe that the Bible's main purpose is to make them "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." All Scripture points to Jesus Christ and His salvation. The Judaism of Christ's day failed to recognize this connection, and Jesus Himself reminded its leaders:

John 5:39

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me....

He again emphasized this connection, after His resurrection:

Luke 24:27

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them [the disciples] what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

So Paul's counsel in 2 Timothy 3 is clearly still valid, as the foundation of the everlasting gospel and fundamental belief. In the passage cited earlier in this chapter, Paul lists three basic facts:

The Bible is the Word of God. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (verse 16). The Bible is God's revelation, written down by human agents, and fully trustworthy. Any discrepancies or contradictions that may be apparent in Scripture are due to faulty human perceptions and limitations, rather than the Word itself.

The Bible is the standard by which to test all teaching and experience. Whenever disagreement arises among believers on a given topic, the Word of God must be the ultimate measure of truth. Too often Seventh-day Adventists turn to Ellen White to settle their arguments, elevating her above God's Word. But she herself makes it clear that the Bible — and the Bible alone — must be the ultimate arbiter of truth:

The Great Controversy, pg. 595

God will have a people upon the earth, to maintain the Bible and the Bible only as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.

The primary purpose of Scripture is to make Christians wise about salvation. I have placed this last in the list because it is the most important. The truth of the everlasting gospel, as revealed in the Word, is the only legitimate foundation for doctrine and

practices. When the Bible reveals gospel truths that contradict preconceived ideas about salvation, the biblical position takes priority.

Faith means taking God at His word, even though it may seem to defy human rationale or imagination. This is how it was with Abraham, and this is how it must be today.

Romans 4:16-18

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul presents a similar idea:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10a

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" — the things God has prepared for those who love him — these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

Scripture reveals God's unconditional love and the incredibly good news of salvation. In turn, we are invited to accept these truths, even though they may seem too good to be true.

Only through Scripture can Christians clearly understand the everlasting gospel; doing so through human reasoning is impossible. As Jesus said:

John 16:13a

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible writers also illuminates and guides the reader. And He does so through the Word of God — the only pathway to a saving knowledge of the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel.

Inspiration Defined

This brings us to an important question: What is inspiration? The words "inspired" or "inspiration" mean different things, even among conservative Christians. To define inspiration is particularly important today, as destructive ideas about inspiration are undermining the faith.

Christians today usually define inspiration in one of the four following ways:

the infusion theory,

the illumination theory,

the dictation or mechanical theory, and

the verbal or dynamic theory.

The Infusion and Illumination Theories. These first two theories are often referred to as the "Historical Critical Method," and place the human mind and its reasoning power above the authority of the Word of God, in the process of inspiration. The theories are not viable from a biblical perspective, and we will not discuss them here.

The last two theories, however, are held widely in conservative denominations today, especially among those who hold, with Martin Luther, to Sola Scriptura (the Bible only).

The Dictation or Mechanical Theory. This theory of inspiration is commonly referred to as "word inspiration." Many Bible-believing Christians assume that God spoke, or dictated, His Word and that Bible writers were His secretaries. Those who hold this view believe that every word in the original Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament is inspired.

Because of insurmountable problems created by this theory, Adventists do not accept it. The theory does not explain discrepancies in wording in the Bible. For example, when Jesus was crucified, Pilate nailed an inscription on the vertical bar of the cross. When we read the inscription as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we find that the words are not identical, though the idea is the same in each.

Each Gospel writer gives his own wording to the inscription. Matthew quotes the inscription as, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews," [Matthew 27:37]. Mark records the sign as reading, "The king of the Jews" [Mark 15:26]. Luke sees, "This is the king of the Jews," [Luke 23:38]. And John records it as "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" [John 19:19].

The idea is identical in each gospel, but the actual wordings differ. So clearly the gospels were not dictated verbatim, but the thoughts behind them are identical. The Bible is clearly thought-inspired rather than word-inspired. As we study the Bible, then, we must ask ourselves, "What are the thoughts of this inspired writer? True Bible study seeks to arrive at the thoughts of God, as revealed in His Word.

The Verbal or Dynamic Theory. Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally held to this dynamic theory of inspiration. Bible writers were God's penmen, not His pen. They expressed in their own words the thoughts God impressed them to share. The Spirit may have also guided these writers in their choice of words, but each writer's clear purpose is to express the thoughts of God. This theory of inspiration is known as plenary, or thought inspiration. This understanding of inspiration is now being challenged, however, and the very foundation of Adventism seems to be eroding.

Not only must we correctly define inspiration, we also need to use sound rules of interpreting the inspired word. Too often we make the Bible say what we want it to say, by stringing together out-of-context "proof texts." We will revisit this problem toward the end of this chapter.

The Bible and the Bible Only

Another area of concern has to do with the claim that Adventists are "the people of the Word" or "the people of the Book." Many Christians, however, see Adventists as a people whose beliefs and practices rely primarily on the writings of Ellen G. White.

I once discussed this perception with the late Walter Martin, author of The Kingdom of the Cults. He told me, "I am convinced that if Ellen G. White were to rise from the dead today, she would be horrified at the way your church is using her." He went on to give me several examples I could not refute.

Dr. Martin's observation was correct. The way some have used Ellen White's writings has led observant, honest Christians to label Adventism a cult, and some compilers of her writings have taken statements that deal primarily with the fruits of the gospel and have equated them with the gospel itself. Thus, the gospel according to Adventism has become good advice (with many do's and don'ts) rather than good news.

This has tended to obscure the fact that Seventh-day Adventists are legitimately a gospel-centered people, who believe and teach that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone.

Therefore, all fundamental beliefs must be based on Scripture alone and vitally connected to the everlasting gospel. Because the doctrine of the Sabbath and the Investigative Judgment are often preached outside the context of the gospel, many Christians see Adventists as relying on works for salvation. This has greatly hindered Adventism's global mission to restore and proclaim the everlasting gospel as God's final plea to a doomed world.

Speaking of last-day events, Jesus prophesized.

Matthew 24:14

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

In response to those who were opposing the precious message of Christ's righteousness and righteousness by faith, in 1888 Ellen G. White penned these words:

Review and Herald, March 11, 1890

You will meet with those who will say, "You are too much excited over this matter. You are too much in earnest. You should not be reaching for the righteousness of Christ, and making so much of that. You should preach the law." As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law, and there will be sap and nourishment in the preaching that will be as food to the famishing flock of God.

That same year, she penned these words:

Faith and Works, pgs. 15-16

On the one hand, religionists [referring to Dispensationalists] generally have divorced the law and the gospel, while we [Seventh-day Adventists] have, on the other hand, almost done the same from another standpoint. We have not held up before the people the righteousness of Christ and the full significance of His great plan of redemption. We have left out Christ and His matchless love, brought in theories and reasoning, and preached argumentative discourses.

The Bible and Ellen G. White

While Ellen G. White possessed a special gift from God, her writings are not to take the place of the Bible, but to guide the church in proclaiming the everlasting gospel. The threat of misusing her writings pales, however, in comparison to the dangerous infiltration of liberal views of inspiration in the church. The subtle introduction of these views is destroying the very foundation of the gospel message and the church's fundamental beliefs.

Some Adventist scholars, with high academic degrees from prestigious universities, are now teaching future pastors new ideas about the Bible's inspiration. These ideas are based on the "historical-critical method" of Bible interpretation, in which the human mind becomes the ultimate measuring stick of truth. This undermines the authority of Scripture as the inspired Word of God.

We do not have space here to deal in full with the issue of the historical-critical method and its effect on one's view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. But I do recommend Eta Linnamann's book, Historical Criticism of the Bible: Reflections of a

Bultmannian Turned Evangelical, to those who would like to study the issue further. The book is published by Baker Book House of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is the story of her experience as a former supporter of the historical-critical method.

The Illumination of the Holy Spirit

The church's first fundamental belief correctly states that all Scripture is inspired by God. But no matter how meticulously one applies the rules of interpretation, this in itself does not ensure a correct understanding of God's Word. The Bible, after all, is a spiritual guide, not a mere academic textbook. Yes, we must follow sound rules of interpretation. But unless the Holy Spirit illuminates the thinking, the conclusions drawn will be superficial and incomplete.

The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers, and now He illuminates and guides the reader's mind into all truth, when he or she approaches God's Word prayerfully and in a humble spirit. Following all the right rules is meaningless without the right attitude and a prayerful approach to God's Word. Consider this, Paul's statement to the Corinthian Christians:

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us understanding. It is our responsibility to meditate prayerfully over the Word of God, as the Holy Spirit illuminates. Jesus promised His disciples,

John 16:13-15

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

A primary function of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all truth, and we must claim that promise when we study God's Word. Matthew illustrates this in the life of Peter:

Matthew 16:13-17

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

Biblical Hermeneutics

We must keep in mind when we come to God's Word that each text, or passage of Scripture, may be interpreted in one of three ways. The technical names for these three approaches to interpreting Scripture are: (1) eisegesis; (2) exegesis; and (3) spiritualizing.

Eisegesis means reading one's own preconceived ideas into a text, making a text — or even the whole Bible — say what one wants it to say, rather than what the inspired writer intended to convey. This approach is obviously unacceptable, yet is common among Christians.

A while back, an unsolicited magazine arrived in my mail, containing an article on the important subject of justification by faith. In it, the author quoted Romans 2:13 as proof that we are not justified by faith alone, but by works of the law, as well. The text itself reads:

Romans 2:13

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Now, on the surface this text might seem to support such a view. But when we examine the verse's context, we find that it is saying the opposite. For here Paul is addressing his fellow Jews, who believe in justification by works of the law. According to verse 17, the Jews were boasting of their knowledge of the law, and Paul's response in essence is: "The fact that you have a clear, explicit knowledge of the law and believe in it does not qualify you for heaven. The law demands perfect obedience. If you want to be justified by the law, you must obey it perfectly and continually. Nothing else will do, as far as the law is concerned." This is the message of verse 23!

Continuing to read, we find in verses 17-24 that Paul explicitly states:

Romans 2:17-24

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth — you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

“You call yourselves Jews. You boast about your knowledge of God. You claim to be teachers of the law, and instructors of the blind. Yet you who teach each other and brag about the law, are you not dishonoring God by breaking the law?”

Like many Christians today, the Jews in Paul’s day gave lip service to the law, and they defended the letter of the law. They conformed outwardly to a set of rules, but were so far removed from the loving spirit of the law that they became obstacles to those who were earnestly seeking God’s will.

Paul is telling these misguided teachers that it is not enough to know the law, or even to believe in the law. If a person wants to be justified by means of the law, he or she must keep it in every detail — in thought, word, and deed — something no fallen human being has ever accomplished on his own.

Romans 10:5

Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”

Galatians 3:10-13

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”

Paul makes it clear in all his epistles that justification is by faith alone, through grace alone, and because of Christ alone, and defines the good news of the gospel as “the righteousness of God.”

Romans 1:15-17

That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to

everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Romans 3:21

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

God justifies sinners who put their faith in Christ apart from their works of the law.

Romans 3:28

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Romans 4:5

However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

But the writers of the article in question chose to take Romans 2:13 [above] out of context and, in so doing, were able to make it appear that Paul actually teaches that which he consistently condemns!

Galatians 2:15-16

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

From this example of eisegesis, we see how important it is to follow sound rules of interpretation if we are to come to a saving knowledge of the truth.

Exegesis. This method of Bible interpretation means to draw out of a text the meaning the Bible writers intended for their readers. This is the correct method of interpreting

any passage of Scripture. We must always bear in mind that the Bible writers were writing, first of all, to people of their own time. So we need to put ourselves in their shoes, as far as possible, by considering the historical, geographical, and cultural setting in which the passage was written.

We also need to pay special attention to the action words, or verbs, in Scripture. At the end of this chapter, I have listed some basic rules we should apply, if we hope to reach a correct exegesis of a passage of Scripture.

Spiritualizing. To spiritualize a text means to take a text or a biblical passage and give it a spiritual meaning or application that may not be what the writer himself had in mind, but one that is nevertheless in harmony with what the Word of God teaches. (Let us not confuse this method of interpretation with what some people refer to as "spiritualizing away" the literal meaning of a text. That is another situation, altogether.)

An excellent example of true "spiritualizing" is the lesson most preachers draw from the parable of the prodigal son, illustrating the unconditional love of God for sinners. Ellen White, herself, does this. But though the parable does manage to illustrate God's unconditional, redeeming love, this lesson is secondary in Christ's actual story.

As recorded in Luke 15, Jesus uses the story to respond to scribes and Pharisees who are murmuring against Him because He eats with publicans and sinners — the prodigals of His day.

Luke 15:1-2

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

The Pharisees see this as reprehensible behavior on the part of a religious leader such as Jesus.

Jesus responds by telling three parables, in series: The Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin, and finally, the Parable of the Lost Boy, or Prodigal Son. In

the first two parables, He illustrates God's attitude toward sinners — that there is great rejoicing in heaven on behalf of every reclaimed sinner.

But Jesus saves His most specific response until the final story in the trilogy — that of the Prodigal Son. He wants to contrast God's attitude toward sinners with the judgmental murmurings of His accusers. So Jesus presents the Father's attitude toward his erring son as an example of God's acceptance of those who have turned their backs on Him, but now want to come back. Like this loving father, God is constantly waiting to welcome sinners back into the fold; the story eloquently presents this side of God the Father.

But this is not the Parable's punch line. That comes with the arrival on the scene of the self-righteous older brother, whose unforgiving attitude toward his brother represents the scribes and Pharisees' hateful attitude toward sinners — the same spirit we see among the self-righteous in our churches today.

To spiritualize a passage of Scripture is by no means wrong; to attach a spiritual meaning that may not have been the primary point being made by the Bible writers is common practice, and often Ellen White spiritualizes a text rather than interpreting it. This is why those of us who read and appreciate her work must always do an exegesis of the texts she uses, to discover whether she is actually interpreting the Bible, or spiritualizing it. Both are acceptable, but differ in their intent.

The goal of spiritualizing is to draw a spiritual lesson from the Bible passage that harmonizes with the general teaching of Scripture, even if that lesson may not be the writer's primary emphasis. The goal of exegesis is to determine the primary teaching the writer was out to convey. Every doctrine and truth we proclaim must stand on the authority of Bible passages, rightly interpreted.

As we approach the end of time, I pray that God's people will be recognized, not only as "the people of the Word," but as men and women who know how to rightly divide that Word. Only then can they successfully witness about the everlasting gospel, as represented by their fundamental beliefs.

Bible Translations

Before ending this chapter, let us look briefly at the various Bible translations that are flooding the market today. All these translations may be grouped into three basic categories.

Literal Translations. These attempt to translate the original text into English, word for word, as far as possible. The best example of a literal translation is the famous King James Version (KJV), which many consider to be the most reliable translation. I personally prefer the New American Standard Bible (NASB) as the best literal translation available. A major problem with the King James Version, first translated in 1611, is that the English language has changed dramatically since that time. Hence the need for the New King James Version (NKJV).

Some 800 words in the King James Version are either no longer used today in English or have changed meaning. For example, the King James Version of Philippians 3:20a says,

For our conversation is in heaven....

Today the word "conversation" means two or more people talking to one another. But, in 1611, conversation meant "destination" or "citizenship." So when we read the King James Version, we must remember that some words no longer mean what they did when they were first translated. The New King James Version attempts to correct this problem.

Dynamic Translations. These attempt to take the thoughts of the original writers and express them in a language meaningful to people today. The New International Version (NIV) and the Good News Bible (GNB) are both good dynamic translations. Generally, these translations make the thoughts of the Bible come alive for the average reader, who may not be trained in biblical languages and the historical background of Bible times. For the sake of these readers, dynamic translations often highlight the central thoughts of Scripture better than literal translations. This explains the popularity of these translations, especially among younger readers.

But there is danger that, in dynamic translation, the theological views of the translator will find their way into the final text. This is far less likely to happen in literal translation.

Paraphrases. A paraphrase is a loose translation of the Bible, and generally includes the unabashed theological views and interpretations of the translator. Although a paraphrase of the Bible may make good devotional reading, it should never be used as an authority. The Living Bible (LB) is a prominent example of a Bible paraphrase. Phillips' Paraphrase of the New Testament is an example of an extremely well-done paraphrase. The Message Bible, by Eugene H. Peterson, is one of the latest Bible paraphrases, and makes for good devotional reading. An Adventist scholar has produced yet another popular paraphrase, The Clear Word.

Rules of Interpretation

This chapter on the first fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church would be incomplete without attempting to deal with the question, "How does one rightly divide the Word of God?"

An approach common within Adventism is the proof text method. This method attempts to arrive at truth by stringing together groups of texts on given subjects, and correctly acknowledges that truth is spread throughout the Bible, "here a little and there a little."

This method has been abused, however, by some who manage to take texts out of their historical and grammatical contexts and to support positions they wish to "prove." To help us avoid such pitfalls, I will conclude this chapter with seven basic rules that will guide us in rightly dividing the Word of God. These same rules, I might add, apply as we read the writings of Ellen G. White and other theological and inspirational authors.

Seven Rules of Interpretation

Since Bible writers wrote primarily for readers of their own day, we must always consider first the historical, geographical, and cultural setting of any passage under study.

The meaning of each text must agree with the theme of the unit, chapter, and book in which it appears, as well as the Bible overall. Always take into account the context of the unit, chapter, and book when interpreting a text.

Be sure to study each sentence grammatically to extract its correct meaning. Pay special attention to verbs, since they deal with actions. For example, when a historical past tense is used (aorist in Greek) in dealing with the gospel, it normally refers to the objective facts of salvation — that is, what Christ has already accomplished for the entire human race in His birth, life, death, and resurrection.

Before making a present application of the text, be sure to determine the meaning of each text as originally intended by the inspired writer for the people for whom he wrote. This is called bridge-building and is important in giving Bible studies or preaching the Word.

Difficult texts must be interpreted in light of the clear teachings of the whole Bible. Therefore, study all that Scripture teaches on a given subject before coming to a conclusion regarding a single verse. Unfortunately, some Christians base one or more of their central beliefs on texts that may be interpreted in more than one way.

The New Testament must be interpreted in the light of the Old Testament, and vice versa. As a general rule, the Old Testament promises that which the New Testament fulfills. Both complement each other.

For accuracy, use more than one translation and, if possible, compare them with the text in the original languages.

These seven points are basic rules one should keep in mind when studying the Word. For the more serious Bible student, I recommend Lee J. Gugliotto's Handbook for Bible Study: A Guide to Understanding, Teaching, and Preaching the Word of God. Published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, this highly recognized tool, written by a Seventh-day Adventist, is an excellent guide in understanding, teaching, and preaching the Word. It is recommended as an addition to the libraries of those who are intent on rightly dividing the Word of God.

Chapter 2

The Trinity

Fundamental Belief #2: The Godhead

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.

[Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 14:7]

Note: As this fundamental belief is closely linked with the next three fundamental beliefs, this chapter will combine these three fundamental beliefs into this one chapter.

Fundamental Belief #3: God the Father

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also those of the Father.

[Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 4:35; Psalm 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:28; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Revelation 4:11]

Fundamental Belief #4: God the Son

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was

raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.

[Isaiah 53:4–6; Daniel 9:25–27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1–3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1–3, 9, 13; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17–19; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15-19; Hebrews 2:9-18; 8:1–2]

Fundamental Belief #5: God the Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and — in harmony with the Scriptures — leads it into all truth.

[Genesis 1:1–2; 2 Samuel 23:2; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26; 16:7–13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 1:21]

Last chapter we learned that the Bible is the inspired Word of God that makes us wise for salvation. Closely linked to this belief is the second fundamental Seventh-day Adventist belief — the doctrine of the Trinity, often referred to as the Godhead.

The doctrine itself defies human reasoning. The idea that God is one, yet comprised of three divine, eternal persons clashes with logic; it transcends the comprehension of finite minds, making it one of the most difficult teachings for non-Christians — especially Muslims — to accept.

So some Christians have tried to come up with alternate explanations that make the idea of the Trinity more logically palatable, such as the concept that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are merely different manifestations of one God. In other words, God is really one person, but manifests Himself in these three different roles. While this interpretation may sound reasonable, we must keep in mind that the measuring stick of

all truth is the Bible (as we learned in the study of the first fundamental belief). So we must ask the question: “Is such an explanation Biblical?”

Three Persons in One

When examining God’s Word on this matter, we find that such an idea contradicts what the Bible says. Scripture plainly teaches that the Trinity, or Godhead, is composed of three persons, all of whom are active in humanity’s salvation, which explains why Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into the world and baptize new believers “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....

These are not three names for a single person, but three persons that constitute the Godhead, which is why the apostle Paul concluded his second letter to the Corinthian church with this benediction:

2 Corinthians 13:14

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In the New Testament, the Father is seen as the chairman, or director, of the Plan of Redemption and the originator of the Godhead’s unconditional agape-love for humanity. He directs the work of both the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:18

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation....

John 14:26

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The Son is the Savior of the world. In His birth, life, death, and resurrection, He obtained salvation full and complete, redeemed the entire human race, and is now sitting at the Father's right hand, interceding for believers.

Romans 8:32-34

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

This is the incredibly good news of the gospel, man's only hope.

The Holy Spirit is the one who communicates the fantastic news of the gospel to human beings.

John 16:8-11

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Part of His work includes convincing believers that they have become children of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The Holy Spirit also provides the means of sanctification, reproducing in the lives of believers the righteous character of Christ, thus providing evidence of the saving power of the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

The Righteousness of God

While the Scriptures make human beings wise for salvation, the Godhead provides the means of salvation. This is why the apostle Paul defines the gospel as "the righteousness of God" — that God is the one who planned mankind's salvation, from the foundation of the world, promised it to mankind the moment Adam and Eve sinned, kept this promise alive all through the Old Testament, and finally made this promise a reality in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:17

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Romans 3:21

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Revelation 13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

Because God loves sinners unconditionally and in His sovereignty allowed Satan to bring about the downfall of mankind, He has taken the initiative and responsibility to redeem humanity. The whole Godhead is pursuing this mission. But before we look at the part each plays in redemption, let's see what the Bible teaches about the Trinity or Godhead itself. Some Christians today claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is a pagan concept introduced into the Christian church during the Dark Ages. What they fail to note is that pagan religions that teach the existence of multiple gods (polytheism) believe that these gods are constantly at cross purposes with one another. The idea of one God, comprised of three divine, eternal persons, perfectly united in thought and purpose, is found nowhere in paganism.

True, the doctrine of the Godhead is beyond human comprehension, and the second of the 28 fundamental beliefs acknowledges this: "He [God] is infinite and beyond human comprehension." The question remains, however, "Is a Godhead composed of three separate, eternal persons Biblical?" If so, then faith in the Word demands its acceptance, though it may defy our human rationale.

Only One God

One reason the idea of a Trinity proves difficult to assimilate is that Scripture clearly declares that only one God exists:

Isaiah 46:9b

I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.

This is the I AM of the Old Testament, who claims that there is no other like Him. Christ Himself claims that He and the Father are one, while also teaching that God is one.

John 10:30

“I and the Father are one.”

Jesus, on occasion, allowed His contemporaries to worship Him, though worship was to be reserved for God alone.

Matthew 2:11

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 28:17

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

In fact, the idea that the Godhead is comprised of more than one entity is clearly alluded to in the Old Testament. In the story of creation, God uses the plural pronoun “Us” when speaking of His creation of man [emphasis mine]:

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

The same plural pronoun refers to God in Genesis 11:7, and in other passages.

Genesis 11:7

“Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

The Book of Psalms also refers to God as more than a single entity.

The very Hebrew name for God provides yet another Old Testament evidence that the Godhead is composed of more than one person. English grammar has a singular and a

plural, but Hebrew grammar has three categories: singular, dual, and plural. In Hebrew, the Old Testament name for God is Elohim, which is the plural form of El and of the dual form, Eloheim. So the Hebrew name for God used in the Old Testament suggests not one or two, but at least three persons. God is not El [singular]; He is not Eloheim [dual]; He is Elohim [plural].

Yahweh is the formal Hebrew name for God, and the Old Testament uses this name to refer to both the Father and the Son. For example, in Isaiah 43:11, Yahweh is applied to the Savior, known as Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead:

Isaiah 43:11

I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.

The New Testament then goes on to apply many Yahweh texts of the Old Testament directly to Jesus.

In yet another surprising reference, Yahweh is referred to as "the Spirit of God," or Holy Spirit:

1 Samuel 10:10

When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.

Thus, the name Yahweh in the Old Testament is used to refer individually to all three persons of the Godhead. We can only conclude, then, that all three persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — were considered attributes of the Godhead in Old Testament times.

Most Christians readily accept the Father as God Almighty, but many wonder if Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are divinely co-equal with Him. They point out — correctly — that, in the New Testament, the Father seems to be regarded as superior to either the Son or the Holy Spirit.

To resolve the question of co-equality, we must understand that the Bible presents the Godhead in context of mankind's redemption (keep in mind that the primary purpose of the Bible is to make readers "wise for salvation").

2 Timothy 3:15

...And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

In this Plan of Redemption, each Person of the Godhead accepts a different role. The Father acts as heavenly Chairperson:

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

The Son functions as Savior, under the direction of the Father:

John 17:3-5

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

And the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to communicate the good news of the gospel to fallen humanity:

John 16:7-11, 13

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this

world now stands condemned. ...But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The Divinity of Jesus Christ

Though the New Testament at times gives the impression that the Father is superior to the Son and Holy Spirit, overall the New Testament makes it absolutely clear that the Son and the Holy Spirit are divine persons, co-eternal with the Father. Let's first examine what the Word says about the divinity of Jesus Christ, who became a human in order to dwell among men as their Savior.

John 1:3 declares Jesus to be the Creator:

John 1:3

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Even earlier, in verse 1, John writes clearly:

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Notice that John defines the Word and God as two different individuals, both of whom are God. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. There can be no doubt that John is speaking of Jesus as the Word, for he continues:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

That Jesus Christ created the world is compelling proof that He is truly God...

Ephesians 3:9

...And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Colossians 1:16

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Revelation 3:14

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

...for only God can create something by His breath, without pre-existing matter.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

The first angel of Revelation 14, who proclaims the everlasting gospel to the entire human race, announces:

Revelation 14:7

He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Since the New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, this announcement applies in a special way to the status of Christ as God.

In John 5:21, we find Jesus' claim:

John 5:21

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

This is blasphemy, unless Jesus is indeed one with God.

Further evidence of Jesus' divinity is found in Luke 5, where Jesus is teaching in a packed room and a paralytic man is lowered in to Him from the rooftop. Jesus looks at him and says, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Luke 5:20

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The religious leaders in the room react and murmur:

Luke 5:21

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus responds by reaffirming that "the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins," and He backs up His claim by directing the paralyzed man, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Luke 5:24

"But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

The Jews of Christ's day believed that sickness came as punishment for sin, and that getting well meant that the sinner had been forgiven. They were correct in saying that God alone could forgive sins, and Jesus backed up His claim to divinity by healing the man.

In Philippians, the apostle Paul writes that it was not robbery for Christ to make Himself equal with God, but that Jesus voluntarily gave up His divine prerogatives in order to become the Savior of humanity:

Philippians 2:6-8

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

1 Timothy 4:10

That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ....

All these texts present clear evidence that Jesus Christ is indeed God, who was made man — that is, He became flesh in order to save the world.

The Divinity of the Holy Spirit

Is the Holy Spirit simply a power, or influence, coming down from God? Many Christians believe this, but Scripture clearly teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person, not just God's influence, or power in the world.

Paul tells us, for example, that the Holy Spirit understands and is able to speak:

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

...These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

Acts 8:29

The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

He teaches and dwells in believers:

John 14:26

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:16-17

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

He leads God's people in the right way and can be grieved:

Galatians 5:8

That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

Ephesians 4:30

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The Holy Spirit is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent:

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

1 Corinthians 2:10

...These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

Psalm 139:7

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

All these are attributes of divinity.

The Trinity and God's Agape Love

To begin to understand the Trinity, we must keep in mind that "God is [agape] love."

1 John 4:8, 16

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

As humans, we tend to project our human ideals of love onto God, because our modern languages lack equivalents for the gradations of love we find in New Testament Greek. Human love, even at its very best, is the very opposite of God's agape-love. Human love is egocentric and declares, "I'll love you, if you love me." Human love contains a

great deal of self-interest and, where self is present, it is impossible to have perfect love. Married couples rarely see eye-to-eye in everything, even in the best of marriages.

But God's love lacks the element of egocentricity. His agape-type love is entirely self-sacrificing and unconditional and "does not seek its own":

1 Corinthians 13:5

It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Thus, the members of the Godhead can be perfectly united in agape-type love as they act as one person. In everything, the Godhead is one — one in thought, one in word, and one in action.

Here it bears mentioning that, when the principle of agape-love controls individuals, two or more persons can likewise behave as one. In Genesis, God says "Let Us make man in Our image."

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

This means that human beings were created in the beginning with a nature like the Trinity's, controlled by agape-love. That is why Adam and Eve could be "one flesh" before the Fall:

Genesis 2:23

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

But after sin, human nature became self-centered, and selfishness, greed, exploitation, and division became the natural way of life.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Adam and Eve's children inherited this nature, which has passed down through the generations to all humankind. Yet, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain united in agape-love, without a hint of jealousy or self-centeredness among them. They think and act alike in all things.

Since one of the main gospel objectives is to restore the image of God in men and women, the greatest proof of the gospel's power is when the body of Christ (the church) is controlled by God's agape-type love, reflecting the kind of unity found in the Trinity:

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

For this unity Christ prayed just before His crucifixion:

John 17:22-23

I have given them [My followers] the glory that you [Father] gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

The greatest proof the early church offered the world about the power of the gospel to save was its oneness in Christ, as Luke writes:

Acts 4:32

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

God wants His church to become a reflection of the oneness of the Godhead. As the apostle Paul writes more than once, Christians are many in number, but one body in Christ.

Romans 12:4-5

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

1 Corinthians 12:12, 25-27

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ...So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

As we consider the Trinity, or Godhead, in the light of the everlasting gospel, we can be grateful that all three members are perfectly united in the redemption of fallen humanity. It takes all three Persons to bring salvation, which explains why Jesus commands His disciples to baptize all believers "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (emphasis mine):

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....

Some Christians believe that Christ is their Savior, but wonder if the Father really shares Christ's enthusiasm for their salvation! Yes, Jesus is on their side, pleading with the Father in the heavenly Sanctuary. But they are not so sure that the Father loves

them. Otherwise, why would Jesus need to plead so earnestly with the Father for their salvation?

Paul reassures us, however, that God (the Father) took the initiative to reconcile the world to Himself, and the Holy Spirit convicts believers that they are joint heirs with Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:19

...That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly united and active in their desire for mankind's salvation. All three desire that, if possible, none should perish, but that all would accept the gift of saving grace:

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The Father's Part in Salvation

So, let's look at the part each member of the Godhead plays in salvation. As mentioned earlier, the Father chairs the Plan of Redemption. He sent His Son into the world, not to condemn, but to save:

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Paul writes:

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

More than once, Jesus made it clear that He had come to this sin-cursed world not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. That is what He meant when He prayed to the Father at the end of His earthly mission, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."

John 17:4

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

This is what Paul means when he writes:

Romans 8:31b-33

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

The Part Jesus Plays in Mankind's Salvation

What part, then, does Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, play in salvation? Certainly, He is the Savior of the world, and for Jesus legally to be able to fill this role, the Father had to first qualify Him to serve. This He did by uniting in the womb of His mother, Mary, the Son's divine life (Greek zoe) with the condemned, corporate human life (Greek bios). Thus, the Word became flesh and was legally qualified to be mankind's substitute and representative. For this reason, Ellen White declares:

Selected Messages, 1, pg. 244

The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. ...This is to be our study.

Once He had fulfilled the qualification of representing both humanity and divinity, Christ had to fully satisfy the law's demands on mankind's behalf. This meant two things. First, He had to successfully meet the positive demands of the law. The law says, "Obey and you will live." This Christ accomplished during His approximately 33 years on earth. From His birth to His death, He rendered perfect obedience to the law. Satan could make no valid claim against Him:

John 14:30

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me....

But Christ had yet another part to play in the law's demands: as humanity's substitute. Obeying the law perfectly on man's behalf was not enough, for the law of God declares, "The person who sins must die," and all human beings have sinned and come short of God's ideal:

Ezekiel 18:20

The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.

Romans 3:23

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

So, after perfectly obeying the law, Jesus took mankind's corporate humanity to the cross and met the law's justice. His perfect life and sacrificial death enabled Jesus Christ to fully redeem the entire human race and reconciled it to God:

Romans 5:10, 18

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ...Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

He became the believer's righteousness and the Savior of the world:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

This salvation, which is God's supreme gift to humanity, is made effective by faith:

Acts 13:39

Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Christ is a perfect Savior, and all who believe in Him are complete and pass from death to life, from condemnation to justification:

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

John 5:24

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

Paul, then, can write:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

On the cross Jesus cried out, “It is finished!”

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Humanity can add nothing to this finished work of redemption. All we can do is confess with the apostle Paul, with heartfelt appreciation:

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

The Mission of the Holy Spirit

In turning to the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation, we find that He is to be the communicator of the gospel, under the Father’s overall direction. As such, His first mission was to unite the divine life of Christ with corporate human life in Mary’s womb:

Luke 1:35

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

His second mission was to overcome sin in the humanity of Christ and to produce the righteousness of God in Him:

Isaiah 11:2

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord....

Isaiah 42:1

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners....

Luke 4:14

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

His third mission, today, is to lead men and women to Christ by convincing them that their only hope of salvation is to believe in Christ.

John 16:7-11

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the

Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Finally, to those who have accepted Christ as their personal Savior and who have experienced the new birth, the Holy Spirit is the power behind their witnessing and the agent of their sanctification.

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

1 Peter 1:2

...Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

So from beginning to end, salvation is God's work, vitally involving each member of the Godhead. Within the context of the gospel we begin to understand the true nature and character of the Godhead. The Godhead is driven by agape love, united and active in the salvation of all humanity. The primary purpose of Scripture is to reveal the saving activity of the triune God. Many things about the Godhead the Bible does not reveal, and we have to wait to learn these during the ceaseless ages of eternity. Until then, may

we give the Godhead all the glory, and worship Him who fully redeemed mankind in Christ.

The Godhead is on Our Side

What the Bible does reveal is that the Godhead is on humanity's side in the great controversy between God and Satan and, when all of God's enemies are put under the footstool of the Father, then God will be God once again, as He was before sin entered the universe.

Romans 8:31

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Until then, each member of the Godhead has temporarily taken a different role in the Plan of Redemption. But when everlasting righteousness is once again ushered in, the Godhead will resume the oneness they enjoyed before the entrance of sin — with one exception. Christ will retain His humanity throughout eternity.

Knowing that the Godhead is on our side and actively involved in our salvation is the source of our assurance. It brings great joy and comfort to every believer.

God the Father directs the Plan of Salvation. God the Son, as our Savior and great High Priest, has redeemed us from the curse of sin and now sits at the Father's right hand, interceding on humanity's behalf, meeting the accusations of Satan. And finally, God the Holy Spirit lives within the believer, convincing us that we are God's children, and guiding us into all truth — helping us, comforting us, strengthening us, and preparing us for the coming of Jesus.

This is the kind of God we worship. All we can say is, "Praise God for His infinite love and redeeming grace!"

Chapter 3

Creation

Fundamental Belief #6

God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made "the heaven and the earth" and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God.

[Genesis 1:2; Exodus 20:8-11; Psalm 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Hebrews 11:3]

The account in Genesis of a literal six-day creation is a major emphasis of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. In the name of science, this fundamental belief is being challenged today by certain liberal scholars within the Adventist Church, and not only undermines the cardinal doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath, but presents a subtle attack on the everlasting gospel. In this context, the counsel Paul gives to young Timothy is especially applicable today:

1 Timothy 6:20-21

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.

Creation Versus Evolution

The widely-held Theory of Evolution is the modern version of what Paul described as "falsely called knowledge." It is one of Satan's great inventions to undermine the truth about the Sabbath, which will become God's seal of righteousness by faith in the last days of earth's history (see Chapter 17 for a detailed study of the Sabbath). It also discredits the wonderful truth of the gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we will see

later in this chapter, the Theory of Evolution destroys the Biblical definition of the sin problem, thus indirectly attacking God's solution to that problem, the everlasting gospel.

The moment one no longer accepts a literal, six-day creation, belief in the seventh-day Sabbath, as a memorial of that creation, goes out the window. But any configuration of the evolution theory destroys more than the Sabbath truth, for any attack on the Genesis account of creation in six days is also a subtle attack on the everlasting gospel. Thus this issue takes on even greater importance.

As the title of this book indicates, its objective is to evaluate the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church in light of the everlasting gospel. So this chapter will attempt to demonstrate why it is impossible to believe in any form of the evolutionary theory and still uphold the fundamental truth of the everlasting gospel. I am convinced that the Theory of Evolution, including theistic evolution, is one of Satan's schemes in these last days to destroy the good news of salvation in Christ.

Evolution Defined

Before we examine its impact on the gospel, it will be helpful to consider briefly how the modern Theory of Evolution began and exactly what it teaches. It began when a sea captain invited a brilliant young Cambridge University student to sail with him on a voyage. The student was Charles Darwin, at the time a third-year theology student noted for his powers of observation. What he observed on this voyage left such a deep impression on his mind that he gave up his theological studies and devoted his energies to proclaiming what he felt was one of the greatest discoveries of his time.

He presented these discoveries in his famous book, The Origin of Species, first published in 1859 — significantly, at the very time God was raising up the Advent Movement to proclaim the everlasting gospel. Could this timing be one of Satan's attempts to undermine the global mission of the Adventist Church?

Darwin believed he had solved the great mystery thinking individuals had been wrestling with since the dawn of civilization — namely, how human life began. Since then, modern science has developed what is popularly known as the Theory of

Evolution. This concept has captured the imagination of millions and is taught worldwide as fact in most educational institutions.

In its purest form, it proposes that God and heaven do not exist, but were invented to help believers escape the harsh realities of life. Marxism adopted the teachings of evolutionary theory and, in turn, gave birth to Communism, which dominated Eastern Europe for decades.

Students of evolution are told that human beings have developed to such an advanced stage that they can, and must, assume responsibility for solving the sin problem (selfishness) themselves — the same ideas taught by secular humanism, which have now reached virtually every developed nation in the world.

Evolution Contradicts the Gospel

In complete contrast, the Bible teaches that human beings are sold as slaves to sin and that their only hope of salvation lies in the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Romans 3:9-12

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Notice the clarity here:

Acts 4:12

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

The Theory of Evolution is incompatible with the teachings of Scripture. If evolution is not included in what Paul called "falsely called knowledge," (1 Timothy 6:21, above), then the Bible is simply a huge hoax.

No one can accept the Theory of Evolution without distorting or perverting the gospel of Jesus Christ. One cannot believe in both, for they are diametrically opposed to each other. Any attempt to harmonize the Theory of Evolution with the Biblical account of Creation, in the manner of some liberal theologians, seriously understates the sin problem, for which the gospel is the only answer.

The modern Theory of Evolution teaches that, billions of years ago, gaseous matter combined, by chance, to form compounds conducive to single-celled life. These cells possessed what scientists call an evolutive urge — that is, the desire and ability to adapt to their environments. This adaptive process continued for eons, gradually producing what we know today as complex living plants and animals, of which man is the highest form.

This is tantamount to believing that placing pieces of scrap metal in a bag and shaking them for millions of years will result in the creation of a modern automobile! Indeed, if the evolutionary urge is responsible for primitive forms of life becoming highly organized creatures and plants, why has this process ceased? Why is the process of evolution now on hold? If the Theory of Evolution is scientific, surely we would see vivid examples of the process in action, now and today. But evidence seems lacking.

In its wider aspects, the Theory of Evolution also attempts to explain the development of the entire universe, without the need for any divine intervention.

Theistic Evolution

Many Christians, however, today accept a modified form of the evolutionary theory. This modified version is known as "theistic evolution," and in it God is seen as having created all living things on earth today, including man, through the process of evolution.

Those who accept theistic evolution fall into two categories: (1) those who deny the divine inspiration of the Genesis record, and (2) those who deny the literal interpretation

of the Genesis account of creation. This second group believes that each day of creation mentioned in Genesis represents a long period of time, not a literal 24-hour day.

Yet, they find that it is impossible to believe in the authenticity of the Bible as God's revealed Word, while at the same time accommodating the Theory of Evolution in any form. For example, those who believe in theistic evolution have to deny the Biblical record that all humanity shares a common origin, through Adam and Eve — which, in turn, leads to denial of the concept of human solidarity in which God made from one man all nations that dwell on earth:

Acts 17:26

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

And once they deny this truth, they must also deny the "in Adam" and the "in Christ" concept that Paul presents in Romans 5 and elsewhere:

Romans 5:12-21

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In fact, the "in Christ" concept is the central truth of Paul's theology and the Biblical explanation of the everlasting gospel:

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Belief in evolution plays to Satan's advantage, as he undermines the truth of the gospel.

Theistic evolutionists attempt to harmonize the Bible with the Theory of Evolution, but in the process find themselves explaining away many Biblical truths as myths, fiction, or mere human stories intended to reveal a spiritual truth. Sin is defined as remnants of our animal natures, weaknesses we have not yet eliminated through evolutionary progress. In this view, redemption occurs by dint of mankind's higher nature (his mind or will) as they exert an ever-increasing control over his flesh, or animal nature.

During this process, we may turn to God, or some higher being, for help (such as the "Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous"), but ultimately it is up to human nature to improve its own situation and the conditions of the world. Thus, theistic evolution eventually produces a sophisticated form of legalism, which in any form is the enemy of the gospel:

Galatians 3:10-11

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”

The Universal Sin Problem

This brings us to the universal sin problem, especially as taught by the apostle Paul in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans. According to the Romans 1:18, Paul teaches that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven because fallen humanity refuses to accept the reality of a God on whom they must depend for life and salvation:

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness....

Notice how Paul expresses it:

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Paul is saying here that our highly organized and complex world could not have come about by mere chance. It is the work of an intelligent being, whose attributes we can discern through the things He made. So anyone who denies the existence of God must do so deliberately, in spite of the evidence of creation. This has actually happened, Paul says:

Romans 1:21-23

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

God's response to this deliberate unbelief, Paul says, is that He gives men up to their own foolish ways of thinking and acting, and things became even worse in the human condition:

Romans 1:24, 26, 28

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ...Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ...Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

This was happening in Paul's day, and it is being repeated in our time. Such unbelief will continue until humanity realizes that it does not have the solution to the sin problem.

News media tell us that what Paul describes in Romans 1:20-28 is happening today.

Romans 1:20-28

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned

natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

Men and women profess to be wise, but are foolishly denying God's role in human affairs, looking instead to mankind's achievements for solutions. In spite of great technological advances, humanity has failed to solve the social and moral dilemmas created by the sin problem.

The inadequacy of human solutions to the sin problem is by no means going unnoticed, and I pray that this 21st Century will force mankind to realize that their only hope is the everlasting gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The very foundation of the Theory of Evolution is a denial of the Biblical truth of Creation. The Scriptures clearly teach that God created this world, not with existing matter, but by the word of His mouth. He spoke, and it happened. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that God combined pre-existing matter to create life. Such ideas are mere speculation.

The Bible says, instead:

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen [this created world] was not made out of what was visible.

In other words, God did not depend on pre-existing matter when He created the world. He spoke, and it happened. God's breath is energy, and He creates things out of nothing. Only when we believe in such a God can we trust in His salvation. Only such an all-powerful God can deal effectively with our sins and their wages:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Arguments for the Theory of Evolution

Since the Nineteenth Century, scientists have come forward with five basic arguments to support the Theory of Evolution. These are: (1) comparative anatomy; (2) embryonic recapitulation; (3) the geological column; (4) vestigial organs; and (5) anthropological findings.

However, modern scientific methods have shown that some of these so-called evidences are no longer valid, underlining the fact that these "evidences" are based on human speculation rather than concrete, scientific facts. In fact, the science of quantum physics more and more appears to support the existence of an intelligent being who created the universe.

In evaluating the Theory of Evolution, we must distinguish between observed facts and factual interpretation. For example, suppose that when I arrive at the church on Wednesday evening for prayer meeting, I discover that a window in the youth chapel is broken. The evidence is indisputable: it's broken. But a more difficult question remains: How was the window broken?

The answer is less obvious. Perhaps some children were playing baseball in the field next to the church and hit the ball through the church window. Maybe some young people were fighting in the chapel and one of them threw a chair, and it hit the window. Or perhaps a nearby explosion broke the glass. Clearly, many possible scenarios can explain the observable facts.

We all agree that animals and humans have many similar features. But does this prove that the human race is descended from animals? An equally valid possibility is that the God who created them employed the same basic pattern and building blocks for both.

When I lived in England, I owned a Vauxhall car that from time to time required repairs. Later, when we moved to the United States, I owned a Chevrolet — and it, too, needed occasional attention. I was amazed by the similarities between the engines in the two cars until I learned that the Vauxhall company was a joint partner with General

Motors and that the same basic engine design was used for both brands. The main difference was that the Vauxhall's engine had less displacement than the Chevy's. Now, I could have concluded that the larger engine had evolved from the smaller one. But the more logical explanation was that they were created by the same designer.

Again, consider the stratification of the earth. Distinct layers of sediment clearly occur in approximately the same order in widely separated parts of the earth. From this fact, scientists have developed the concept of a geological column, one of the evidences used to prove the validity of the Evolutionary Theory. We are taught that these sediments were laid down gradually over extremely long periods of time. But the Biblical account of a worldwide Flood is just as viable an interpretation of the facts. As the earth settled following the Flood, it produced stratification.

So we must careful to distinguish between an observed fact and the interpretation of what caused that fact. The observed facts may be accurate, but the interpretation of its causes may be nothing more than human opinion. That is one reason why scientists disagree with one another and are constantly revising their theories. History has proved that the experts are not always right.

The same may be said about the dating system used by the modern scientific method. All such methods of establishing dates fail to take into account the possibility that conditions on this earth may have been quite different before a universal Flood took place, as described in the Bible. In other words, all such scientific dating systems are based on an assumption which cannot be proved — that conditions on earth have been constant and consistent throughout is entire existence.

But we must keep in mind that, according to the Bible, this earth was covered by a layer of water in the atmosphere, prior to the Flood. This layer of water would have filtered the cosmic rays bombarding the earth, thus dramatically affecting life on earth and making all the modern scientific dating systems unreliable.

The Fruit of Evolution

Another factor is the necessary distinction between evolution (one species developing into another distinct species) and adaption (creatures and plants adapting to their environment but clearly remaining the same species). God has implanted in every living

organism the ability to adapt to its environment. That is why, since the Flood, humans living near the equator have more skin pigment that those living nearer the poles.

But whatever the arguments, the bottom line remains: "What are the results of this theory? Has evolution solved the sin problem? Is the world a better place as a result of what evolution teaches?" For Jesus says:

Matthew 7:20

Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

What are the fruits of the Theory of Evolution? Has evolution as taught in the schools as fact helped solve the social and moral problems of our day? Are conditions in society improving? Here are some of the results of the Theory of Evolution:

Evolution has produced the ideal self-preservation — the survival of the fittest. The result is self-glorification, the very foundation of the sin problem. An illustration of where the survival of the fittest leads is found in the ethnic cleansing in Germany during World War II and what has happened more recently in the former Yugoslavia and tribal Rwanda. These situations are all fruits of the idea, "others must die so that we may survive." In sin:

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.

Evolution only fans the fires of self-glorification in a sin-cursed world.

Evolution magnifies the problems of racism. According to the Theory of Evolution, human beings developed from lesser primates at different times and places. So it claims that people who developed later are obviously superior to those who came earlier. This leads to notions of inferior and superior races, and Adolf Hitler justified his idea of Aryan superiority on this basis.

In contrast, the Bible teaches that all humanity has a common origin:

Acts 17:26

From one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Evolution has produced modern atheism. Those who believe that everything in the universe happened by chance have no need for a God. As we saw earlier, such disbelief is the fruit of the sin problem, as described by the apostle Paul in Romans 1:20-28 [above]. Surely it requires more faith to believe that this highly-designed, complex world came about by chance than to believe in a God who created all things.

Paul was absolutely correct when he wrote that, although men claim to be wise, they become futile-thinking fools when they repudiate God and refuse to either glorify Him or give Him thanks for His creative power and redeeming grace:

Romans 1:20-23

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Clearly, evolution is the result of man's inner enmity and rebellion against God:

Romans 8:7

The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Evolution Perverts the Gospel

We have looked at the fruits of evolution, but the fundamental question still remains: How does the Theory of Evolution, including theistic evolution, pervert the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ? The Theory of Evolution denies basic teachings of Scripture and nullifies the power of the gospel in at least four ways:

Evolution denies that man was created perfect in the image and likeness of God.

1 John 4:8

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love [agape].

Therefore, God created men and women with a nature that was dominated by this same kind of agape-love. First Corinthians 13 describes agape-love as unconditional and selfless:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

The sin problem and the downward spiral in social and moral values is the result of the Fall. At that time, agape-love disappeared and selfishness took its place.

Psalm 51:5

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Psalm 58:3

Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.

Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White, pg. 17

Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed. It was the tempter's purpose to thwart the divine plan in man's creation, and fill the earth with woe and desolation. And he would point to all this evil as the result of God's work in creating man. In his sinless state, man held joyful communion with Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" [Colossians 2:3]. But after his sin, he could no longer find joy in holiness, and he sought to hide from the presence of God. Such is still the condition of the unrenewed heart. It is not in harmony with God, and finds no joy in communion with Him. The sinner could not be happy in God's presence; he would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. Could he be permitted to enter heaven, it would have no joy for him. The spirit of unselfish love that reigns there — every heart responding to the heart of Infinite Love — would touch no answering chord in his soul. His thoughts, his interests, his motives, would be alien to those that actuate the sinless dwellers there.

Contrary to the Theory of Evolution, the Bible teaches devolution, the idea that man was created perfect and upright, but that sin ruined our very natures. Since that time, sin has abounded and the human moral situation has worsened. But thank God, where sin has abounded, grace abounds all the more:

Romans 5:19-20

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

Man's only hope is the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evolution denies that irreversibility of the moral damage experienced at the Fall. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus:

John 3:6

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

By this He meant that, no matter how hard one may try, it is impossible for humans to change their sinful nature to something pleasing to God:

Jeremiah 13:23

Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

James illustrates the same truth this way:

James 3:11-12

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

We need to face the reality that evolution has no solution to humanity's sin problem, because no amount of time can change sinful natures, as history amply demonstrates. Only the everlasting gospel can take away stony hearts and replace them with hearts of flesh:

Ezekiel 11:19

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

The Theory of Evolution denies the solidarity of all mankind in Adam. The Bible says that God created all human beings in one man — Adam. In other words, the entire human race is a multiplication of Adam's life:

Acts 17:26a

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth....

The word Adam in Hebrew means mankind. In Genesis 5:2, the word "mankind" in the original is actually "Adam":

Genesis 5:2

He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" when they were created.

This word is used some 510 times in the Bible and, in the majority of cases, is used in a solidarity sense, making humanity many in one.

In creating Adam, God was creating the entire human race, and even Eve herself was an extension of Adam. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve sinned before they began multiplying and, since the corporate life of the whole human race was in Adam when he sinned, all humanity was ruined at the very source:

Romans 5:12-14

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

Evolution denies this fact, and in doing so must also deny God's solution to humanity's sin problem through Jesus Christ. Scripture clearly teaches that, just as all men and women have become victims to sin and death in Adam, likewise all humanity has been redeemed from sin's curse in Christ:

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

The only difference is that humanity inherits what Adam passed onto it, while redemption in Christ is God's supreme gift to mankind. And, like any gift, to be effective it must be accepted and enjoyed:

Romans 5:15-18

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

The incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel is that God united the corporate, condemned life (Greek bios) of the Adamic race with the sinless, divine, eternal life (Greek zoe) of Christ, at the incarnation. Then, by His life, death, and resurrection, Christ fully redeemed mankind from the sin problem, reversing the damage Adam passed on to his descendants.

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Corinthians 15:21-23

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

The Bible presents three vital facts about the everlasting gospel, all of which the Theory of Evolution denies:

That God created all humanity in one man, Adam;

That Satan ruined the entire human race in that one man's sin; and

That God has redeemed all humanity in one man, Jesus Christ.

And because these three facts are interdependent, to deny any one of them is to deny or distort the other two. In doing so, the Theory of Evolution perverts the good news of the everlasting gospel.

Evolution denies a literal six-day creation and, thereby, does away with the hope of the resurrection. The blessed hope of the gospel is that, when Christ comes the second time, He will speak, just as He did at creation, and those who died in Him will rise instantly from the dead, with glorified bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O

death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Evolution teaches that it took billions of years to advance the human race to its present state of development. So the idea that Jesus can instantaneously resurrect those who have died would seem to lie far outside the natural order of God's relationship with His creation. In effect, evolution makes the glorious hope of the resurrection null and void.

Indeed, both evolution and the idea of a literal six-day creation by God are based on faith. Neither can be demonstrated scientifically. The former finds its basis in the opinions of scientific men and women; the later in the revealed Word of God. The important question is: Which will we choose? If we deny the Biblical record of a divine creation in six literal days, we must also deny the resurrection hope of the gospel. If we cannot accept the reality of an almighty God who creates matter and life simply by speaking, then we may as well bid good-bye to all for which Christianity stands and hopes. The Theory of Evolution and the gospel are incompatible; they cannot coexist.

Today many scientists realize that the highly complex world in which we live could not have come about by chance. So some are pushing to include an alternative theory in science classes — that of "intelligent design."

While it causes great controversy among scientists and educators, we must recognize that the scientific method leaves no room for supernatural acts, such as spontaneous creation. Second, "intelligent design" is clearly a subtle way of teaching creation. As Shakespeare once wrote, "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The "intelligent design" theory does not belong in the science classroom since it cannot be proven scientifically. Christians believe in creation because the Bible says so:

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

On the other hand, evolution remains a hypothesis as well, requiring further confirmation before it can claim to be scientific fact. The Theory of Evolution clearly

presents one of the damaging attacks on the everlasting gospel. No matter how convincing the arguments for evolution may sound, no matter how popular it may be, to accept it is to eventually turn one's back on the claims of the gospel. The wise man said:

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

It may be unpopular today to believe in a literal six-day creation of the world. In fact, to do so may mean being mocked or ridiculed. But truth has never been popular at any time in history. Accepting the Theory of Evolution is not merely a matter of opinion, it is a matter of life and death. May God give each of us the wisdom and courage to stand for the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus, no matter what the cost.

We know beyond a doubt that there is no human solution to the sin problem. Modern science has produced a monster in nuclear bombs that can wipe out the human race within minutes. Our only hope is in the everlasting gospel, so let us never deny the facts of creation as recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis. A careful reading of the gospels of the New Testament clearly indicates that Jesus Himself believed in a literal, six-day creation.

Belief in evolution will not only destroy the Sabbath truth, it will undermine the very purpose for which God raised up Adventism — to restore and proclaim the everlasting gospel with a loud cry to the entire human race before the end comes.

Chapter 4

The Nature of Man

Fundamental Belief #7

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under God. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment.

[Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7; Psalm 8:4-8; Acts 17:24-28; Genesis 3; Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; Psalm 51:10; 1 John 4:7-8, 11, 20; Genesis 2:15]

Closely related to the doctrine of Creation is that of the Nature of Man, the crowning act of God's creation. Last chapter we saw that, according to the Theory of Evolution, human beings originated from lower forms of animal life and have become what we are through natural processes that take billions of years. Clearly, the Adventist understanding of the nature of man, as stated above, cannot be harmonized with the evolutionary theory. The Bible tells us that the human race originated as a special, crowning act of God's creative activity:

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us [the Godhead] make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

What does the Bible mean when it says that God created humanity in His own image and likeness? God is a Spirit; therefore, human beings were created as spiritual beings. That is to say, the life that God breathed into Adam (which was passed on to Eve) was similar to God's life (Greek zoe).

John 4:24

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

In the Image of God

While on a physiological level humans and animals may share similarities, God created the human personality with a spirit, that He might have a dwelling place and mankind, in turn, could reflect His glory.

Zechariah 12:1b

The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the human spirit within a person, declares....

Animals have bodies and souls, but, in addition, human beings have spirits, which explains why men and women of cultures great and small possess the innate desire to worship a higher being.

God formed this spiritual component in human beings as His contact point with humanity. He planned that the Holy Spirit would indwell each human being and direct his or her mind which, in turn, would control their bodies. Thus, the entire person — spirit, soul, and body — would live in total dependence on God, reflecting His agape-type love.

God's very nature is agape-love:

1 John 4:8, 16

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

This love is unconditional, everlasting, and selfless:

Jeremiah 31:3

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

As we saw in our study of the Godhead, agape-type love makes it possible for the three persons of the Godhead — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — to constitute one God.

This was the image in which God created Adam and Eve. Their natures were controlled by unconditional, selfless agape. Thus, man's nature, as originally created, contained the image and likeness of God Himself; that is to say, man's very nature reflected God's glory. This allowed Adam and Eve to act as one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Sin Enters

Sad to say, the entrance of sin resulted in agape becoming turned inward toward self. Adam's sin resulted in spiritual death, but it also stole God's glory from within him.

Romans 3:23

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

The New Testament describes his fallen life with the Greek word bios. In the following two texts, the word life in the original is bios:

Luke 8:14

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

Our first parents, then, no longer reflected God's image, and Eve became an agent to entrap Adam:

Genesis 3:4-6

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

The apostle Paul tells us that, although Eve was deceived by Satan, Adam was not:

1 Timothy 2:14

And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

This means that, when Eve brought Adam the forbidden fruit, he knew it was the very fruit God had commanded them not to touch. He also realized that, in eating it, he could not save Eve, only join her in death. Yet he ate it knowingly, deliberately. Why?

The Bible doesn't dwell on Adam's motive, but, since his nature was controlled by selfless agape-love, he loved Eve more than life itself. But the moment he sinned, his nature changed. The agape disappeared and selfishness took its place.

Steps to Christ, by Ellen G. White, Page 17

Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed. It was the tempter's purpose to thwart the divine plan in man's creation, and fill the earth with woe and desolation. And he would point to all this evil as the result of God's work in creating man.

So Adam began blaming God for giving him a defective wife! In turn, Eve blamed God for creating a serpent capable of such profound deceit.

Genesis 3:12-13

The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Prior to Eve's sin, Adam could love God and Eve simultaneously, for Eve was on God's side. But the moment she sinned, her allegiance changed. So when she handed Adam the forbidden fruit, he had to choose between God and Eve. He could no longer be loyal to both.

By putting Eve first, Adam turned his back on God and lost his spiritual connection. This is known as the Fall, and the fundamental belief says, "When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under God. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death."

By getting Adam and Eve to eat the fruit God had forbidden them, Satan corrupted human nature at its very source. Now:

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Results of the Fall

When Adam and Eve sinned, it affected their natures in at least three ways:

Spiritual Death. Since sin is the act of turning one's back on God, the immediate result was alienation from God, or spiritual death. The Holy Spirit departed from our first parents, and their lives were plunged into darkness. They were now spiritually dead, in the sense that God's Spirit no longer had a place in their characters, and they became unable to reflect His glory.

Romans 3:23

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

Only through man's positive response to the everlasting gospel can God's glory be restored.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Adam and Eve's children were all born after the Fall and inherited fallen human nature:

Genesis 5:3

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

Likewise today, every child born is separated from God, devoid of the Holy Spirit, and spiritually dead, and Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus that, before their conversion, they were all:

Ephesians 2:1

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....

Jesus reminded Nicodemus:

John 3:6

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Ellen White describes the human situation this way:

Child Guidance, pg. 475

The inheritance of children is that of sin. Sin has separated them from God.

The Sentence of Death. Adam brought a death sentence both on himself and all the human race. The Bible does not teach that the human race inherited the guilt of Adam's sin (the heresy of Original Sin). That would make humanity as a whole responsible for

Adam's sin, which is unscriptural. But the Bible does teach that all of Adam's descendants suffer the consequences of his sin — the curse of the law — and that all are born on death row.

Romans 5:12, 18

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

According to the apostle Paul, all are "by nature children of wrath" (emphasis supplied):

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But nowhere in Scripture do we find the idea that this inherited condemnation is terminated by infant baptism, as the Roman Catholic and some Protestant churches teach.

Weakened Human Nature. Beside spreading condemnation to all human beings, the Fall brought weakened human nature into harmony with sin. When Adam sinned, the agape that "does not seek its own" did a U-turn and placed self at the very core of fallen human nature.

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Philippians 2:21

For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

No wonder David could write:

Psalm 58:3

Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.

"The image of God in them [Adam and Eve] was marred and they became subject to death," reads the text of the fundamental belief. "Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil."

Concerning his own nature, David admits:

Psalm 51:5

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Martin Luther was correct, I believe, in his interpretation of this text when he declared:

Luther's Works, Vol. 12, pp. 347-351

He is not talking about certain actions but simply about the matter, ...the human seed, this mass from which I was formed, is totally corrupt with faults and sins. The material itself is faulty. The clay, so to speak, out of which this vessel began to be formed is damnable.... This is how I am; this is how all men are.

Ellen White describes the result of the Fall in these words:

Steps to Christ, pg. 17

Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God especially interposed.

The law of sin now prevails and, although human beings are capable of doing much good, all self-generated good works are ultimately motivated by self.

Romans 7:21-25

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Says the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Christian living itself is polluted with self-interest, unless prompted by a clear understanding of the gospel and the truth of justification by faith alone. As long as believers are insecure of their salvation, they remain victims to self, and their behavior will be motivated by fear of punishment or desire for reward. Says Ellen White:

Steps to Christ, pg. 54

Such religion is worth nothing.

The apostle Paul notes:

Romans 3:9b

For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.

The word "under" was used by the slave society of his day to refer to those ruled or dominated by another. Paul adds that all human beings since the Fall are sold as slaves to sin:

Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

This is the human situation, and nothing can be done to change it, as Jesus Himself made clear in addressing the Jews:

John 8:34

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

Philip Melanchthon, one of the great reformers of the Sixteenth Century, described the universal sin problem [in 1530] as follows:

The Augsburg Confession, Article II

After Adam's fall, all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin; that is, without fear of God, without trust in Him, and with fleshly appetite; and that this disease, or original fault, is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death upon all that are not born again by baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Man's Only Hope

This is mankind's predicament, and no amount of human effort can undo the threefold damage of the Fall. Every humanistic solution to the sin problem has failed, and will continue to fail. For nearly 75 years, Russia tried to undo the selfishness of human nature (Marx's "self-alienation") by forcing people to share what they produced and owned. The experiment ended when it became evident that, under Communism, there would never be enough to go around — however much the people shared.

Sinful human nature is beyond repair. No amount of education, legislation, or human effort can reverse the damage caused by the Fall. Mankind's only hope is the everlasting gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is why Christ came into the sin-cursed world, to save every human being:

Matthew 1:21

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

What man is incapable of doing, and what God's law cannot do because of weakened human nature, God did:

Romans 8:3-4

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 13:10

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:14

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

As we read in Chapter 2, God at the incarnation united the holy, immortal, divine nature of Christ to corporate, unredeemed, sinful, mortal human nature. Thus humanity, though spiritually dead because of the Fall, was recalled to spiritual life in Christ.

Ephesians 2:5

[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

Titus 3:5

...He [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit....

The incarnation itself did not save humanity, but it prepared, or qualified, Christ to be the substitute who could legally represent mankind in His work of redemption. Thus:

Hebrews 2:17

For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

The Life of Christ

Qualified as He was by His unique birth to represent mankind, Jesus, the God-man, then spent 33 years living a perfect human life. From birth to manhood, He achieved perfect obedience to the law, as required, and was able to tell the Jews:

Matthew 5:17

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Everything the law of God demands and the prophets foretold about the Messiah finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and to declare before He died on the cross, “It is finished!”

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The Death of Christ

Redemption called for more than Christ’s perfect obedience to the law on mankind’s behalf. God’s law demands perfect and continual obedience, as well as judgment for those who have broken its demands. Paul declares:

Romans 3:23

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

On the cross, Christ met the demand of the law for judgment. He paid the full price for the sins of the human race and, thereby, redeemed it:

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.”

By His perfect life, Christ met the positive demands of the law, “obey and live”; by His death on the cross, He met the justice of the law, “disobey and die.”

Thus, Christ became mankind’s righteousness. He is “the end [Greek completion or fulfillment] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This holy history of Christ is God's supreme gift to humanity and includes the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel. This good news is made effective in the lives of every individual, by faith.

The Resurrection of Christ

After fully redeeming mankind in Christ on the cross, God raised His Son back to life. In doing so, He also raised humanity in Him, totally cured from the effects of the Fall and the sin problem. On the cross, the corporate, condemned, sinful human life (bios) died the second, or eternal, death. It forever came to an end in Christ. In exchange, God gave mankind the eternal life (zoe) of His Son. This is God's supreme gift to mankind.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

In one of his last letters, Paul declared that Christ has abolished death:

2 Timothy 1:10

...But it [grace] has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Christ's Ascension

Finally, in Christ's ascension, God took redeemed humanity to heaven in Christ and sat it in heavenly places in Him:

Ephesians 2:6

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

Christ took a glorified body to heaven, fully redeemed from the effects of sin, and all who accept Him by faith will receive the same. This blessed hope will be realized at the Second Coming of Christ.

Romans 8:22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Revelation 22:20

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Believers at His Second Coming will experience this transformation, when this mortal will put on immortality. Through the everlasting gospel, the Lord, Jesus Christ, will restore human nature to its original perfection in Him.

1 Corinthians 15:50-54

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

Although human nature has been ruined by the Fall, there is indeed still hope — but not through modern science, the process of evolution, education, or human effort. The only solution for the predicament of sin and the curse of the Fall is faith in the everlasting gospel. Only Christ can take away the stony birth-heart and replace it with a heart of flesh. This is God's promise of the New Covenant:

Ezekiel 36:26-27

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Today, mankind already stands perfect in performance, in justice, and in nature — but still only in Christ, and the apostle Paul could declare to the believers at Colossi, "you are complete in Him":

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

The Blessed Hope

The act of conversion, then, does not alter the believer's sinful nature. Christians prior to the Second Coming will continue to struggle with what the Bible calls "the flesh."

But by the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, through the everlasting gospel, believers may experience sanctification of spirit, soul, and body while they await the glorious appearing of the Savior.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-9

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Now let us consider how human beings can experience the power of the gospel and its transforming grace individually, here and now.

The Gospel Experience

Although God redeemed, or reconciled, the entire human race to Himself through Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection (the everlasting gospel), the Holy Spirit communicates this redemption.

John 16:8-11

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

How does this happen?

Since sin is a deceiver, the Holy Spirit must first convince sinners of their total depravity and inability to save themselves. The Holy Spirit points out not only sins of performance, but the base sinfulness of human nature.

Romans 3:9-20

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Ephesians 2:1-3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Titus 3:3

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

After proving that "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified," and destroying all confidence in the flesh, the Holy Spirit then points humanity to the agape-type love of God as the basis of salvation:

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Philippians 3:3

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh....

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Ephesians 2:4

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy....

Titus 3:4

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared....

1 John 4:9-10

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

He follows this up with the facts of the everlasting gospel, the truth as it is in Christ:

Romans 3:21-31

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood — to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Ephesians 2:5-9

[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the

incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

Then He impresses the conscience that the gospel is the only hope of salvation. Finally, He pleads with humanity not to refuse the supreme gift of God, the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel — at the risk of losing eternal life:

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 16:8-11

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Once these things are established, there is no excuse for anyone to be lost. But God created human beings with free will — the power of choice. The gospel demands a person's response, either in the form of deliberate rejection of God's gift (the unpardonable sin of unbelief) or as a positive, abiding faith-obedience in Christ.

This is what justification by faith, or righteousness by faith, is all about. This righteousness by faith is the very opposite of righteousness by works of the law:

Romans 9:30-32

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

The moment Christians place themselves under the canopy of justification by faith, they pass from death to life, and their subjective status changes from condemnation to justification.

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Romans 3:24-26

...And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood — to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Believers now have peace with God and can call Him "dear Father," for they have become His adopted sons and daughters in Christ:

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

1 John 3:1-2

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

The New Birth Experience

Once believers receive Jesus by faith, God sends the Holy Spirit to live in them. This is known as the new birth, or regeneration:

1 Peter 1:23

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

To have faith in Christ means more than agreeing in a casual way to the gospel. It means deliberately surrendering the Adamic life (bios) that stands condemned to death on the cross and pursuing a life of heart-obedience:

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

John 12:31-33

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

In exchange, a Christian accepts Christ's divine, immortal life (zoe) that He laid down at the cross.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Some Bible scholars call this the great exchange of the gospel, clearly taught by the apostle Paul:

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Once believers experience the new birth, the process of sanctification begins — the fruit of the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

1 Peter 1:2

[To God's elect] who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

This transformation of character results from walking by faith and in the Spirit.

Romans 13:14

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Galatians 2:19-20; 5:16

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ...So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

But we must never forget that this process of sanctification has no merit in itself for salvation and brings about no change in the basic, sinful human nature. It simply transforms the character to better reflect Christ's life of love:

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Thus, what was impossible to do in one's own strength is fulfilled in the believer by the Holy Spirit. Paul refers to this as "the fruit of the Spirit":

Galatians 5:22-24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

This fruit, incidentally, is in perfect harmony with the law and is defined as the New Covenant experience:

Hebrews 8:10-12

This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

The Glorification Experience

Finally, at Christ's Second Advent, the believers' very natures will be changed and be fully restored to the original perfection of creation. This is the blessed hope of the gospel.

Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ....

Romans 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Until then, Christians will be battling their sinful natures. The apostle Paul describes the situation this way:

Romans 8:22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

This is the fantastic, incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel. Because of the Fall, the world has come under the curse of sin. The very nature of human beings, along with the animal and vegetable kingdoms, have been damaged and corrupted by the principle of self. Thus, sin and crime abound and men's hearts fail because of what is happening in the world. Man's only hope is in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Since sharing the good news of the everlasting gospel is the main emphasis and primary purpose of the Bible, this incredibly good news of the gospel will be dealt with in much more detail in Chapter 6, on the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ.

Society remains torn by all kinds of factions and atrocities, and every human effort to stop its downward trend has failed. There seems to be no hope of lasting peace in a sin-cursed world. But the good news remains that:

Romans 5:20b

But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

This can be the experience of every Christian.

Chapter 5

The Great Controversy

Fundamental Belief #8

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide Flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.

[Revelation 12:4-9; Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18; Genesis 3; Romans 1:19-32; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; Genesis 6-8; 2 Peter 3:6; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 1:14]

Most Christians acknowledge that some kind of controversy continues to rage between Christ and Satan. Seventh-day Adventists, however, believe specifically that this battle revolves around the nature of the everlasting gospel. The controversy began in heaven, was transferred to earth at the Fall, and will continue until sin is eradicated and the earth is made new.

That this great controversy exists between Christ and Satan is fundamental to Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. Scripture describes the great controversy this way:

Revelation 12:7-9

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the

devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The Fundamental Issue

Ellen G. White felt that the controversy between Christ and Satan was so important that all Christians should clearly understand what was involved, so she devoted five of her main books to this theme. We know them as the "Conflict of the Ages" series: Patriarchs and Prophets, Prophets and Kings, The Desire of Ages, Acts of the Apostles, and The Great Controversy.

Her understanding of the fundamental controversy comes through in the opening and closing statements of the set. She begins the series with these words:

Patriarchs and Prophets, pg. 33

"God is love. His nature, His law is love. It ever has been; it ever will be. Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love."

She closes with these:

The Great Controversy, pg. 678

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats throughout the vast creation. From the

minutest atom to the greatest world, all things both animate and inanimate declare that God is love."

Between those two statements she depicts the grand, ongoing conflict between God's government (based on His law of self-less, agape-type love) and Satan's kingdom (based on the principle of self-centeredness). This principle of self had caused Lucifer's downfall in heaven, and he, in turn, exported the philosophy to earth, at the Fall.

Ezekiel 28:14-15

You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The Fall of Lucifer

Scripture in Ezekiel explains poetically how the great controversy began, and how it will all end:

Ezekiel 28:12-19

"Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre [symbol for Lucifer-turned-Satan] and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I

expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.'"

Lucifer was a perfect created being, but when iniquity entered his heart he became Satan, God's great enemy. The Hebrew word translated "iniquity" means "to be crooked" or "bent." When used in a spiritual sense, it means bent toward self.

Psalm 51:5

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Philippians 2:21

For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

This bent towards self rebels against God's opposite nature of agape-type love, which, according to the apostle Paul "is not self-seeking":

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Lucifer fueled the great controversy by, first, introducing the principle of self into heaven, and the prophet Isaiah describes the process:

Isaiah 14:12-14

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

God is agape, and last chapter we discovered that this agape-type love is unconditional and selfless.

1 John 4:8, 16

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

It is God's nature, His character, and the governing principle of His law and creation. So when Lucifer allowed self to become the goal of his existence, he completely contradicted God's nature and the law of His government. Lucifer introduced a foreign element into heaven: the element of sin.

Lucifer, to whom God had given the highest position in the universe, felt that he could not be truly happy unless the primary object of his love was himself, and this concept lies at the heart of the great controversy between God and Satan. The battle is between agape-style, selfless love and the life principle of self-seeking.

The Fall of Mankind

The principle of self-first brought discord in heaven and cursed the earth when it arrived here. When Satan infected the human race with the principle of self at the Fall, he introduced the law of sin into human nature, and humanity became slaves to self. As the prophet Isaiah puts it:

Isaiah 64:6

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

In other words, even the supposed good we do is polluted with self-interest.

Adam and Eve accepted Satan's principle of self and, to demonstrate the heinousness of this principle to the universe, God has allowed sin to produce its fruit on earth, in the form of wars and other atrocities. Not until the end of the world will this central issue of the great controversy be finally resolved. The final showdown between Christ and Satan is symbolically illustrated in the Day of Atonement service of the Old Testament Sanctuary.

The Day of Atonement

The biblical Sanctuary is God's visual aid for the Plan of Salvation. The service on the Day of Atonement represented the culmination of the Plan of Redemption, where two goats were brought into the Sanctuary. Both were spotless, without blemish, and lots were cast (similar to drawing straws or tossing a coin, today), and one animal was selected to be the "Lord's goat." It represented Christ and Him crucified. The other goat became the "scapegoat" and represented Lucifer, who was created perfect until iniquity was found in him. The central question asked on the Day of Atonement is this: "Who is responsible for the sin problem that has plagued God's creation?"

Since the beginning of the great controversy, Satan has accused God Himself of being responsible for the sin problem. Satan has held that His law of selfless, agape-type love is unreasonable and impossible to follow. God has responded by allowing Satan to develop his principle of self on earth, even as God has temporarily accepted full blame for all the terrible things that the human race has to endure. This is why the sovereign God declares:

Isaiah 45:7

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.

But the real culprit must ultimately be exposed before God can bring sin to an end and usher in everlasting righteousness. Satan and his idea of self-centered utopianism must be seen as ultimately responsible for the sin problem. This is the symbolism of the two goats on the Day of Atonement. It shows that Satan is the one responsible for the curse under which the earth has suffered. It also demonstrates that, once Satan's guilt is established, all blame will be placed on his head and God will be vindicated. The saints will declare, "Just and true are your ways":

Revelation 15:3

...And sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations."

Only then can God cleanse the universe of sin and its curse.

The Great Controversy and the Gospel

The primary issue of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, we have seen, is God's selfless agape-type love versus Satan's principle of self. Now we must deal with the big question: "What effect does this controversy have on the Plan of Salvation, the good news of the gospel?"

While the great controversy began in heaven, it is one that will ultimately be resolved here. When Adam sinned, he surrendered his God-given dominion over the earth.

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Centuries later, when tempting Christ in the wilderness, Satan showed Him all the kingdoms of the world (the entire human race) in a moment of time and said:

Luke 4:6

And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”

Christ did not dispute Satan’s claim. In fact, on more than one occasion, Jesus openly referred to Satan as “the ruler (or prince) of this world”:

John 12:31

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

John 14:30

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me....

He acknowledged that, at the Fall, the entire human race was taken captive and came under Satan’s dominion. Using human beings as tools, Satan governed the world on the principle of self. Self is the undergirding principle behind society today — commerce, politics, education, sports, nationalism, you name it.

In coming to redeem the human race from this captivity, Christ established His own kingdom on earth, a kingdom built on the principle of agape. He announced the arrival of that kingdom with the words:

Mark 1:15

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

And the great controversy begun in heaven is now focused completely on earth. Jesus described it this way:

Luke 11:21-22

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.”

On the cross, Christ bought back the entire human race, delivering mankind from Satan’s dominion and bringing everlasting hope.

John 12:31-33

“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Since the cross, Satan’s kingdom stands condemned before the universe, leaving open only one escape: the gift of salvation offered in Christ:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

To follow Christ, therefore, is to pass from death to life, to change spiritual citizenship, under the banner of Christ.

John 5:24

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

John 15:19

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Jesus can indeed rightfully declare:

Luke 11:23

“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

Luke 12:51

“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.”

For everyone who receives the gospel also becomes involved in the issues under dispute in the great controversy.

The Two Groups

The apostle Paul describes this warfare that affects the followers of Christ:

Ephesians 6:12-13

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

The everlasting gospel polarizes the human race into two camps:

1 John 5:19

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

On one side are those who by faith accept Christ as their personal Savior, Lord, and Master, and have become God’s adopted children.

1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

On the other side are those who deliberately and persistently reject the good news of the gospel:

John 8:44

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Scripture describes these two groups in many ways: as believers and unbelievers, sheep and goats, builders on rock and builders on the sand of self-righteousness, etc. In the final judgment, the believers (sheep) are invited into heaven, while the unbelievers (goats) join Satan and his angels in an all-consuming, life-ending lake of fire.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' ...Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

So, the moment an individual obeys the gospel and receives Christ by faith, Satan loses a citizen, and does not accept the loss lying down! Hence the battle for the believer's soul begins in earnest, and the Christian becomes personally involved in the great controversy. This is the fight of faith that the apostle Paul mentions to young Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

As long as faith in Christ perseveres, Satan cannot deprive the Christian of the joy of salvation, in Christ. But the moment he destroys that faith, the canopy of justification can no longer offer protection.

Scripture nowhere teaches that once saved means always saved, as some teach. Christ Himself said that only the person whose faith "endures to the end will be saved":

Matthew 10:22

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

The writer of Hebrews is even more specific:

Hebrews 10:38-39

And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved. [Emphasis supplied.]

Also:

2 Peter 2:20-21

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

Matthew 10:17-22

Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

The righteousness that justifies the believer and that qualifies him or her for heaven, both now and in the judgment, is secure in Christ. But the faith that makes that righteousness effective is found in the believer's heart, and this Satan can indeed influence. Nowhere does Scripture teach that Christians become unjustified every time they fall or commit a sin. But it does teach that, in deliberately turning their backs on Christ and His righteousness, they also turn their backs on heaven.

Hebrews 6:4-6

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

The prodigal son did not cease to be the father's son when he rejected his father and left home. But he did say good-bye to the father's joys and blessings when he left for a faraway country. Had he not returned in repentance, he would never again have enjoyed the blessings of home.

In the same way, God does not stop loving the Christians who turn their backs on Christ; but neither does he force them to return. Persisting in unbelief is to turn one's back on heaven forever. So,

Hebrews 10:26

If we deliberately keep on sinning [deliberately reject Christ's sacrifice] after we have received the knowledge of the truth [as it is in Christ, and Him crucified], no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

The Battle in the Great Controversy

This raises the vital question, "How can Satan destroy faith in Christ?" Scripture lists three primary ways — through persecution, through worldly attractions, and by perverting the gospel. He will try any and all, if necessary. Let's examine each of them, one by one.

Persecution. Satan first used persecution to attack the faith of the early Christian church:

Revelation 12:12-13

"Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

Christ warned His disciples that, after His departure, they would face severe attacks from the world under Satan's control:

Matthew 10:16-21

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death."

Matthew 13:20-21

“The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”

John 15:18-21

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

But all attempts failed to destroy the infant church and, as the church father Tertullian so aptly puts it:

Apologeticus, L.13

“The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.” [“Plures efficimur, quoties metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis christianorum.”]

According to the apostle Paul:

2 Timothy 3:12

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted....

Satan’s persecution may take many forms. It may be mental, social, economic, or even physical. It can originate both inside and outside the church. It can come from family members, the government, or strangers. Satan doesn’t care whom he uses or what methods he applies, so long as it effectively destroys the believer’s faith.

How should Christians respond to persecution? Both James and Peter offer good counsel. James says:

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance [Greek: endurance]. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Peter puts it another way:

1 Peter 1:6-7

In all this [salvation] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Worldly Attractions. Since the believer's sinful nature remains unchanged at conversion, and even during the sanctification process, the Christian continues to feel the effect of three human drives — "the lust of the flesh (self-indulgence), the lust of the eyes (covetousness), and the pride of life (desire for power and status)":

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

Satan is skilled at using this sinful nature as the point of contact (the law of sin within) to draw Christians away from Christ. The New Testament presents the example of Demas, Paul's co-worker, who was caught up in this Satanic snare:

2 Timothy 4:10

...For Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

All Christians face the great danger of worldly attractions — that is, materialism — especially in developed countries. In one of his last letters, Paul gave this counsel to the young pastor Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:9-12

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

See also:

2 Timothy 2:3-4

Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus describes what happens in a life when the gospel seed falls among thorns and is choked out by the cares of the world:

Matthew 13:22

"The seed [the gospel] falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word [a believer], but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful."

Well aware of this problem, Christ often warned His disciples,

Luke 21:34

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life [bios], and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap."

Perverting the Gospel. Satan has met with some success using persecution and the cares of the world, but his most successful method of drawing believers away from Christ and destroying their faith continues to be by perverting the gospel. For example, using the Judaizers (Jewish believers who opposed Paul's message of salvation by grace alone), Satan was successful in turning the Galatian Christians from the good news of the gospel to a perverted form of gospel that demanded grace plus law and works:

Galatians 3:1; 5:7

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ...You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

Note how Paul responds with some anger when he discovers what was going on:

Galatians 1:6-7

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

If Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus, then the "so quickly" [or "so soon"] represents only one year. If, on the other hand, he wrote this letter from Corinth, the "so quickly" would mean about three years. In either case, it did not take long for the devil to sidetrack the Galatian Christians from the pure gospel of grace.

The very first council of the Christian church, the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15, centered on the matter of perverting the gospel. The same Judaizers who had caused so much trouble in Galatia came to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were ministering. The Judaizers insisted that all Gentile believers could not be saved unless they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses.

The Bible records that Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, and that finally "they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question":

Acts 15:1-2

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

What happened at the council? One thing came though clearly, whatever differences the apostles may have had among themselves on various issues: they all came away perfectly united in the gospel of salvation by grace alone:

Acts 15:7-11

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Had they not done so, the Christian church would have withered away long ago. Satan understands the power of the pure gospel and, from the very beginning of the Christian era, has tried his best to pervert it.

Paul's greatest fear as an apostle/evangelist was that the Christian church would accept a perverted gospel. Note how he expresses this fear to the church in Corinth:

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

Perverting God's Agape

Believers need to understand the crafty ways Satan has used to pervert the gospel. His first salvo was to misrepresent the agape-type love of God, which lies at the very foundation of the Plan of Salvation:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Ephesians 2:4

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy....

1 John 4:9-10

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The nature of this love is the defining question in the controversy between Christ and Satan.

In writing about God's love, all New Testament writers use the Greek word agape. This noun appears some 87 times in the New Testament and always refers to the unconditional, everlasting, changeless love of God, love so unlike self-centered human love. This agape allowed Christ to reconcile mankind to God, while they were still helpless, ungodly, and at war with God:

Romans 5:6-10

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

The English language, unfortunately, has no word equivalent to the Greek noun agape. This has allowed Satan to equate God's love with human love, perverting the very foundation of the gospel and presenting the incredibly good news as simply "good advice," with lots of do's and don'ts.

Even at its very best, human love is conditional, and those who wish to be loved in this world must work hard to present themselves attractively. When we project this kind of human love onto God, we tell ourselves, "I must first be good, meet the demands of His law, and make myself attractive to Him so He can love and save me." This turns the gospel into a subtle form of pagan legalism, in which salvation is at least partially earned by good works and law-keeping.

After the disciples passed from the scene, church leadership fell into the hands of the Church Fathers, most of whom were cultural Greeks. Satan used some of these men as his agents to pervert the church's understanding of God's agape-love. Through Church Father Marcion, Satan tried to substitute the Greek word eros for the word agape in describing God's love.

Plato had used the word eros to describe the highest known form of human love: man's love for God. But the word eros appears nowhere in the New Testament, and this

bothered some of the Church Fathers. So a few years later, Church Father Origen of North Africa succeeded in changing John's sublime statement, "God is love (agape)" to "God is love (eros)."

Human love, even at its very best (i.e., eros), is polluted with self and falls short of God's agape, "which seeks not its own":

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Satan seemed to know if that, if human love, eros, could be substituted for God's love, agape, he would succeed in turning the gospel from salvation by grace alone to salvation by human goodness. The gospel would then cease to be good news for sinners and become merely good advice as Christians came to believe that, to be saved, they would have to achieve God's standards of conduct.

1 Timothy 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

Augustine, the fourth-century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, evolved this idea yet further, teaching that true love was a synthesis between God's agape and human eros, a love he termed caritas (from which comes the English word "charity," as used in the King James Version of the Bible). Interestingly, the present Roman Catholic Pope defended caritas love in his first encyclical.

The Christian church of Augustine's day embraced this new idea and it became the dominant view regarding God's love as defined by Christianity during the Dark Ages.

The introduction of caritas love turned the gospel into a call for a mixture of grace and works, faith and law-keeping. The gospel became defined as infused grace, grace through which "I must do my best to meet God's requirements, and Christ will make up

the difference in saving me." So the everlasting gospel of God's unconditional agape-love was downgraded to conditional good news.

Restoring Agape

The Reformation in the Sixteenth Century corrected this perverted gospel and restored the good news of justification by faith alone. But many Christians today — including the majority of Seventh-day Adventists, unfortunately — still find themselves victimized by the perverted gospel of the Galatians: that one is saved by grace plus keeping the law, by faith plus works.

If Adventists wish to restore the pure gospel of the New Testament and preach it with the Three Angels of Revelation 14 as a worldwide proclamation, they must first restore the true biblical understanding of God's agape-type love.

Only when this happens will the earth be filled with the glory of God, infuriating Satan and precipitating the final showdown in the great controversy, described in the book of Revelation as the War of Armageddon.

Revelation 18:1

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

Revelation 16:12-16

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

This war has nothing to do with the Middle East crisis, nor is it some nuclear war or global battle. This is "the battle on that great day of God Almighty."

This will be a spiritual war, fought between the world under Satan and God's people on earth, the final generation of Christians who, as the 144,000, will have fully washed their robes in the blood of the lamb and will be able to withstand the great tribulation.

Revelation 7:13-17

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?"

I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

Jesus prophesied that, before the end of time, the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

When this happens, the earth will be filled with the glory of Christ, and there will be no further excuse for any who have reached the age of accountability to misunderstand the good news. Those who persist in rejecting the gospel will come under Satan's banner and make war against the followers of Christ.

The Final Conflict

The issue in this war will be the believers' faith.

Luke 18:8

"I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

On the cross Jesus felt forsaken of God:

Matthew 27:45-46

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Ellen G. White describes this as follows:

The Desire of Ages, pg. 753

"The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that their separation was to be eternal."

While Jesus hung on the cross, Satan used human agents to tempt Him to come down and save Himself:

Luke 23:35-39

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But:

The Desire of Ages, pg. 756

"By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was victor."

The big question in this final showdown is this: "Can God reproduce this same kind of faith, the faith of Jesus, in His people — faith that will endure the feeling of God's abandonment?" The everlasting gospel of the Three Angels says, "Yes." Christ will do it in the last generation of Christians, the 144,000:

Revelation 14:12

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. [Emphasis supplied.]

To vindicate the power of the gospel, Christ will allow His people to feel forsaken of God in the great tribulation, but they will come out victorious:

Isaiah 54:5-8

"For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.

When Satan realizes his defeat in this final conflict, he will influence his followers to issue a decree that all the saints are to be killed. But Christ will step in and deliver His people at His Second Coming. This will bring a 1,000-year halt to the War of Armageddon, but, after that time, during which Satan will have been exiled on earth, he will once again gather all who have taken his side since the Fall, and they will attack the New Jerusalem as it comes down from heaven, with Christ and the redeemed.

At this time, fire will come down from heaven and consume, once and forever, Satan and all who have accepted his principle of self:

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

At last,

The Great Controversy, pg. 678

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things both animate and inanimate declare that God is love."

During this great controversy, all must choose one side or the other. May God give each one of us the wisdom to make the right choice, the one that allowed the apostle Paul to exalt:

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Chapter 6

The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ

Fundamental Belief #9

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. This perfect atonement vindicates the righteousness of God's law and the graciousness of His character, for it both condemns our sin and provides for our forgiveness. The death of Christ is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil and, for those who accept the atonement, assures their final victory over sin and death. It declares the Lordship of Jesus Christ, before whom every knee in heaven and on earth will bow.

[John 3:16; Isaiah 53; 1 Peter 2:21-22; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 20-22; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 19-21; Romans 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3-4; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Colossions 2:15; Philippians 2:6-11]

We now turn to the most important fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. While we touched on this important truth in Chapter 4, "The Nature of Man," we now look at it in much more detail. This fundamental belief presents the sum total of the everlasting gospel, which God commissioned the Advent Movement to proclaim to all the world before the end of time. This is the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:

Revelation 14:6-7

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

As this fundamental belief indicates, "In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life." This is the good news of the everlasting gospel that qualifies all believers for heaven, now and in the last-day judgment.

It also addresses one of the key prophecies Christ made regarding last-day events, prior to His Second Advent:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

But before we can consider the nature of this incredibly good news, let us confront a major obstacle Satan has successfully used to deceive many Christians, as he did Eve, robbing them of the joy, peace, and assurance of salvation. It is the problem of the two-dimensional gospel.

The Gospel's Two Dimensions

The Bible presents two dimensions of salvation in the gospel — related, yet distinct. On the one hand, the New Testament presents an objective or general salvation, full and complete. This salvation was completed some 2,000 years ago in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Reformers of the Sixteenth Century referred to this salvation as an "alien righteousness," since it was entirely God's work in Christ, to which mankind contributed nothing. Because it is a finished work, all verbs describing this dimension of salvation are in the past historic tense. The completeness of this unilateral salvation is what makes the everlasting gospel such incredibly good news.

On the other hand, Scripture also presents salvation as a subjective or individual experience in those who have obeyed the gospel by faith and are abiding in Christ. The objective and subjective dimensions are related, yet, for purposes of discussion, must be addressed separately. Failure to do so confuses the objective facts of salvation (a

finished work) with the subjective experience of salvation (an ongoing experience), which continues until the Second Advent. By confusing these two aspects of salvation, many have been robbed of the joy, peace, and assurance of making it to heaven and fail as witnesses for Christ.

What are the distinctions between the objective facts of the gospel and its subjective experience? There are basically four:

Universal vs. Individual. The objective facts of the gospel are universal. This aspect of salvation applies to the entire human race; none are excluded. Here are just a few of many New Testament texts that point to the salvation of all mankind in Christ:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

1 John 2:2

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The subjective experience of the gospel, on the other hand, is individual. It applies only to those who by faith accept Christ as their personal Savior and abide in Him for their salvation:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

John 5:24

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Complete vs. Ongoing. The objective fact of the gospel is that this part is already complete. It is a finished work to which mankind can add absolutely nothing:

John 17:3-4

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Ephesians 2:5-6

[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

This is how the birth of Christ was announced to the frightened shepherds of Bethlehem on Christmas night:

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." [Emphasis added.]

This is what the objective gospel is all about.

The subjective experience of the gospel, on the other hand, is an ongoing process. This is the application, or fruits, of the gospel — the do's and don'ts. While this experience is important and varies in the lives of each believer, it does not contribute one iota to the believer's acceptance before God. Its primary purpose is to demonstrate to the world the power of the gospel and to give evidence of the believer's salvation in Christ.

Matthew 7:16-20

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Titus 3:8

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Unconditional vs. Conditional. The objective facts of the gospel are unconditional good news. This salvation was motivated by God's unconditional and everlasting agape-type love for the sinful human race.

Jeremiah 31:3

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:5-10

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Ephesians 2:1-6

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in

transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

1 John 4:9-10

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The New Testament, therefore, presents the objective gospel as salvation by grace alone:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

Paul defines this objective gospel as "the righteousness of God":

Romans 1:16-17; 3:21

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." ...But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

By this he means that it was planned by God before the foundation of the world...

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

...promised by God from the moment Adam and Eve sinned...

Genesis 3:15

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

...and was kept alive by God throughout the Old Testament, especially through His visual aid of the Plan of Redemption, the earthly Sanctuary:

Exodus 25:8

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.”

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Finally, this objective gospel became a complete reality in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Romans 1:1-4

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

In contrast, the subjective experience of the gospel is conditional. To experience justification unto life one must believe the truth as it is in Christ (justification by faith):

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

To experience sanctification or holy living, the believer must learn to walk in the Spirit:

Galatians 5:16

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

And, last of all, to experience glorification, the believer's faith in Christ must endure to the very end:

Matthew 10:22

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Hebrews 10:35-39

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay."

And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back."

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

Meritorious vs. Demonstrative. Finally, only the objective facts of the gospel are meritorious. This is the part that qualifies believers for heaven, now and in the judgment:

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Romans 3:28; 4:5

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ...However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

1 John 4:16-18

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

This is why the words in the Adventist fundamental belief — "the life, death, and resurrection of Christ" — are the most important. Failure to realize this truth has produced fear of the Investigative Judgment in the lives of many Adventists.

The subjective experience of the gospel, on the other hand, is entirely demonstrative. Its purpose is to give evidence of the power of the gospel in the lives of those who are abiding in Christ by faith:

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Titus 3:8

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

The Problem Defined

Many unfortunate Christians, however, continue to depend on their subjective Christian experience to gain them acceptance before God. And because this sanctification is an ongoing process, with many failures along the way, they often come to believe that they are not good enough to be saved. The Valuegenesis survey, conducted in the late 1980s among Adventist young people in the North American Division, documents this. The vast majority of the young people who took that survey said they had no assurance of salvation. When asked why, they typically replied, "Our behavior does not measure up to God's requirements."

To understand this fundamental belief, Christians must recognize the distinction between the good news of the objective gospel which saves all mankind (unless individually rejected), and the subjective experience of those who accept that salvation. Good works are a natural outgrowth of the power of the gospel working within those who accept Christ's salvation. We must keep this distinction clearly in mind, as we study this important fundamental belief of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

This chapter — on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ — will focus primarily on the objective facts of the gospel. We will look more at the subjective experience of the gospel next chapter.

The apostle Paul writes that the objective gospel is the foundation of salvation:

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid [past tense], which is Jesus Christ.

This is the objective fact of the gospel. Using building materials as a metaphor for the subjective Christian experience of believers, he then adds in verses 12 and 13:

1 Corinthians 3:12-13

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day [judgment or the Great Tribulation] will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

The Situation in Adam

The objective gospel is God's solution to the universal sin problem inherited from Adam. Therefore, to fully appreciate the good news of this objective gospel, it is helpful to review the nature of the sin problem.

The New Testament tells us that the human race today is the multiplication, or extension, of Adam's life:

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

We read:

Acts 17:26

From one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

The life Adam passed on to his posterity was tainted with his sin, in at least four distinct ways:

First, the moment Adam sinned, the Holy Spirit was forced to leave Him, for, in sinning, Adam turned his back on His Creator and gave his allegiance to another. Adam's life was plunged into darkness and he became spiritually dead. Likewise, human beings today are born without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit — that is, they are spiritually dead. Several texts in both Old and New Testaments clearly bring this out:

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

John 12:35, 46

Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ...I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

Romans 13:12

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Ephesians 5:8

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light....

Second, at the Fall, Adam's life was taken captive by Satan, and mankind from birth since then has been subject to his kingdom. In tempting Christ in the wilderness, he underscores this reality:

Luke 4:5-6

The devil led him [Christ] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world [the entire human race]. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."

Christ does not challenge Satan's claim to world sovereignty and, in fact, underscores it often by referring to Satan as the prince or ruler of the world:

John 12:31; 14:30

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ...I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me....

The apostle Paul himself refers to Satan as "the god of this age":

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Third, Adam's life became enslaved to sin at the Fall, and his descendants all share that fate. Jesus made this clear to the self-righteous Jews of His day:

John 8:34

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

The apostle Paul confirms this reality in Romans and elsewhere:

Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I [corporate I] am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Romans 3:9-20

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The word "under" was used in Paul's day to refer to slaves who were totally dominated, or ruled, by masters.

Fourth, the moment Adam sinned, his life came under the condemnation of death; he was cut off from the life Source forever. God had made it abundantly clear to him, in advance:

Genesis 2:16-17

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

According to the apostle Paul, this disconnectedness with the Source of life was passed along to his descendants:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass [Adam's] resulted in condemnation [unto death] for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

The New Testament refers to this ruined life received from fallen Adam with the Greek word bios. In both Luke 8:14 and 1 John 2:15-16, the word "life" in the original is bios:

Luke 8:14

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the

eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

This bios is far different than the life God breathed into Adam at creation, which the New Testament refers to with the Greek word zoe (more on this word later).

It is from this Greek word bios that we get the English word "biography," which usually tells the story of an individual's birth, life, and death. Mankind is incapable of redeeming itself from the limitations of bios. The human race desperately needs a Savior, and that Savior is Jesus Christ. This is where the objective facts of the gospel come into play. The incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel is that, in Christ, mankind is freed from the bonds of bios.

The Objective Facts of the Gospel

The objective facts of the gospel comprise four major events in Christ's earthly mission. Each of them is vital to the Plan of Salvation.

His Birth. Apart from the Christmas celebration, Christ's birth receives little theological attention in the objective gospel (including the Adventist fundamental belief). Yet His birth plays a vital part in mankind's redemption.

Some 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second person of the Godhead, entered Satan's domain as a human baby. This is the mystery of the incarnation, where, through the Holy Spirit, God united the corporate, sinful, condemned bios-life of the human race to the sinless, divine, eternal life of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:30-35

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

The New Testament refers to this sinless, eternal, divine life of Christ with the Greek word zoe. Here are a few examples:

John 1:4; 8:12

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ...When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Romans 5:10, 17-18

For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ...For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

This is the same life God breathed into Adam at creation, for the word “life” used in Genesis 2:7, in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), is zoe:

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Unfortunately, both bios and zoe are translated to English simply as “life,” which makes it difficult to distinguish between man’s condemned bios-life and the sinless, eternal zoe-life of Christ. Yet the two are worlds apart in meaning.

The union between Christ's eternal, divine zoe with mankind's corporate, condemned bios at the incarnation saved no one. But it did legally qualify Christ to represent and, in fact, become a substitute for the human race. At the incarnation:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Thus Christ, the God-Man, became the second, or last, Adam:

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

The word "adam" means mankind in Hebrew. In Genesis 5:2, the word "mankind" is "adam" in the original:

Genesis 5:2

He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" ["adam"] when they were created.

Incidentally, the word "adam" appears some 510 times in Scripture but seldom as a proper name. Usually it signifies the human race, in solidarity — the many in one. Thus Christ, the last Adam, was the sum total of the entire fallen human race.

Scripture presents only two instances of one man representing the entire race. The first Adam knowingly disconnected himself and his lineage from the Source of life; the second, or last Adam, reversed the damage by His life and death:

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

Through the incarnation, Jesus assumed the heredity of Adam and gathered it up in Himself. Thus, His victorious history became the history of the entire human race. This is the good news of the objective gospel, available for the claiming by every individual through faith in Christ.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Thus, God could justify mankind in Christ and still maintain the integrity of His holy law, by which, otherwise, all are condemned.

Now, God's law will not allow an innocent individual to be punished on behalf of a guilty person, and this has caused some confusion among Christians and non-Christians, especially Muslims who accuse Christians of "legal fiction."

Deuteronomy 24:16

Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

Ezekiel 18:20

The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.

What we must understand is that, once Christ became the second, or last, Adam (corporate or collective mankind), He was legally qualified to represent the human race

during His earthly mission. This is what qualified Christ to be a substitute for the human race, since he became the human race, all in One.

The Life of Christ. Once fully qualified as a legal redeemer of Adam's race, Christ needed to overcome where Adam had failed — by fully satisfying God's holy law on mankind's behalf. That law is very specific: obey and live; disobey and die. So, in His earthly mission, Christ first met the positive demands of God's law (obey and live). He Himself said to the Jews of His day:

Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Thus, from His birth to manhood (age 30 in the Bible) Christ met all the positive demands of the law, in the power of the Holy Spirit...

Luke 4:14

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

...and could claim:

John 14:30

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world [Satan] is coming. He has no hold over me....

In thought, word, and deed, Christ kept the divine law. This perfect, sinless obedience fulfilled, in fact, what the Sanctuary service (God's Old Testament visual aid for the Plan of Redemption) symbolized with spotless sacrificial animals. The spotlessness represented Christ's perfect obedience to the positive demands of the law (obey and live) necessary for the salvation of mankind.

Perfect obedience alone did not perfectly fulfill the law, however, for the law specifies that those who disobey its demands must die, and:

Romans 3:23

...For all [human beings] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

Unless Christ fulfilled this second demand, He could not be mankind's righteousness, since:

Ezekiel 18:20a

The one who sins is the one who will die.

Thus, after perfectly obeying the positive demands of the law, Christ went to the cross to meet its justice. In the Sanctuary service, the spotless animal was killed and its body was consumed by God's fire on the brazen altar. This burning represented the wrath of God poured out against the sum total of mankind's sin — in the person of Jesus.

Isaiah 53:6, 8, 10-11

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ...By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. ...Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

This brings us to the third event in Christ's redemptive history.

The Death of Christ. As quoted above, the apostle Paul makes it clear "all (Jews and Gentiles) have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." To meet the just demands of God's holy law, therefore, Christ had to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross:

Philippians 2:6-8

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

Referring to His death on the cross, Jesus prayed:

John 17:4

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

Only when Christ met this second demand of the law could He cry out, "It is finished":

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Thus, by His perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross, Christ forever became "Our Righteousness." This is why the Father commissioned His Son to join with humanity in its sin-cursed world:

John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world [though the human race deserved it], but to save the world through him.

Those who understand this incredibly good news of the objective gospel will join the apostle Paul with heartfelt praise:

2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

While Christ Himself was tasting the second death for everyone on the cross...

Matthew 27:45-46

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

...the collective bios-type life of the human race was dying in Him, never to rise again:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In exchange, out of pure agape-level love, God gave the human race the eternal zoe-life of His Son, in the resurrection:

2 Corinthians 5:14, 17

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Thus, by His perfect life and sacrificial death, Christ earned the legal right to take to heaven every individual who accepted Him as Savior. He confirmed this after His resurrection when He declared to His disciples:

Matthew 28:18-20a

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [by the Father]. Therefore go and make disciples [believers] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

We now turn to the final event in the objective gospel.

The Resurrection of Christ. The redemption of the human race was totally fulfilled on the cross when Christ cried out, "It is finished." This is the significance of the seventh-day Sabbath, which points to God's perfect and finished work on the sixth day (whether creative or redemptive).

The resurrection of Christ, therefore, did not add anything to mankind's salvation but, rather, confirmed it. Had Christ failed to fully meet the demands of the law, even in a single point, the Father would not have had the legal right to raise His Son from the dead.

Romans 1:1-4

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

The apostle Paul made it clear that the resurrection of Christ from the dead qualified Him to be mankind's justification:

Romans 4:25

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

It bears underscoring here that on the cross of Christ the condemned bios-life of the collective human race died the Second Death forever. The apostle Paul expresses it this way (emphasis mine):

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Unless this were true, justification by faith would become simply a "legal fiction" conducive to cheap grace.

Romans 6:1-2, 7-8

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ...Because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

2 Timothy 2:11

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him....

Because God so loved the world, however, He gave the eternal zoe-life of His Son to the human race, at the resurrection. The apostle John explains:

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us [mankind] eternal life [zoe], and this life [zoe] is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life [zoe]; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life [zoe].

This whole objective gospel is defined by the In Christ motif or idea, the central theme of Paul's theology. The Pauline expression in Christ or its equivalent (in Him, together with Him, in the Beloved, etc.) appears some 64 times in his epistles and sums up his exposition of the objective gospel as well as the subjective experience of believers.

Ephesians 2:5-10; 3:8

[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ...Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ....

The Three Angels' Messages

At the very beginning of this chapter, we noted that the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ are identified with the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14. This three-part series of messages lies uniquely at the very core of the Adventist Church's global mission.

I firmly believe that God raised up the Advent movement in order to fully restore the objective facts of the everlasting gospel and proclaim it to the whole world. These messages are a fulfillment of the last signs of the times that Christ predicted would take place before the end:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The First Angel's Message

The First Angel's Message is clear and straightforward:

Revelation 14:6

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people.

This is an end-time message that will be proclaimed for a witness when "the hour of judgment has come":

Revelation 14:7

He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

It will be presented as such incredibly good news that all who have reached the age of accountability will make a deliberate choice, either for Christ or against Him. The objective gospel will be used in the judgment as a witness, or testimony, against all who purposely reject the gift of salvation in Christ.

Hebrews 2:1-4

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church recognizes its responsibility to carry this judgment-hour message to the world, and this sets it apart as more than just another denomination. Adventists believe they have been called and commissioned specifically by God to restore the clear teachings of the objective facts of the everlasting gospel. When that happens, one truth will prevail, one subject will swallow all others — Christ our righteousness. Note how Ellen G. White expresses it:

Sons and Daughters of God, pg. 259

"As Christ's ambassadors, they [referring to Adventists] are to search the Scriptures, to seek the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other, Christ our righteousness."

This is the last-day Elijah message that will prepare a people to meet Christ at His Second Coming, without tasting death. This will be the remnant, the faithful ones who will withstand Armageddon (the great tribulation of the last days) and vindicate the power of the gospel:

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

Revelation 16:13-16

Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Seventh-Day Adventists, therefore, clearly must understand the significance and purpose of the Three Angels' Messages, for the devil is fully aware of the Great Commission God has given the Adventist Movement. So he does everything in his power to frustrate God's purpose and sidetrack us from our God-given tasks. But God's purpose will triumph, and the truth as it is in Christ will be restored and proclaimed with great power in all the world:

Revelation 18:1

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

According to Hebrews 1:14, angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation."

Hebrews 1:14

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

The Three Angels of Revelation 14, therefore, represent God's prophetic people with a mission to proclaim the objective facts of the everlasting gospel before the end comes.

The Meaning of Everlasting

The gospel is referred to as "everlasting" for two reasons. First, God planned this gospel from eternity. Christ, we read, is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world":

Revelation 13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Second, the gospel is everlasting because its effects are eternal — everlasting life:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

God's plan for saving fallen humanity is one, and one only — the objective gospel laid down from eternity. David declares of the gospel:

Psalm 103:17

But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children....

Paul tells Timothy that Christ saved the world by grace "before time began":

2 Timothy 1:9

He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time....

The Second Angel's Message

After the first angel, comes a second:

Revelation 14:8

A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

The word "followed" in the original actually means "to join with." The second angel joins the first angel in proclaiming the everlasting gospel, but adds that "Babylon" has fallen because she has made all nations accept her perverted gospel. The word "Babylon" and the idea of its fall comes from Daniel 5 and is used here to represent the fall of modern, spiritual Babylon.

The Semitic root words that form "Babylon" are Bab-el, the "gate of heaven," the dwelling place of God. Those who deliberately reject the objective facts of the everlasting gospel and try to reach heaven by their own good works (in the manner of the builders of the Tower of Babel) commit the sin of Babylon. This is the false wine that brings God's wrath on them.

Revelation 18:1-6

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!' She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup."

Daniel 5 says that the ancient city of Babylon fell because its king, Belshazzar, deliberately desecrated God's sacred temple vessels and refused to humble himself before the God of heaven, though he knew full well how his great-grandfather, King

Nebuchadnezzar, had learned the hard way that the God of heaven controls the affairs of men:

Daniel 5:13-30

So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

"Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

“This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin.

“Here is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain....

The deliberate sin of self-exaltation lies at the heart of the sin of Babylon.

Daniel 4:30

...He said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

Now the second angel declares that spiritual Babylon is fallen because she has made all nations drink “the wine of the wrath of her fornication”:

Revelation 14:8

A second angel followed and said, “‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

Fornication consists of the unlawful physical union of two consenting parties. Applied spiritually, it refers to the union of salvation by grace (God’s way) with salvation by works (man’s natural preference). We could call this perverted message the “I plus Christ” gospel or the “I must do my best and Christ will make up the rest” philosophy.

This is the same perverted gospel the Galatian Christians accepted in New Testament times:

Galatians 1:6-7

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 3:1-3

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Galatians 5:4

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

The Third Angel's Message

A third angel now joins the first two angels:

Revelation 14:9-10a

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath."

This third angel proclaims the objective facts of the everlasting gospel, but adds a significant warning, God's final plea to a lost world. This third angel makes it clear that

the day of mercy is ending and that any who willfully turn their backs on Christ and His righteousness will have to experience the full wrath of God against sin.

Final Events

In Revelation 6:12-16, the apostle John vividly describes events that transpire under the sixth seal, before and during the Second Coming of Christ.

Revelation 6:12-16

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

This all-consuming day of God's wrath sends "the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man" to hide themselves "in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains," and cry for the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

This naturally raises the question in verse 17:

Revelation 6:17

For the great day of His wrath has come, and who can withstand it?

The answer seems to be "no one." But when we turn to Chapter 7, we find a special people, the remnant (the faithful ones), who do so. But to do so, their faith must first be sealed, by a mark on their foreheads:

Revelation 7:2-3

Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

These are the "144,000" described in Revelation 7:4-8, who represent the last generation of Christians — those who fully obey the objective facts of the everlasting gospel.

Revelation 7:4-8

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

They are sealed in their foreheads because their minds have settled into the truth of the objective gospel, the unconditional agape-type love of God on which their salvation is based, and the truth as it is in Christ, their means of salvation. Nothing can now shake their faith in Christ, though they will feel forsaken by Christ in the Time of Trouble:

Isaiah 54:5-8

For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.

These 144,000:

Revelation 14:4b

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits [the first to attain full maturity of faith] to God and the Lamb.

In Revelation 12:17, we find that the dragon (Satan) "was enraged with the woman (the church that fully restores the objective truth of the everlasting gospel)"; he does not make war with her, the church, but rather "with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God (not mechanically, but spiritually, see Romans 13:8-10, below) and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." These are the 144,000, the true remnant (see Chapter 10 for a detailed study of the 144,000).

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

In complete contrast, the third angel of Revelation 14 describes those who deliberately and ultimately reject the everlasting gospel and receive the mark of the beast and his image. The beast and his image represent the agents of Satan who oppose the everlasting gospel:

Revelation 13:2

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

“The dragon” is Satan:

Revelation 12:9

The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Satan and this beast, and all who follow them, will experience the full wrath of God at the end:

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The Wrath of God

The apostle Paul declares:

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness....

These have willfully turned their backs on Him:

Romans 1:20-23

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so

that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Three times in this one chapter, Paul defines the wrath of God as giving those who reject Him exactly what they have chosen:

Romans 1:24, 26, 28

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ...Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ...Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

Those who reject the good news of the everlasting gospel will indeed experience the wrath of God:

Revelation 14:10a

...They, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.

God still loves them, but if they willfully join the other side in the great controversy, God honors their choice.

This wrath of God experienced by believers at the end of time is referred to as God's "unusual act" (or "alien task"):

Isaiah 28:21

The Lord will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon — to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.

This wrath is unusual for two reasons: First, God so loved the world that, at tremendous cost to Himself, He gave His only begotten Son to redeem the entire human race:

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Romans 8:32

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

1 Timothy 2:5-6; 4:10

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. ...That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Second, God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance":

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The only possible way a person can lose salvation is willfully, knowingly, persistently, and ultimately to reject God's supreme gift in Christ. Only then God is left with no choice but to give them what they have chosen:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

John 3:18

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

God always respects mankind's freedom of choice.

Who Will Experience Salvation?

The New Testament clearly teaches that God has redeemed all of humanity and reconciled it to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

He has given the whole human race a new history in Christ, the second, or last, Adam. In that history, every human being stands objectively justified and reconciled to God:

Romans 5:10, 18

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ...Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Yet, millions have not yet heard this incredibly good news of the objective gospel. How will God deal with them in the judgment?

God has clearly put in the heart of every human being a measure of faith, a desire to follow the way of righteousness:

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Those who, through no fault of their own, never hear the good news of the everlasting gospel but who yield to the law written in their hearts will be vindicated in the judgment. Paul mentions this in Romans and says they will be saved, not because of what they have done, but because they were faithful to the light they had, whatever that light may have been:

Romans 2:14-15

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)

God can take them legally to heaven because He has already and fully redeemed the entire human race in Christ:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

These will hear the good news of the gospel and the name Jesus for the first time in heaven:

The Desire of Ages, by Ellen G. White, pg. 638

"Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.

"How surprised and gladdened will be the lowly among the nations, and among the heathen, to hear from the lips of the Saviour, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me'! How glad will be the heart of Infinite Love as His followers look up with surprise and joy at His words of approval!"

But just prior to the Second Advent, none will be ignorant any longer of the incredibly good news of the objective gospel, for the whole world will have been illuminated by the glory of the truth, as it is in Christ:

Revelation 18:1-5

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!' She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for

every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes."

When this everlasting gospel of the kingdom is preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, it will be inexcusable for any to be lost. And only at that point can God bring the sin-cursed world to an end, in righteousness.

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

A Paradigm Shift

Many years ago, a Swiss scientist invented the quartz watch and offered it to the Association of Swiss Watchmakers. They were horrified: "What! No springs or internal moving parts! Don't you know that we are the experts in watchmaking and have mastered the trade? How dare you insult us by offering us a watch that has no internal moving parts?" (At that time, 80 percent of the world's watches came from Switzerland.)

Discouraged, but undaunted, the scientist showed his new invention at a trade show in Japan. The Japanese grabbed the idea and, as a result, the Swiss market share has declined to only 10 percent of watches sold. The Japanese were the ultimate winners; the Swiss lost out because there were unwilling to make a paradigm shift.

Likewise, mankind as a whole usually opposes anything nontraditional, including new ideas on the gospel. This has become an unfortunate problem with historic Adventism and is why traditional Christianity is on the decline today, while the nonconforming and

nondenominational churches are flourishing. Rightly or wrongly, they have been willing to change to meet the demands of modern man.

If Adventists are ever to restore the objective facts of the everlasting gospel and the message of the Three Angels, "Christ Our Righteousness," and proclaim it with a loud cry, they must be willing to accept a paradigm shift of what constitutes the true gospel message. This will include a willingness to painfully swallow denominational pride.

Jews in New Testament times were asking, "Is Jesus Christ the true Messiah?" No longer is this at issue among Christians today. The big question is now, "Which view of Christ being preached today represents who He really is?" For only the true Christ can set us free:

John 8:31-36

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

The everlasting gospel God wants His followers to proclaim worldwide is not a rehash of the Reformation gospel. It is not Calvinism, which proclaims "limited atonement," nor Arminianism, which teaches "provisional or potential salvation" (the two main gospel emphases preached today within Protestantism). The everlasting gospel is the restoration of the full and complete objective gospel, first proclaimed by the disciples:

Galatians 1:8-9

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say

again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

The Three Angels' Messages present the unconditional good news that, while mankind was helpless, ungodly, still sinners, and in enmity with God, they were reconciled (past tense) with Him by the death of His Son:

Romans 5:6-10

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

This has nothing to do with the heresy of universalism — the idea that God will eventually take all mankind to heaven. God is love and does not force salvation on anyone. The good news of salvation requires the response of faith to make it effective:

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

If Adventism is to preach the true Three Angels' Messages, then it can no longer preach the old Arminian concept of "provisional" or "potential" salvation, which has been the norm for decades. The Arminian gospel proclaims that, only after one believes, repents, and confesses past sins can God extend salvation.

This is certainly not good news, but "good advice" and a subtle form of legalism. The Bible proclaims that God has already reconciled everyone to Himself and justified them through the life and death of His Son:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

All that remains is that they accept that reconciliation, through faith in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

This message must be proclaimed in its fullness. May that day come soon.

Chapter 7

The Experience of Salvation

Fundamental Belief #10

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds; writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment.

[2 Corinthians 5:17-21; John 3:16; Galatians 1:4; 4:4-7; Titus 3:3-7; John 16:8; Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 2:21-22; Romans 10:17; Luke 17:5; Mark 9:23-24; Ephesians 2:5-10; Romans 3:21-26; Colossians 1:13-14; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26; John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23; Romans 12:2; Hebrews 8:7-12; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Romans 8:1-4; 5:6-10]

We now understand that the objective facts of the everlasting gospel — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ — apply to the entire human race. We dealt with this in some detail last chapter. The objective gospel is God's supreme gift to mankind and, as with any gift, must be received to be experienced.

Romans 5:17

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

According to the apostle Paul, this objective gospel is "the power of God to salvation for anyone who believes":

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

In other words, this incredibly good news is meaningless unless received by faith and experienced in the believers' lives.

1 Corinthians 4:20

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

The objective gospel offers redemption in Christ to the entire human race from every aspect of the sin problem — from its guilt and punishment, its power and slavery, and its nature and presence. Salvation, therefore, begins not at the Second Advent but at the moment Christ is received as personal Savior and, through the experience of the new birth, a believer enters into the joy of justification by faith.

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

As the fundamental belief states, "In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example."

The Experience of Salvation

But now as we move forward and study the experience of salvation, we dare not forget or misapply what we emphasized last chapter — that all Christian experience must be built on the finished work of Christ, the objective facts of the gospel. Acceptance of objective salvation forms the only true basis for Christian experience.

1 Corinthians 3:11-23

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved — even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Anything else leads to legalism.

As Christians, we will never experience anything that the Lord, Jesus Christ, has not already overcome in His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Jesus left nothing for us to prove — He did it all. The good works and obedience the Holy Spirit produces in believers add nothing to Christ's finished work. What they do is allow believers to participate personally in what is already theirs, through justification by faith. Justification by faith is the only basis for peace and assurance.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

But if knowledge of the gospel is incomplete or incorrect, it will affect the joy of the Christian experience. We absolutely cannot experience the full power of the gospel unless we first understand the objective facts of the everlasting gospel, as they are in Christ.

The apostle Paul reminded discouraged Ephesians believers that:

Ephesians 2:4-6

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.... [Emphasis added.]

How noteworthy that all verb tenses in the passage appear in the past historic tense, indicating that Paul is referring only to the objective facts of the everlasting gospel, as expressed already in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Second, how interesting that the word "with" (or "together," in some translations) appears three times in this text. According to Webster's Dictionary, the word "together" means "in union with." Paul here is using the in Christ motif, the central theme of his theology of the objective gospel.

The Humanity of Christ

This could not have happened, of course, unless Christ had assumed the selfsame fallen nature of mankind (the sinful bios life) that needed replacement (redemption). That word "assumed" does not mean that Christ "had" a sinful nature — that would have made Christ a sinner himself, in need of His own Savior. There is indeed a fine distinction between assuming and having.

As the Church Fathers of the first five centuries often stated, "What Christ did not assume, He could not redeem, or save." Ellen G. White declares:

Selected Messages, Vol. 1, Pg. 244

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study.”

Medical Ministry, Pg. 181

“He took upon His sinless (Divine) nature, our sinful (human) nature, that He might know how to succor (help) those that are tempted.”

Once we accept the everlasting gospel in its true fullness, the big question becomes: “How do we experience its power?” The answer is, by faith alone. From start to finish, man’s part is by faith alone:

Romans 1:17

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

But before we consider what New Testament faith is all about and what it involves, let us review the part the Holy Spirit plays in salvation, because, apart from His influence, no one can experience the gospel’s power.

The Convictions of the Holy Spirit

In Chapter 2, we considered the Trinity, or Godhead, in the second fundamental belief of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. There we found that all three members contribute to the Plan of Salvation. The Father directs, the Son saves, and the Holy Spirit communicates.

Once Jesus finished His earthly mission, He ascended to heaven to serve as the believer’s great High Priest, and the Holy Spirit remained to represent Him on earth as communicator of the good news. Jesus asked His disciples, in fact, to “wait” until they received the power of the Holy Spirit from on high before launching forth to fulfill the Great Commission.

Luke 24:49

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In the Gospel of John, Jesus explains to His disciples that the Holy Spirit will convince the world of three realities: sin, righteousness, and judgment:

John 16:8

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment....

Of sin, Jesus said:

John 16:9

...about sin, because people do not believe in me....

Many Christians, unfortunately, limit the definition of sin to “transgression of the law” or “lawlessness”:

1 John 3:4

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

But Christ here defines sin as unbelief:

John 16:9

...about sin, because people do not believe in me....

He is pointing to the one sin that can deprive unbelievers of salvation.

Through the objective gospel, every sin against the law was dealt with on the cross:

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace....

But the sin of unbelief is unpardonable. It is the one sin for which Christ could not die. Salvation never forces anyone to accept life; the wishes of those who reject the gift of salvation are honored.

John 3:18, 36

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ...Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Hebrews 10:26-29

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Ultimately, to reject salvation is to sin against the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 12:31-32

And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

The Holy Spirit would convince of righteousness, Jesus said, because:

John 16:10

...about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer....

The connection between His leaving and righteousness may seem difficult, until we remind ourselves that the Father is the director of the Plan of Salvation and it was He who sent His Son into this world to save:

John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Galatians 5:4-5

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.

What God begins, of course, He finishes. So it was with creation, and so it will be with redemption.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

John 17:4; 19:30

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ...When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

When Jesus rose from the dead, having fully redeemed mankind from the "curse of the law,"...

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

...the first person to see Him was Mary. In her great excitement she must have grabbed Him, for Jesus said to her:

John 20:17

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Jesus needed to seek the Father's approval, to make sure that His earthly mission of saving the world was perfect and complete. After gaining that assurance, He returned to His disciples to give them the Great Commission, reporting:

Matthew 28:18-19

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples [believers] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...."

Then Christ leaves the earth in the hands of the Holy Spirit and returns to the Father.

In convincing the world that Christ has gone to the Father and will return only at the Second Advent, the Holy Spirit is telling the world that Christ's earthly mission fulfilled every aspect of righteousness on behalf of the human race and that those who accept Christ Jesus by faith as their personal Savior are guaranteed a place in heaven.

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The Holy Spirit would convict of judgment because:

John 16:11

...and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

In other words, any person who deliberately, persistently, and ultimately rejects God's supreme gift of salvation in Christ will be judged as belonging to the camp of Satan and his angels. Jesus makes this clear:

Matthew 25:41

"Then he [Jesus] will say to those on his left [the goats, or unbelievers], 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

Satan, Ruler of this World

When God created the world, He gave Adam and Eve full dominion over all the creation:

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

But at the Fall, they handed the world over to Satan, and as we saw last chapter, the devil became its prince, or ruler:

Luke 4:5-6

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”

John 14:30

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me....

To save mankind, Christ had to buy back the human race from Satan’s rule — to redeem it. Jesus accomplished this at the cross, predicting shortly before His crucifixion:

John 12:31

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world [Satan] will be driven out.

By the word “now,” Jesus was referring to the cross, as he continues:

John 12:32-33

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

1 Peter 1:18-19

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

By extension, then, believers belong to God and His kingdom, while the unbelieving world voluntarily remains under Satan's sway:

1 John 5:19

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

For God to eradicate sin forever, when the Plan of Salvation is finished, fire will come down from heaven and consume Satan and his angels, along with those who have deliberately chosen to resist the Holy Spirit:

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

This consuming fire was never intended for mankind, but for the devil and his angels. But God in His love coerces no one. Those who insist on listening to lies and reject God's gift of salvation will receive what they have chosen.

Once a person is convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, the good news of the gospel demands a human response. God created mankind with freedom to choose — to be able to reply with a "yes" or "no." The New Testament uses the word "faith" to describe the positive response to the gospel.

Romans 3:21-28

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood — to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Paul's favorite quote from the Old Testament is:

Habakkuk 2:4

"See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness...."

The gospel becomes a subjective experience only when one accepts it:

Galatians 3:11

Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."

New Testament Faith Defined

As it is with the objective facts of the everlasting gospel, many Christians fail to realize the full meaning of the New Testament faith and the changes it brings to the way they think and live.

How does the Bible define faith, that crucial word that makes it possible to individually experience the righteousness of Christ, the power of the gospel? According to the New Testament, especially in the apostle Paul's writings, faith contains three essential elements. Let us consider each one.

A knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ. In proclaiming the good news of salvation, Jesus declared:

John 8:32

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Verse 36 makes it clear what He meant by the word "truth." Jesus was referring to Himself:

John 8:36

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

This knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ, the objective facts of the gospel, which was dealt with in the last chapter, is the first prerequisite to faith. That's why the Great Commission to go and teach is central to the Christian faith. Mark records the commission in these words:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

The gospel is the account of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ — the incredibly good news of salvation.

In Romans 10, the apostle Paul describes how one experiences this first element of faith. He first quotes Joel 2:32:

Romans 10:13

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Then he poses a series of questions, the answers to which are obvious:

Romans 10:14-15a

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?

Then comes a wonderful quote from Isaiah 52:7:

Romans 10:15b

As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

He sums up man’s response in verse 17:

Romans 10:17

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

This brings us to the second element of true faith.

Belief in the truth as it is in Christ. In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word “faith” and the word “belief” come from the same root, for faith involves belief — a mental assent to the truth as it is in Christ. It is not enough to hear or know the gospel; for the joy of salvation is to be experienced, it must be believed.

Jesus made it clear:

John 5:24

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged [Greek: condemnation] but has crossed over from death to life.”

Many other texts show that belief in the truth as it is in Christ is vital in saving, genuine faith.

Many Christians, however, limit faith to the mere mental assent to the gospel truth, and leave it at that. The result is what Dietrich Bonhoffer called “cheap grace,” and a license to sin, giving Christianity a bad name.

Romans 6:1, 15

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ...What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!

Galatians 5:13

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

True New Testament faith makes it possible for one to experience the power of the gospel. But faith must be accompanied by yet a third element — heart obedience to the truth as it is in Christ.

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

Obeying the truth as it is in Christ. Because this third element of faith is often ignored in the proclamation of the great truth of justification by faith, some suppose that, since they are saved by grace alone, they can behave as they please. This has led many sincere, conservative Adventists away from the wonderful truth of righteousness by faith to a subtle form of legalism, in which salvation is experienced by faith plus good works (lawkeeping).

Galatians 3:1-3

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

What does it mean, then, to obey the gospel? And, is obeying the gospel the same as obeying the law? The answer is a definite no, though the end result of obeying the gospel is a heartfelt obedience to the law. Jesus said:

John 14:15

"If you love me, keep my commands."

Obeying the law is a fruit of the gospel, the standard of Christian living. But lawkeeping itself contributes nothing to one's salvation.

This is what the apostle James is writing about when he declares, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead" (James 2:17):

James 2:14-20

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

True faith changes lives — unless that faith is a sham, or dead.

Now, before launching into a deeper study of what it means to obey the gospel, let us consider several helpful texts, all of which show that obeying the gospel is a vital part of true New Testament faith. In both the introduction and the conclusion of his great epistle to the Romans, for example, the apostle Paul defines faith as obedience:

Romans 1:5; 16:26

Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ...But now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith....

The Obedience of Faith

Paul commends the Roman Christians for their faith in Christ, saying:

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. [Emphasis added.]

To Paul, faith is a heart obedience to the truth as it is in Christ.

In complete contrast, note Paul's interpretation of why many of his fellow Jews — those who have deliberately rejected Christ as their Messiah — will be lost:

Romans 10:16

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

To the apostle Paul, "believing our message" (or "report") is the same as "obeying the gospel." One discovers, in reading Romans 9-11, that Paul believes that many Jews will

be lost, not because God has failed to keep His promise, but because they have deliberately refused to obey the gospel.

Romans 9:6

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

Romans 10:18-21

But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."

And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

One cannot read far in Paul's epistle to the Galatians without realizing that Paul is upset by the Galatian Christians' decision to turn their backs on the truth, as it is in Christ, for a perverted gospel. Deceived by false teachers (Judaizers), they turned from justification by faith alone to faith plus works.

Galatians 5:7

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? [Emphasis added.]

Again we see that, for Paul, justification by faith means obeying the gospel, the objective truth as it is in Christ.

To the discouraged believers in Thessalonica facing persecution and hardships, Paul wrote these encouraging words:

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

...And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [Emphasis added.]

The apostle Peter expresses the same idea in familiar words:

1 Peter 4:17

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us [believers], what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? [Emphasis added.]

Being sinners does not cause men and women to be lost; after all, all are born slaves to sin and can do nothing to alter that reality.

Romans 3:9-20, 23; 7:14

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

According to the Bible, men and women are lost because of unbelief — the deliberate rejection of the good news of the gospel:

John 3:18

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Only those who refuse to obey the gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ, are destroyed with Satan and his angels:

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Obeying the Gospel Explained

True, saving faith includes "obeying" the gospel, but since the gospel is not a set of rules or commands, how can Christians "obey" it?

First, we must keep in mind that the gospel is the new history God has given mankind in Christ. As pointed out last chapter, in the incarnation, God united the sinless, eternal, divine life (zoe) of Christ to the corporate, sinful, perishing life (bios) of the human race. In this role, as both Creator and creature, Christ became a second Adam (mankind), qualified as humanity's substitute and representative.

By His perfect life and sacrificial death, Christ then fully met the demand of the law on behalf of the human race...

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

...and the legal status of mankind changed from condemnation to justification by His obedience, and the bios inherited as a result of Adam's disobedience was replaced with zoe-life.

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

That bios-life died forever on the cross as Christ met the final, just demand of the law in exchange for the eternal life (zoe) of His Son. This is the great exchange that took place at the death and resurrection of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

This is God's supreme gift to humanity and the believer's blessed hope:

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life [zoe], and this life [zoe] is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life [zoe]; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life [zoe].

Paul declares:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Ephesians 2:5-6

...[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

The cross and resurrection of Christ carry the central message of the New Testament — that a great exchange took place that has forever changed the status and destiny of the fallen human race.

While in a Roman prison awaiting martyrdom, Paul described this great exchange to the young pastor Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death [the bios-type life] and has brought life [zoe] and immortality to light through the gospel. [Emphasis added.]

When we inherited Adam's life (bios), it was life biased toward sin. To that condemned life we have added our own personal sins, and thus stand condemned to eternal death. Christ did not come to change that death sentence, but to fulfill it, as He declared in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Romans 5:16

Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

On the cross, the corporate life (bios) of humanity died forever, to meet the just demands of God's law.

Romans 6:10

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

Obeying the gospel, then, means for the believer to deliberately surrender the mortal, condemned, sin-loving bios to the cross. In exchange, the Christian receives the immortal, righteous, holy life (zoe) of Christ, through the new-birth experience. Paul makes it clear that the life (zoe) of Christ only comes after surrendering the condemned life (bios) to the death of the cross.

Romans 6:7-8

... Because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

2 Timothy 2:11

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him....

This exchange is confessed publicly by baptism:

Romans 6:3-7

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

In other words, to obey the gospel is to confess from the heart what Paul wrote about himself to the Galatian Christians:

Galatians 2:19-20; 6:14

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ...May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

True Christianity means "not I, but Christ." This is the formula of righteousness (justification by faith) that must be applied to both one's standing before God (i.e., justification or the imputed righteousness of Christ), as well as to the Christian behavior (i.e., sanctification or the imparted righteousness of Christ).

From start to finish, the Christian experience of salvation is founded on the principle of "not I, but Christ," or righteousness by faith alone. And since Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, He will reproduce the life He lived on earth in our humanity some 2,000 years ago, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

When faith is understood as obeying the gospel, it leaves no room for cheap grace.

The Fruits of Obeying the Gospel

The outgrowth of this experience is true witnessing, as Jesus told His disciples:

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This true commandment-keeping is the fruit of the gospel:

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In obeying the gospel and surrendering the old life (bios) to the cross of Christ, at conversion, one does not eradicate the influence of the bios; it is literally dead only "in Christ." In the believer, it is dead only by faith. And faith is:

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Therefore, the goal of every Christian is:

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....

The Place of Faith

Before concluding this chapter, let us look at the role faith plays in the experience of salvation. Without faith, it is impossible to subjectively experience salvation — this is indeed true. But we must not give faith itself any credit or merit, as some Christians inadvertently do when they point to the exact date they believe they were saved. What they forget is that all humanity was saved on the cross some 2,000 years ago. Faith does not add to that salvation.

Nowhere, in fact, does Scripture teach that believers are saved because of our faith. What the Bible does teach is salvation by or through faith. Faith is only the instrument — the channel — by which human beings receive the righteousness of Christ. It is the object of faith — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ — that saves, both now and in the judgment.

It doesn't take long after conversion for the believer to realize that the converted mind is no match for the sinful flesh, and the apostle Paul describes the experience well:

Romans 7:14-24

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can the Christian subdue the sinful clamors of the flesh and produce the righteous life of the Savior:

Galatians 5:16-17

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Romans 8:2-4; 13:14

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ...Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Sanctified by the Holy Spirit

The Spirit's negative work in subduing the flesh, and His positive role in reproducing the righteous life of Christ in the believer, is sanctification:

1 Peter 1:2

[To God's elect] ...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

This work begins at conversion and continues until the believer goes to sleep in Christ or until Christ arrives at the Second Advent. Hence, sanctification occurs throughout life. And while it is impossible for believers to conquer their sinful nature in their own strength, the resurrection of Christ proved that the power of the Holy Spirit is greater than the power of all the accumulated sins of the world.

The apostle Paul explains it this way:

Romans 8:11

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal [spiritually dead] bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

What does Paul mean, exactly, by this?

First, we know:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is [eternal] death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And we know that on the cross Christ bore the sins of the whole world. We also know that it was not the cross that killed Christ, since from Roman history we know it took three to seven days for a man to die on the cross, and Christ died within six hours. The accumulated sins of the world broke Jesus' heart and killed Him.

Christ indeed tasted eternal death for everyone:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

But the sins of the whole world could not keep Him locked in the grave. His resurrection, by the power of the Holy Spirit, proved that the power of God is greater than the accumulated power of human sin. This is Paul's point:

Romans 8:11

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

And that the same power is now available to all who have experienced the new birth:

Romans 8:12-14

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation — but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit

you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

To experience that power, one needs to walk in the Spirit, a process that takes time and struggle, for the sinful nature still opposes the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:16

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Yes, sanctification will be an up-and-down experience, but we must keep in mind that one's status in Christ remains constant through justification by faith.

For sanctification is the fruit of salvation — and has no saving merit and makes no contribution to salvation; rather it is the evidence of salvation. And since sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian may often be unaware of these good works and be conscious only of the sinful behavior.

Matthew 25:37-39

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'"

Therefore, the Christians' eyes must always be focused on Christ on the question of their standing before God; otherwise, they will experience much discouragement, which the devil will use to try to destroy their faith in Christ. Only in Christ does one stand perfect, both now and in the judgment.

The Experience of Glorification

Finally, at Christ's Second Coming, all believers will be delivered from the vile bodies that have been a constant hindrance to them in Christian living. This is known as glorification, the blessed hope of every Christian.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

But since glorification occurs only at Christ's Second Advent, only then will believers experience the full salvation they have in Christ through justification by faith. Until then, they will continue to grow into Christ, while groaning inwardly and waiting eagerly, but patiently, for the redemption of their bodies:

Romans 8:22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

So, while every believer stands perfect in Christ through justification by faith — perfect in performance, perfect in justice, and perfect in nature — experiencing that perfect salvation will not be fully realized until the Lord's return.

Ephesians 2:7

...In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

According to Romans 5:19, Adam's sin made everyone sinners (past tense), while Christ's obedience will one day make all believers righteous (future tense) at the Second Advent:

Romans 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

We must conclude, then, that salvation is a past, present, and future experience, and all believers can testify, "I was (past tense) saved" (from the guilt and punishment of sin), but "I am being (present tense) saved" (from the power and slavery of sin), and "I will be saved (future tense)" (from the nature and presence of sin).

Put another way, Christians are already saved from guilt and punishment (since they are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ):

Ephesians 2:5-6

...[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

But when it comes to the power and slavery to sin, they are being saved (present continuous tense) daily through the process of sanctification as they learn to walk in the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Finally, at the Second Advent, they will be saved (future tense) from the nature of sin and its presence. Note the future tense when it comes to experiencing the righteousness of Christ:

Romans 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

This is what the experience of salvation is all about.

Revelation 22:20

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Chapter 8

Growing in Christ

Fundamental Belief #11

By His death on the cross, Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience.

[Psalm 1:1-2; 23:4; 77:11-12; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:6, 14-15; Luke 10:17-20; Ephesians 5:19-20; 6:12-18; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Philippians 3:7-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 23; Matthew 20:25-28; John 20:21; Galatians 5:22-25; Romans 8:38-39; 1 John 4:4; Hebrews 10:25]

This Fundamental Belief, "Growing in Christ," was adopted at the 2005 General Conference Session as the most recently added (28th) fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It appears as the 11th entry in the series of beliefs, however, because of its close topical relation to the 9th and 10th fundamental beliefs, "The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ" and "The Experience of Salvation." I concur that the addition of this latest belief strengthens the church's statement of beliefs.

What does it mean to grow in Christ? To begin to answer that question, let us first examine the sin problem Jesus Christ faced when He came to this sin-cursed world.

The Biblical Definition of Sin

The Hebrew Old Testament uses some 12 different words to define sin; the Greek New Testament uses about five. Together they represent eight different categories of sin, from which the objective gospel of Jesus Christ — His birth, life, death, and resurrection — redeems mankind from seven. The eighth is unforgivable — the unpardonable sin of unbelief:

John 3:18

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Here briefly are eight categories of sins that contribute to mankind's total sin problem:

Deliberate acts against the law of God (KJV "transgression" or lawlessness, according to the Greek), choosing to live a life of sin:

1 John 3:4; 5:17

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ...All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

Mental consent to a temptation, though the act is not committed; the sin of coveting:

Romans 7:7-11

What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the

opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

Matthew 5:27-28

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

James 1:14

...But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

Proverbs 24:9

The schemes of folly are sin, and people detest a mocker.

Neglect of known duties or opportunities:

James 4:17; 2:14

If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them. ...What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

Matthew 23:23

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

Matthew 25:43-46

“I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Doing the wrong things out of ignorance:

Leviticus 5:17-19

“If anyone sins and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though they do not know it, they are guilty and will be held responsible. They are to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for them for the wrong they have committed unintentionally, and they will be forgiven. It is a guilt offering; they have been guilty of wrongdoing against the Lord.”

Luke 12:48

But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

1 Timothy 1:13

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

Doing the right things — good works or law-keeping — for the wrong reason or motives:

Matthew 7:22-23

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Isaiah 64:6

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Romans 9:30-32

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Philippians 3:3-9

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh — though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

The sinful nature inherited from fallen Adam:

Psalm 51:5; 58:3

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ...Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.

Romans 5:19-20

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

A law, principle, or constant force dwelling in our sinful nature that enslaves to sin ("indwelling sin," according to Ellen G. White), making holy living on one's own impossible:

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Romans 7:14-24

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Matthew 23:27-28

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

Luke 11:39

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness."

John 8:34

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

The sin of unbelief — the deliberate, persistent, and ultimate rejection of the gift of salvation in Christ:

John 3:16-18, 36; 16:9

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ...Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. ...About sin, because people do not believe in me....

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

The first five types of sin require individual initiative (volition) and, therefore, result in guilt. But the next two are inherited at birth because of the disobedience of Adam. Believers bear no responsibility for what Adam did, but they do inherit the consequences — condemnation and death:

Romans 5:15-18

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

These are the two sins that make us all sinners by nature:

Romans 5:19a

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners....

Ephesians 2:3b

Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

The eighth sin, however, fits into a different category altogether, for it is a sin not against the law, but against grace. Jesus defined it as the sin against the Holy Spirit, since it is the Spirit who communicates the good news of the gospel to mankind.

Matthew 12:30-32

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

John 16:8-11

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Of these eight categories of sin, the sin of unbelief is the only one that will keep anyone out of heaven — for God does not hold the believers' fallen nature or behavior against them. But since the objective gospel fully redeemed the entire human race in Christ's holy history (His birth, life, death and resurrection), only those who reject that redemption will be lost. Once an individual learns the objective facts of the gospel and rejects it, the sin of unbelief becomes the unpardonable sin.

Hebrews 2:1-4

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every

violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 10:26-29, 35-38

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ...So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For,

"In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay."

And,

"But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back."

Two Uses of the Word 'Sin'

The New Testament uses the word "sin" in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it presents it as a verb. This use of the word has to do with behavior or acts of sins — whether in word, thought, or deed. The Greek word for sin as a verb is harmatano, which in most cases is translated in the plural, "sins."

But the New Testament also presents sin as a noun and refers to a condition of sinfulness — that condition inherited from Adam:

Romans 5:12, 19a

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners....

Ephesians 2:3b

Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

To grow fully in Christ, mankind must be saved from this dual sin problem, sin as a verb as well as sin as a noun.

In praying to His Father before going to the cross, Jesus confessed:

John 17:4

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

This work of saving mankind was fulfilled on the cross, when Jesus cried, "It is finished":

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

By His perfect life and sacrificial death, Christ met all the demands of God's law on behalf of mankind:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

But how can believers experience total salvation from their dual sin problem? The New Testament describes the process in two ways. We already know that the first five definitions of sin involve responsibility and guilt:

Romans 6:23a

For the wages of sin is death....

And Scripture clearly states:

Romans 3:23

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

Christ paid the full price for all sin committed by the human race against God's law. On the cross, the justice of the law was fully met, and this is what the apostle Paul proclaimed to the Christians in Galatia:

Galatians 3:13a

Christ redeemed [past tense] us [humanity] from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us....

Because of this:

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace....

The death of Christ forgives every act of sin, in thought, word, or deed; but growth in Christ also requires deliverance from the power, nature, and law of sin in their members.

In other words, sinful acts can be forgiven because of the blood of Christ. But innate sinfulness needs more than forgiveness, and Christ has condemned the law of sin in our members, that is, "the law of sin in the flesh":

Romans 8:2-4

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Christ's Power Over Sin

How did Christ condemn sin in the flesh? Paul writes:

Romans 8:3

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh....

First, note that the word sin above appears in the singular. Paul is referring here to sin as a noun, the law (or power) of sin in our members which enslaves us under the principle of self:

Romans 7:22-24

For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Second, notice that in order to deliver humanity from this law (or power) of sin, God had to send His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3, just above).

Some insist that the word "likeness" really means that Christ was physically — but not spiritually — like the rest of humanity. That is, they say that Christ's human nature looked like sinful flesh but, in fact, was different. They insist that His human nature was like that of Adam before the fall — with no tendency at all toward sin.

The problem with this interpretation is that Paul uses the identical word, "likeness," in the same dative case, in Philippians 2:7, where we read:

Philippians 2:7

...Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [Emphasis mine.]

Surely we all agree that Christ was a real man — He did not just look like one.

As the International Critical Commentary explains, "Paul uses the word likeness in Romans 8:3 (above) to point out that Christ's humanity was not the sum total of His being and that He never ceased to be the divine Son of God." His divinity with the internal zoe-life was truly His, but He assumed our corporate human bios-life, with the law of sin, in order to be legally qualified to be the second, or last, Adam and save the world:

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

Besides, it would have been impossible for Christ to conquer and condemn the law of sin in our members vicariously — that is, without assuming the selfsame human nature that has the law of sin in its members. The law of sin is a constant force, like the law of gravity. And the only way Christ could condemn it is by meeting that force head-on. He did it in our corporate humanity in the power of the Spirit:

Luke 4:14

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

Romans 8:2

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

The stumbling block to holy living and growing in Christ is the law of sin that enslaves the human personality:

Romans 3:9-20

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know."

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

In Romans, Paul identifies himself with every born-again Christian who hates evil and delights in the law of God, yet fails miserably to do good on their own:

Romans 7:14-25

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Twice, in verses 17 and 20, Paul blames the noun sin (sin living in him) for this failure and concludes that the only hope of deliverance from this wretched condition is in and through Jesus Christ (verses 24-25).

The good news of the objective gospel is that Christ has saved humanity both from its sins (plural) and from (past historic tense) the "law of sin and death":

Romans 8:2

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. [Emphasis mine.]

Christ accomplished this by assuming the human nature that was dominated by the law of sin:

Hebrews 2:16-18; 4:15

For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. ...For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin.

But note that His victory was not gained in His own strength (an impossibility for the fallen human nature), but by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit:

John 5:19, 30

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ...By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

Luke 4:14

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

Not only did Christ conquer this law of sin that enslaves humanity to the principle of self, He also executed it on the cross.

Romans 8:3

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh....

That is why:

Romans 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus....

This victory over sinful flesh is what makes it possible for believers to fully grow in Christ, as they learn to walk in the Spirit:

Romans 8:4

...In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Unless Christians clearly understand the objective facts of the gospel, they have no hope in their subjective experience of growth in Christ.

Growing in Christ

One of the most encouraging statements on growth in Christ is penned by Paul:

Romans 8:11

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give [spiritual] life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

This is very good news, so let’s study what he’s saying.

Paul taught that the wages of sin is death (the second death) — that is, eternal death — but that, on the cross, Christ bore the wages of the accumulated sins of the whole world:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Isaiah 53:4-11

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

1 John 2:2

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We can be assured that crucifixion itself did not kill Christ, for Roman historians (Celsus and Cicero) record that it took between three to seven days for a crucified one to die. Yet Christ died within six hours. The accumulated sins of the whole world apparently broke Christ's heart.

Desire of Ages, Pg. 753

"Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners

was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

"Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.

"With amazement angels witnessed the Saviour's despairing agony. The hosts of heaven veiled their faces from the fearful sight. Inanimate nature expressed sympathy with its insulted and dying Author. The sun refused to look upon the awful scene. Its full, bright rays were illuminating the earth at midday, when suddenly it seemed to be blotted out. Complete darkness, like a funeral pall, enveloped the cross. 'There was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.' There was no eclipse or other natural cause for this darkness, which was as deep as midnight without moon or stars. It was a miraculous testimony given by God that the faith of after generations might be confirmed.

"In that thick darkness God's presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him."

When the law of God executes sin, it executes it permanently; so the fact that Christ rose from the grave proves that the power of the Holy Spirit is greater than the accumulated sins of the world. And, since that same Spirit dwells in every born-again Christian:

Romans 8:11

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

This is what Paul is saying, and why he could write to believers in Philippi:

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....

Unlike the law of God, which cannot sympathize or help us to obey, Jesus Christ can do both. He understands human weakness and can help us to obey His commandments:

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin.

Hebrews 2:18

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Since human nature does not change until the Second Advent, when "this corruption will put on incorruption," the believers remain sinners by nature, saved by grace alone, even after probation closes.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

This does not mean the believers will keep on sinning, but that their natures will still contain a bias toward sin, though in performance and character they may be fully reflecting the love of Christ — the true fulfillment of the law:

Romans 13:10

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The goal of every true Christian should be to be able to say, with the apostle Paul:

Philippians 3:12

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Relating Justification and Sanctification

Through the objective facts of the gospel — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ — He took to heaven the absolute guarantee of a glorified humanity, fully and completely redeemed from every aspect of the sin problem. This is why, the moment an individual receives Christ by faith, that person stands complete in Him:

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

This is justification by faith — the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. As Christ Himself pointed out, such a believer has passed from death to life:

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

That means he or she stands perfect in performance, in justice, and in nature in Christ:

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

But holy living (sanctification) is the work of a lifetime, as the Holy Spirit makes real in experience what is already true in Christ through justification by faith. Growing in Christ means to see reproduced in one's life the character of Christ. This is the imparted righteousness of Christ, the fruits of imputed righteousness.

The following texts show the relationship between justification by faith (imputed righteousness) and sanctification by faith (imparted righteousness) — the fruits of the gospel. This fruit-bearing growth process will not be fully realized until the Second Advent, when this corruption puts on incorruption:

1 Corinthians 15:50-54

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

Through justification by faith, believers are dead to sin in Christ:

Romans 6:1-7

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Colossians 3:3

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Therefore, in Christ they must give no place to sin, at least in attitude:

Romans 6:11; 13:14

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ...Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Colossians 3:6

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

1 Peter 2:24

"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

Through justification by faith, believers are made alive to God through the new birth experience:

John 20:31

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Romans 6:11; 8:10

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ...But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

1 John 5:11

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Therefore, as Christians, they must live unto God, reflecting daily the life of Christ:

Romans 14:8

If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In Christ, believers are adopted as children of God:

Galatians 3:26

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith....

Ephesians 1:5

...He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will....

1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Therefore, as adopted children, they are to behave as God's children:

Ephesians 5:1, 8

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children.... For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light....

1 Peter 1:13-14

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

As adopted children of God, they are spiritually no longer of this world but citizens of heaven:

John 15:19; 17:14-16

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ...I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

1 John 5:19

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Therefore, growing in Christ means they should not love the world or the things of the world:

1 John 2:15-16; 5:4-5

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world. ...For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Through baptism into Christ, believers have surrendered their sinful bios-life to the cross and are, therefore, crucified to the world:

Galatians 6:14-15

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

Colossians 2:20

Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules....

As Christians growing in Christ, they should avoid worldly practices:

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

James 4:4

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

1 John 2:16-17

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

As Christians who have chosen to be slaves of God, growing in Christ means serving the Lord and Master joyfully, as God's slave:

Romans 6:20-22

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

1 Corinthians 7:22

For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

Romans 6:17-19

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe....

In Christ, believers possess the zoe-life of Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Galatians 6:15

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

Therefore, growing in Christ means learning to walk in newness of life:

Romans 6:4; 7:6

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ...But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Ephesians 4:20-24

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

As Christians who are a light to the world, they should walk as children of light as they grow in Christ:

Matthew 5:14

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."

1 Thessalonians 5:5

You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

Matthew 5:15-16

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Ephesians 5:18

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit....

As believers abiding in Christ, they have been made secure through justification by faith:

John 10:27-28

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Romans 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus....

1 Peter 1:5

[You] who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Therefore, as Christians, they should enjoy security in Him:

1 Thessalonians 1:5

...Because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

2 Peter 1:10

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble....

Being justified by faith and led by the Holy Spirit...

Romans 8:9-10

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ...Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

2 Corinthians 6:16

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

...as they grow in Christ they must learn to yield to the Spirit's control:

Galatians 5:16-17, 25

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ...Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:30; 5:18

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ...Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit....

1 Thessalonians 5:19

Do not quench the Spirit.

All who are justified in Christ have received one or more gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Romans 12:5-6

...So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith....

1 Corinthians 12:4, 12

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ...Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

Ephesians 4:7-13

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

If believers are to grow in Christ and serve His church, they must use their God-given gifts:

Romans 12:3-8

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have

different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

1 Peter 4:11

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Every believer justified by faith in Christ has been empowered for witnessing:

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

Ephesians 3:20

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us....

2 Timothy 1:7

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

As Christians growing in Christ, they should witness to the truth as it is in Christ:

1 Corinthians 2:4

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power....

Ephesians 6:10

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Philippians 3:10; 4:13

I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.... I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

The life God expects of every believer is the life of His Son. Every provision has already been made in Christ; therefore, there is no excuse for crediting faith, plus works, for salvation. True justification by faith, however, always produces works:

John 14:12

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Titus 3:5, 8

[God our Savior] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.... This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who

have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

These works do not save, but provide evidence of salvation in Christ. As the apostle John notes, whoever is born of God overcomes "the world" (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life):

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith:

1 John 5:4

...For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Significance of the 11th Fundamental Belief

This fundamental belief, added to the list in 2005, states: "By His death on the cross, Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love (manifested through the objective gospel — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ). Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us."

It goes on to declare that, "in this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together in worship, and participating in the mission of the church."

May this be the experience of all as they learn to walk in the Spirit. Amen.

Chapter 9

The Church

Fundamental Belief #12

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures, which are the written Word. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish.

[Genesis 12:3; Acts 7:38; Ephesians 4:11-15, 3:8-11; Matthew 28:19-20, 16:13-20, 18:18; Ephesians 2:19-22, 1:22-23, 5:23-27; Colossians 1:17-18]

The word "church" means different things to different people. To some it means an established denomination, to others a building where Christians worship, while to still others it means a religious group or organization. In the Bible, however, the church (koinonia) represents a living organism made up of individuals from all races and social structures, male and female, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, knit together as one body in Christ. To this body of believers, Christ has delegated authority as well as certain responsibilities, goals, and objectives:

Matthew 18:18

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

John 20:23

“If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

From its very inception, Christ intended the church to be the most powerful force for good on earth. With Christ as its head, not even the gates of hell can prevail against it:

Matthew 16:18

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

(The “rock” is not Peter but his confession, “You are the Christ.”) The church as the body of Christ is unique to the New Testament; all other metaphors used in the New Testament to define the church are found also in the Old Testament.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clearly spelled out the goals and objectives of the church on earth, telling His followers, “you are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world”:

Matthew 5:13-14

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”

This sermon, delivered on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee, was intended for His disciples (those who accepted Him as their Messiah). Many of His hearers were fishermen, who used salt to both flavor and preserve the fish they caught, and they understood exactly what Christ was saying when He compared them to salt.

The world in which they were living, like dead fish, was rotting spiritually — as was the antediluvian world before the Flood:

Genesis 6:5

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

Scripture does not teach that things are evolving, getting better and better. It teaches instead that, because of the Fall, sin is multiplying and things are going from bad to worse and that mankind's only hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Romans 5:20

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

Jesus was saying that Christians, like salt, not only add flavor to the insipid life of this world, but slow down the rotting process in a society "dead in trespasses and sins":

Ephesians 2:1

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....

This is the negative — or restraining — function of the church.

Then Jesus told His disciples, "You are the light of the world" — a positive function.

Matthew 5:14

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."

In the Greek, the word you is in the plural, while the world light is singular, for though the church is made up of many individuals, it is one corporate body that is to reflect only one light. That light is none other than Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Jesus said of Himself:

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 1:4

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

As the body of Christ, the church is to reflect His life, through the good works of His disciples. Through them the world will see Christ's true character of selfless love and will glorify the Father in heaven:

Matthew 5:16

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Paul says the believer's goal should be, "Christ in you, the hope of glory":

Colossians 1:27

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Before Jesus left this world, He gave His disciples "a new commandment,":

John 13:34- 35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This is the church's mission, as ambassadors of Christ on earth.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of

reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Unfortunately, the church today has lost its saltiness and is hiding its light under a bushel, "having a form of godliness but denying its power":

2 Timothy 3:5

...Having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

No wonder its impact for good in the world is small. The church today desperately needs revival and reformation. But it will take more than promotional programs to turn things around. Only a clear understanding of the gospel and the power of the cross, and surrender to its demands will bring change.

Galatians 6:14

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In the New Testament, the word for "church" comes from two Greek words joined together, ek and klesia, from which we get the English word "ecclesiastical." Ekklesia was commonly used in secular Greek to refer to any gathering of people for a special meeting or occasion. But in the Bible, it refers exclusively to the gathering of God's people — the body of Christ, the church. Christians have indeed been called out from the kingdom of this world under Satan, to the kingdom of heaven under Christ.

John 15:18-19

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

The apostle Peter describes Christians as:

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The world of spiritual darkness is driven by three egocentric drives, or compulsions: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life":

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

In contrast, the church is made up of individuals who have surrendered their self-centered bios-lives to the cross of Christ and who through the zoe-life of Christ, powered by the Holy Spirit, are denying these three sinful drives.

Galatians 5:24

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Romans 13:14

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Christ makes it clear:

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Each of these New Testament descriptions helps define what the church should be. But, sad to say, the church today falls far short of this ideal. The reason is twofold.

First, there has been a falling away from the true gospel, the power of God unto salvation, and the church is no longer reflecting the holy and righteous zoe-life of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us — whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter — asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

We see little difference today between the behavior of the world and of the church, which resembles the general condition of the Corinthian church of Paul's day. He told those members:

1 Corinthians 3:3

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

Second, not all who call themselves Christians are truly converted, born-again believers. The church, Jesus said, will always contain two groups — the true and the false, the wheat and the weeds [or "tares" in some translations]:

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed

weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

"'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

Between the world, under Satan, and the church, under Christ, stands the cross of Christ, and His cross will allow nothing of the world to creep into the church.

Today the church is borrowing ideas from the world and depending on worldly resources for its success. But when the everlasting gospel of the three angels has done its job and God's people emerge from their Babylonish self-centeredness...

Daniel 4:30

...He said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

...the church will once again turn this world upside down with the power of the gospel message, as it did in the New Testament times:

Acts 17:6

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here...."

May that day come soon.

The twelfth fundamental belief of the Adventist church states that the New Testament church "is in continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times." The Jews mistakenly identified the church (people of the covenant) with the literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — the three fathers of Israel. The apostle Paul corrected this misunderstanding in his letter to the Romans. First, he stated in Chapter 2 that:

Romans 2:28-29

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

In Chapter 9, the apostle then further defines true Israel in God's eyes, declaring:

Romans 9:6-8

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel [descendants of Jacob] are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the children by physical descent [natural descendants] who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Paul is saying that the church consists of those who are born from above, like Isaac, and who possess the spiritual qualities of Abraham. What are these qualities, and where does Jacob, the third father, fit in?

A careful study of the lives of these three great men of God reveals that Abraham represents faith — the first attribute of those who make up God's family. Note how Paul expresses this truth in defense of justification by faith alone:

Romans 4:13-18

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if

those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring — not only to those who are of the law [Jews] but also to those who have the faith of Abraham [Gentile believers]. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Galatians 3:6-9

So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

The second characteristic of those who truly belong to the family of God is the new birth, represented by Isaac.

John 3:5-8

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

The historical Isaac was special primarily because of the nature of his birth. When Abraham was 75 years old, God promised him a son:

Genesis 12:1-4

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

But not until Abraham reached 100 years of age did God fulfill that promise:

Genesis 21:5

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Why did God wait so long? Apparently because He wanted Abraham to understand that this child's birth was miraculous — that because Sarah was long past child-bearing age, the conception would otherwise be impossible. Through this extraordinary intervention, God established that salvation is based on His promise in Christ, not on human effort. Paul brings this point forward to the Galatian Christians, who were trapped in a subtle form of legalism:

Galatians 4:28

Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

But faith and the new birth require persistence — they must endure to the end, said Jesus, if they are to bring salvation:

Matthew 10:22

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Jacob represents a faith that endures, or perseveres. Even before Jacob was born, God had promised his mother, Rebecca, that of her two sons, "the older shall serve the

younger," and that Jacob — not Esau — would possess the spiritual birthright and be the Messianic ancestor.

Romans 9:12

...Not by works but by him who calls — she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

The promise, in fact, contradicted the normal laws of birthright.

The name Jacob means "schemer," and describes Jacob's lifelong quest to obtain the birthright by deceit and cunning. Finally, after wrestling with the Man of God and prevailing, his name was changed from Jacob to Israel:

Genesis 32:22-28

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

And Jacob at last realized that, when God makes a promise, it is He who fulfills it.

The experience of no other character in the Bible better describes the battle between the flesh and the Spirit than does Jacob's. All who make up the church must face this internal conflict, but, as the writer of Hebrews so succinctly puts it:

Hebrews 10:38-39

And,

"But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back."

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

We can say, then, that the church is made up of individuals who:

have the faith of Abraham,

have experienced the new birth from above like Isaac, and

have a faith that endures to the end, like Jacob's.

Together, these core qualities in every believer represent a living connection with the Lord, Jesus Christ — the Head of the church.

The New Testament uses many metaphors to describe the church, all of which point either to a living connection with Christ or to a total dependence on Him. The church is called:

a "flock," with Christ as the shepherd:

John 10:1-15, 26-30

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen

to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep.

...But you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

"branches," with Christ as the vine:

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

a "holy temple," with Christ as the chief cornerstone:

Ephesians 2:19-22

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

or a "wife," with Christ as the husband:

Ephesians 5:29-32

After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.

These metaphors all represent a unique relationship between believers and their Savior, Jesus Christ. The flock depends totally on the shepherd for survival, protection, and care. Likewise, believers rely totally on Christ:

Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Without the vine, the branches wither away and bear no fruit. So it is with believers who lose their living-faith connection with Christ:

John 15:4

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Buildings in Bible lands were primarily made of stone and, during construction, each stone had to line up with the chief cornerstone. Likewise, all Christian experience must be measured by the truth as it is in Christ:

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

God's ideal in marriage is that a husband and wife become one flesh — that they are to act as one person. Their thoughts, goals in life, and behavior are to be united. Believers must likewise be united in Christ:

Ephesians 5:30-31

...For we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

Their desires, ambitions, goals in life, and behavior must bear witness to their connection with Christ:

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

All of these are key metaphors that the Old and New Testaments apply to the church, but the unique description, "body of Christ," appears only in the New. According to the apostle Paul, every true believer is baptized into the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

The New Testament does not regard the church as either a building or a denomination, but a spiritual body — a community, or fellowship, of believers (Greek, koinonia). This fellowship of believers consists of men and women of all races and walks of life who have one thing in common — they have all obeyed the gospel and been baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 12:12

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

Romans 12:2-5

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Ephesians 1:19-23

...And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Colossians 1:24

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

The Christian church today, unfortunately, is a far cry from this ideal. It has splintered into various denominations and non-denominational groups, each of which claims to have the truth. This denies the unity of the body which, in turn, undermines the power of the gospel. In praying to the Father for His disciples, Jesus expressed this concern (emphasis mine):

John 17:20-21

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

This unity will not be regained through human efforts, such as the ecumenical movement. This will occur only when God's prophetic people fulfill their divine commission of restoring the pure and full everlasting gospel, and the earth is lit up with the glory of Christ through the loud cry of the fourth angel.

Revelation 10:11

Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

Revelation 18:1-5

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!' She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

At that time, the unity of the body will become a reality. Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

But every believer must keep in mind that Christ is the head of the body, just as the head controls every part of the human body.

Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ...For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Colossians 1:18; 2:19

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ...They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Every Christian must be connected with Christ, in what the Bible calls a slave-master relationship:

1 Corinthians 7:22

For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

Ephesians 6:6

Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons....

Of all the biblical metaphors illustrating the relationship between Christ and His church, the unity between Christ (the head) and believers (His body) is the most intimate — we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones:

Ephesians 5:30

...For we are members of his body.

Those who wish to function as the body of Christ need to keep certain principles in mind. First, just as the various parts of the physical body are vitally connected to the head by the nervous system, so there must be a living connection between the believer and Christ, which is why Paul says to:

1 Thessalonians 5:17

...Pray continually....

Without such a connection, a believer becomes spiritually paralyzed and a burden to the church, as happens physically when any nerve leading to a part of the human body is severed from the head.

Second, every believer must be submissive to Christ, as every part of the human body submits to the directions supplied by the head. What if the organs tried to live

independently of the will of the head? Suppose, for example, the stomach is empty and crying for food. So it tells the brain, which immediately tells the legs to take the body to the kitchen for food. Now, suppose the legs refuse to cooperate. The body, in the worst case, could starve to death. Just so, every believer must be fully submissive to Christ, the head of the spiritual body. Or as Paul puts it, we should consider ourselves slaves of Christ:

1 Corinthians 7:22

For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

Only then will the church reflect the Lord's holy zoe-life.

Finally, every believer has a vital part to play in the church, just as no part of the physical body is truly superfluous. The apostle Paul made this very clear to the church members at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 12:14-24

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it....

The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts to each believer, so the church can fulfill its mission on earth:

1 Corinthians 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

These gifts are given:

Ephesians 4:12-13

...To equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Those who become part of Christ's body stand "complete in Him":

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

This means that when the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers, God sees them as if they had never sinned. This provides the fullness of salvation and of a place reserved for them in heaven. But it does ask the believer, in turn, to reflect His righteousness to the world. Paul refers to this as "Christ in you, the hope of glory":

Colossians 1:27

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Just as Jesus was able to manifest God to the world through the incarnation, so believers are to manifest Christ to the world through the righteousness He imputes to them.

1 Timothy 3:16

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

How is this accomplished? Jesus told His disciples that they were to live in His power, in the same way He lived by the power of the Father:

John 6:57

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

This means that, just as God worked in Christ, so Christ must work in and through His believers:

John 14:10-12

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

In practical terms, His followers must follow Christ's own example, by putting self aside and totally surrendering the will to Him:

John 5:19, 30

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ...By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

The formula of the gospel is: Not I, but Christ, the path to true obedience.

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Jesus Himself describes it this way:

John 12:24-25

Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their [bios] life will lose it, while anyone who hates their [bios] life in this world will keep it for eternal [zoe] life.

Once the bios-life is submitted to the cross of Christ, the door is open for the Spirit to take over and manifest the life of Christ in the believer. This is the church's highest priority. The church is an extension of the incarnate Christ; through His followers, the world is to get a glimpse of His matchless charms. But for this to happen, every believer must walk in the Spirit. Take the example of the apostle Peter. Before Pentecost, he walked in his own strength. Though he was ever so sincere when he promised Jesus he would never deny him, when tested, he failed miserably. Yet only a few days later, Peter was proclaiming Christ powerfully before a multitude! What made the difference? The power of the Holy Spirit had filled him at Pentecost.

Acts 2:14

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."

The first four New Testament books present a historical account of God being manifested in one Man, Jesus Christ. The fifth is the Book of Acts, an account of God being manifested through the church, the body of Christ. What was the secret behind the power of the early church? These men and women were filled with the Holy Spirit!

Stephen, for example, was the first Christian martyr and, even before He was selected as a deacon in the early church, he was "full of faith and the Holy Spirit":

Acts 6:5

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

Why, then, was this glorious witnessing period so short-lived? An unfortunate departure from the pure and true gospel of Christ occurred. Self took over, and the church was plunged into darkness.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Yes, it grew in numbers, but it became an established institution devoid of spiritual power, especially during the Dark Ages.

Today, to a large degree, we see the same situation in the Christian church. If the church of the 21st Century is to turn the world upside down with the power of the gospel, there must be a restoration of that pure and complete gospel first proclaimed by Christ's apostles. I believe God has raised up a movement to fulfill this mission, to restore and proclaim with a loud voice the everlasting gospel, the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14.

The original power of the gospel comes from what Christ accomplished for the entire human race, some 2,000 years ago, by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. But this power is meaningless unless demonstrated in the life of the church, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul, therefore, does not limit the word "grace" to redemption in Christ, but also applies it to the power of God demonstrated in and through believers:

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them [the other apostles] — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

The apostle repeats the message in his second epistle to the Corinthians. This is what he recorded (the phrases "My grace," "My strength," and "the power of Christ" all refer to the same power — they are interchangeable and synonymous):

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

...Or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

God wants to demonstrate "His grace," "His strength," and "the power of Christ" in the life of every believer individually, and in the church collectively. To that end, He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in every true follower. The Spirit was not to save the believers (He is not a co-redeemer with Christ), but to make real and to manifest in them the salvation Christ had already obtained.

The Holy Spirit gives gifts and calls believers from worldly ways, the better to demonstrate through them the saving power of the gospel. Peter says that the believers are:

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you [believers] may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Believers may indeed shout “hallelujah” as they praise the Lord, but this passage is referring to their role in exalting the life of the Lord, Jesus Christ, to a world groping in spiritual darkness. The church has the potential of becoming the most powerful force on earth for good.

But how can people from various nations, cultures, backgrounds, outlooks, temperaments, and walks of life become a united body? With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. What the United Nations has failed miserably to accomplish, God will do when the church comes together in the truth of the everlasting gospel — united in one faith, one baptism, one Sabbath, and one Lord and Master:

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

In the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the objective facts of the gospel), all humanity was redeemed and reconciled to God:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

But unless this good news is communicated and demonstrated to the whole world in a compellingly positive way, the end will not come:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

God has commissioned His church to carry the knowledge of salvation to the entire human race and, to that end, has equipped the church with various gifts.

The church, therefore, is an extension of Christ's mission on earth. His mission was:

Luke 4:18

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...."

This same mission is now to be fulfilled by the church, through the power of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, the earth will indeed be "illuminated with His glory":

Revelation 18:1

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

But this will take place only when the church reaches maturity. The church talks a great deal about the importance of evangelism, but all efforts to evangelize the world will be frustratingly inadequate unless the church first reaches maturity. Some believe and teach that evangelism helps produce maturity. But true evangelism is an outgrowth of maturity, not its instigator, as Pentecost proved and church history confirms. Many who come through the front door and join an immature congregation will quickly leave through the back. We would hear more about this, were it not that many world divisions hesitate to admit how seriously this impacts their active membership count.

God wants the church to no longer be immature:

Ephesians 4:14-16

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole

body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When the church reaches this level of maturity, it will make its ultimate impact on the world. Through the humanity of Christ, God fully revealed Himself to mankind:

John 14:8-11

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."

At Pentecost, this manifestation of God was reproduced in the apostolic church, and the world of that time was turned upside down with the gospel message:

Acts 17:6

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here...."

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God plans to repeat this manifestation in a most powerful way in these last days and, when that occurs, there will be no more excuse for anyone to be lost. God can then bring sin to an end and usher in everlasting righteousness.

With this purpose in mind, I believe God raised the Advent Movement; when this prophetic people at last fulfills its mission of proclaiming the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, the devil will become enraged and will make war with this last generation of Christians, who have the testimony of Jesus Christ and are keeping the commandments of God by exhibiting selfless love:

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

This will be the final showdown in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. At that time, the church triumphant will truly be able to sing what the writer of the song Onward, Christian Soldiers! wishfully penned:

Like a mighty army moves the church of God.

Christians, we are treading where the saints have trod.

We are not divided; all one body we,

One in hope and doctrine; one in charity!

Onward, Christian soldiers! Marching as to war,

With the cross of Jesus going on before.

What a glorious day that will be! The church, as the body of Christ, and with Christ as its head, will at last be one flesh. And the third angel will proclaim to the universe:

Revelation 14:12

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

We continue reading:

Revelation 14:14-16

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Revelation 22:20

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Chapter 10

The Remnant and Its Mission

Fundamental Belief #13

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.

[Revelation 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Revelation 21:1-14]

Both the remnant (literally "the rest of the seed") of Revelation 12:17 and the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 represent the last generation of Christians alive at the Second Coming of Christ, which is why the two topics appear together in this chapter.

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

They play an important part in Seventh-day Adventists' understanding of last-day events, though the Adventist statement of fundamental beliefs does not specifically mention the 144,000.

In 1993, the last Jack W. Provonsha, a prominent Adventist scholar, published The Remnant in Crisis, a thought-provoking book dealing with this fundamental belief. In his introduction, Provonsha pointed out that:

The Remnant in Crisis

There was a time when most Seventh-day Adventists felt they knew who they were. They were the remnant, the true church of the last days. But today Adventists face an identity crisis. Many sincere, educated Adventists, especially in the first world, are not sure that we have the right, as a church, to call ourselves 'the remnant church'; they question the validity of this claim.

In 1963, 30 years before Provonsha's book appeared, Calvinist scholar Anthony A. Hoekema had already challenged Seventh-day Adventists on this very point. Dr. Hoekema came to this conclusion in his book:

Seventh-day Adventism, p. 56

We conclude, then, that Seventh-day Adventist teachings on the remnant church are not consistent with their claim that they recognize the existence of an invisible or universal church of Christ which is larger than their fellowship. It should be added that their application of the concept 'remnant church' to themselves is neither exegetically nor doctrinally defensible.

To begin with the exegetical matter, the idea that Revelation 12:17 refers to a 'remnant church' is based on a misinterpretation of the Greek of this passage. The King James Version, to be sure, translates here: 'the dragon ... went to make war with the remnant of her seed.' The Greek here, however, does not use either the word leimma (translated remnant in Romans 11:5) or the word hupoleimma (translated remnant in Romans 9:27, a rendering of the Hebrew she'ar in Isaiah 10:22), but rather the plural, hoi loipoi, literally, the rest of them. In the American Standard Version, the expression hoi loipoi is in every instance translated 'the rest.' Here, in Revelation 12:17, the expression is rendered in the American Standard [as] 'the rest of her seed'; both the Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible have 'the rest of her offspring.'

The usual interpretation of this passage is that, after having failed to wipe out the church (represented by the woman), Satan (represented by the dragon) now makes war against certain individual believers: 'the rest of her seed.' To read a separate church into this phrase 'the rest of her seed,' is completely unwarranted.

This challenge to Seventh-day Adventists' understanding of themselves as the "remnant church," coming both from inside and outside the church, can no longer be ignored. The best solution I have found to this problem was published in an article some years ago in the magazine Insight. According to its author:

Insight Magazine, 13 March 1979

Technically, two movements must occur before God will have a remnant church on earth. First, many Seventh-day Adventists will decide to leave the church and will join Babylon. Some of these will become the most bitter enemies of God's people (see The Great Controversy, pg. 608).

Second, a great number of people who are not now Seventh-day Adventists will be convinced that God is truthfully perceived by this church, and will join (see The Great Controversy, pg. 390).

This blending of God's friends at the end of time is what will make up the remnant church.

[Note: The two quotations below from The Great Controversy (mentioned in the Insight article above) are included for the reader's information. These did not appear in the original BUTR publication.]

The Great Controversy, pg. 608

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 Sabbath-keepers 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, pg. 390

The Bible declares that before the coming of the Lord, Satan will work "with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;" and they that "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," will be left to receive "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" [2 Thess. 2:9-11]. Not until this condition shall be reached, and the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete. The change is a progressive one, and the perfect fulfilment of Rev. 14:8 is yet future.

Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness and alienation from God that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ's true followers are still to be found in their communion. There are many of these who have never seen the special truths for this time. Not a few are dissatisfied with their present condition, and are longing for clearer light. They look in vain for the image of Christ in the churches with which they are connected. As these bodies depart farther and farther from the truth, and ally themselves more closely with the world, the difference between the two classes will widen, and it will finally result in separation. The time will come when those who love God supremely can no longer remain in connection with such as are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Revelation 18 points to the time when, as the result of rejecting the threefold warning of Rev. 14:6-12, the church will have fully reached the condition foretold by the second angel, and the people of God still in Babylon will be called upon to separate from her communion. This message is the last that will ever be given to the world; and it will accomplish its work. When those that "believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" [2 Thess. 2:12] shall be left to receive strong delusion and to believe a lie, then the light of truth will shine upon all whose hearts are open to receive it, and all the children of the Lord that remain in Babylon will heed the call, "Come out of her, My people" [Rev. 18:4].

This view of the remnant harmonizes with the fundamental belief of the church, as now stated — that "in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called

out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." This remnant, I believe, is what the 144,000 is all about. They are the last generation of Christians, the rest of her seed, those against whom Satan makes war and who will be victorious in the war of Armageddon, the great tribulation. They will demonstrate to the universe the full power of the everlasting gospel, for they are the final product of that gospel, proclaimed by the three angels of Revelation 14.

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?"

I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

Revelation 14:12

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

The Two Requirements

In the Old Testament, the yearly Day of Atonement service in the Sanctuary pointed symbolically to the culmination of the Plan of Salvation. On that day, God's people performed a twofold work. While the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place of the earthly Sanctuary to cleanse the people of their sins, the people themselves had to (1) deny, or humble themselves ("afflict their souls," in some translations), and (2) do no work, that is, keep it as a Sabbath day of rest:

Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:26-32

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work — whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you — because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins. It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance."

...The Lord said to Moses, "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the Lord. Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people. I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a day of sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

This twofold requirement harmonizes with the gospel formula of the New Testament, Not I, but Christ...

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

...as expressed by Paul himself in Philippians 3:3-10, and ends with these words (verses 8-9, emphasis added):

Philippians 3:3-10

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh — though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things [his self-righteousness]. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....

This is what the Day of Atonement requirements symbolized, but the Jews instead gave them an unfortunate legalistic application. The 144,000, however, fulfill the requirements spiritually, when the true gospel of Revelation 14 is restored. Note how Ellen G. White expresses the process:

Sons and Daughters of God, Pg. 259

“As Christ’s ambassadors, they [Adventists] are to search the Scriptures, to seek the truth that has been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other, Christ our righteousness.”

This, I believe, is the global mission for which God raised the Advent movement out of the Great Disappointment of 1844. The context of this mission is the cleansing of the Sanctuary (the gospel in type) predicted in Daniel 8:14 (see Appendix A).

Daniel 8:14

He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

The restoration of the everlasting gospel, as we shall see, will produce the 144,000, God's remnant of the last days.

Rather than claiming to be the remnant church, would it not be far better (and more biblical) to claim that God has raised the Seventh-day Adventist church to preach the remnant message, the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14? Not all members on the church books are at this time born-again Christians or committed to the church's vision. The remnant will emerge as the final product of "the gospel of the kingdom":

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Both Bible testaments use the word remnant in two ways. It can refer to believers faithful to God in times of widespread apostasy, or to those loyal to Him during persecution. In either case, remnant applies to those who remain faithful during terribly difficult times. For example, we find these words in Isaiah:

Isaiah 1:9

Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors [a remnant], we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

This remnant consisted of Jews who remained faithful during Israel's apostasy.

We note in Paul's writings two uses of the word remnant, in quotes he takes from the Old Testament. Paul writes, using Isaiah's words [emphasis added]:

Romans 9:27

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant [the faithful ones] will be saved."

Elsewhere Paul quotes God's reply to the prophet Elijah, who believed he alone remained faithful in Israel [emphasis added]:

Romans 11:4-5

And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

The Great Controversy

The word remnant (KJV) as it appears in Revelation 12:17 means, literally, the rest of her seed:

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring [seed] — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

The situation, as described in Revelation 12, is that of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, from beginning to end. Verses 1 to 4 use symbolic language to describe how the struggle began:

Revelation 12:1-4

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain

as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.

Verses 7 to 9, then, tell how the controversy escalated into war in which Satan and his angels were defeated and cast out of heaven to earth, where the great controversy gains a foothold and intensifies after Christ redeems the human race and reconciles the world to God, for Satan is desperate, knowing he has but a short time left (verses 10-12):

Revelation 12:7-12

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

Beginning with verse 13, the apostle John then shares a brief visionary account of what happens to the Christian church throughout history. At first Satan tries to destroy the infant church through persecution, but fails. As the Church Father Tertullian puts it, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The more Satan kills the faithful believers, the more new ones join the church. God helps His faithful people — the remnant — survive in the wilderness:

Revelation 12:13-14

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

So Satan tries a new tactic, and meets with far greater success. By filling the church with unconverted pagans (symbolized as floods of water entering the church, verse 15), Satan succeeds in perverting the truth of the gospel and corrupting the church:

Revelation 12:15

Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.

Thus begins the "Dark Ages." This fulfills the prophecy of the "little horn" spoken of by Daniel 7 and 8 and the "man of sin" (or "man of lawlessness") mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us — whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter — asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Then comes the Sixteenth-Century Reformation, in which God begins to restore the everlasting gospel by laying the foundation for the proclamation of the Three Angels' Messages to follow.

Revelation 12:16

But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

The three fundamental principles of the Reformation laid down are “Sola Scriptura” (the Bible is the only source of authority), “Sola Gratia” (salvation is by God’s grace alone), and “Sola Fide” (mankind is saved through faith alone).

The reformers began the restoration of gospel truth, but many Christian theologians of the Seventeenth Century and onward began to undermine the authority of Scripture by introducing liberal ideas associated with the scientific method.

Finally, God raised up a movement destined to eventually restore and proclaim the everlasting gospel in all its fullness and purity. This movement, I believe, is the Advent Movement (see Revelation 10:7-11, where “the little book which is open” refers to the book of Daniel):

Revelation 10:7-11

“But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but ‘in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”

The everlasting gospel is the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation 14. When this work is complete, the earth will be illuminated with the glory of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and His righteousness, through the power of the fourth angel:

Revelation 18:1

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

Satan will then become enraged and will make war with the remnant of her seed:

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

This war is the great tribulation, the war of Armageddon, "the battle of that great day of God Almighty":

Revelation 16:13-16

Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

"Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The final showdown in the great controversy between Christ and Satan will take place and the remnant (whom I believe are the triumphant 144,000) will represent God's faithful people. At that time, the remnant will remain loyal to their Lord, Jesus Christ, though they may feel forsaken of God:

Isaiah 54:5-8

For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you

back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.

They will vindicate the power of the gospel to save mankind totally from the power of sin and self.

The 144,000 of Revelation, Chapter 7

Questions about the 144,000 have produced much speculation and controversy within Adventism. It is a literal or a figurative number? Are the 144,000 composed only of Jews, or does the number include Gentile believers? Since the 144,000 are described as virgins (Revelation 14:4), are they all unmarried?

Revelation 14:4

These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

What does the Word of God have to say about this group?

Only two passages allude to the 144,000 — Revelation 7 and 14. By analyzing each passage in context, however, we can get a true picture of this special group. Let's begin by reviewing the context of Revelation 7, in Chapter 6. The first 12 verses symbolically describe the Lamb's opening of a succession of five seals — about two verses are devoted to each. But when we come to the opening of the sixth seal, beginning in Revelation 6:12, the narrative goes on through the end of Chapter 7. Clearly, this sixth seal has to do with the signs and Second Coming of Christ in all His glory. Note how it describes the coming of the great day of the Lord:

Revelation 6:14-17

The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

This description seems to suggest that no one will be able to stand at His coming. No wonder the apostle John raises the question, "Who is able to stand?" [or "who can withstand it?"].

Luke 18:8

"I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

But John does not leave us in darkness. Chapter 7 answers the question of Revelation 6:17 — the 144,000 will be able to stand! But before they can endure the Second Coming and the great tribulation that precedes it, their faith must be sealed so that it becomes unshakable.

So God holds back the four winds of strife (the great tribulation) until His faithful ones, the remnant, are sealed in their foreheads:

Revelation 7:1-3

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

At this time, John does not see the sealed ones, but he hears:

Revelation 7:4

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

John does not see them, apparently, because they are not grouped together and, according to verses 5 to 8, are composed of 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel:

Revelation 7:5-8

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

Since events surrounding the opening of the seals are described in symbolic language, it stands to reason that this group of men may not be literal, either. One notable clue is that, as we examine the list of 12 tribes in Revelation 7:5-8, the tribe of Dan is omitted and replaced by that of Manasseh, a son of Joseph, not Jacob. Toward the end of this chapter, we will look at the significance of each of the 12 tribes and see how they represent the 144,000, God's remnant of the last days. But first we must determine the identity of true Israel, as represented here.

God's True Israel

According to the apostle Paul:

Romans 2:28-29

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

Later, in Romans 9, Paul clearly states that to belong to Israel does not mean that one must be a literal descendant of the three fathers of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob);

rather, those who belong to Israel have the experience and character qualities of these men.

Romans 9:6-8, 30-32

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ...What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Abraham stands for unquestioning faith in God and His Word:

Romans 4:13-18

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Galatians 3:6-9

So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to

Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Isaac represents the new birth, those who are born from above. All who by faith have received the righteousness of Christ and have experienced the new birth, “as Isaac was, are children of promise”:

Galatians 4:28

Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

But what about Jacob? What does he represent? The name Jacob means schemer or one who deceives. How can he represent God’s remnant?

Jacob’s experience is actually typical of all God’s faithful ones, for it represents the constant struggle between the unconvertible flesh, on the one hand, and the converted mind, on the other hand — what Paul refers to as the inner, or inward man:

Romans 7:21-24

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

On his own, Jacob tried very hard to fulfill the promise God made to his mother Rebekah, that he would have the birthrights:

Genesis 25:23

The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

But all his attempts failed, until finally he found himself wrestling with the Man of God all night long. When he failed to defeat his assailant and instead suffered a dislocated hip himself, Jacob realized that he was wrestling against a supernatural being and refused to let him go without first receiving a blessing from God. Note the dialogue between Jacob and the Man of God:

Genesis 32:27-28

The man [the Man of God] asked him [Jacob], "What is your name?"

"Jacob [deceiver or schemer]," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

So Jacob represents all those whose faith endures to the end, in spite of human failure. According to Jesus, these three fathers of Israel represent the living — that is, the saved:

Matthew 22:31-32

"But about the resurrection of the dead — have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

It is not enough for one to believe in Christ (to be Abraham's descendant) and to experience the new birth (to be the child of Isaac). For a believer to ultimately make it to heaven, one's faith must also endure to the end, as did Jacob's:

Matthew 10:16-22

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother

will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

Hebrews 10:35-39

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back."

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

In the case of the last generation of Christians (the 144,000), faith must endure to the end, in spite of the great tribulation that will try their faith, as no other generation of believers has been tested before:

Daniel 12:1

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered."

The prophet Jeremiah describes this Time of Trouble in these words:

Jeremiah 30:7

How awful that day will be! No other will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.

Going back to the description of the 144,000 as John describes them in Revelation 7, notice in verse 9 and following that John then actually sees their group in heaven, after

the great tribulation is over and the remnant is delivered by the Second Coming. He describes the scene as follows:

Revelation 7:9-10

After this [the Second Advent] I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Some prefer to interpret this great multitude as representing all of the saved. But this cannot be, for at least two reasons. First, the chapter itself does not deal with the question of who makes it to heaven, but, "Who is able to stand (the Second Coming of Christ)"? Second, in Revelation 7:13, one of the 24 elders voices this question:

Revelation 7:13

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes — who are they, and where did they [referring to verses 9 and 10] come from?"

The answer is instructive:

Revelation 7:14b

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

These are clearly the 144,000, and they represent a vast multitude made up of "every nation, tribe, people and language" (verse 9).

John had not yet seen the 144,000 (verse 4) but hears "the number of those who were sealed":

Revelation 7:4

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

Only after the great tribulation and the Second Coming does John see them assembled before the throne of God and of the Lamb. That is because the 144,000 constitute believers from "every nation, tribe, people and language."

The 144,000 in Revelation 14

What more can we learn about the 144,000 in Revelation 14? In this description of the final generation of Christians, the topic at hand is the everlasting gospel of the three angels — the full and pure gospel, restored and cleansed. This is the everlasting gospel that produces the 144,000 — this special group that demonstrates the full power of the gospel and vindicates Christ in the final showdown, the war of Armageddon.

The first thing we notice in Revelation 14:1-5 about the 144,000 is that they are standing in heaven before the Lamb on Mount Zion (verse 1).

Revelation 14:1-5

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

So we can assume that, in Chapter 14, John is describing this group after they have endured the full force of Satan's attack in the Time of Trouble and have been delivered at the Second Coming. This scene is basically the same as the one described in Revelation 7:9:

Revelation 7:9

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

That God's name is written on their foreheads simply means that their minds have been fully rooted and grounded in the truth of God's agape-love and the righteousness of Christ.

Ephesians 3:13-19

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Then John hears something — the noise of rushing waters, as in a thunderstorm, created by a multitude of harpists:

Revelation 14:2

And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.

He also hears the 144,000 singing a new song that only they can sing:

Revelation 14:3

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

All this harmonizes with what John was shown in Revelation 7:

Revelation 7:9-10

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

And why can only the 144,000 from among the redeemed sing this new song? The answer comes:

Revelation 14:4-5

These are those who did not defile themselves with women [false churches], for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

The 144,000 describe mature Christianity that has experienced the full power of the gospel and is, therefore, fully reflecting the character of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They are called "virgins" in the same sense as these words by Paul to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 11:2

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

They are called "firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4) because they are the first among the redeemed to have reached full maturity (though they are the last generation chronologically). As Jesus told Peter after the experience with the rich, young ruler:

Mark 10:31

“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

As we review Revelation 14, we see that it first describes the 144,000 (verses 1-5):

Revelation 14:1-5

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

In verses 6-11, then, we are told that this group is the product of the everlasting gospel, proclaimed with power by the three angels.

Revelation 14:6-11

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

A second angel followed and said, “‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest

day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

This is the fulfillment of what Christ predicted:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

In Revelation 14:12-13, John sums up the 144,000 in these words (emphasis added):

Revelation 14:12-13

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

In verses 14-20, then, the harvest of the earth is described, at the Second Coming of Christ, when the 144,000 and all the saved are taken to heaven and the lost are destroyed by fire:

Revelation 14:14-20

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia [180 miles or about 300 kilometers].

The Twelve Tribes

The 12,000 from each tribe of Israel, as listed in Revelation 7:5-8, are symbolic and clearly do not represent literal Jews:

Revelation 7:5-8

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

In Genesis 29:31-30:24 we find the meanings of ten of the twelve tribes:

Genesis 29:31-30:24

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” So he was named Levi.

She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!”

Jacob became angry with her and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?”

Then she said, “Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her.”

So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son.” Because of this she named him Dan.

Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, “I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.” So she named him Naphtali.

When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, “What good fortune!” So she named him Gad.

Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, “How happy I am! The women will call me happy.” So she named him Asher.

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

But she said to her, “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?”

“Very well,” Rachel said, “he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.”

So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. “You must sleep with me,” she said. “I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he slept with her that night.

God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, “God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband.” So she named him Issachar.

Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, “God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons.” So she named him Zebulun.

Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.” She named him Joseph, and said, “May the Lord add to me another son.”

The other two, Benjamin and Manasseh, are found in Genesis 35:18 and 41:51, respectively:

Genesis 35:18

As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

Genesis 41:51

Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.”

In Bible times, names represented traits of those named and the following is a list of the names of the 12 tribes, and the meaning of each: Judah means praise; Reuben means a son; Gad means a company; Asher means happy; Simeon means hearing; Napthali means wrestling; Manasseh means forgetting; Levi means joined; Issachar means servant; Zebulun means dwelling; Joseph means added; and Benjamin means son of the right hand.

These beautifully describe the 144,000, who represent the remnant of God. They will endure the full force of Satan's attack in the great tribulation and come out victorious, vindicating the power of the gospel. Someone has penned this elegy to the 144,000:

"Praise these sons of God, this company of happy Christians, who having heard and responded to the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14, wrestled with Satan in the War of Armageddon (the final conflict in the great controversy); they are now in heaven forgetting the past and have joined themselves as servants of Christ in His temple and are now dwelling with Him as added sons of the right hand."

As we approach the last days of earth's history, may we fully surrender to the claims of the everlasting gospel and join this special group of believers who will vindicate the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the final showdown of the great controversy.

Chapter 11

Unity in the Body

Fundamental Belief #14

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scripture we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.

[Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Matthew 28:19-20; Psalm 133:1; 2 Corinthians 5:16-17; Acts 17:26-27; Galatians 3:27, 29; Colossians 3:10-15; Ephesians 4:14-16; 4:1-6; John 17:20-23]

Closely related to the doctrine of the church in Chapter 9 is the doctrine of unity in the body. According to the apostle Paul, all born-again Christians make up the body of Christ, and he explains it as follows:

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

In our study of the doctrine of the church, in Chapter 9, we learned that the New Testament uses many metaphors to define the church, all of which have one thing in common: without exception, they emphasize unity of the believers in Christ. The church is one bride with one husband; one flock with one shepherd; one set of branches on one vine; one kingdom with one king; one family with one father; one building with one foundation.

All of these metaphors have Old Testament equivalents, but the idea of the church as one body in Christ is unique to the New Testament. No other metaphor stresses the unity and cooperation of believers as does the picture of the church as the body of Christ. Paul described it to the church at Rome in these words:

Romans 12:5

...So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

In this body there is no room for hierarchy, no room for believers to feel as either upper- or lower-class Christians. Levels of authority exist (1 Timothy 5:17) and diversities of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4, both below), but no such thing as spiritual superiority. Conference leaders and church pastors, for example, have no claim to upper-class Christian status.

1 Timothy 5:17

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

1 Corinthians 12:4

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

Jesus makes no mention of longer and shorter branches on the vine, or that, in the church flock, some sheep are blue-ribbon, while others are rejected. Yes, each member receives a specific gift, according to the will of the Spirit and for the benefit of the whole church:

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to

another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

But no one member is more important than another:

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

All are one in Christ and, as the fundamental belief states: "In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us."

When Jesus instituted the ordinance of foot washing as part of the Lord's Supper, He sought to impress the view that in Him all members are equal. Paul calls this unity of the body, produced by the Holy Spirit through the gift of agape-love, "a more excellent way":

1 Corinthians 12:31

Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

It is the most powerful evidence the church can give the world that the gospel is not some human theory, but the power of God unto salvation from the principle of self and sin:

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

In our study in Chapter 8 of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, we defined the central issue as the struggle between the principle of self introduced by Lucifer in heaven when he became Satan...

Isaiah 14:12-14

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

...and God's agape-love, "which does not seek its own":

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

At the Fall, Satan's principle of self was injected into man's very nature, and every child of Adam is born a slave to self:

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Philippians 2:21

For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

It is this principle of self that has divided mankind into all kinds of factions — national, racial, tribal, ethnic, social, religious — without end.

But the cross struck down Satan's principle of self. On the cross, the law of sin in the flesh was condemned and executed, and mankind was set free from the law of sin and death in the crucified Jesus:

Romans 8:2-3

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh....

The entire human race was, thus, reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and every selfish barrier between human beings was likewise removed:

Ephesians 2:14-16

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

The same principle of the body that demands intimate unity between Christ and the believers also requires unity among believers themselves. On the cross, Christ not only reconciled sinful mankind to a holy God, He removed every dividing wall mankind had created to divide and conquer one another:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Though Jews and Gentiles were natural enemies in the early Ephesian church, Paul could assure them:

Ephesians 2:14-15

For he himself [Christ] is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace....

In Christ's day, a wall in the temple courtyard separated the Court of the Gentiles from the area reserved for Jews, and modern archaeology has unearthed an inscription posted on this dividing wall. It reads, in part, "No foreigner [Gentile] may enter within the barricade.... Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Paul was referring to this very wall when he wrote that Christ "has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between us (Eph. 2:15). The same principle applies to all divisions today — racial, tribal, cultural, and social.

These divisions exist in the world still dominated by self, but they should not exist in the church, where all have been made one in Christ:

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

At the risk of sounding repetitious, note how the apostle Paul expresses this truth in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 12:4-5

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We must honestly confess, however, that separation and division still exist within the Adventist Church today. Surely, according to John 13:34-35, this is a denial of the power of the gospel:

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Again, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul counsels believers to:

Ephesians 4:2-3

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Humility acknowledges from the heart that God controls everything. But this kind of humility is possible only when believers submit to the claims of the cross and recognize that, alone, all are 100 percent sinners and that completeness is found only in Christ:

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

When a church practices such Christian humility, we will find that:

1 Corinthians 12:25-26

...So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

What a tremendous witness God's people could have been if church members from the two opposing tribes in Rwanda had been united in love during the 1994 genocide, when

the Adventist Church was one of the largest Protestant denominations in the country! Or what a powerful witness the church could be in the United States if all racial, cultural, and ethnic antagonism and divisions were eliminated and all were united in the bond of love. Surely such love and unity would turn our modern world upside down with such proof that the everlasting gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation.

Acts 17:26

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Some may feel that reaching such a goal is wishful thinking in today's world. But Christ's world in His day was just as divided, and the unity of the body became a reality in the early Christian church. It could indeed be written at that time:

Acts 4:32-33

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all....

To make things even more difficult, the first-century church sprang up in a slave society, with slaves and masters accepting Jesus together, as we read in Paul's letter to the Christian slave Philemon. Traditionally, these two groups never mixed socially, and the class distinctions seemed irreconcilable. Yet, in the church, they shared the same meal, commonly known as the agape, or love feast. This became such a powerful witness to society that even enemies of the gospel, including historians Celsius and Cicero, admitted, "These Christians know how to love one another."

This is what God longs to produce in the Adventist Church around the world, but He will not do so through committee actions or promotional programs. Only when believers submit their self-centered bios-lives to the cross of Christ and by God's grace learn to walk in the zoe-life of Christ will this happen. But first the everlasting gospel must be restored, so that the members are established in the truth as it is in Christ — Not I, but Christ:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Scripture does not command Christians to produce this unity, for God has already made them one body in Christ. Believers simply are to accept what Christ has already accomplished for them, by following a pattern described by Paul:

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

There's no need for more church conferences on unity; what is needed are Christians willing to live meek, long-suffering, and forbearing lives.

What joy and power would fill the church if meekness and lowliness became the order of the day, and if members submitted to one another in love:

Ephesians 5:21

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Yet some Christians today act like children, insisting on their own rights and creating a plague of factions. The church cries out for unity in diversity!

This brings us to the all-important question, "How is this love and unity to be accomplished?" The answer, says Paul, is found in applying the principle of the body to one's own Christian experience. In the human body, there is but one head in control — the mind, or will. Everything is subject to the head; the various body parts are slaves to

the head and, when the head commands, members of the body obey without question. This is the principle of the body at work:

1 Corinthians 12:14-22

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable....

Let's say, for example, that I want to go to church to celebrate the joy of salvation with my fellow believers. I first call on my legs to transport me to the car, then instruct my hands, eyes, and legs to cooperate in driving me to church. Once in church, I command my vocal chords to join in the hymn-singing, and so forth. All this takes place without a problem, because no part of me lives for itself. Everything is controlled by my head.

If all believers would deny self and take up the cross daily and submit to Christ, He who is the head of the church would guide them into perfect unity and harmony:

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

All members would do their part in the body, and the church would become like a beehive, each member doing his or her part for the common good. Such a church would be Spirit-controlled, and the world would see Christ in it, the hope of glory:

Colossians 1:27

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The church is not a sports field, where a few overworked athletes toil while the rest sit and watch. Because the pastor is denominationally paid, many think he is responsible for all or most of the work. This leads to pastoral burnout and to complaints about poor preaching.

The Bible is hidden treasure and, like any hidden treasure, to reach it requires digging. Average lay people have little time to dig the treasure from the Bible. But a pastor does have the time, and the tools, so each church service he can share the treasures he has discovered with his flock:

Acts 20:28

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Thus:

Ephesians 4:15-16

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we [the church] will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

But if a pastor is burdened with all sorts of administrative duties, where is the time for him to dig into the Word? People are dying for want of a clear understanding of righteousness by faith and kindred truths, while pastors bankrupt their congregations by sharing spiritual trinkets:

Gospel Workers by Ellen G. White, p. 301

Our brethren should be willing to investigate in a candid way every point of controversy. If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought

to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is being taught among us; for if it is truth, we need it. We are all under obligation to God to know what He sends us. He has given directions by which we may test every doctrine, — "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.] If the light presented meets this test, we are not to refuse to accept it because it does not agree with our ideas.

No one has said that we shall find perfection in any man's investigations; but this I do know, that our churches are dying for the want of teaching on the subject of righteousness by faith in Christ, and on kindred truths.

No matter by whom light is sent, we should open our hearts to receive it with the meekness of Christ. But many do not do this. When a controverted point is presented, they pour in question after question, without admitting a point when it is well sustained. O, may we act as men who want light! May God give us His Holy Spirit day by day, and let the light of His countenance shine upon us, that we may be learners in the school of Christ.

The Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth, creates true Christian unity by living in every believer:

Romans 8:9

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

The body of Christ is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, collectively and individually:

1 Corinthians 3:16

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

Paul emphasized this when he wrote:

Ephesians 2:22

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

And again:

Ephesians 4:3

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

In the body, only Christ gives the orders. Christians in conflict usually are doing so because they are confusing their own desires, feelings, or wishes with the will of Christ. Therefore Paul admonishes Christians to...

1 Thessalonians 5:17

...Pray continually....

...in the sense of maintaining a living connection with Christ by focusing their minds on Him and His Word:

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

This brings us to the next principle of the body: To function property, there must be pathways for impulses to travel between the head and every living body part. In the human body, these pathways are known as nerves. If these vital nerve pathways are interrupted, the body parts affected become paralyzed and create a burden for the rest of the body.

So it is in the church, where ordinarily only a few do the work of the body, while the rest sit and watch. Little wonder, then, that many active members experience burnout.

Because believers possess sinful natures (the flesh), the mind becomes the battleground between the desires of the Spirit and of the flesh.

Romans 7:18

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

These two, says Paul, constantly oppose one another:

Galatians 5:16-17

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Therefore:

Romans 8:5

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Believers must remind themselves that:

Romans 8:9

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

Genuine faith, as we noted in Chapter 7, The Experience of Salvation, is more than a mental assent to the gospel message. It includes a heart obedience to the truth as it is in Christ:

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

And baptism becomes a public confession of death, burial, and resurrection to a new zoe-life in Christ:

Romans 6:3-8

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

All believers, therefore, must have the attitude that Paul expresses to the Galatian Christians:

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The correct understanding of righteousness by faith opens the door for the Spirit of Christ to take over and produce a world-baffling oneness in His body. But if the church refuses to cooperate with its head, it will appear to the world to be just another human organization with the same quarrels and divisions found elsewhere:

1 Corinthians 3:3

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

The world judges Christ by the witness of His church and, because its witness is often so far from what it should be, some onlookers judge Christ to be at worst a fake and at best a good man and enlightened teacher. The witness of the body of Christ so often tears down the claims of the gospel by the way its members behave; it would be better for the sake of the gospel if they did not call themselves Christians at all.

The Christian church's failure to practice what it preached led directly to Karl Marx's decision to label religion the opiate of the people. Much of Marx's work is written to protest the social and economic injustices of his time, terrible practices the church encouraged because the rich mill owners who exploited their workers made heavy donations to the church. Corruption in the church helped lead Eastern Europe to turn its back on Christianity in favor of communism.

What an impact a united church could have! Not the kind of ecumenical unity in which everyone kisses doctrine good-bye, throws their arms around each other, and marches off to battle over the latest social issue. I mean the kind of unity displayed by the Godhead, a unity founded on unconditional agape-love.

The body of Christ needs to be one in spirit and love. But it is not, and the body's testimony in many Adventist churches is one of envy, strife, division, carnality, and confusion over the gospel. This was the problem in the Corinthian church, probably the most carnal church of the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

God sent to His Old Testament people rebukes and appeals through the prophets and, in repeating Israel's history, God is doing the same today through His modern prophet. In one such rebuke, Ellen G. White writes:

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pages 719-720

Oh, for a religious awakening! The angels of God are going from church to church, doing their duty; and Christ is knocking at the door of your hearts for entrance. But the means that God has devised to awaken the church to a sense of their spiritual destitution have not been regarded. The voice of the True Witness has been heard in reproof, but has not been obeyed. Men have chosen to follow their own way instead of God's way because self was not crucified in them. Thus the light has had but little effect upon minds and hearts.

If the world is to understand that God's agape-love is selfless and unconditional, it must see it demonstrated through His ambassadors. Christ came to this earth some 2,000 years ago not only to redeem mankind but to glorify the Father:

John 17:4

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

The work as a church, likewise, is to witness for Christ to the world. Jesus promised the disciples that, when He sent the Spirit, they would receive power to be His witnesses:

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

That power is still available today. But only as the believers behold themselves in Christ will they be changed into His image.

According to Paul, gospel power works as follows:

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom [from guilt, condemnation, and self-centeredness]. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

This is how he expressed what true Christianity is all about:

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

Adventists often worry about whether or not they will someday walk on streets of gold and live in mansions. While this indeed is the blessed hope, blessed is the church where members' egocentric concerns do not stand in the way of their witness to God's glory. When Christ turns loose His power in the body in the latter rain, the earth will be illuminated with His glory:

Revelation 18:1

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

But will the believers welcome that power so they may glorify him? Will they be willing to pay the price for taking up the cross, denying their self-centered goals, and following Him daily?

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

May this be the heartfelt desire of each Christian.

Chapter 12

Baptism

Fundamental Belief #15

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings.

[Romans 6:1-6; Colossians 2:12-13; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Matthew 28:19-20]

In establishing His church on earth, Jesus commissioned His apostles:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

In Chapter 7, The Experience of Salvation, we discovered that the salvation Christ obtained on the cross for the entire human race would express itself individually, by faith, in the lives of those who responded positively. We also saw that genuine, saving faith consists of three elements:

A knowledge of the gospel,

A belief in the gospel, and

Obedience to the gospel.

The Gospel Commission

In Mark 16:15-16 (above), we discover that, according to Christ's Great Commission, baptism appears to be necessary for salvation. Is baptism, then, something to be added, above and beyond faith — a subtle form of works? In this chapter, we will examine the significance of baptism by immersion, in light of the gospel, and discover why Christ said it was necessary for salvation.

Notice that the fundamental belief states that baptism "is a symbol of our union with Christ." This concept is fundamental to understanding the true meaning of baptism. We must not repeat the mistake of some Jewish Christians, who took the symbols God gave the Jews in the Old Testament and made them requirements for salvation:

Acts 15:1-11

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

In the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's Supper are symbols, or shadows, pointing to the truth in Christ. No matter how correctly these symbols are performed, they carry no merit for salvation. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in what Christ has already accomplished for the human race by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Nothing can be added to this gospel truth.

I emphasize this because of the debate over baptism by immersion, versus baptism by sprinkling. Immersion is the biblical, authentic method of baptism — of this there is no doubt. But in emphasizing this distinction, there is danger that baptism by immersion will be seen as meritorious for salvation. As we will discover, it is the truth of baptism that saves, not the act itself, as important as the act may be.

The Truth of Baptism

Baptism is the outward confession of one who already believes and obeys the gospel, and wishes to unite with the church, the body of Christ:

Acts 8:35-38

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Next chapter, we will find that the Lord's Supper reminds the believers that the cross of Christ is the basis of salvation. Because sinful human beings are legalistic by nature, we must be constantly reminded that we need to keep our eyes focused on Christ until He returns. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are significant in that they point to Christ, and Christ alone, as the only hope of salvation.

So let us now examine the significance of baptism and why Christ made it a requirement for salvation. The word "baptism" (baptizo in Greek) was first used to describe the dying of cloth. In Bible days, the main materials used in weaving cloth were cotton and white wool. Adding color required dipping the cloth in a dye, then

lifting it out. This process became known as baptizo. Lydia, a prominent New Testament Christian, dyed cloth for a living:

Acts 16:14-15

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

The New Testament gives baptism a spiritual significance, beginning with the account of John the Baptist, who came preaching repentance from sin. He baptized those who turn to God, in repentance, prior to the imminent arrival of the Messiah:

Matthew 3:1-6

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Acts 19:4

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

But Jesus reintroduced baptism as a necessary symbol of the believer's faith in and obedience to the gospel. This explains why the New Testament always refers to baptism into Christ:

Romans 6:3

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Paul writes, for example:

Galatians 3:27

...For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Baptism is always into Christ; this is the first and most important truth about the process. True, the pastor baptizes in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for all three members of the Godhead are involved in salvation, as we saw in Chapter 2 on the Trinity.

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....

But baptism, as a symbol that points to the truth of salvation, is always into Christ, by the Holy Spirit, for it was in Christ that God redeemed and reconciled humanity to Himself:

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Only when the inner baptism reflects the outer symbolism can the new birth occur. This was Christ's message to Nicodemus when He told him:

John 3:5-6

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

To appreciate this, we must keep the facts of the gospel in mind. For Christ to qualify as mankind's Substitute and Redeemer, God had to unite the divine zoe-life of His Son with humanity's corporate, condemned bios-life. Only by doing this could Christ rewrite humanity's history. His life, death, and resurrection changed humanity's status from one of condemnation to death to one of justification to life:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Ephesians 2:5-6

...Made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

All humanity was thereby implicated in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ, the second, or last, Adam:

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

On the cross, the corporate bios-life of the human race, which Christ assumed at the incarnation, died forever. In exchange, God so loved the world that He gave the human

race the zoe-life of His Son. Thus, at His resurrection, God raised the entire human race, in Christ, with a new life, eternal and immortal. This is God's supreme gift to mankind, the fantastic, incredibly good news of the gospel.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Christ did not come to simply cancel humanity's death sentence or to bypass the law's just requirement:

Romans 3:19a; 5:12

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law.... Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....

He came to redeem it by fulfilling the just requirements of the law:

Matthew 5:17

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Since all have sinned and come short of God's glory, all must die:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But because Christ, as Creator, took humanity into Himself and died the death humanity deserved, human beings now have a choice. Individually, they can accept their death in Christ (obey the gospel), or choose to die independently of Christ.

Those who choose by faith obedience to accept their death in Christ must bear in mind that their salvation has already taken place:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Christians baptized into Christ, therefore, must seriously consider Paul's counsel:

Colossians 3:3

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

To die in Christ means to have the hope of resurrection to eternal life, the gift of God:

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

But to reject the gospel that all humanity died in Christ and to choose through unbelief to die independently of Christ, means a future death, when Satan and his angels are destroyed.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Matthew 25:41

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

The human race has these two options: eternal life in Christ through the hope of resurrection, or eternal death without Him:

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

A Christian, by definition, is one who has chosen to become identified with Christ and Him crucified, buried, and resurrected. Baptism confesses this faith choice, or obedience, and is always described in the Bible as immersion. Immersion under the water symbolizes one's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. Baptism, therefore, is

a confession of faith obedience to the gospel and justification by faith alone. The apostle Paul describes this in the first half of Romans 6.

Now, let us pause for a moment in our study of baptism and consider Paul's statement in Romans 5:

Romans 5:20

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

It assures us that, no matter how deeply one falls into sin, grace can save — even men such as Idi Amin or Adolf Hitler, if they accept the gospel:

1 Timothy 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

But Paul's message of hope can be twisted to mean that grace grants license to sin, as in, "The more we sin, the more we are giving grace an opportunity to cover our sins. So let us sin the more, that grace may abound."

Paul corrects this misinterpretation in the first half of Romans 6, by asking two rhetorical questions:

Romans 6:1

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

In other words, "Is this what you think I am teaching?" He answers:

Romans 6:2

By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

When do believers die to sin, by individual choice? At baptism, according to Paul. Baptism acknowledges one's union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection:

Romans 6:3-4

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

The phrase "died to sin" appears three times in Romans 6, in verses 2 and 11 as applied to believers and once in verse 10, as applied to Christ Himself:

Romans 6:10

The death he [Christ] died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Then he concludes:

Romans 6:11

In the same way, count yourselves [who are baptized into Christ] dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The bios-life of the flesh is at enmity with God and is not subject to His law; therefore, it cannot inherit the Kingdom of God:

Romans 8:7

The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

1 Corinthians 15:50

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

It came to an end forever at the death of the Savior and was replaced with Christ's eternal, immortal zoe-life in the resurrection:

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

This great exchange, as we have already seen, is the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel.

Since baptism is always into Christ, it is the confession of faith obedience to this gospel truth that saves. Such obedience has several implications. First and foremost, it means that, by faith, one says "good-bye" to the life of sin inherited from Adam. Many who have been baptized in the Adventist Church through the years received the impression that, to become a Christian, one must give up certain sinful habits, such as smoking, alcohol, and unclean flesh foods, and baptism was interpreted as symbolic of a decision to give up these things. Failing to give up these things meant no baptism and, by symbolic extension, no salvation.

But, rightly understood, baptism means much more than giving up such habits; it means giving up the very life that enjoys these habits and receiving, in exchange, the life of Christ. This new life is not only immortal, it delights in learning and keeping God's law:

Romans 6:17-18; 7:22

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have

been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. ...For in my inner being I delight in God's law....

Baptism into Christ also means that the various parts of the body will no longer be allowed to be driven by the old self-life of sin. Paul applies the truth of baptism to the believer's life, as follows:

Romans 6:5-6

For if we have been united with him [Christ] in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self [self-life] was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with [Greek: "become inoperable"], that we should no longer be slaves to sin....

Baptism into Christ also gives the Savior the legal right to declare the believer justified, or righteous, though in and of themselves they are still sinners:

Romans 4:5

However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

The word "justified" is a legal term used in court and can be used in two ways. If the accused is found not guilty, the judge will "justify," or acquit, him.

Deuteronomy 25:1

When people have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.

But since all humanity stands guilty before the law of God...

Romans 3:23

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

..."justified" must mean something other than "not guilty," in terms of the gospel. It applies in the sense of a guilty person having paid the price, the penalty, for a crime committed. Once the price is paid, the person is "justified" of that crime.

Suppose someone robs a bank and is caught, taken to court, found guilty, and sentenced to 10 years in the penitentiary. The robber spends the next 10 years in prison, but then is set free, not because he is innocent of the crime, but because he has now paid the price for breaking the law. Likewise, humanity as a race has sinned against the law of God and stands condemned to death. Thus:

Romans 7:1

Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?

Only when the just demands of the law are met can God legally justify the sinner.

But the gospel shares the wonderful news that Christ's life and death met the just demands of the law:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

And Paul can write:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

This justification can only be activated when it is accepted — an acceptance signaled through baptism into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes:

Romans 6:7

...Because anyone who has died has been set free [Greek: "justified"] from sin.

Baptism means death to sin and becoming "alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord":

Romans 6:11

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Understanding the significance of baptism combats the delusion of cheap grace. But even more, baptism becomes the basis for living the true Christian life, which is Not I, but Christ:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The apostle explains:

Romans 7:4, 6

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ...But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

If all church members would clearly understand the true meaning of their baptism, the church would be spared many problems. Ellen G. White comments:

Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 1075

The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. They have been baptized, but they were buried alive. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ.

This same problem shows up in Israelite history during the Exodus. The apostle Paul uses that experience of escape from bondage as a type, or symbol, of salvation from the bondage of sin and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Accordingly, Moses is a type of Christ, the crossing of the Red Sea is a symbol of baptism into Christ, Canaan is a symbol of heaven.

But most adults delivered from Egypt and baptized into Moses at the Red Sea never made it to Canaan, not because God failed to keep His promise or do His part, but because baptism into Moses did not bring salvation:

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

In spite of all the evidence God gave in delivering them from the most powerful nation of the ancient world, they harbored the unpardonable sin of unbelief:

Hebrews 3:16-19

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Their history instructs us today, as we experience the last days. Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ...These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

Because those delivered from Egypt by God's mighty hand failed to understand the true meaning of baptism, God had to repeat the experience with their children, 40 years later. But this time, God wanted to make sure everyone understood, so when they crossed the Jordan River, just as their parents had earlier crossed the Red Sea, God gave Joshua specific instructions. The people were to take 12 stones from the middle of the riverbed and set them up in Canaan as a memorial of their "baptism" in the Jordan. In exchange, Joshua placed 12 stones from the wilderness in the midst of the Jordan:

Joshua 4:4-9

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

This was to remind the Israelites that the life of Egypt (symbolizing the world) represented the life of the flesh in bondage to sin, which cannot inherit the kingdom of God (represented by Canaan). It had to be left in the watery grave of baptism, the Jordan

River. Only the resurrected life of Christ, God's supreme gift to mankind, could enter heaven. Christ was trying to get this across when He insisted that John the Baptist baptize Him in the Jordan River:

Matthew 3:15

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

Peter brings out this same truth in his first epistle. Using the story of Noah and his family as a symbol of baptism, and applying the experience to believers baptized into Christ, he points to "an anti-type which now saves us, namely baptism" (NKJV):

1 Peter 3:20-21

...To those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ....

In other words, baptism, in and of itself, does not cleanse filthy, sinful natures. Human nature remains sinful until Christ comes:

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

But, since baptism is always into Christ, from that time forward, God looks at those baptized as if they were in His Son, standing complete, or justified, in His sight:

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Thus, believers can approach God with a clear conscience. The writer of Hebrews expresses it this way:

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place [the very presence of God] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

The antediluvians died in the Flood not because they were sinners, but because they refused to believe and obey Noah's message, though Noah pleaded with them for some 120 years. When the Flood came, the ark rose up, and those in it were saved by the very water that drowned the rest.

The ark represents Christ, and the Bible tells us that this world will again be destroyed when He comes the second time — not by water, but by fire:

2 Peter 3:7-10

By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Those who have entered into Christ by faith and baptism will, at that time, rise up to meet Him in the clouds:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

But those who through unbelief have refused to enter into Christ will be consumed by that fire.

This is what Jesus meant when He told His disciples:

Mark 16:16

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

The act of baptism saves no one; it is the truth of baptism that saves. The act of baptism, performed by a pastor, is simply a public confession of the believer's faith obedience. In reality, only the Holy Spirit truly baptizes the believers into Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

This is the baptism that saves.

No pastor can read the heart of one who requests baptism. He or she may be asking to be baptized for selfish reasons, such as the right to a discount in school fees for their children in the local church school. Only the Holy Spirit can read hearts, and He baptizes only when one's faith obedience is genuine and from the heart:

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

Everyone enters the world with bios-life, condemned to death:

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....

There are no other options. But in the gospel program, the experience begins with death. First a believer must say "good-bye" to the life with which he or she was born. Then, and only then, can the life of Christ, eternal and immortal, replace the old bios-life:

Romans 6:8

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

This "great exchange" took place on the cross and in the resurrection, and is made effective in the individual life when the gospel is accepted and baptism into Christ occurs, by the Holy Spirit. Paul explains:

2 Timothy 2:11

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him [Christ], we will also live with him....

Too many Christians want to live with Christ and receive the blessings of heaven without first dying and saying "good-bye" to their old self-life of sin. Paul calls such Christians "carnal," fleshly, or worldly Christians:

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food,

for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

Only when God's people clearly understand the true meaning of baptism and surrender to the demands of the cross, will the church experience the full power of the everlasting gospel.

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

When that happens this earth will be illuminated by the glorious power of the fourth angel of Revelation:

Revelation 18:1

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

May that day come soon!

Chapter 13

The Lord's Supper

Fundamental Belief #16

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Savior. In this experience of communion, Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christlike humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians.

[1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-30; Matthew 26:17-30; Revelation 3:20; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17]

Closely related to the New Testament's central message, "Christ and Him crucified," is the fundamental belief in The Lord's Supper. During my many years of ministry, I've noticed that — no matter which country, no matter which church — Adventist members seem reluctant to participate.

In one overseas church, out of 450 members who attended Sabbath-morning services, only about 50 took part in The Lord's Supper. In one of my pastorates in the United States, all the Adventist churches in that area agreed to conduct The Lord's Supper on the same Sabbath, to prevent church-hopping that day.

This problem, I believe, comes primarily from misreading Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:

1 Corinthians 11:27, 29

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ...For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Some have interpreted the phrase "eats or drinks in an unworthy manner" as saying that The Lord's Supper is reserved only for "good" Christians who have confessed every last sin and are living up to the light they have received, in the Christian walk.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus instituted The Lord's Supper, and even offered it to Judas (knowing he would betray Him), to encourage discouraged believers not to give up their faith in Him. He knew, and even predicted, that they would face persecution and hardships after He left them:

Matthew 10:16-22

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

The Lord's Supper may be described as the New Testament version of the ceremonial law that points to Christ and Him crucified as the only hope of salvation.

In the Old Testament, God gave the Israelites ceremonial laws to point them forward to the coming Messiah, to keep alive their faith in Him. The Lord's Supper has the same purpose, but pointing backward to the death of Christ until He comes back to take the believers to heaven.

Until that day, Christians will continue to live in Satan's territory and will retain their legalistic natures. These two realities will tend to discourage them as they face trials and hardships. So Jesus instituted The Lord's Supper to help keep faith alive until His Second Advent. The only difference between the Old Testament ceremonial laws and The Lord's Supper is that the former pointed forward to the first coming of Christ, while the later points us backward to what Christ has already accomplished in His life and death.

The Significance of The Lord's Supper

What does The Lord's Supper mean in light of the everlasting gospel? Key to finding the answer is the fundamental belief's use of the word participation, as the apostle Paul uses it:

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

The Lord told the believers in His day:

John 6:53-56

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them."

Many who heard these words turned away from Him:

John 6:60

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Jesus was trying to tell them that whoever identified with His life and death was guaranteed salvation, so He replied:

John 6:61-64

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you — they

are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

Clearly, Jesus was linking the believer's participation in His flesh and blood to salvation. That is, He was linking The Lord's Supper (symbolically eating His flesh and drinking His blood) with the truth of the gospel and justification by faith.

Saving faith is to obey the gospel from the heart:

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

This means identifying with the life and death of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and publicly confessing this obedience of faith through baptism:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

This, as we saw last chapter, is the true meaning of baptism, and The Lord's Supper reminds the believer of that confession.

The gospel consists of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ. By His birth, His divine zoe-life was united to the as-yet-unredeemed bios-life of humanity. This legally qualified Christ to represent and substitute for the human race; then, by His life and death, Christ rewrote human history and changed its legal status objectively (as a whole) from condemnation to justification unto life:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

On the cross, the corporate bios-life of the entire human race experienced eternal death in Christ and, in the resurrection, God raised the human race up with the eternal zoe-life of His Son. Thus, it gives all the blessed hope of the resurrection from the dead, if they will accept it:

1 Corinthians 15:23

But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Faith, then, is the believers' response to identifying themselves with the holy history of Christ. To help keep this faith alive in His disciples, Jesus instituted The Lord's Supper. It reminds the believers that they are in Christ and that their only hope of reaching heaven is to remain faithful to the truth as it is in Him.

Hebrews 10:35-39

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

To understand the significance of The Lord's Supper in these terms and yet refuse to participate, is to turn one's back on Christ, the only hope of salvation. The devil, whose primary purpose is to destroy faith, tries to cloud the true meaning of the Lord's Supper. So he has perverted the meaning of Paul's words:

1 Corinthians 11:29

For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

He has led believers to take this statement out of its context and use it to justify non-participation in The Lord's Supper.

What, then, is the true interpretation of these words? What Paul actually wrote is correctly translated in the New King James Version:

1 Corinthians 11:29

For he who eats and drinks [The Lord's Supper] in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

The early Christians celebrated The Lord's Supper by sharing a common loaf of bread and a single cup. Many of the Corinthian Christians were slaves who may not have had a good breakfast that morning, so when the bread and grape juice reached them, they would break off a rather large piece of bread and drink a hearty draught of juice. In so doing, they failed to realize that this was not a common meal, but a sacred service. It is this misuse of The Lord's Supper that the apostle Paul is rebuking, beginning with these words:

1 Corinthians 11:20-22

So then, when you come together, it is not The Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

Paul then explains the significance of The Lord's Supper:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this,

whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

He then admonishes the believers in verses 27-32, to examine their motives, to consider why they are taking part in this sacred service:

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

Finally, he concludes:

1 Corinthians 11:33-34

So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat [The Lord's Supper], you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

Far from trying to limit participation in The Lord's Supper to only a few, Paul makes it clear that all who are resting in Christ for their salvation should participate in The Lord's Supper. The fundamental belief, as well as our Church Manual, therefore prohibit preventing any Christian from joining in The Lord's Supper. In fact, the Church Manual requires that even those under censure by the church for wrongdoing must be allowed to participate in The Lord's Supper. Yet, in many countries, this injunction is ignored.

The Significance of the Emblems

What do the bread and the juice of the grape signify in The Lord's Supper, and why did Jesus select them from among so many other possibilities?

To answer these questions, we must first focus on the two requirements Christ fulfilled to deliver humanity from the condemnation of the law and place us under grace:

Romans 6:14

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Those two requirements are Christ's perfect obedience and His sacrificial death. During his 33 years of perfect obedience, Christ met what is commonly known as the positive demands of the law, obey and live. Second, by His death on the cross, He met the justice of the law, disobey and die, for the law demands the death of those who disobey it:

Galatians 3:10

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

On the cross, Christ fully met this requirement and became forever:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The Significance of the Bread

When Jesus broke the bread and declared, "This is My body which is given for you," He was representing His body as a symbol of His perfect obedience to the law throughout his 33 years:

Luke 22:19

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

He was not referring to His crucified and broken body, but to the fact that He was now sharing this body with His disciples. By partaking of the bread, they were participating in His perfect obedience and would, therefore, receive the blessings of His perfect obedience to the law:

1 Corinthians 10:18

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

The idea that Christ's perfect obedience to the law was fulfilled in His body is clearly brought out by the writer of Hebrews. Quoting from the book of Psalms, he confirms:

Hebrews 10:5-7

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you [God] did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll [the Old Testament] — I have come to do your will, my God.'"

The full statement, as recorded in the Book of Psalms (very familiar to the Jews), makes clear the will of God:

Psalm 40:6-8

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire — but my ears you have opened — burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart."

Then we read these words:

Psalm 40:9

I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know.

The Jewish nation completely missed the significance of the animal sacrifices God asked them to offer in the Old Testament. They turned these sacrifices into requirements for salvation. God was displeased with these sacrifices for, in and of themselves, they had no merit; they were but shadows of the reality to come. They were to point God's people to the cross of Christ, the one and only sacrifice that would cleanse them of sin and justify them before the law.

Hebrews 10:14

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

In the same way, the emblems of The Lord's Supper carry no merit. They make no contribution to salvation. But they do point the believers to the life and death of Christ, the Source of their salvation. The Lord's Supper is intended to keep alive the believers' faith in Christ, until He comes to take them to heaven at His Second Advent.

To summarize, then, the bread points to Christ's perfect obedience in His body, a body which had become the corporate body of the entire human race. Jesus was the second, or last, Adam (the word Adam in Hebrews means "mankind"):

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

Genesis 5:2

He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" [Hebrew: "adam"] when they were created.

The Significance of the Wine

While the bread represents the perfect obedience of Christ, the grape juice points to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This sacrifice met the full justice of the law, on mankind's behalf. Thus, by His perfect life (which met the positive demands of the law) and His sacrificial death (which met the justice of the law), Christ became the Savior of all. The Lord's Supper constantly reminds the believer of this glorious truth.

In the Old Testament, the animal sacrificed had to be spotless, pointing to the perfect obedience of Christ. The blood of the sacrifice symbolized life — life laid down in death, as God declared through Moses:

Leviticus 17:11

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

Therefore, the bread and wine together symbolize the life and death of Christ — his life of perfect obedience and His death, which met the just requirements of the law. Together, His life and death save us, both now and in the day of judgment.

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Romans 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus....

Those who refuse to take part deny themselves these blessed reminders. As long as Christians live on earth, they will remain sinners by nature, saved by grace alone. They need to be constantly reminded of their condition, in the manner of The Lord's Supper.

To partake of the emblems of The Lord's Supper is to confess participation in Christ's life and death, keeping alive faith in Christ as Savior and in the blessed hope of His

soon coming. Paul links The Lord's Supper with the function of the Old Testament sacrificial system:

1 Corinthians 10:18

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar [that is, its blessings]?

In the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, we have noted that the lamb had to be examined and found spotless before it could be sacrificed. The spotlessness of the lamb pointed to the perfect obedience of Christ, in the same way that the bread in The Lord's Supper points to Christ's perfect obedience. Likewise, the blood of the lamb on the altar pointed to the death of Christ, just as the wine points to the cross. Clearly, then, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, including the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, has been replaced in the New Testament by The Lord's Supper — the former pointing forward to the life and death of Jesus, the latter backward to his life and death as Redeemer.

The Lord's Supper, correctly understood, becomes not only a sacred service, but the most joyful event in the life of the church and of the individual believer. It revives one's faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ. It reminds believers that their "hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Those who miss this sacred service deprive themselves of the inspiration of their one and only hope of salvation.

As the writer of Hebrews reminded the New Testament Jewish believers, if anyone willfully refuses the sacrifice of Christ, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, they have no other sacrifice to cover their sins, but a fearful expectation of the judgment:

Hebrews 10:26-29

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God

underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

The Significance of Foot Washing

In preparation for The Lord's Supper, most Adventist Christians take part in the ordinance of foot washing, a practice unique to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and normally referred to as "the ordinance of humility." But besides humility, foot washing also symbolizes, in the wording of the fundamental belief, "renewed cleansing." It is to this aspect of the foot washing service that we now turn our attention as recorded in the Gospel of John:

John 13:3-11

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

In the days of Christ the people wore sandals over their bare feet and, on the dusty roads, their feet were the first part of the body to become soiled, sometimes even sunburned and blistered. So it was customary in those days to order a servant or a junior member of the family to wash a visitor's feet. It made the visitor feel refreshed and was used as a sign of welcome. Yet when Simon the Pharisee invited Christ to his home, he did not extend this courtesy — a telling insult:

Luke 7:44

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

But now Jesus takes this common practice of washing a guest's feet and gives it a spiritual meaning, vitally linked to the saving grace of the gospel. When they first accept Christ as their Savior and are baptized into Him, His blood cleanses the believers from all sins:

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

But they are still living in a sinful world and are sinful by nature. And just as dust would cling to the feet of those who walked the roads of Christ's day, the things of this world cling to Christians as they walk in a world of sin.

So it is that one's spiritual soles need periodic washing. This is part of the blessing of The Lord's Supper. It gets the believer back on track by focusing the mind on the fact that the world has been crucified to the Christian and the Christian to the world:

Galatians 6:14

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Jesus Himself prayed to the Father to keep His followers from evil, since He knew that they would be living in an evil world that was not their home:

John 17:15-19

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Christ was trying to get this across when He told Peter:

John 13:10

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."

The words "not every one of you" referred to Judas, who Christ knew would soon betray Him. But the rest of the disciples were clean, weak and feeble as they were, because they believed in Jesus from the heart. That is why we must examine ourselves and ask ourselves why we are taking part in The Lord's Supper. Only as we come to Him in humility, as sinners, can we return home justified, cleansed from all unrighteousness.

The ordinance of foot washing also reminds all believers that in Christ no one occupies a place of spiritual superiority. Each believer stands on the same ground in Christ. In this sense, the ordinance of foot washing also is an ordinance of humility. This act, done from the heart, will bring unity in the body of Christ. "By this," said Jesus:

John 13:35

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

As often as believers partake of the bread and drink the juice of the vine, they are confessing their faith in the life and death of Christ as their righteousness and only hope of salvation, now and in the judgment. Amen.

Chapter 14

Spiritual Gifts and Ministries

Fundamental Belief #17

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love.

[Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:9-11, 27-28; Ephesians 4:8, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11]

When Jesus finished His earthly mission and ascended to begin His priestly ministry in heaven, He not only sent the Holy Spirit to communicate the incredibly good news of the gospel to the human race that He had redeemed, He also bestowed spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts are absolutely necessary for the growth and mission of the church, the body of Christ. This is why the church has adopted this fundamental belief.

Since the church is the body of Christ and every member has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into that one body, it goes without saying that every member has a vital part to play in the church.

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Every believer has been given a specific spiritual gift or function, that the body of Christ may be united, healthy, and may fully represent its head, Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 4:11-15

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

The first four books of the New Testament, called the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), give a historical account of Christ, who manifested God in the flesh:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

1 Timothy 3:16

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

Today Christ is in heaven, invisible to the human race He redeemed. The only way, then, that the world can see the matchless charms of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is through the church, which now represents His body. Hence, the fifth book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, presents a historical account of Christ, as

manifested in His body, the church. Unfortunately, because many fell away from the gospel, this striking manifestation of power was short-lived.

For the church to function as a united body, manifesting Christ in all His glory, believers must once again understand the function and purpose of the spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. In Matthew, Christ addresses this issue with His disciples, telling them:

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

The word you in this text is in the plural, representing the church body, but light appears in the singular, referring to Christ:

John 1:4; 8:12

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ...When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

While the church is made up of many individuals, together they represent only one person — Jesus Christ.

The Function of Spiritual Gifts

The spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit have a dual function. On the one hand, one set of gifts bring spiritual growth in the church itself, so that:

Ephesians 4:13

...Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Yet another set of gifts, however, equips the saints "for the work of ministry" (or "service"):

Ephesians 4:12

...to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up....

While on this earth, Jesus revealed and glorified God by the works He did:

John 14:8-11

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

Likewise, the church is to manifest and glorify God today. These works are made possible by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as He equips the church for its ministry.

Jesus told His followers:

John 14:12

"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

What has Jesus' going to be with the Father have to do with the believers' works? Jesus answers two chapters later:

John 16:7

“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

Without the Holy Spirit and His spiritual gifts, the church is helpless to witness for Christ in all His fullness and beauty. Some gifts of the Spirit — such as prophecy, pastoring, administering, etc. — specifically build up the church into Christ, that it might reach maturity. Other gifts — such as healing, miracles, tongues, and so forth — bear witness to the world of the life of Christ. Both kinds of spiritual gifts are necessary for the church to fulfill its mission on earth, until Christ returns.

The gifts of the Spirit, therefore, are not for the individual benefit of individual believers, but for the benefit of the church, as a whole:

1 Corinthians 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

This is important because some Christians insist that, unless one speaks in tongues, one is not saved. This idea is not found anywhere in Scripture; in fact, Paul makes it clear that the gift of tongues is for witnessing to unbelievers, not for the benefit of the believer who possesses the gift:

1 Corinthians 14:22

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers.

The role each member performs in the body is decided by the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 12:18

But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

When the Holy Spirit baptizes a believer into the body of Christ, He decides how that person will serve the whole — some as toes, some as fingers, others as tongues or eyes.

Yet, every member has a place and function in the body, by God's choice and not the believer's. The Holy Spirit is the sovereign Lord, and Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 12:11

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

The choices the Holy Spirit makes in determining which parts of the body members are to represent is not governed by natural abilities, but by how those members can best bring glory to God.

For example, I am an introvert and have no natural ability for public speaking, so when the Spirit called me to the ministry, my first reaction — and a strong one at that — was to object. Make no mistake, the call was so strong I could not push it aside. Not until I surrendered to this call after some six months of struggle did I find any peace.

Now I realize that, when the Holy Spirit calls a person for a specific task, He gives him or her the grace and ability to carry it out. Once we understand this, we can rejoice in our weakness, with the apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:10

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This may sound like a paradox, but God says to all of us:

2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

The Biblical Use of Grace

The Bible uses the word grace three main ways. Its first and primary meaning is God's loving disposition toward sinful humanity. Because of this grace:

Ephesians 1:7

In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace....

And again:

Ephesians 2:8

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God....

Scripture also uses the word grace to refer to the perfect obedience of Christ in His earthly mission on behalf of humanity. The apostle Paul writes:

Romans 5:15

But the gift [of salvation] is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man[Adam's], how much more did God's grace [unmerited favor] and the gift that came by the grace [obedience] of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Finally, the word grace in Scripture also can describe the power available to believers so that God's purpose can be attained in their lives. Referring to his ministry, the apostle Paul declares:

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them [the other apostles] — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Ephesians 3:8

Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ....

In this sense, Paul could write to the church at Rome:

Romans 5:2

...Through whom [Christ] we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Distinction Between the Gift and its Use

Possessing a spiritual gift is one thing; using it is another. We established in Chapter 9 that, if any part of the human body is paralyzed, it becomes useless and a burden. The same is true of the church, the body of Christ. For the good of all, every member needs to exercise the gifts he or she has been given.

Since Christ wants a healthy spiritual body — one that is growing, maturing, functioning, and witnessing — every member must have a ministry that adds to the body's health. As the human body has all kinds of organs and members that interact to benefit the whole, so it must be with the body of Christ.

Romans 12:5

...So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

If just one organ fails to function, the whole body is affected. A church is truly healthy only when all members are involved in church life. In the closing section of Paul's letter to the Romans, he addresses this issue, saying we must use our gifts:

Romans 12:6-8

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if

it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

The concept of spiritual gifts in the church needs special emphasis, because of the unbiblical model of ministry developed during the Dark Ages and still prevalent today. At that time, church members were divided into clergy and laity — the professional workers (clergy) supported financially by the nonprofessionals (laity). Such a system is hierarchical and contradicts the New Testament ideal for the church. As we've already seen, all members of Christ's body are on the same level, but each member has a unique and important part to play if the church is to function as one body.

The church witnesses verbally, as well as through the love and unity it demonstrates to the world. Only when believers are one in perfect love will the world be impressed by their verbal witness. Unity built on humility and selfless, agape-love presents the most powerful testimony possible in favor of the gospel.

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

But the world today sees a fragmented Christian church with little love expressed openly to the world. In the great controversy, Satan's goal is to divide and conquer; God's is to bring unity to last an eternity. While the church is filled with carnal (selfish) Christians, Satan can create divisions at will. And he has done exceedingly well. Only when the character of Christ is reproduced in the church, says Ellen White, will He come to take His people home:

Christ's Object Lessons, Page 69

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who

profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.

May that day be soon!

The Spirit's Gifts

So far we've examined God's purpose in providing spiritual gifts to His church. Now, let's consider some of the specific gifts that build up the church to maturity. (I say "maturity" because the truth is that too many of our churches are like the Corinthian church, filled with babes in Christ, though the majority of the members have been Christians for many years.)

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

According to Paul, the gifts responsible for building up the members in Christ and equipping them for service are the gifts of prophecy and the gifts of pastors and teachers. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul makes it clear that while the gift of tongues is important, the gift of prophecy edifies the church:

1 Corinthians 14:3-4

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.

Believing this gift to be of vital importance, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has set aside a separate fundamental belief called "The Spirit of Prophecy" to deal with it. We will study this belief next chapter.

When we study carefully the list of gifts in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we discover that the Holy Spirit gives:

Ephesians 4:11

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers....

(In some translations, each of these gifts is preceded by the word "some.") Notice that the last gift in the list differs slightly from the others: "pastors and teachers" is not two gifts, but one. Why does the last gift have a dual aspect?

Clearly, Paul regards this last gift as having two manifestations. A pastor is both a shepherd and an instructor. He not only leads the flock and cares for it, he builds it up in Christ by teaching it the things pertaining to God's truth.

The word "apostles," on the other hand, means "sent ones," and can be equated with the modern word "missionary." Prophets are those who edify God's people by telling them how to conduct themselves in light of things to come. But ultimately the responsibility of feeding the flock, and grounding them in the truth as it is in Christ, falls on the pastors.

The Gift of Pastors and Teachers

Upon his return from his third missionary journey, the apostle Paul stopped at Ephesus, called for the elders (pastors) of the church, and counseled them:

Acts 20:27-30

For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of [Greek: "feed"] the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

These savage wolves and self-appointed shepherds are still at work today, as surely as they were in Paul's day. When a pastor fails to feed his members and to build them up in Christ, the members become spiritually malnourished, and growth ceases. Many churches today are filled with Christians who are still babes in Christ.

Centuries ago, when the Bible was written, people thought and acted far differently than we do in the Twenty-first Century. As a result, much of the Bible is seen today as a closed book, difficult to understand and easy to misunderstand. To the pastor falls the duty to bridge the gap between the two worlds and to make the Bible relevant to his flock. This is what he was trained to do. If he fails, the church will have a difficult time growing up in Christ.

While pastors are to evangelize, this is not their primary calling. Evangelism, in fact, is really the work of the whole church. Most pastors do not have the gift of evangelism, and Ephesians 4:11 lists that calling separately from that of pastor/teacher.

The evangelist is to reach the unchurched and bring them to Christ. The pastor is to then take these babes in Christ and build them up in grace and truth by feeding them from the Word of God every week, so they will develop and mature. According to Ephesians 4:14, God does not intend His followers to be as "children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine":

Ephesians 4:14

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

He intends for them to grow through discipling.

The pastor feeds the flock by preaching the Word. Genuine preaching builds up, encourages, and comforts. Paul's advice to young Timothy is still the best:

1 Timothy 4:13-14

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Paul is advocating what we refer to as "expository" preaching. In effect, he is telling Timothy to "read the text, explain the text, and apply the text." The gift of preaching today expresses itself the same way, as it "expounds" the Word of God. The standard is not to draw spiritual lessons from Time or Newsweek, sports, politics, philosophy, or great books. Preaching ("kerygma" in the Greek) always includes teaching ("didache") from the Word of God.

The gift of pastor/teacher is the most important gift in the church, when it comes to the spiritual growth of the body. Yet many pastors are so burdened with administrative duties and promotional programs that feeding the flock has been largely neglected. As Ellen G. White once wrote:

Gospel Workers, Page 301

Our churches are dying for the want of the truth on righteousness by faith and kindred truth.

Other Spiritual Gifts

The gifts of administration, of faith, and of ministry to the needy also help the church accomplish its God-appointed mission. These gifts, working in unison, equip the church for ministry. But if the members have not been built up in Christ and remain immature, the church will come up short as the salt of the earth and light of the world. This occurs far too frequently.

In our denomination, evangelism is given great emphasis and rightly so. However, we must remember that the function of the gift of evangelism is not to get other Christians to join Adventism, but to lead men and women to Christ, the Savior of the world. I say this because most evangelistic efforts concentrate on converting other Christians to Adventism, which leaves the non-Christian largely untouched. This is not the biblical view of soul-winning.

All Christian denominations combined (including Roman Catholicism) constitute only about 30 percent of the world's population. That means that some 70 percent of the world's population is still groping in darkness when it comes to any knowledge whatsoever of the everlasting gospel.

Yes, I do believe that God raised up the Advent movement to illuminate the whole earth with the glory of God, manifested in Christ. The present emphasis on Global Mission is, therefore, correct. But as long as we, as a church, are squabbling over what constitutes the everlasting gospel and are polarized regarding the truth as it is in Christ, this mission will meet with a large degree of failure. Yes, we may baptize many souls, but most will leave through the back door because of the lack of maturity of those entrusted with their spiritual care.

The Gift of Evangelism

The word "evangelist" comes from the Greek word euangelion and has a fascinating background. The word was first used in Egypt during the Hellenistic period some 400 years before Christ. During this period, many Greeks migrated to Egypt and settled in and around the city of Alexandria. Egypt primarily consists of desert terrain, and its staple crop, wheat, grew only along the Nile River and in quantities limited by the lack of arable land.

So wheat was shipped in to Alexandria from Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon) to meet the demands of the growing population. Sometimes the grain reserves in Egypt would grow precariously low, and the people would scan the horizon for incoming grain ships, and cry out "Euangelion! Euangelion!" and spread the word throughout the city when the ships finally appeared. Now there would be enough food for all!

This word, euangelion, first appears in the Bible when the angel of the Lord appears to announce the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind:

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news [euangelion] that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

The spiritual gift of evangelism is bestowed on a believer by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim to the world the incredibly good news of salvation in Christ. It is indeed true that Adventism rose up to help restore neglected Bible truths, such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead, and others. But when an evangelist dwells long and hard on church doctrine, those who hear these doctrines for the first time tend to assume that these teachings themselves are the sum total of the everlasting gospel.

As a result, when these newly baptized members begin to practice these doctrines, many find themselves trapped in legalism and they find no joy, as discouragement overtakes them and they drop out of the church.

Evangelists today are often sincere men of God, and I do not mean to criticize them. But if they would do what the Holy Spirit has called them to do and concentrate on leading men and women to Christ; and, in turn, if pastors would fulfill their task of establishing new believers in the teachings of Christ, I believe we would have far fewer dropouts from the church.

When Christ gave the Great Commission to His disciples, He made it clear that their first task was to:

Matthew 28:19

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....

A disciple is a follower of Christ, one who has obeyed the gospel from the heart and who has surrendered to Christ as his or her Lord and Master.

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Only when this occurs can it be said that the believer is properly established in Christ.

Matthew 28:20

"...And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

It is only then that their baptism becomes genuine. Otherwise, we will continue to fill our churches with members who profess to be Christians, but whose faith is not grounded in the truth of the gospel. Note again how Ellen White describes this problem:

SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, Page 1075

The new birth is a rare experience in this age of the world. This is the reason why there are so many perplexities in the churches. Many, so many, who assume the name of Christ are unsanctified and unholy. They have been baptized, but they were buried alive. Self did not die, and therefore they did not rise to newness of life in Christ.

In concluding this important chapter, let me point out the common thread that connects all the gifts of the Spirit. Every gift that the Holy Spirit bestows — and there are 11 of them — is a characteristic of Jesus Christ. He possessed each of the gifts in their fullness. He was a preacher, a teacher, a healer, a giver, a comforter, and a leader — He did it all! If we were to make a composite of all the gifts of the Spirit, we would have a complete picture of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual gifts, then, are intended to reproduce Christ's attributes in the church. They are grace gifts in the body of Christ, so that the church may carry forward the life of Christ in the world. To be truly effective, the world must see that work as a true reflection of Him:

Colossians 1:27

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Every believer needs to identify his or her spiritual gifts. Man-made tests cannot disclose these attributes; only the Holy Spirit can reveal them through conviction. But even more important, every believer must use the spiritual gifts bestowed, so that the body of Christ can become effective in witnessing the mighty power of the gospel to the world. Only then will the earth be illuminated with His glory. Only then will the gospel be preached to all the world for a witness, and the end can come:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

May that day come soon.

Chapter 15

The Gift of Prophecy

Fundamental Belief #18

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

[Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:14-21; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 12:17; 19:10]

Last chapter we looked at spiritual gifts in a general way and at the importance of these gifts in maturing the church for ministry. Now we focus on prophecy, a gift that has helped make the church what it is today. Seventh-day Adventists generally believe that the gift of prophecy was given to Ellen G. White, who played a major part in the development of the denomination.

Critics from outside the church, and more recently from within, have attacked this unique Adventist belief. The objections are twofold. First, critics have argued that the prophetic gift ceased with John the Revelator, that the completion of the New Testament ended the need for the gift of prophecy. But, in recent years, Christians of several faiths, including Pentecostals, have come to believe that the prophetic gift continues to the end of time. So this early objection to the prophetic gift of Ellen White has largely been abandoned.

The second, and more serious, argument brought against the fundamental belief is that Adventists place Ellen G. White's writings on par with the Word of God. In other words, some Adventist doctrines are said to be based on her writings rather than on the Bible and the Bible alone.

In theory, and according to the fundamental belief quoted above, this accusation is untrue. But, in practice, some Adventists do make Ellen G. White's writings the ultimate measuring stick of truth. This has given the church a bad name and the stigma

of being called a cult. While she was alive, Ellen White herself condemned such uses of her writings and refused and forbade church members to use her writings to settle theological arguments, such as the identity of the "daily" of Daniel 8 or whether 144,000 was a literal or symbolic number. She wrote:

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, Page 708

Believers are not to rest on suppositions and ill-defined ideas of what constitutes truth. Their faith must be firmly founded upon the Word of God so that when testing times shall come and they are brought before councils to answer for their faith they may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them.

Not far from a church I once pastored stands a theological seminar which teaches a class on cults. One day a student handed me a recording of a class study that dealt with Seventh-day Adventists. According to the professor who taught this class, Seventh-day Adventists are a cult, because he said they base their teachings on Ellen G. White rather than on the Word of God. This is not an uncommon accusation, one for which Adventists themselves are partly to blame, because of the way many have misused her writings.

I once had the opportunity to discuss this question with the late Walter Martin, author of The Kingdom of the Cults. He told me, "I am convinced that if Ellen G. White were to rise from the dead today, she would be horrified at the way your church is using her." He went on to give several examples to prove his position and, sad to say, I couldn't deny them.

Christendom applies certain standards, or fundamental rules, when evaluating whether a denomination is part of orthodox Christianity or a cult. One of these standards holds that any church that uses extra-biblical material to support any of its doctrines is a cult, and many Christians feel that Seventh-day Adventists do this in support of at least some of their unique doctrines. All doctrines must be based on and defended from the Bible, and the Bible alone. All 28 fundamental beliefs must be explained in context of the everlasting gospel, which is the main purpose of this book.

Ellen G. White herself emphasized that the church's beliefs need to be supported from the Bible alone. She wrote:

Evangelism, Page 256

The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word.... Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.

Gospel Workers, Page 249

The Bible is our rule of faith and doctrine.

Prophets and Kings, Page 626

The words of the Bible, and the Bible only, should be heard from the pulpit.

The Great Controversy, Page 595

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrine and the basis of all reforms.

The Use of the Spirit of Prophecy

How, then, are Seventh-day Adventists to understand and apply the prophetic gift? What does the Bible teach? According to the apostle Paul, the gift of prophecy is second in importance among the spiritual gifts, following the gift of apostleship:

1 Corinthians 12:28

And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

Paul also writes:

1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good....

Notice that all things must be tested by the Word of God:

Isaiah 8:20

Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning [the Bible]. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

Paul clearly is suggesting that the prophetic gift was not to end with John. In fact, Jesus Himself predicted that, in the last days, prior to His Second Advent, there would arise false prophets:

Matthew 24:11, 14

...And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ...And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

That Jesus warned His disciples about false prophets in the last days indicates that there would also be true prophets, or He would have ruled out prophets altogether. In fact, Joel predicted the coming of prophets, in the Old Testament:

Joel 2:28-29

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

While the apostle Peter did apply the above text to the Pentecost experience (see Acts 2:14-21), what happened at Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. In the verses that follow, the prophet clearly applies his prophecy primarily to the days just prior to the Second Advent:

Joel 2:30-32a

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved....

Clearly, these are the signs predicted elsewhere in Scripture for the Second Coming of Christ:

Matthew 24:29

"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'"

Revelation 6:12

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red....

As one reads through the Bible, it becomes clear that Scripture never declares, or even implies, that the prophetic gift is to cease with the death of the apostle John.

But we must make a distinction here between the prophetic gift as manifested by the prophets of the Bible and the prophetic gift in the Christian church since John the Revelator. While the prophetic messages of Bible times were often added to the canon of Scripture, this ceased with the passing of those who had known Jesus personally. Nothing is to be added to Scripture beyond the book of Revelation:

Revelation 22:18

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.

All knowledge necessary for salvation and the doctrines of the church are revealed in Old and New Testament Scriptures. Christ is indeed God's final word to mankind:

Hebrews 1:1-2

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

But this does nothing to undermine the legitimacy of inspiration and importance of the prophetic gift as manifested in the Christian church since New Testament times. The admonition is still true today:

2 Chronicles 20:20b

"Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

But if the writings of modern-day prophets are not to be placed in the same level as the Bible, does this mean that Ellen White's writings are "less inspired" than those of Bible writers? The answer is a definite No. The issue is not one of inspiration, but of function. What, then, is the place, function, and importance of the prophetic gift today?

I will begin with the negative. Clearly, God has not given the prophetic gift to take the place of personal Bible study. Ellen G. White herself emphasized this point, writing that:

The Colporteur Evangelist, Page 37

Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.

She did not say that God has given the lesser light to replace the greater light, but to lead to it. Yet, some Adventists make her writings the final word in matters of doctrine.

We must recognize that not all of Ellen White's writings are intended as interpretation of Scripture, but as spiritual application of the Word of God. So it stands to reason that, in studying the Bible, we cannot always use the writings of Ellen G. White to exegete,

or interpret, specific texts. To interpret a passage is to draw out the meaning of the text as intended by the Bible writer for the audience of that day. To spiritualize a passage, however, is to give a spiritual application of a text, an application in harmony with overall Scripture, but not specific to the text in question.

Take the parable of the prodigal son. This parable can be spiritualized as a wonderful illustration of God's unconditional love towards sinners, and Ellen G. White does this very thing. Yet, Jesus' main purpose in sharing the parable was to contrast God's attitude towards sinners with that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus told the parable in response to their murmuring:

Luke 15:2

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man [Jesus] welcomes sinners and eats with them."

The spirit manifested by the older brother toward his sibling clearly illustrates the self-righteous, unforgiving attitude of the scribes and Pharisees toward sinners. Thus, as leaders of God's people, they were misrepresenting God Himself.

According to the apostle Paul, the purpose, place, and function of the prophetic gift is to edify, exhort, and comfort the church — in other words, to build it up spiritually:

1 Corinthians 14:3

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.

The prophetic gift is given specifically to the believers themselves:

1 Corinthians 14:22

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers.

No wonder, then, that an examination of Ellen White's writings reveals that the majority of what she says deals with Christian living and church organization. God's purpose, through her, was to prepare the Advent movement to restore the pure and full gospel — the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14.

Revelation 10:11

Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

In fulfilling this purpose, the little group raised up after the Great Disappointment of 1844 would fulfill the prophecy of Matthew 24:14, and the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world, for a witness in the end times:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

But many Adventists fail to focus on this basic function of the prophetic gift and misuse her writings by placing them on par with the Bible. By misunderstand the purpose of her writings, many have portrayed Ellen White as promoting salvation by works of the law, by taking her writings on Christian living and behavior and applying them to the gospel. In doing so, they have perverted the gospel from "good news" to "good advice," using her writings as a hammer of reform. No wonder so many turn their backs on the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy and leave the church in discouragement.

We must never confuse the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel with its application, or fruit, in the lives of believers. The gospel consists only of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ — period. Nothing must be added to this. This good news applies to and embraces the entire human race. But its application or fruits apply only to the believers who are abiding in Christ. Failure to distinguish between the gospel, on the one hand, and its fruits has produced confused legalism, by equating the doctrines of the church with the gospel. This seems particularly true of those independent ministries who proclaim "historic Adventism."

As can happen with any good thing, Ellen White's prophetic gift has been misused. That misuse expresses itself by contradicting in practice the first fundamental belief — that "the Bible and the Bible alone is the standard of all our doctrines and the basis of all reform." This can occur in three ways:

By using the Spirit of Prophecy, instead of God's Word, to prove or defend a doctrinal truth. This misuse makes the Spirit of Prophecy rather than the Bible, the yardstick of truth. Note that she herself says:

Evangelism, Page 256

The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word.... Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.

By refusing to accept a truth that is taught in Scripture unless it can also be proven from the Spirit of Prophecy. This makes Ellen G. White the ultimate authority in doctrinal matters. She herself says:

Gospel Workers, 1915 ed., Page 249

The Bible is our rule of faith and doctrine.

By making the Spirit of Prophecy, rather than God's Word, the main emphasis of proclamation and witnessing. In doing this, Ellen G. White becomes a substitute for the Bible. She herself gives the following council on this point:

Prophets and Kings, Page 626

The words of the Bible, and the Bible only, should be heard from the pulpit.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, Page 708

Their [believers'] faith must be firmly grounded upon the Word of God.

Because many Adventists have misused the writings of Ellen G. White, few realize that she clearly understood and articulated the good news of the gospel message and the glorious truth of justification by faith alone. Two years after the historical 1888 General Conference session held in Minneapolis, Minnesota (where the most precious message of righteousness by faith was clearly presented by E.J. Wagoner and A.T. Jones), a special ministerial institute was held in Battle Creek, Michigan, to clarify in the minds of ministers matters pertaining to the truth of righteousness by faith and how to promote it. Ellen White herself was keynote speaker at that conference, and clarified the main thrust of her message with these words:

Faith and Works, Page 18

The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ. I have wondered that this matter was not made the subject of discourses in our churches throughout the land, when the matter has been so constantly urged upon me, and I have made it the subject of nearly every discourse and talk that I have given to the people.

Because a large number of church members today, especially in the North American Division, have been bombarded with out-of-context do's and don'ts from the Spirit of Prophecy, they have an unbalanced view of Ellen G. White's understanding of salvation, and turn away from reading her writings.

Ellen G. White clearly understood and upheld the Reformation's view on salvation — that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. To demonstrate this, let us read several statements from the Spirit of Prophecy that express her clear understanding of salvation by grace alone and the truth of righteousness by faith. This is the foundation of Ellen White's Christian experience:

Sons and Daughters of God, Page 259

As Christ's ambassadors, they [God's people] are to search the Scriptures, to seek the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light revealed is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other — Christ our righteousness.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6, Page 426

The sweetest melodies that come from God through human lips are justification by faith, and the righteousness of Christ.

Evangelism, Page 186

When the free gift of Christ's righteousness is not presented, the discourses are dry and spiritless; the sheep and lambs are not fed.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 384

The gift of Christ to this guilty world must be largely dwelt upon in every discourse.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6, Page 19

The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God, which closes the work of the Third Angel.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 360

There is not one in one hundred who understands for himself the Bible truth on this subject [justification by faith] that is so necessary to our present and eternal welfare.... The doctrine of justification by faith has been lost sight of by many who have professed to believe the Third Angel's Message.

Gospel Workers, 1915 ed., Page 161

The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us... is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that, if the people perceive it fully, his power will be broken.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 372

Justification by faith...is the Third Angel's Message.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 363

We must center our hopes of heaven upon Christ alone.

Prophets and Kings, Page 725

Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 328

Do not feed upon the husk of self-righteousness, but go to the Lord. He has the best robe to put upon you.... You must have something solid for the foundation of your faith.... You are to come depending upon the Sun of Righteousness.... We should be disgusted with our own righteousness.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 359

Justification by faith is a message from God; it bears the divine credentials, for its fruit is unto holiness.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 360

When we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, we shall have no relish for sin.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Pages 356-357

Christ is the source of all hope and salvation.... The tidings that Christ is our righteousness has brought relief to many, many souls, and God says to His people, "Go Forward."

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 353

There are conscientious souls that trust partly to God and partly to themselves. They... depend upon watchfulness... and the performance of certain duties for acceptance.... There are no victories in this kind of faith.... We can do nothing, absolutely nothing, to commend ourselves to divine favor.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 354

God will accept everyone that comes to Him trusting wholly in the merits of a crucified Savior.... Duty becomes a delight.... This is walking in the light as Christ is in the light.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, Page 744

By dwelling upon the love of God and our Savior, by contemplating the perfection of the divine character and claiming the righteousness of Christ as ours by faith, we are to be transformed into the same image.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Pages 322-323

At the cross, mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace kissed each other.

Steps to Christ, Page 64

The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes.

Testimonies to Ministers, Page 456

What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust.

Review and Herald, 21 August 1894

What is righteousness? It is the satisfaction that Christ gave the divine law in our behalf.

Sons and Daughters of God, Page 240

The active obedience of Christ clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness that meets the demands of the law.

The Faith I Live By, Page 115

The part man has to act in the salvation of the soul is to believe on Jesus Christ as a perfect Redeemer.

Patriarchs and Prophets, Page 372

Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness, we accept the righteousness of Christ.

Sons and Daughters of God, Page 240

Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sinner may feel that he is pardoned, and may know that the law no more condemns him.... By faith he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ.... He looks to the perfect obedience of Christ.

Steps to Christ, Page 65

No deep-seated love for Jesus can dwell in the heart that does not realize its own sinfulness.

The Sanctified Life, Page 8

By beholding Him, we become changed into His divine likeness and, when this work is wrought in us, we shall claim no righteousness of our own.

The Desire of Ages, Page 300

The proud heart strives to earn salvation, but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ.

Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 4, Page 1,141

Whatever virtue humanity possesses, it exists only in Jesus Christ.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, Page 48

Are you in Christ? Not if you do not acknowledge yourselves erring, helpless, condemned sinners.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 364

When we seek to gain heaven through the merits of Christ, the soul makes progress.

Selected Messages, Book 2, Pages 32-33

We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but only what He thinks of Christ our Substitute and Surety.

Patriarchs and Prophets, Page 353

The incense, ascending with the prayers of Israel, represents the merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness, which through faith is imputed to His people, and which alone can make the worship of sinful beings acceptable to God.

The Youth's Instructor, 31 May 1900

But those whose life is hid with Christ in God can say, "I believe in Him who was condemned at Pilate's bar, and given up to the priests and rulers to be crucified. Look not upon me, a sinner, but look upon my Advocate. There is nothing in me worthy of the love He manifested for me; but He gave His life for me. Behold me in Jesus. He became sin for me, that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 331

It is impossible for man to save himself. He may deceive himself in regard to this matter, but he cannot save himself. Christ's righteousness alone can avail for his salvation, and this is the gift of God. This is the wedding garment in which you may appear as a welcome guest at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 332

No man can look within himself and find anything in his character that will recommend him to God, or make his acceptance sure.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 333

We are to be found in Him not having our own righteousness, but the righteousness which is in Christ.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 343

God always demanded good works, the law demands it, but because man placed himself in sin where his good works were valueless, Jesus' righteousness alone can avail. Christ is able to save to the uttermost because He ever liveth to make intercession for us. All that man can possibly do toward his own salvation is to accept the invitation.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 367

Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law, but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 395

The believer is not called upon to make his peace with God; he never has nor ever can do this. He is to accept Christ as his peace.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 353

Some seem to feel that they must be on probation and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed, before they can claim His blessing. But these dear souls may claim the blessing even now.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, Page 81

All who assume the ornaments of the Sanctuary, but are not clothed with Christ's righteousness, will appear in the shame of their own nakedness.... When multitudes of false brethren are distinguished from the true, then the hidden ones will be revealed.

The Desire of Ages, Page 490

Henceforward Christ's followers were to look upon Satan as a conquered foe. Upon the Cross, Jesus was to gain the victory for them; that victory He desired them to accept as their own.

Spiritual Gifts, Vol. 3, Page 136

That faith which will live through the Time of Trouble must be in daily exercise now.

The Desire of Ages, Page 660

His [Christ's] sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 4, Page 212

Living faith in the merits of a crucified Redeemer will carry them [God's people] through the fiery furnace of affliction and trial.

Selected Messages, Book 1, Page 372

Some of our brethren have expressed fears that we shall dwell too much upon the subject of righteousness by faith.... There is no danger in presenting this doctrine as it is set forth in the Scriptures.

The Desire of Ages, Page 175

There are thousands today who... depend on their obedience to the law of God to commend them to His favor.... They are bidden to look to Jesus, and believe that He saves them solely through His grace.

The Desire of Ages, Page 113

And the word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). The glory that rests upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us.

To close this chapter on the gift of prophecy, let us read a letter Ellen White penned to a discouraged sister:

Testimonies to Ministers, Pages 516, 518, 519

The Lord has given me a message for you, and not for you only, but also for other faithful souls who are troubled by doubts and fears regarding their acceptance by the Lord Jesus Christ. His word to you is, 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name; thou are mine.' You desire to please the Lord, and you can do this by believing His promises. He is waiting to take you into a harbor of gracious experience, and He bids you, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' You have had a time of unrest; but Jesus says to you, 'Come unto me... and I will give you rest.' The joy of Christ in the soul is worth everything. 'Then are they glad,' because they are privileged to rest in the arms of everlasting love.... The feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross.... Comfort your soul with the promises of God.... When [the feelings and emotions] fluctuate between hope and fear, the heart of Christ is hurt; for He has given them unmistakable evidence of His love.... He wants them to do the work He has given them; then their hearts will become in His hands as sacred harps, every chord of which will send forth praise and thanksgiving.

Chapter 16

The Law of God

Fundamental Belief #19

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Savior. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives and, therefore, strengthens Christian witness.

[Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 40:7-8; Matthew 22:36-40; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Matthew 5:17-20; Hebrews 8:8-10; John 15:7-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 John 5:3; Romans 8:3-4; Psalm 19:7-14]

The law of God has always held an important place in Adventist theology, partly to counteract the completely non-Scriptural dispensationalist theology which claims that the law was nailed to the cross and no longer applies. A second reason is Adventism's emphasis on the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

In the mid-Nineteenth Century, about the time the Adventist Church was being established, men with names like John Darby, Maitland, and Scofield were introducing and popularizing the doctrine of dispensationalism. Dispensationalists divided the history of the human race into different periods of time called "dispensations." According to this theory, God dealt with mankind differently in each of these epochs, or dispensations.

For example, they identified the period of time between Moses and Christ as the dispensation of the law, or "old Covenant" period. But, according to this theology, because this covenant failed, Christ came to replace the Old Covenant with a new one.

By His life, death, and resurrection, therefore, Christ did away with the law and replaced it with the dispensation of salvation by grace alone, the "New Covenant." So, naturally, they say, the law is no longer binding on Christians, and they use such texts as these to support their case:

Romans 7:6

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Galatians 3:19-25

Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

Colossians 2:13-14

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

In Adventists' attempt to counteract this false theology and restore the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, the Adventist pioneers divided the law into two main categories — the moral and the ceremonial — and taught that the texts used by the Dispensationalists applied to only the ceremonial law. It was this law, they claimed, that was nailed to the cross when Christ's death fulfilled it.

While this argument has convinced many, we must honestly ask if this response to dispensationalism is truly biblical. For one, it is impossible to prove exegetically that the texts used by the Dispensationalists refer only to the ceremonial law. For example, in Romans 7:7, Paul clearly refers to the moral law regarding verse 6, and E. J. Waggoner, in a series of articles in the Signs of the Times, biblically demonstrated that the law of Galatians 3 was the moral, not the ceremonial law. Later Ellen G. White confirmed this.

Romans 7:6-7

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

According to Colossians 2:14, that which was nailed to the cross "was against us, which was contrary to us" [NKJV]:

Colossians 2:14

[God forgave us all our sins,] having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

This can hardly apply to Christ the Savior, to which the ceremonial law pointed. In truth, what was nailed to the cross was the condemnation of the law, which was against us as well as contrary to us. According to Romans 7:4, humanity was nailed to the cross in the body of Christ, and not the law:

Romans 7:4

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Christ could not legally bear humanity's sins on the cross without bearing the condemned ones, themselves, in His body:

1 Peter 2:24

"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

It bears noting here that not all the ceremonial laws (Torah) were fulfilled at the cross — specifically, those found in Leviticus 16 and 23, dealing with the Day of Atonement. Adventist theology, in fact, is emphatic that this part of the ceremonial law was not fulfilled until 1844.

But, according to Ellen G. White, the sad fact remains that, to counteract dispensational theology, the pioneers emphasized the law, to the point that they began to lose sight of the wonderful truths of "Christ our righteousness" and justification by faith.

Uriah Smith, a leading pioneer of the Adventist Church and chief editor of the Review and Herald, published a series of articles, from August 17 to December 19, 1874, titled, "Leading Doctrines of the Review." He had much to say in this series of articles about God's law, but made no mention of justification or righteousness by faith.

Three years later (1877), Smith and James White jointly conducted a Bible Institute for pastors, to better prepare them for evangelism. These studies given at the Institute were later published as a book under the title Bible Institute. Again, no mention was made in these studies of justification by faith.

The following year, 1878, Uriah Smith published Synopsis of Present Truth, a 336-page book in which God's law appeared prominently, but still nothing was said about righteousness by faith as a part of present truth.

Clearly, for years Adventism's primary concern was to counteract dispensational theology. This is reinforced in the published baptismal vows required of those who joined the church. Baptismal Vow Number 6, for example, for many years read as follows (though it has recently been modified): "Do you accept the Ten Commandments as still binding upon Christians; and is it your purpose, by the power of the indwelling

Christ, to keep this law, including the fourth commandment, which requires the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord?" (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 1981 edition).

To many Adventists, the word "binding" means being under the law. This contradicts texts that clearly state that believers are not under law but under grace:

Romans 6:14

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

Emphasizing law, to the exclusion of justification by faith, led to reliance on works of the law for salvation.

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Two young preachers in the late 1880s, E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones, called for a return to belief in justification by faith, in 1888, and received the unconditional support of Ellen G. White. Unfortunately, many church leaders at that time did not accept their message, believing that the men's message might lend support to the dispensational theology. Ellen White wrote some strong words on this matter, as follows:

Review and Herald, March 11, 1980

You will meet with those who will say, "You are too much excited over this matter [righteousness by faith]. You are too much in earnest. You should not be reaching for the righteousness of Christ, and making so much of that. You should preach the law."

As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law, and there will be sap and nourishment in the preaching that will be as food to the famishing flock of God.

Many Christians find it difficult to reconcile the law of God with the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace alone. A discrepancy, or tension, exists between the two.

For, on the one hand, the law demands perfect obedience and condemns those who fail to obey it continually:

Romans 2:13; 10:5

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ...Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."

Galatians 3:10

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

But the gospel offers justification to sinners who believe in Christ as a free gift made effective by faith alone:

Romans 3:28; 4:5

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ...However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Acts 13:39; 15:11

Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. ...We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

So many who accept God's offer of free grace through the perfect righteousness of Christ reject the law.

But nowhere does the Bible present the gospel and the law as being mutually opposed. Both come from God, and God does not contradict Himself. The law was never intended as a pathway to salvation, but it does play a vital part in the Plan of Salvation. The Jews made a great mistake, however, when they assumed that God gave the law through Moses as a requirement, or agreement, for salvation. The apostle Paul, a Jew himself, clearly makes this point in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

Romans 9:30-32

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone [Jesus Christ].

Since the Fall, God has had only one way of saving men and women — by the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The only difference between the Old and New Testaments is that, before Christ came, salvation by grace alone was offered as a promise:

Romans 1:2

...The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures....

After Christ came, it became a reality:

Ephesians 2:1-6

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The apostle Paul uses all of Romans 4 to present this truth (in his attempt to convince the Jews), presenting Abraham as the prototype of the saved, and pointing out that this great father of the Jewish nation was not saved by his works, nor through circumcision, nor even by keeping the law. Abraham was saved by faith alone in God's promise of salvation, through his one seed, Jesus Christ the Messiah:

Galatians 3:16-18

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Scripture nowhere teaches that God introduced the law as a means of salvation, nor does it teach that obedience to the law contributes toward one's salvation. Paul makes it very clear that "by works of the law no one will be justified":

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The phrase "works of the law" is a Pauline expression to describe what we would call in English legalism — that is, keeping or using the law as a means of salvation.

But many Adventists have become victims to legalism because of the church's emphasis on the law — though nowhere does the church actually teach that the law of God saves anyone. The fundamental belief quoted earlier this chapter makes this clear — salvation is all of grace and not of works.

But there is a helpful role for the law in the Plan of Salvation, for sin is deceptive, and most humans fail to realize their total helplessness in trying to meet God's perfect demands. The idea that human beings are incapable of making any contribution toward their salvation is hard for human pride to swallow. And all man-made religions, including pseudo-Christianity, teach some form of salvation by works. This is the very reason God gave His law to sinful humanity; He wanted to open their eyes to their total sinfulness and destroy any confidence they might have that they could be saved by keeping the law:

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Romans 7:7-13

What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Philippians 3:3-9

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh — though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

By expressing the demands of the law openly in writing, He would help humanity confront its total sinfulness and how impossible it is to keep the law. We refer to this as the "negative function" of the law. The Jewish nation failed to accept this negative function and, in so doing, they rejected their only hope of salvation, the righteousness of Christ:

Romans 9:30-33

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."

When God introduced His law to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, they immediately vowed, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do":

Exodus 19:8

The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

Yet, when they repeatedly failed to keep His law, instead of admitting failure, they began redefining it to make it easier to keep. Then they deceived themselves into believing that, by obeying their own man-made rules, they were keeping God's law. No wonder Christ accused them of "nullifying the commandments of God" by their "tradition":

Matthew 15:6

...They are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

The New Testament points out three main ways the Jews misused God's law, and how their history has been recorded as a warning to believers living in the last days:

1 Corinthians 10:11

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

First, the Jews misused God's law to make themselves feel superior to the Gentiles. Because God had given His law to them, they believed they were God's special children and, therefore, better than all the rest of humanity:

Romans 2:17-24

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth — you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

In response to this kind of thinking, Paul wrote:

Romans 2:13-15

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)

Likewise, Seventh-day Adventists need to realize that upholding all of the Ten Commandments does not, in and of itself, make them better than Christians who believe that only nine of the Ten Commandments apply to New Testament believers.

Second, the Jews believed that if they kept the law to the best of their ability or obeyed the majority of the law's demands, God would accept this and, by doing so, they would earn salvation. To this, James responded:

James 2:10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Adventists make the same mistake; too often they believe that God accepts one's best efforts to keep His law, and that Christ will make up for the failures. The apostle Paul, however, made the fallacy of such thinking very clear to the Galatian Christians, warning them that, the moment they accepted law-keeping as a requirement for salvation, they became debtors to the whole law and had fallen from grace:

Galatians 5:3-4

Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Finally, the Jews misused the law by focusing on its wording, rather than on its spirit. Adventists should take special note of this, as well. The Jews had the do's and don'ts down pat, but they failed to realize that only love can truly fulfill the law:

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Paul makes this point clearly in the great chapter on love. He writes:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Jesus tried to correct this same mistake when he declared:

Matthew 23:23

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

See also:

Romans 13:10

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13–14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

When an expert on the law asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment, the Lord did not point to some specific requirement of the law, but quoted two texts from the book of the law — Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, which emphasize love for God as the first great commandment and love for our fellow men as the second greatest:

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Leviticus 19:18

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Jesus then added:

Matthew 22:40

"All the Law and the Prophets [that is, the whole Bible] hang on these two commandments."

Sinful human beings alone cannot render perfect obedience to the law. The apostle Paul declares that the whole human race — Jew and Gentile, alike — stands guilty under the law, unjustified:

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Christ came to the earth to change this condemnation:

Galatians 4:4

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law....

In chapter 6 of his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul reminds them that, because of the cross of Christ, they no longer remain under the law but under grace:

Romans 6:14

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

In Romans 7, he comments further on this glorious truth, declaring that the believer has been delivered from under the law and placed under grace. He first points out that the law of God, under which all humans are born, has dominion only as long as a person is living:

Romans 7:1

Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?

But Christians who are baptized into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are delivered from the legal requirements of the law through their union with Christ:

Romans 6:3-8

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also

be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

They are now under grace, and the natural fruit of such a relationship is holy living:

Romans 7:4, 6

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ...But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Being ‘Under Law’ and ‘Under Grace’

Every born-again Christian must realize that he or she is no longer under law, but under grace:

Romans 6:14

For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

But what does this mean? Does “under grace” mean that the law has been abolished? Dispensationalism argues that it is. But nowhere in the Bible do we find that the law died on the cross of Christ; rather, humanity died in the body of Christ:

Romans 7:4

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

To understand "under grace" and how this condition affects the Christian lifestyle, we must bear in mind that the word under means "to be ruled or dominated by." In New Testament times it usually applied to slaves — slaves dominated by masters who ruled over them.

To be "under" the law, therefore, means to be dominated or ruled by it — that is, obey and live, or disobey and die. This was Adam and Eve's choice in Eden. Having created them with a perfect, sinless nature, God placed them "under" the law:

Genesis 2:16-17

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

When Adam and Eve disobeyed and forfeited their conditionally immortal zoe-life, their lives became bios dominated, driven by the principle of self-advancement:

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

Their lives came under the condemnation of death, or curse of the law. In the New Testament, zoe-life always refers to God's life and bios-life to human existence after the Fall.

This curse of the law all human beings inherit at birth, but Christ came to break the hereditary curse:

Galatians 3:10, 13

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

The human race is an extension, or multiplication, of Adam's life...

Acts 17:26

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

...and on its own cannot shake free of the inborn consequence of sin:

Romans 5:12, 18

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

As we have already pointed out, God gave the law to mankind primarily to make him conscious of his sin problem. The apostle Paul makes it clear that the law entered the picture (the promise of salvation) to make mankind aware that Adam's one sin has produced a race of sinners who commit sin continually:

Romans 5:19-20

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

But he concludes with these hopeful words: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”

Many understand “under the law” to mean “under condemnation of the law,” but this is only partially true, for unfallen angels and inhabitants of sinless worlds live “under the law.” If “under law” always means “under condemnation,” why would the Galatian Christians want to be “under the law”?

Galatians 4:21

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

Such a statement makes no sense if “under the law” means “under condemnation of the law.” No one wants to be condemned!

True, human beings today are born both “under the law” and “under condemnation of the law.” As we saw in Romans 3:19, this is our human plight:

Romans 3:19

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

We are all “by nature deserving of wrath”:

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

None can be saved or justified as long as we are “under the law.” No matter how hard we try or how good an opinion we may have of ourselves, all of us were born to a lost race, on death row. Apart from Christ, there is no hope of salvation; grace is the only hope.

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Earlier we noted that being "under law" means being "under the dominion of the law." Likewise, being "under grace" means being "under the dominion of grace." And what is grace? Its primary meaning is "God's unconditional love toward fallen humanity that led Him to give His only begotten Son to be the Savior of the world":

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 8:31-32

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-9

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul declared:

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

At the incarnation, Christ stepped into the shoes of humanity and, by His perfect life and sacrificial death, met the full demands of the law on man's behalf. This is the incredibly good news of grace.

While under law, human beings are victims of the fear of death. But under grace, that fear is gone and they can approach God with full confidence and call Him "Dear Father":

Hebrews 2:14-15; 10:19-22

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ...Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

1 John 4:16-18

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

In Christ:

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Under grace, Christ becomes “the fulfillment of the law”:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This is the incredibly good news of the gospel and salvation by grace.

Under grace, no longer are human beings justified before God on the basis of their own actions or works of the law; they are justified entirely on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, what He has already accomplished for all mankind by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. The Bible makes it clear that Christians stand complete (perfect) in Christ:

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

But being “under grace” means something more than “being justified.” It means that Christians have also died to the life of sin in which they were born and are now living lives hidden in the personality of Christ Jesus:

Colossians 3:3

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Paul reminds the believers in Rome that the law had dominion over them only as long as they were alive:

Romans 7:1

Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?

But when they acknowledged that they had died in the body of Christ through baptism, they were delivered from being under the law's dominion and were married to Christ, the source of grace. Now they can bear fruit pleasing to God — fruit in harmony with the spirit of the law:

Romans 7:4, 6

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ...But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Galatians 5:22-24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Bear in mind that Christ was made flesh at the incarnation, united to the flesh of the entire human race:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

He is, therefore, called the second, or last, Adam, and His death was, in effect, the punishment for the entire human race, just as the sin of the first Adam condemned the entire human race to that punishment:

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....

When, by faith, we accept this gospel truth, we identify ourselves through baptism with Christ, and Him crucified. We become dead to sin and the dominion of the law and arise to life in God:

Romans 6:11

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is what baptism signifies — the union with the Christ who took us into Himself and was crucified, buried, and resurrected. Now, under grace and with confidence, the believer can "live a new life":

Romans 6:2-8

By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

All this affects the Christian lifestyle. First, to be "under grace" does not mean that the law is no longer God's standard for Christian living. Christ Himself made it very clear, in His Sermon on the Mount, that He did not come to abolish the law:

Matthew 5:19

Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

But the believer no longer counts on his obedience to the law for salvation:

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Grace totally delivers the believer from trying to accomplish that impossibility. Paul says that justification by faith establishes (or upholds) the law, by which he means that the earthly mission of Christ fully satisfied the law on man's behalf:

Romans 3:31

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

But grace has not done away with the law — rather, it affirms the law's goodness. Anyone who teaches otherwise perverts the truth of the gospel.

Scripture clearly speaks of the law in two ways. A person trying for salvation through law-keeping is said to be "under law." But when the law is used as a standard of Christian living, the believer is said to be "under grace":

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit

adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Those who fail to make this distinction will become confused.

God's law is as eternal as God Himself, for the spirit of the law is love, and "God is love":

Matthew 22:36-40

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

1 John 4:8, 16

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

God's laws, therefore, are a true expression of His very nature and character, and The Ten Commandments can be described as codified love. The problem sinners face does not lie with the quality of the law, but in themselves. God's law is clearly holy, just, good, and spiritual. Human beings, by contrast, are by nature carnal, sold as slaves under sin:

Romans 7:12, 14

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. ...We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

The great mistake Judaism, and at times Adventism, has made, is to emphasize the letter of the law. One can indeed obey the rules of the law, and yet transgress its spirit:

Matthew 23:23

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

Paul reminded his fellow Jews that this was their great mistake. "You claim to be experts on the law," he told them, "but in reality you are nowhere near keeping the law":

Romans 2:17-20

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth....

In fact, he goes on to say that, because of their legalism, "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you":

Romans 2:24

As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Law-keeping devoid of genuine agape-love contradicts the spirit of the law:

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Jesus said:

John 13:35

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Any Adventist who in self-righteousness criticizes other Christians or “the brethren” is blind to the true spirit of the law. Christians may not see eye to eye in all things, but true law-keeping will produce unity among God’s people, in spite of their diversity on non-essential matters.

The second principle of grace for the Christian lifestyle is that being “under grace” does not mean freedom to live as one pleases. Just as being “under law” means “obey and live or disobey and die,” being “under grace” has its own condition — spelled out by Christ Himself, the Source of grace:

John 15:4-5

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Paul echoes the words of Jesus:

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

When Christ Jesus — who is the same yesterday, today, and forever — lives in the believers, they will delight in going about doing good, as He did:

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

John 14:12

"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

A person under law is motivated either by fear of punishment or desire for reward — which are condemned, both in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen G. White:

Steps to Christ, Page 44

There are those who profess to serve God, while they rely upon their own efforts to obey His law, to form a right character, and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. Such religion is worth nothing. When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action. Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer. With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery.

But being under grace changes all that. One's relationship to God is no longer one of fear, but of love and heart-felt appreciation. God's law is no longer a set of rules one must keep in the selfish hope of making it to heaven. Under grace, the law becomes a delight, for the love of God is now the driving force in the life:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

The spirit of the law — selfless agape-love — becomes the compelling force of the new nature.

This is the essential New Covenant, in which God promises:

Hebrews 8:10

This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

God does not mean that He will literally tattoo His Ten Commandments on hearts and minds, but that He will instill in the heart principles of His unconditional, self-emptying, agape-love. This is the "most excellent way" that Paul outlines in 1 Corinthians 13, his great chapter on agape-love:

1 Corinthians 12:31

Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

How does all this work in practical life? The New Testament says that the law has both a positive and a negative function. So far in this chapter, I have emphasized the negative function of the law — its role as a schoolmaster to lead sinners to Christ, that they may be justified by faith:

Galatians 3:24-25

So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

But before bringing this chapter to a close, we must explore the positive function. In this role, God's law serves as a standard for Christian living. We can better appreciate this as we review the four main steps in the experience of justification by faith.

In Step 1, God takes the initiative and shares the incredibly good news of the gospel — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, which reconciled the whole world to Himself:

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

He may do this in various ways — perhaps through the witness of a believer, in a book, through a radio or TV program, or at an evangelistic meeting. He has thousands of ways to reach us.

Step 2 is the human response to this incredibly good news. That God has reconciled the entire human race to Himself in Christ does not mean that this reconciliation comes automatically. God created everyone with a free will, and the gospel demands a human response:

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Redemption in Christ can be accepted by faith, or rejected by unbelief.

But the moment one believes and surrenders by faith obedience to that which God has obtained in Christ, he or she passes subjectively from death to life, and from condemnation to justification:

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Incidentally, this faith response to the gospel is equivalent to obeying the first four commandments of the law, our relationship to God and His gift of salvation in Christ:

1 John 3:23

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

The moment the good news of the gospel is accepted by faith, God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer, as Christ's representative. This is Step 3 in the salvation experience, known as regeneration, or the new-birth experience. Christ and Paul both make it clear that this God-given experience is an essential part of the salvation experience:

John 3:3-6

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

Romans 8:9-10

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

The very first message the Holy Spirit impresses on born-again Christians is that they are now children of God and joint heirs with Christ:

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The Holy Spirit then imparts the power and ability to live a life pleasing to God.

Finally, in Step 4, the Holy Spirit pours God's agape-love into the believers' hearts:

Romans 5:5

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

This is the promise of the new covenant, where love dominates the life and new desires and goals emerge, toward God and fellow men. Unconditional love in Christ now becomes the motivating drive in relationships with others, and translates into true law-keeping:

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love

your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

This love toward others becomes the most effective witness for the power of the gospel, fulfilling Jesus' promise to His disciples:

John 13:35

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Without this witness of God's agape-love, all other witnessing, no matter how theologically correct, becomes meaningless:

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Those who have this witness are spoken of in Revelation as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus":

Revelation 14:12

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

For those living under grace, Christ becomes the guarantee of salvation and source of righteousness and Christian living, all in one. Fear of the law now becomes delight in the law. “Not I, but Christ,” is the key both to one’s standing before God and one’s Christian style of living.

The law first brings a person to Christ, out of fear of death and hope for salvation. But once a person believes, the law becomes the standard of Christian living, as its precepts are manifested through the Holy Spirit. Barring arrested spiritual development, agape-love will motivate the Christian walk.

The Power of Grace

This brings us, finally, to a second meaning of the word “grace.” While the primary meaning of grace is God’s unconditional agape-love that led Him to send His Son into the world to save mankind...

John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace....

...the word grace also refers to the power of God made available to believers to live the Christian life.

The apostle Paul writes that Christians stand in grace:

Romans 5:2

[Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

By this he means that the power, or strength, of God is available to them so that they can live the Christian life. Note how Paul applies this meaning of grace to his own life:

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them [the other apostles] — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Clearly, God's grace also encompasses His power. He makes this strength available to believers so that they may experience both the joy of salvation and its power in Christian living. May this be our experience.

Chapter 17

The Sabbath Rest

Fundamental Belief #20

The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts.

[Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Luke 4:16; Isaiah 56:5-6, 58:13-14; Matthew 12:1-12; Exodus 31:13-17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Hebrews 4:1-11; Leviticus 23:32; Mark 1:32]

The Sabbath doctrine played a vital role quite early in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the pioneers came to see the sacredness of the fourth commandment of God's moral law. Early in her ministry, Ellen G. White received a vision in which she was shown that the Ten Commandments were eternal principles of God's government and that "the holy Sabbath looked glorious, a halo of glory was all around it" (Early Writings, p. 33). Not only is the Sabbath one of Adventism's unique doctrines, in fact, but the pioneers felt that its significance was so important that it was incorporated into the denominational name itself, "Seventh-day Adventist Church" (emphasis mine).

Yet, after proclaiming the seventh-day Sabbath for some 150 years, it has made no real impact on the Christian church as a whole, no matter how correctly it has been presented. Why is this so? I believe it is because we have failed to apply a fundamental principle that the apostle Paul used in his evangelistic ministry:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

We must keep in mind that most Christians today are Dispensationalists who believe the law is no longer binding on Christians, since it was nailed on the cross. So, no matter how correctly we present the Sabbath in the context of the fourth commandment, we are immediately branded as being legalistic under the Old Covenant.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, a theological seminary was located not far from a church I pastored in Washington, D.C. This Protestant seminary teaches a class on the four major American cults, Seventh-day Adventists among them, and recently, one of my members handed me a recorded lecture on Seventh-day Adventists given by one of the professors. His key argument against the Sabbath doctrine was, indeed, that observing the seventh day was a Jewish practice from the Old Covenant. His is a typical argument, often used against the Sabbath doctrine and cited as grounds for excluding Adventists from consideration as a "Christian" denomination. This problem makes it even more important that the Sabbath be presented with a redemptive application, as it is in the fundamental belief.

Adventists rightly insist, however, that the Bible nowhere substantiates a change from keeping the seventh-day Sabbath to observing Sunday, the first day of the week. But then they often take things a step further and accuse Sunday-keeping Christians of intentionally observing the day established by Papal Rome. When I was first introduced to Adventism, for example, I was told that, if I continued to keep Sunday as a Roman Catholic, I would receive the mark of the beast when the Sunday law was passed and would be eternally lost.

Seventh-day Adventists tend to make it an issue between "us" and "them," that is, between Sabbath- (Saturday) keeping Christians and Sunday-keeping Christians. But let's be honest, the great majority of believers who will make it to heaven most likely will be Sunday-keeping Christians. After all, Sunday-keeping was first introduced as early as the Second Century A.D. and, since the Fourth Century, the majority of sincere, dedicated Christians have been Sunday-keeping Christians — including the reformers of the Sixteenth Century. They kept the wrong day, but they kept it for the right reason — to honor the resurrected Christ.

As we have already established, salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in what Christ has already obtained for the entire human race by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Then why do Adventists make such a big issue over the Sabbath/Sunday dispute? The whole purpose of this chapter is to show how the Sabbath doctrine is vitally linked to the gospel of grace, the New Covenant. The real Sabbath/Sunday controversy is not over the two days themselves, but what they represent.

As we studied last chapter, we can look at the law of God two ways. First, we can see it as a means of salvation. Paul defines this with the phrase "works of the law." Judaism mistakenly saw the law in these terms, though God never gave His law as a means or method of salvation:

Romans 9:31-33

...But the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

The second way is to see the law is as a standard of Christian living. This is indeed biblical and, in this context alone, we must consider the fourth commandment and the Sabbath.

Romans 13:8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The Sabbath/Sunday Issue

Why did God specify the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as His holy day? Or, how can Sunday, the first day of the week, fulfill the purpose for which God's Sabbath was established? Christendom today is divided over the day of worship and rest, and both groups sincerely believe in Christ and come under His banner. Sunday-keeping Christians should be treated as brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter how much we may disagree with them regarding the true New Testament Sabbath. Taking this approach will make it much easier to dialogue with them, as they learn of its vital link to the everlasting gospel and the doctrine of justification by faith alone — truths they, too, hold dear.

Then, in the very last days, when this gospel of the kingdom will have been preached in all the world for a witness, and human probation will be closing, the Sabbath will become God's seal of justification, or righteousness by faith:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Exodus 31:13, 16

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. ...The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.'"

But, for this to occur, a clear connection between the seventh-day Sabbath and the everlasting gospel must emerge in the church. Traditionally, the church has hinged its presentations about the Sabbath on the law and the fourth commandment. But, as already mentioned, Christians who believe in the doctrine of Dispensationalism are not persuaded, and consider Adventists to be a legalistic people who are still living under the Old Covenant of salvation by works of the law.

The Sabbath and the Fall

To appreciate the important connection between the Sabbath and the everlasting gospel, we need to go back in time to the Fall. At Creation, God gave our first parents, Adam and Eve, dominion over all creation:

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Psalm 8:3-8

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you

put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

But, at the Fall, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat of the forbidden tree, Satan snatched this dominion from them and became the ruler of this world:

Luke 4:5-6

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."

John 14:30

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me....

Thus the entire human race came under the dominion of God's archenemy, and the great controversy between God and Satan, which began in heaven, was transferred to earth:

Revelation 12:7-9

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Lucifer and the angels who fell for his lies had rebelled in heaven over the issue of the nature of God's agape-love, the love that:

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Agape-love is God's personality, by nature, and forms the basis for His government:

1 John 4:8, 16

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

Lucifer, turned Satan, insisted that such a principle stood in the way of human happiness and self-fulfillment and that true joy could be found only under a system based on self-first:

Ezekiel 28:15

You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Isaiah 14:12-14

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

Once Satan assumed dominion on earth, he set out to govern humanity under the fundamental principle of self-first (the underlying principle of all sin), and today governs human affairs in politics, commerce, education, sports, and everything else:

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Philippians 2:21

For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Satan's principle of "self," including self-righteousness, contradicts everything about God. Note the words of the apostle John:

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

Through the centuries, this principle has led to war, crime, and atrocities of every kind.

Christ came some 2,000 years ago to redeem mankind from this predicament and to establish His own kingdom of grace:

Luke 11:21-23

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

At the cross, Satan's accusations against God were unmasked as absolute lies, and the human race was bought back (the meaning of redeemed) by the precious blood of Jesus Christ:

John 12:31-33

"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

1 Peter 1:18-19

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

So now every human being can escape the tyranny of Satan's dominion and come under the banner of Christ. But the choice is made individually, and those decisions ultimately divide humanity into two distinct groups — those who by faith receive the gift of salvation in Christ, and those who reject Him by unbelief. As John wrote to the believers of his day:

1 John 5:19

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

What, then, does this all have to do with the Sabbath/Sunday controversy? A great deal, as we shall see. At Creation, God sanctified the seventh day (set it aside for holy use) because it represented His perfect and finished work for humanity:

Genesis 1:31; 2:1-3

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day. ...Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Adam and Eve could add nothing to God's creation; they could simply receive it with joy by entering into God's rest. Even the Garden of Eden was planted by God Himself:

Genesis 2:8

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

And as long as our first parents rested in God, He provided all their needs. This is the meaning of the Sabbath (Sabbath, in the original, simply means rest).

But the Fall changed things. When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke the commandment and, in doing so, became self-dependent rather than God-dependent. God recognized this change when He told Adam:

Genesis 3:19

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Since the Fall, mankind has had to survive by the sweat of his brow, and needs a day of rest from physical labor and, for all practical purposes, that day has become Sunday, as proclaimed by the International Labor Union.

Furthermore, the vast majority of Christendom today keeps Sunday as a day of worship, remembrance, and rest to commemorate the resurrection of Christ. They refer to Sunday as "the Lord's Day." However, non-Christians keep Sunday as a day of rest from their personal labor, which is neither perfect nor finished. The real issue, therefore, regarding Sabbath and Sunday is not between Sabbath-keeping and Sunday-keeping Christians, for both groups belong to Christ. The real issue is between God's people who are resting exclusively in Christ and those in the world who prefer total self-dependence.

Matthew 6:24-34

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed

like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The Sabbath/Sunday Controversy

The lines in the Sabbath/Sunday controversy will be drawn only when this gospel of the kingdom has been preached, and every accountable person has made his or her ultimate choice — for or against Christ. At that time, Sunday will become the Mark of the Beast, representing self-righteousness; the Sabbath will represent God's day of rest, the seal of righteousness by faith alone.

Ever since the Fall, the fundamental controversy in the world has been between two opposing methods for salvation — Satan's method of salvation by works and human effort, set against God's salvation by faith alone in the righteousness of Christ:

Romans 10:4-5

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."

In other words, the Old versus the New Covenant. It began when Adam and Eve first sinned and, prompted by Satan, tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaf aprons they made themselves:

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

This illustrates humanity's attempts to cover its sin with self-righteousness. But the fig leaves withered and fell away.

In contrast, God covered their nakedness with skins of sacrificed animals, representing the righteousness of Christ obtained through His life and death:

Genesis 3:21

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

The same controversy can be seen in the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel — one given to appease God, the other given out of faith in the promised Messiah:

Genesis 4:3-5

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering — fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

With these facts in mind, let's now consider the importance of the Sabbath as it points to the truth of righteousness by faith alone, our total dependence on God's perfect and finished work of redemption in Christ. Of course, this understanding of the Sabbath does not negate the fact that the Sabbath is also a memorial of Creation, as pointed out in the fourth commandment. It also points forward to a perfect restoration of Creation:

Isaiah 66:22-23

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord.

The Sabbath and the Gospel

However, before examining the Sabbath in the light of the everlasting gospel, it would be well for us to note a few Old Testament texts that give the Sabbath a redemptive application. The first is found in Exodus:

Exodus 31:13, 16

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. ...The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting [or everlasting] covenant.'"

The second is also found in the book of the law:

Deuteronomy 5:15

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

According to the apostle Paul, the Exodus was a type of salvation:

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Finally, consider what the gospel prophet of the Old Testament has to say about the Sabbath:

Isaiah 58:13-14

"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you

honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Clearly, the Jews were given the Sabbath as a sign of redemption that pointed them to Christ and His Righteousness.

God's Sabbath Versus Man's Sabbath

The first thing to recognize about the true meaning of the Sabbath, in the light of the everlasting gospel, is that the Sabbath does not belong to man, but to God Himself. As Jesus pointed out, the Sabbath was made for mankind (the human race), but it does not belong to humanity:

Mark 2:27

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Luke 6:5

Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath because all things were created by Him:

John 1:3

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Scripture nowhere indicates that the Sabbath belongs to, or was made specifically for, the Jews.

In both the Old and New Testaments, Scripture identifies the Sabbath as God's day of rest. The fourth commandment says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God":

Exodus 20:10

...But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

And, later in the book of Exodus, Moses records God's command:

Exodus 31:13

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.'"

Paul uses the Exodus from Egypt to represent salvation from the bondage to sin:

1 Corinthians 10:1-11

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did — and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did — and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

Moses stands for Christ, and crossing the Red Sea represents baptism into Christ (verses 1-4). Extending that analogy, Egypt is the world, and Pharaoh its satanic prince, the enemy of God's people.

Because the Exodus symbolizes salvation from sin, Moses can link the Sabbath rest to God's act of deliverance. Note his conclusion when he later repeats the fourth commandment to Israel:

Deuteronomy 5:15

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

This is God's seventh day, not man's; actually, it's man's first day. Genesis records that God created mankind, in Adam (the word Adam in Hebrew means mankind), at the end of the sixth day of Creation week:

Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

So the seventh day of Creation week, God's Sabbath, was really Adam's and Eve's first whole day.

This naturally raises the question, Why did mankind's first parents rest on God's day of rest, the seventh-day Sabbath, when they had done nothing yet to deserve such a rest? They rested on the seventh day of Creation week, apparently because God had made it holy — that is, He had set it aside as a gift for humanity:

Genesis 2:3

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Jesus plainly told His contemporaries:

Mark 2:27

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man [mankind, in Greek], not man for the Sabbath."

Adam and Eve entered into God's rest on that first Sabbath.

All this leads us to some very important conclusions: From God's point of view, the Sabbath is His day of rest, His seventh day. But from man's viewpoint, the Sabbath rest was given before humanity had accomplished any work.

Why did God make things this way? First, when God created the world, He worked first and then rested. In contrast, mankind, in Adam, began by resting in God's provision of a perfect and finished Creation. Then Adam and Eve spent the next six days working — work that was neither intensive nor stressful, as they tended God's perfect and finished Creation.

Thus we find that the Sabbath teaches eternal truths about salvation. Our first parents depended totally on God for all their needs, entering into His seventh-day Sabbath as their first act of participation in the Creation process.

So it is for those who today depend totally on God's perfect and finished work of redemption. They do not work for their salvation; they receive it for free, as a gift, by entering into God's rest, of which the Sabbath is a sign:

Exodus 31:13

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.'"

Only after being justified by faith and attaining peace with God do they begin working out their salvation during the next "six" days, expressing in their lives the fruits of salvation:

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

Philippians 2:5-16

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked

generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

The Sabbath and Redemption

At the cross, Christ proclaimed the completion of humanity’s redemption:

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

And just as God’s original Creation was perfect and finished at the end of the six days, so mankind’s redemption was perfect and finished on that sixth day, Friday, when Jesus died on the eve of the Sabbath. Mankind can add nothing, through work, to this perfect and finished redemption. All that remains is for the children of Adam to accept the spiritual rest so amply provided, in Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath.

But, just as Adam and Eve worked the six days after the Sabbath rest, Christ’s followers today are enabled to reflect Christ’s righteousness by their works. Their rest on Sabbath is in Christ’s righteousness.

Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

The word you in verse 14 is in the plural, applying to the whole body of believers. But the word light is in the singular, applying to Christ, the light of the world:

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Colossians 1:27

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Clearly the Sabbath is linked to the gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews brings this out:

Hebrews 4:2-3

For we [the Jews of the New Testament times] also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did [the Israelites of the Exodus]; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world.

He then links this rest with the seventh-day Sabbath:

Hebrews 4:4

For somewhere he [God] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.”

He then concludes:

Hebrews 4:9-10

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God [the Jewish nation]; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

The New Testament clearly teaches that Christ is the One who created this world:

John 1:3

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Ephesians 3:9

...And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Colossians 1:16

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Revelation 3:14

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."

This is what enables Him to claim to be "Lord of the Sabbath":

Mark 2:28

"So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Luke 6:5

Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

This same Christ, the One who fashioned a perfect creation, in the beginning, came to this earth some 2,000 years ago to redeem it from the terminal problem of sin. How fitting, then, that, just as Christ finished Creation on the sixth day of the week and rested on the seventh, so He finished the process of redemption on the sixth day of the week (Friday) and rested in the tomb from all His work on the seventh day (Saturday).

Through Christ's work of redemption, the Sabbath rest has not only been restored, it has gained a new, redemptive significance. Rather than the cross doing away with the Sabbath, as some teach, it restores true Sabbath rest, which the Fall had defaced. As the writer of Hebrews says, we who believe in the gospel enter into God's rest, of which the Sabbath is a sign:

Hebrews 4:2-9

For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

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

Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God....

Paradoxically, the unbelieving Jews of New Testament times claimed to keep the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment, but did so in an effort to earn salvation:

Romans 9:30-33

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."

They refused to rest in Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, and more than once accused Him of Sabbath-breaking, for He did not accept their legalistic rules.

One of the first great invitations Jesus extended to the Jews of His day appears in Matthew:

Matthew 11:28

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Many were discouraged, and He, the Lord of the Sabbath, wanted them to find rest for their souls. In Him there was salvation, full and complete.

The fact that one does, or does not engage in labor on the Sabbath has no merit, in and of itself; otherwise, Sabbath-keeping would become a means of salvation by works. The whole purpose of resting on the Sabbath is to remind the Christian that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ's finished work on the cross. As we have already read:

Hebrews 4:10

...For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

How, then, should we keep Sabbath today? Much controversy has focused on which 24-hour period is the true day of Christian worship. But the Sabbath itself has always focused primarily on rest, secondarily on worship. The word Sabbath literally means rest. Notice that, when God first introduced the Israelites to the Sabbath, He did not mention worship at all:

Exodus 16:29-30

"Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day.

Those Israelites of the early Exodus simply remained in their tents to rest:

Exodus 23:12

"Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed."

Only later on, in Leviticus, is the Sabbath mentioned as a day for "holy convocation" (or "sacred assembly") and, when the Jews settled in Canaan, the Sabbath did become the day for corporate worship in their synagogues:

Leviticus 23:3

"There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly [or "holy convocation"]. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord."

But attending services was never the primary purpose of Sabbath. Even today, the average Sabbath-keeper spends at most three to four hours on the Sabbath in worship gatherings. For the Sabbath is primarily a time for spiritual reflection on the joy of salvation, of which it is a sign. It is this that makes the Sabbath a delight:

Isaiah 58:13-14

"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

I bring this point here, for I know that many sincere Sabbath-keeping Christians in many parts of the world keep the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of rest, but attend services on Sunday. I applaud them! They may be coming closer to the true

meaning of the Sabbath than those who insist on going to Sabbath church as a requirement for salvation.

The Sabbath and Self-Righteousness

Because fallen human nature is self-centered, people tend to prefer a course of action known as legalism, or righteousness by works. I once had a church member, a victim of legalism, who asked me, "I have to work for everything I want in this world; so why should salvation be any different?" I replied that God's ways are the very opposite of man's ways, and that we must never project our ways onto Him:

Isaiah 55:6-9

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

As we have seen repeatedly in this book, the basic issue in the great controversy between God and Satan is whether salvation comes through works or by faith in Christ. Ever since the fall, all man-made religions, including pseudo-Christianity, have built on a concept of salvation by works. By contrast, genuine Christianity offers salvation as a gift, by grace alone, through faith alone in what Christ alone accomplished through His life and death.

The controversy about the nature of salvation is seen in the account of a dialogue Jesus has with a rich, young Jewish ruler:

Matthew 19:16

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

The man is already rich and can expect a long and comfortable life; but he wants more — eternal riches, eternal life. Jesus responds:

Matthew 19:17a

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good."

The young man does not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, but only as "Good Teacher." So Jesus quotes Ecclesiastes, to remind him that no human being is truly "good," only God:

Ecclesiastes 7:20

Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.

Jesus is saying that, for one to truly do good, one must first be good. But since the young man had been raised in Judaism and believes in salvation by works, Jesus addresses salvation from the law's point of view, and adds:

Matthew 19:17b

"If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

To this young man, the "commandments" means the five books of the Old Testament (the Torah, or Pentateuch). So he naturally wants to know:

Matthew 19:18a

"Which ones?" he inquired.

Which good things in particular? Jesus responds by quoting the six commandments of the Decalogue that deal with relationships, and summarizes them with the words, "love your neighbor as yourself":

Matthew 19:18b-19

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The young man replies:

Matthew 19:20

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

He (like many Adventists) has been taught very carefully to observe the letter of the law — the do's and the don'ts, he has memorized!

But Jesus knows his motivation is self — self-interest — and that he neither loves God with all his heart, nor cares for his neighbors as himself. So the Master calls his bluff and says plainly:

Matthew 19:21-22

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect [a perfect law-keeper], go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

The young man had kept the law so that God would make him rich and give him long — if possible, eternal — life. To give away his wealth to undeserving sinners makes no sense at all! He had hoped for better from Jesus, and goes away sorrowful.

So Jesus turns to those disciples who have witnessed the scene, and says:

Matthew 19:23-24

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle [referring to the small door in the city gate kept open after dark] than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

From the disciples' point of view, Jesus is contradicting the bedrock teaching of the best rabbis:

Matthew 19:25

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

The disciples are products of Judaism and, like the young ruler, believe that if one is faithful to God and keeps all His commandments, God, in turn, will bless with great riches. Likewise, some today believe that if they faithfully return tithe, God will bless them with overflowing bank accounts.

So let us apply this story to the Sabbath. Notice Jesus' reply to the disciples' question:

Matthew 19:26

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this [salvation] is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The gospel formula is always, "Not I, but Christ." The Sabbath reminds us that God does the work of salvation; His invitation to His followers is to rest in Him, then to go forth to reflect His goodness to the world.

The Sabbath and the New Covenant

The Sabbath rest belongs to God, but He set it aside, or sanctified it, for human beings:

Mark 2:27

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

He gave the Sabbath as a covenant agreement between Himself, the provider, and humanity to constantly remind us that we are God-dependent. At the Fall, Adam and Eve turned against this covenant and became self-dependent (the Old Covenant). But through the gospel, this Sabbath covenant is restored.

Only as Sabbath-keeping is linked to the finished work of redemption does it become a sign:

Exodus 31:13

"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.'"

That is why the writer of Hebrews declares:

Hebrews 10:14

For by one sacrifice [the cross] he [Jesus Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The apostle Paul pointed out the Corinthians' sinful past, then assured them:

1 Corinthians 6:11

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed [past tense], you were sanctified [past tense], you were justified [past tense] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

He is telling them that their salvation was obtained entirely at the cross and that, as they rest in this salvation, their lives will grow to be more like the Savior's. On one hand, the Sabbath rest symbolizes the perfect, finished salvation in Christ; on the other, it reminds the believer that sanctified living is the fruit of salvation.

Even before the Fall, God established the Sabbath covenant to point to Adam and Eve's total dependence on Him. That this Sabbath covenant was made with them before the Fall implies that it had a permanent significance, and that, even in the absence of sin, the Sabbath would have been kept throughout eternity. But after the Fall, the Sabbath was given a redemptive significance, for the Lord of the Sabbath is both Creator and Redeemer:

Deuteronomy 5:15

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Hebrews 4:1-10

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

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

Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

This same Lord of the Sabbath, furthermore, will one day re-create us. So the whole purpose of the Sabbath, from paradise lost to paradise restored, is to point to Christ who created, redeemed, and will one day restore humanity to its original perfection:

Isaiah 66:22-23

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord.

The Sabbath, as a day of rest in Christ's salvation, ultimately points to a future when Christ will create "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells":

2 Peter 3:13

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

The Origin of the Sabbath

Some argue that because the word "Sabbath" is not mentioned in the Genesis record of Creation, it was not actually instituted at that time. The word "Sabbath" appears in Exodus 16 in connection with feeding the Israelites with manna, and some hold that the seventh-day Sabbath was instituted at that time exclusively for the Children of Israel.

True, the word "Sabbath" appears nowhere in the Genesis record of Creation, but the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) as well as Christ's statement in Mark 2:27, clearly indicate that the rest instituted in Genesis 2:3 is synonymous with Sabbath rest.

Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any

work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Mark 2:27

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Genesis 2:3

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

If, indeed, the absence of the actual word "Sabbath" in Genesis is proof that it did not exist at Creation, we should be reminded that the word "substitute" never appears in the New Testament at all, nor does the word "Trinity." Yet, the truth of the Godhead is clearly taught throughout the Bible, and so it is with the Sabbath. At Creation God did indeed sanctify the seventh day and rested from all His work on that day. This provides the foundation for what the Sabbath has become.

The Sabbath and the Sanctuary Message

This brings us back to the Sabbath/Sunday issue, where we began. When God asked the Israelites of the Exodus to build Him a Sanctuary so that He could dwell among them, He was providing a visual aid of the whole Plan of Salvation as it would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ:

Exodus 25:8

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

It was God's "Show and Tell." The Sanctuary and its services revealed both Christ's earthly mission as well as His heavenly ministry:

John 1:14; 2:19-22

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ...Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Each year, the Sanctuary services all reached their climax with the Day of Atonement, which even today is the most sacred feast day on the Jewish calendar. The Day of Atonement pointed to the culmination of the Plan of Salvation, when Christ, the Savior and Great High Priest, would eradicate sin and usher in everlasting righteousness, and God required its observance:

Leviticus 16:29-34; 23:26-32

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work — whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you — because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins. It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the tent of meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the members of the community. "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites." And it was done, as the Lord commanded Moses.

...The Lord said to Moses, "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the Lord. Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people. I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a day of

sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

In this same context we must understand the revival of Sabbath observance in these last days.

On the Day of Atonement, the Jews were told to do two things, both essential to their ultimate salvation: They were to deny self ("afflict their souls," in the NKJV) and to refrain from work. God's words are clear:

Leviticus 23:27-32

"The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the Lord. Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people [they will be lost]. I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a day of sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

Unfortunately, the Jews took these two requirements and gave them legalistic applications. They denied themselves (which is what is meant by "afflict your souls" in some translations) by fasting, and kept the day as a solemn day of Sabbath rest. But they did these things in order to pass God's final judgment and receive salvation. They failed to see that these requirements were not a means of salvation, but a symbol of the actual Plan of Redemption by grace.

Likewise today, the gospel demands two things of those who fully experience the perfect salvation of Christ, obtained on the cross. First, believers must deny themselves all self-righteousness, which they may have been depending on for their salvation. This is the negative demand of the gospel. Second, believers must rest entirely in the perfect righteousness Christ has obtained for mankind by His life and death. This is the positive demand of the gospel:

Philippians 3:3-11

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh — though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Bringing these two demands together leaves a formula for what it means to be saved by grace alone, through faith alone. This formula is expressed, “Not I, but Christ”:

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Read, for example, what Paul writes to the Philippians. He wants to:

Philippians 3:9

...And be found in him [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

The two requirements God demanded of the Jews on the Day of Atonement — denying self and keeping the day as a solemn day of Sabbath rest — are the same ones by which one experiences the righteousness of Christ. God wanted the Jews to realize that only those who had lost all confidence in themselves and who were resting entirely in the righteousness of the promised Messiah would pass the final judgment and make it to heaven. The Sabbath rest on the Day of Atonement was to be the seal of righteousness by faith.

The Sabbath, Seal of Righteousness by Faith

The Sabbath/Sunday issue in the end time will be about the same issue, when the Loud Cry of the Everlasting Gospel is proclaimed and the world receives one final chance to accept God's gift of salvation in Christ:

Revelation 18:1-5

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!' She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "'Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes."

When "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations," there will be no excuse for anyone to be lost:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

At that time, the human race will polarize into only two groups — believers and unbelievers, those who are resting entirely on Christ for their salvation and will keep His Sabbath as the outward sign, and those who have deliberately and ultimately rejected Christ as their Savior, depending on their own self-righteousness.

Those who turn their backs on the free gift of salvation in Christ and determine to follow the self-sufficient pathway of the dragon or Satan, will prefer to observe a day other than Saturday, as a token of their independence from the Plan of Salvation established from the foundation of the world:

Revelation 12:9; 13:4-8

The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. ...People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

At that time, then, Sunday observance will become the Mark of the Beast, signifying a deliberate rejection of the everlasting gospel as proclaimed by the three angels of Revelation 14.

Revelation 14:9-11

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest

day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

In contrast, those who have given up all dependence on their own self-righteousness will be fully surrendered to the truth of Christ, our righteousness. These will have come out of Babylon — that is, they will have abandoned their dependence on self:

Daniel 4:30

...He said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

By resting on Saturday, the Lord's Sabbath, they will receive the seal of God, the seal of righteousness by faith.

Romans 4:11

And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

The true significance of the Sabbath, in the light of the everlasting gospel, will have been presented, and all who take their stand on Christ's side will then make their decision to join God's commandment-keeping people:

Revelation 14:12

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

Such commitment will anger Satan:

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

As he did in Jesus' day, Satan will again use the civil powers to enforce his will, this time by compelling Sunday observance and persecuting those who resist:

John 8:44

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

This is the war of Armageddon, "the battle of that great day of God Almighty":

Revelation 16:14

They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

In this final showdown between God and Satan — between the people of God under Christ's banner and the world under the evil one. The church will triumph, though the last generation of believers will feel forsaken of God:

Isaiah 54:5-8

For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer.

Yet, they will demonstrate the faith of Jesus and, thus, vindicate the power of the gospel. Their faith is unshakable, for they will have been sealed with the sign of the Sabbath rest.

Then, in his anger, Satan will impress civil authorities to pass a decree that all Sabbath-keepers be put to death. But Christ will intervene with the glory of His Second Coming, and the wicked will see Him as a consuming fire.

Revelation 6:15-17

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

But the saints will rejoice and worship the Lord of the Sabbath in the New Earth throughout eternity:

Isaiah 66:22-23

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord.

Chapter 18

Stewardship

Fundamental Belief #21

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness.

[Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chronicles 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Malachi 3:8-12; 1 Corinthians 9:9-14; Matthew 23:23; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; Romans 15:26-27]

When church members hear the word "stewardship" mentioned from the pulpit, many envision that the church wants their money. Money does play a major part in the doctrine of Christian stewardship, but stewardship includes more than money. Stewardship has to do with responsibility for all our God-given gifts, time, possessions, abilities, and lifestyle. But even the doctrine of stewardship, if not understood in context of the gospel, can become legalistic in its application. In this chapter, we will examine the doctrine of Christian stewardship, exclusively in the context of the everlasting gospel.

The formula of the gospel when experienced by faith is always, "Not I, but Christ," and the apostle Paul applied this formula to his own life with these words:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

To appreciate Christian stewardship in the light of this formula, let's consider an incident in the life of Jesus, as recorded in Mark's Gospel.

Jesus and His disciples once stood near the temple treasury, watching as the people placed their offerings in the treasury box (this is how tithes and offerings were collected in those days):

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on."

These words must have surprised Jesus' disciples, and they may even have questioned if He really knew what He was talking about. Even after He explained that she had put in everything she had, they may have wondered how two mites could become more than all that the rich had given. But God apparently evaluates things differently, and Jesus was saying that the offerings of the rich came from their surplus, but the widow had given away her very livelihood.

Widowhood today is not easy, but nothing compared to what widows experienced in Christ's day. There was no welfare, no food stamps, no social security, no community services back then. Reputable employment for women simply did not exist, so widows often turned to prostitution to survive. Even so, widows in Jesus' day had very few resources, even for basic needs such as food and clothing.

The issue was crucial, and the apostle James counseled early believers:

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Clearly, the widow at the treasury who dropped in her two mites was not giving of her surplus; she was giving her livelihood, revealing how completely she depended on God for her survival. She was putting into practice what Jesus taught His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [food, clothing, shelter, etc.] will be given to you as well.

Stewardship and Righteousness by Faith

As we studied last chapter on the Sabbath, Adam lost his dominion at the Fall, and Satan claimed ownership of his domain, claiming right of ownership while tempting Jesus in the wilderness. In his second temptation, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said:

Luke 4:6

And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."

While Jesus resisted Satan's temptation, He did not dispute Satan's claim and, on more than one later occasion, Jesus referred to Satan as the prince of this world:

John 14:30

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me....

The apostle John expressed this same idea to the believers of his day, when he wrote:

1 John 5:19

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

For Jesus to be able to save men and women who lived in Satan's domain, He had to buy them back. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus did exactly that, at the cross. All believers acknowledge that:

1 Peter 1:18-19

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed [repurchased] from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Salvation cannot be bought with silver or gold — that is, with tithes and offerings. The cross of Christ is the only means of redemption from sin and Satan, and a Christian's lifestyle must be based on this reality.

This brings us, now, to the true meaning of Christian stewardship. Tithes and offerings, time and abilities given to God do nothing to buy His favor, nor do they add insurance to one's salvation in Christ. Stewardship is simply a confession of faith that one belongs to Christ, along with everything one possesses. Paul expressed this principle to the Corinthian believers this way:

1 Corinthians 6:20 7:23

...You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. ...You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings.

This is the essence of true stewardship. Everything a believer is and has now belongs to Christ — possessions, time, abilities, body, and one's life itself. Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 10:31

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

This is the fruit of genuine righteousness by faith, and the apostle Paul says of his own life:

Philippians 1:20-21

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Acts 4 records an example of how this genuine stewardship exhibited itself in the lives of the New Testament Christians:

Acts 4:32-35

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

The cross of Christ and the saving grace of God will produce similar fruits in the lives of all true believers. The cross of Christ compels the believer to live and die for Him who lived and died for them:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Such Christian stewardship makes no sense to the natural, human mind, something the apostle Paul readily admits:

1 Corinthians 1:23-24

...But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The cross of Christ delivers the believer from his or her original, mortal, self-centered bios-life. In exchange, God bestows the divine zoe-life of His Son, given to mankind at the resurrection. Not only is this life eternal, it is dominated by agape-love that "does not seek its own:"

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Christian stewardship is a manifestation of this power of the gospel in the life of the believer.

This brings us to Malachi 3:8-10, a text commonly used to promote stewardship in the matter of tithes and offerings:

Malachi 3:8-10

"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — your whole nation — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

The real issue for Malachi is not that the people are failing to give tithes and offerings; the problem is much deeper, as expressed in the two previous verses:

Malachi 3:6-7

“I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’”

The people have turned their backs on God, just as their fathers had done; this is the main issue. So they are ignoring God’s ordinances, including giving of tithes and offerings. The Jews of Malachi’s day have turned from God-dependence to self-dependence, and their failure to pay tithes and give offerings is but an outward evidence of the inner reality. These are symptoms, not causes, of their real problem.

Fruits of the Gospel

The same may be said today of many of God’s people. Those who fail to clearly understand the gospel of Jesus Christ — and the truth of justification by faith — will also fail in Christian stewardship. Even if they faithfully give tithes and offerings, they will do so grudgingly, as a requirement for salvation, rather than in joyful gratitude for the salvation received by faith.

When God accuses His people of stealing what belongs to Him, it can sound quite legalistic unless we consider these verses in their context:

Malachi 3:8-9

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — your whole nation — because you are robbing me.

When we look at the whole of what God is saying here, we find that He is accusing the whole nation of Israel of robbing Him of what is rightfully His — that is, they are robbing Him of themselves. He had delivered them from Egyptian bondage so that they might be His special people. But instead, they want independence to go their own way, robbing God of His most precious investment.

Therefore, God pleads with them to return to Him with their whole heart. Among the evidences of that return will be faithful tithe- and offering-giving. If they repent and

return, God promises that He will "open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be enough room to receive it":

Malachi 3:10

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

In what form will these blessings come? Many imagine them as material wealth and possessions. But in these verses, when God promises overflowing blessings, He is speaking of the spiritual treasures given in Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself said to the rich young ruler who thought he could make it to heaven by his own good works:

Matthew 19:21

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

One of my church members once complained to me that, whenever she paid tithe, her financial situation would deteriorate. "God promises that if I am faithful in tithes and offerings, He will more than take care of my financial needs," she complained, "but instead I have become poorer!" This dear sister, like many others, failed to see the true meaning of Christian stewardship. I had to remind her that, in giving her His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, God had already opened the windows of heaven and had blessed her more than she could imagine. Paul puts it well:

Ephesians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us [past tense] in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If this dear sister had really understood the gospel, she would have realized that:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” — the things God has prepared for those who love him — these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

In giving His Son, God emptied heaven, and the Spirit convinces those who have received Christ by faith that they:

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Those who accept Christ as personal Savior and surrender all to Him as Lord and Master sacrifice nothing. In exchange for their miserable, mortal lives and transitory personal wealth, they receive Christ’s eternal life and heavenly wealth. Jesus offered the rich young ruler this amazing bargain. For those who appreciate the real nature of the riches of God, stewardship becomes a delight. God is not after money when He asks the believers to be faithful in tithes and offerings. He could easily turn stones into gold; He doesn’t need more money! What he really wants are committed people who rely on Him for everything.

In Satan’s economy, money is everything, and God knows this. But He wants His children to learn that faith involves being totally dependent on Him — for everything. Though His followers still live in a wicked world where Satan can make life miserable, God wants them to be totally dependent on Him. Jesus taught this clearly in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Jesus then admonished His followers not to be worried about material things:

Matthew 6:25

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”

And why not? He urged them:

Matthew 6:26-30

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?”

The issue here is faith, and stewardship is ultimately a faith issue, as Paul tells young Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:6-10

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Paul is not here saying that money is the root of all evil; otherwise, the church would not touch it. Love of money is the root of all evil. God is not necessarily opposed to His people being rich, for He showered Abraham with wealth. But money can easily become an idol, and Satan can use the desire for money to replace Christ as the center of affection.

A church member I knew in the mission field once won a large sum of money in the lottery and shortly thereafter left the church, telling the pastor, "I got what I wanted (the financial blessing) by joining your church; now I'm leaving my seat for another." He had failed to understand the gospel and its claim on him.

Besides teaching lessons about faith, Christian stewardship also encourages the believer to reflect God's own self-emptying love. The gospel not only provides a ticket to heaven; it delivers the believer from selfishness, the underlying principle of sin. Isaiah describes the self-centeredness of sin in these words:

Isaiah 53:6a

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way....

Sin always wants to have "its own way." But the power of the gospel provides deliverance from this fundamental problem that has plagued the world since the Fall. The genuine practice of Christian stewardship testifies to this deliverance:

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

He adds:

Romans 14:7-8

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

By contrast, Paul says of those in the world:

Philippians 2:21

For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

God's Gift

Human existence may be categorized into four specific areas, each a gift from God. First, God gives everyone a body capable of performing many good deeds. Second, He blesses each with certain natural abilities, or talents. Third, He provides each with time — 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Finally, He blesses each with a measure of possessions.

A person entrusted with the management of another person's estate is known as a steward. Christians belong to God, and He makes each His steward over the four areas — body, talents, time, and possessions. Paul reminds the Christian:

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Jesus once told the Parable of the Talents to illustrate the importance of being faithful stewards:

Matthew 25:14-30

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Two of the three servants in the parable are faithful with the talents entrusted to them, and the master commends them (verses 21 and 23), “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

But of the third, unfaithful servant the master says (verses 26-27), "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest."

Immediately after telling this parable, Jesus describes the last-day judgment, when He will divide the human race into two groups — sheep and goats:

Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

The sheep represent the faithful stewards, and to these He says:

Matthew 25:40

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

In contrast, He says to the unfaithful goats:

Matthew 25:45

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”

In these two statements, Jesus reveals a most important gospel truth. When Jesus came to this world and redeemed humanity on the cross, He purchased the entire human race. That is why, according to the parable, Christ identifies Himself with every human being. No one has been excluded, including the “stranger” who represents unbelievers. Christian stewards, who have accepted the gift of salvation, are to look at every human being (no matter who they are, regardless of race, gender, or situation) as if he or she were Christ Himself. In Christ’s estimation of things, the way we treat others is how we are treating Him. As stewards of Christ’s possessions, all will give an account in the judgment of how they have treated others.

Taking the name of Christ is to become His ambassador and to plead with others to accept Him as their only hope of salvation:

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Most in the world have no idea that they have already been reconciled to God by the death of His Son. They are afraid of God and are running away from Him. God's stewards have a primary responsibility to give witness to the unconditional agape-love and saving grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

This means sharing with others the incredibly good news of the gospel. It requires prioritizing one's time, abilities, and possessions to encourage others to accept this salvation. Everything the Christian is and everything he or she has must be dedicated to this one goal. This, I believe, is the God-given mission and responsibility of every Christian — and, by extension, the whole church's.

As expressed in the fundamental doctrine on stewardship, Christians are God's stewards, "entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources." Being a faithful steward means to acknowledge God's rightful ownership of all these things. One way to do so is by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of the gospel and the upkeep, growth, and support of His church. But being a faithful steward also means recognizing one's dependence on God for all things, by accepting the righteousness of Jesus, which is by faith alone. Then, as faithful stewards of God's grace, His followers will focus on sharing the wonderful, good news of the gospel that they have experienced.

Chapter 19

Christian Behavior

Fundamental Belief #22

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord, we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle quiet spirit. It also means that, because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness.

[Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 2:6; Ephesians 5:1-21; Philippians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 6:14-7:1; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 10:31; Leviticus 11:1-47; 3 John 2]

Adam's original sin affected mankind three ways — spiritually, morally, and physically. Spiritually — because, through his rebellion, he had expelled the Holy Spirit from his life, and the lives of his offspring:

Ephesians 2:1

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....

Colossians 2:13

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins....

Morally — because, from then on, all human beings were born with a bent to sin, no longer capable of obeying God's moral law:

Romans 5:19; 8:7

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. ...The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Physically — because, from that day forward, all human beings were born with a universal tendency to sickness, aging, and death:

Romans 5:12, 18a

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people....

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Christ provided redemption from all of these effects of sin and, when a person receives Christ by faith as personal Savior, he or she can confidently surrender fully to His transforming grace in each area of life. The apostle Paul writes that sanctification, or Christian living, involves the total person:

1 Thessalonians 5:23

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians do not experience total salvation from the effects of sin this side of eternity. But, at Christ's Second Advent, corrupted sinful humanity will put on incorruption and mortal life will be replaced with immortality:

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

Still, God intends that a Christian's lifestyle now should reflect the saving grace and power of the gospel, and this is reflected in the 22nd Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Old Testament Laws

When God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and brought them to the promised land of Canaan, He intended that, as a nation, they would fully reflect the principles of heaven in every area of life. In turn, they would become a witness to the rest of the world of His saving power. He said through Moses:

Deuteronomy 7:14

You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless, nor will any of your livestock be without young.

So He placed the nation of Israel under His direct rulership, in what we call today a "theocracy."

God would be their ruler in all things, and they would be His people. As their divine King, God gave the Israelites laws that affected every phase of existence, and Moses recorded these laws in the first five books of the Old Testament — called the Pentateuch or the Torah. These instructions, besides the moral law (The Ten Commandments), dealt with banking, agriculture, civil issues, diet, health, and dress, as well as

ceremonial religious regulations pointing forward to the redeeming work of the Messiah to come.

Though Christ did not establish His kingdom as a theocracy, the original principles laid down by God in the first five books of the Bible are still valid as guidelines to Christian behavior. Paul reminds us:

1 Corinthians 10:31

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Christians belong to Christ. He is their Savior, as well as Lord and Master. Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

Romans 14:7-8

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

God wants His followers to make intelligent choices; He wants them to make wise use of the laws laid down by Moses as standards of Christian living. Most countries today have laws that govern banking, civil issues, criminal behavior, and so forth. Christians should abide by these laws, for the common good, as long as the laws of the state do not stand in the way of loyalty to God:

Romans 13:1-7

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to

bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

In other matters, however, Christians may freely choose how they want to live, guided by the principles of the Old Testament laws. Christians can choose what they wish to eat, drink, and read; they can choose how to dress and how they will use their time for reflection and leisure. In these choices, they are constantly challenged to measure up to their Christian commitment and confession of faith. People evaluate Christianity, not so much by what Christians say, but by how they live. Wrote Paul to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 4:20

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

As ambassadors of Christ, His followers will seek to glorify Him in all things, especially in outward behavior. With this in mind, let us consider the Christian lifestyle in two major areas — health and dress.

The Health Message

Through the writings of Ellen G. White, Seventh-day Adventists have received extensive guidelines in two major areas — dress and health. Though these guidelines were given in the context of Nineteenth-Century life, the principles laid down are still valid today. Unfortunately, some take these guidelines and apply them in an inappropriately legalistic way.

Because of this, many today have turned against the God-given principles regarding health and dress. Christian behavior must always be evaluated in the light of the gospel and the principles laid down in the Bible.

Let's begin with the matter of health. God told the Israelites of the Exodus that, if they practiced health rules He gave them through Moses, they would not experience the diseases that had plagued the Egyptians:

Exodus 15:26

He said, “If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.”

Much the same is true today. Those who practice the health counsels given through Ellen G. White experience superior health. In a sinful environment, Christians may not be able to escape all the diseases that plague the modern world but, in general, those who practice the health guidelines found in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy are the healthiest specimens of humanity alive and provide a powerful witness to the world!

Some Christians may be tempted to practice health principles to satisfy their egocentric desire to live a few years longer, or to imagine that they stand a better chance of salvation. Some Adventists become vegetarians and practice other aspects of healthful living because they think that doing so will enable them to live through the Time of Trouble.

For such misguided Christians, healthful living is allowed to take the place of the gospel, just as it did for some of the Jews in Jesus’ day. For example, the scribes and Pharisees once caught Jesus’ disciples eating with unwashed hands. So they complained to Jesus:

Matthew 15:2

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

Note Jesus’ reply:

Matthew 15:7-11

“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’”

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."

As with other laws of Moses, the Jews had taken this rule and made it a requirement for salvation. But the fact remains that, while eating without washing one's hands may indeed transmit disease, it does nothing to make a person more or less sinful. The human heart is already exceedingly sinful:

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

When Jesus' disciples later asked Him to comment on the matter, He said:

Matthew 15:17-20

"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts — murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

Christians must not repeat the mistakes of the Jews of Christ's day. God did not give the health instructions as requirements for salvation, or as a means of preserving one's title to heaven. As God's witnesses and co-laborers, Christians' only valid reason for keeping their bodies in good health is to glorify God, recognizing that their bodies are God's temple, to be used for His glory:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Paul speaks to this:

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

My car gets me around safely and dependably, in direct proportion to how well I maintain it. The more I neglect it, the worse it performs. This same principle applies to my body. God wants to use my body for His service. But if I fail to maintain my body as I should — through appropriate exercise, rest, and nutrition — I will be spending more time in bed or in the hospital than serving God. Our purpose in healthful living should be to better represent God, or as Paul puts it:

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Manufacturers know the grades of oil and fuel that work best in their cars; likewise, God knows what is best for our bodies. The original human diet featured fruits, nuts, and grains, and we can assume that these provided the best nutrition for the human body:

Genesis 1:29

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”

After sin entered and human bodies were damaged by the Fall, God added vegetables and green herbs to the recommended diet:

Genesis 3:17-18

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.”

Finally, after the Flood of Noah’s day, God added flesh foods to the human diet, but He limited consumption to “clean” meats — that is, flesh of animals with specific characteristics:

Genesis 9:3

“Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”

Genesis 7:2-3

Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth.

But God made it clear to Noah that, when he did eat meat, no blood or animal fat was to be ingested:

Genesis 9:4

“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.”

Leviticus 3:17

“This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.”

Medical science today has proven the validity of this guideline.

Later on, through Moses, God gave even more specific instruction about which animals were acceptable to eat. These guidelines of “clean” and “unclean” animals are spelled out in Leviticus 11. Again, in giving the list of animals that could be eaten, God made it absolutely clear that the blood was not to be ingested, and He repeated this many times in the Old Testament and once in the New, in the instructions given at the Jerusalem Council by James:

Leviticus 3:17; 7:26

“This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood. …And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal.”

Deuteronomy 12:16

But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water.

1 Samuel 14:34

Then he said, “Go out among the men and tell them, ‘Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood still in it.’” So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there.

Acts 15:20

Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

Animal fat was added to the strong prohibition, along with blood:

Leviticus 3:17; 7:23

"This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood. ...Say to the Israelites: 'Do not eat any of the fat of cattle, sheep or goats.'"

Long before medical science discovered the dangers of eating blood and animal fat, the Creator knew that these were damaging when taken into the body. He gave these prohibitions, not as requirements for salvation, but to help ensure physical prosperity.

John expresses:

3 John 1-2

The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

Clearly, God is concerned about the health of His followers.

Adventists often are very particular in instructing people that they should not eat "unclean" meats such as pork and certain sea foods. But why do they seldom say anything about not eating the blood and fat of "clean" animals? For it is the blood and fat of these "clean" animals, far more than the meat of "unclean" animals, that causes most of the killer diseases passed along through meat in our modern world. Some blood and fat are purposely allowed to remain in most meat to provide better taste and texture. To fail to teach about the dangers of the blood and fat makes a mockery of the health message.

Dress Reform

On the issue of dress and other forms of Christian behavior, we often see similar inconsistencies. I remember that, when I first arrived in the United States in the early 1960s, for an Adventist to wear a wedding ring was considered a "no-no." Yet I noticed that Adventist women — even some who held prominent positions in the church — would often wear rather large, gold brooches. It was apparently sinful to wear a gold ring on one's finger to indicate one's marital status, but perfectly all right to pin the same "ring" on one's blouse. As a visitor, looking on from the outside, I saw this as hypocritical and inconsistent.

Such inconsistency has led to bitterness, when those who most criticize others seem all too ready to drive luxury automobiles and stay in luxury hotels while on the "Lord's business." They condemn Adventist young people for working Sabbaths in fast-food restaurants, while paying other young people to do the same work in academy and college cafeterias on the Lord's day.

At some church gatherings, Adventists will go to elaborate lengths to avoid "buying" food on Sabbath, by selling "meal tickets" on Friday, which are then exchanged for food on Sabbath. Somehow, it seems acceptable to exchange one kind of paper for food on Sabbath, but not the other. And yet we shake our heads sadly at the Jews of Bible times who regarded carrying a handkerchief as an unacceptable Sabbath burden, unless it was attached to the clothing and, thus, became an extension of the person's garments. Sad to say, many in the church today see such inconsistencies as a mockery of the fundamental belief in Christian behavior and are not surprised when it leads to rebellion against the doctrine itself.

The main texts used to condemn wearing jewelry are 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4:

1 Timothy 2:9-10

I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

1 Peter 3:3-4

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

Yet, when we examine these texts carefully, neither of them actually prohibits wearing jewelry. They simply emphasize modesty and the need for Christians to manifest the beauty that comes from the inward adornment of a true Christian character. According to Ezekiel, Lucifer, as created by God, was adorned with all kinds of jewelry. Note this description of Lucifer before he became Satan:

Ezekiel 28:13

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared.

At the Exodus, God Himself instructed the Israelites, through Moses, to take the jewelry of the Egyptians and give it to their sons and daughters to wear:

Exodus 3:22

"Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

Later, when asked to donate this jewelry for the tabernacle, many of these same Israelites gave it willingly:

Exodus 35:22

All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord.

It is only when we make such outward adornment an idol or use it to draw attention to ourselves that God condemns its use.

The Antitypical Day of Atonement

Based on the biblical concept of an end-time judgment, Adventists believe that the world is now experiencing the antitypical Day of Atonement. The biblical Day of Atonement was the most solemn Jewish feast day of the year:

Leviticus 16:30

...Because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.

On that day, the people were required to deny self, for:

Leviticus 23:29

Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people.

This included denial of food, denial of certain kinds of dress, and denial of jewelry — instructions the Jews interpreted through a legalistic lens.

Adventists today must not make the same mistake of viewing Christian behavior legalistically. Still, the counsels regarding health and dress, given in writings of Ellen G. White, need to be understood in the context of the solemn times in which we are historically living. Two areas of life in which self-exaltation seems to rise most readily is in diet and clothing. Those who truly believe they are living in the solemn days of the antitypical Day of Atonement, when sin (the principle of self) is to be eradicated and everlasting righteousness is to be ushered in, will certainly deny self in these and other areas of Christian behavior.

The greatest proof Noah gave to his world that he believed in the coming Flood was his act of building an ark. Likewise, the greatest proof Adventists can give of their belief in the soon-coming Christ is by living lives of self-denial.

Modern means of communication and rapid travel have effectively shrunk the world in which we live. But the implementation of Christian principles of behavior has become much more complicated than in the past. That complexity has led Adventists to develop separate guidelines for appropriate behavior in various parts of the world. As long as Adventists remain in their own countries, all goes quite well. But now that Adventists travel much more widely, misunderstandings can and do occur. In a church I pastored in Washington, D.C., the membership represented 42 nationalities! How does one harmonize Christian behavior when members of the same church have such wide cultural differences and have been reared to observe so many so many different sets of rules?

The Two Fundamental Principles

The answer lies in two biblical principles presented in the writings of the apostle Paul. The first appears in Paul's first letter to the Christians at Corinth. The Corinthian church was cosmopolitan in character and plagued with many factions. Paul shared a very important principle with the Corinthians, one that transcends time as a guideline for all Christian behavior and relationships. Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 32-33

"I have the right to do anything," you say — but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything" — but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. ...Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God — even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Paul is saying that Christians must do their utmost not to offend fellow Christians or cause them to stumble. Even if believers feel that certain behavior is otherwise justifiable and permissible, their first consideration must be to avoid giving offense to others.

Second, Paul writes that Christians should do nothing that would affect their own faith relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ Himself. Here he writes a young co-worker in ministry:

1 Timothy 1:18-19

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience [toward God], which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.

Christians must constantly remind themselves that they are citizens of heaven, but living in enemy territory. Every time a person accepts Jesus as his or her personal Savior and is baptized, Satan loses a subject and does not take it sitting down. He will do his utmost to destroy the new believers' faith. One method is to dangle the trinkets of the world in front of them, hoping to lure them back to the world.

Jesus warned His disciples:

Luke 21:34

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap."

He was speaking in context of last-day events, so the warning has special significance for Christians today.

In all its manifestations, the Christian lifestyle is a response to salvation in Christ. The believers' one goal should be to live in such a way as to bring honor and glory to God and their Savior, Jesus Christ. Some have misrepresented the doctrine of Christian behavior as a list of do's and don'ts, but a Christian who is rejoicing in the good news of the gospel will look at Christian standards as a series of positive principles in the framework of salvation. Jesus wants His followers to live life more abundantly:

John 10:10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The fruit of the Spirit in the life of the believer includes:

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

These virtues of true Christianity manifest the power of the gospel and lie at the core of the doctrine of Christian behavior.

The gospel of Jesus Christ affects the whole person; there is no aspect of a Christian's existence it does not touch. Paul says:

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

But when it comes to our Christian lifestyle, God is more concerned with motive than with behavior itself; He is more concerned with why a person acts as he or she does, rather than what is actually done. To God, choices of the heart are more important than outward acts, which can be fraught with self-interest and hypocrisy. Even the best actions of the unconverted heart are always motivated by self, be it business, education, sports, or the outward practice of religion. All advertising in the media is designed to appeal to self — to one of the three basic drives of the world:

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

But in the Christian who has been transformed by the saving power of the gospel, the flesh and all its self-centered desires have been crucified:

Galatians 5:24

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that the cross of Christ compels him to live for Jesus, who gave us eternal life by His death on the cross:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

In the world, the principle of self dominates; but in the church, the self-emptying love of God must dominate believers, so that no one seeks his or her own good, but the well-being of others:

1 Corinthians 10:24

No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

This is true law-keeping and the fruit of the gospel. And although this behavior does not save or carry any merit toward our salvation, it does give evidence that the gospel has touched the Christian's life.

The world judges Christianity by the believers' lifestyle, not by their claims — and rightly so. Christians are to move forward:

Philippians 3:13b-14

...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 20

Marriage and Family

Fundamental Belief #23

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian, a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words, they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message.

[Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:3-9; John 2:1-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21-33; Matthew 5:31-32; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Proverbs 22:6; Malachi 4:5-6]

Marriage is the first of God's two original gifts to humanity, the second being the Sabbath. Both came at Creation. After forming Adam from the dust of the ground and breathing into him the breath of life:

Genesis 2:18

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Then:

Genesis 2:21-22

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

Creating the woman from a part of the man's own body was designed to teach the couple, and their posterity, that marriage between a man and a woman is the bonding of two lives into one.

According to one modern Bible translation, when Adam woke up and saw Eve, his wife-to-be, his first reaction was "This is it!" When Adam realized that the woman was a part of himself, he proclaimed:

Genesis 2:23

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

The Bible goes on to say:

Genesis 2:24

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Clearly, God originally intended that the marriage union was to reflect the oneness of the triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But the Fall marred this oneness. After Eve sinned and gave the forbidden fruit to Adam, he had to choose between his wife and his God. By yielding to Satan's temptation, Eve had been taken captive by God's enemy. She was now on Satan's side, and Adam could no longer be loyal to both God and Eve. He had to make the difficult choice between his Creator and his dear wife, and he chose Eve.

Why did Adam choose Eve over his Creator? Adam knew that, in eating the fruit, Eve had already rebelled against God, and that, in eating himself, certain death awaited them both:

Genesis 2:16-17

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

But before we judge Adam too harshly, let us remember that Adam was created in the image of God. And God is agape-love:

1 John 4:8

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

According to Paul's great chapter on love, one of agape-love's principal characteristics is that "it is not self-seeking":

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Adam possessed a natural love for his wife, greater than his love for himself. So Adam ate the forbidden fruit and chose to die with Eve and, in so doing, he turned his back on a God who had the ability to create another wife for him.

A Change of Nature

When Adam sinned, the Holy Spirit left him and Adam died spiritually that very day:

Genesis 2:17

"...But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

His natural loving nature then made an about-face, from agape-love, that does not seek its own, to self-centered love. Ellen G. White describes the effect of Adam's sin this way:

Steps to Christ, page 17

"Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed."

Satan invented and spread the principle of self:

Isaiah 14:12-14

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

At the Fall, he infected human nature with this principle and, through them, passed along this nature to the entire human race.

When God visited Adam and Eve after they had sinned, this new principle of self-interest led Adam to blame Eve for tempting him and God for having created such a defective creature:

Genesis 3:12

The man said, “The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Ever since, human beings have worked diligently to cast the blame for their shortcomings on others, or on God Himself.

Now, as we focus on marriage and the family, we must begin by asking, “How did the Fall affect Adam and Eve and, through them, the human race?” God told the couple:

Genesis 3:16-19

To the woman [Eve] he [God] said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

The passage summarizes the consequences of sin on humanity and on the marriage relationship. Before examining the details, however, let us first resolve any misunderstandings about what God means in the passage. Some believe that God purposely set out to punish mankind with these woes, because of Adam and Eve’s sin. Nothing could be further from the truth. God, who is agape-love, is simply informing His created beings of the direct consequences of sin, and that, in His sovereignty, He will allow these natural consequences to prevail.

A Great Controversy Perspective

Because of the great controversy between God and Satan (see Chapter 5), God must allow sin to take its natural course, within certain limits. The unfallen worlds and human beings on this earth must come to see that Satan is a liar and that the results of sin (self-love) bring only greed, violence, heartaches, and sorrow.

And because God is sovereign (which means that nothing happens without His permission), He assumes overall responsibility for all the terrible things that sin produces. But the ultimate responsibility for sin and its results will be placed on Satan, the true instigator. This will take place on the antitypical Day of Atonement, the culmination of the Plan of Salvation.

Leviticus 16:20-22

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites — all their sins — and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness."

But, until then, God accepts full responsibility for the consequences of sin. He says, for example:

Isaiah 45:7

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.

Deuteronomy 32:39

"See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand."

Exodus states that God "hardened" Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the children of Israel leave Egypt:

Exodus 4:21

The Lord said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go."

And, later, "an evil spirit from God came upon Saul":

1 Samuel 18:10

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand....

Here and there, throughout the Bible, we find similar statements in which God is portrayed as doing things that seem out of character. God does not actually set out to do these things; rather, in His sovereignty, He allows them to happen and accepts temporary responsibility as an accommodation to humanity's limited understanding of the issues at play in the controversy. We must recognize this distinction, for many today feel that God causes countless atrocities and the misfortunes in their lives.

Some cry out, "Where was God when I was being abused as a child?" or, "Where was God when my loved one was helplessly murdered?" How interesting that Jesus asked the very same kind of questions as He hung on the cross:

Matthew 27:46

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

God did not reply from heaven, that day, but Jesus knew by faith that the Father was indeed nearby, for He then cried out:

Luke 23:46

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Only eternity will fully reveal why God allowed bad things to happen to good people.

Satan is ultimately to blame for all atrocities, and God, in His great wisdom, allows them for a reason. Says Paul:

1 Corinthians 13:12

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then [at the Second Coming of Christ] we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

For the eternal security of the universe, God must allow sin to wreak its utmost damage, until the universe cries back, "It is enough; there remains no doubt whatsoever that sin causes terrible things!"

So when God tells Eve that her husband will rule over her, and that she will conceive more frequently [KJV] and experience great pain when giving birth [NIV], He is simply informing her of the natural trend of life under sin. Likewise, when God tells Adam that the earth is cursed and that, henceforth, he will toil exceedingly hard to feed himself and his family, He is sharing with Adam the new facts of life, under sin. These are natural consequences, with which God will not directly interfere in the great controversy with Satan.

Genesis 3:16 [NKJV]

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children. [NIV: "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children."] Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

What God predicted has indeed come true. Uncontrolled conception has led to rampant overpopulation in most of the world, and many governments have become so desperate to resolve the problem that they are allowing millions of unborn babies to be sacrificed through abortion. Furthermore, as a rule, women are being dominated by men and mistreated as second-class citizens. Surely, sin has abounded, and the world desperately needs to experience the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ!

Romans 5:19-20

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more....

God's Original Plan for Marriage and Family

God originally intended marriage and the family as building blocks of society. But sin has brought a curse on marriages and families everywhere and in every ethnic group. In the United States alone, more than half of all marriages end in divorce, and the divorce statistics among professed Christians are close to those of the nation as a whole.

The ripples of this high divorce rate are being felt throughout the land as the children of these broken homes suffer. It is believed that approximately a half-million teenagers attempt suicide every year in the United States! Many, if not most, do so because they feel unwanted and responsible for their parents' breakup.

History proves that the disintegration of the family will eventually bring down nations and societies, and I know from my work in prison ministry that a majority of male, long-term inmates come from broken homes. As children, they experienced neither love nor acceptance and were passed from one foster home to another. The only family many knew were gangs that led them into crime. These are the consequences of sin and, as sin abounds, its effects on society proliferate. Is there no cure for this epidemic of ruined families? Thank God, He has a solution in the everlasting gospel!

Because marriage and family life are vital to social order, their preservation is considered a fundamental doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Yet, many marriages and families in the church today fall far short of representing the power of the gospel. Only when God's professed people put self aside and submit to the demands of the cross, will God's Spirit step in and pour His agape-love into their hearts, and many marriages will be healed in remarkable and miraculous ways.

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

As the fundamental belief declares, “Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message.”

But how is this achieved? We find the answer in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Using Christ and His relationship to the church as a model, Paul presents important guidelines about how marriage and family relationships should be conducted in a sinful world. These guidelines are intended to restore the marriage relationship to that which God originally intended it to be — that is, a relationship where two people act as one flesh:

Ephesians 5:31

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

Paul’s key statement to husbands and wives appears in Ephesians 5:21, where he counsels them to:

Ephesians 5:21

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The rest of Ephesians 5 expounds on this basic counsel.

Many men have relished quoting the next verse:

Ephesians 5:22

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.

But, interestingly enough, the verb “submit” that appears in most English translations is not present in verse 22, in the Greek. In the original, the word “submit” appears only in

verse 21, where it applies to both husbands and wives. Paul clearly wants all married Christians to treat one another with Christ-like love.

But Paul also recognizes that believers will not be delivered from their sinful natures until Christ comes, so, even in the best of marriages, there will be disagreements.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

This leads Paul, then, to list some specific instructions for both wives and husbands, in context of the redeeming grace of the gospel. Wives are to submit to their husbands in the same way that husbands submit to Christ. Paul says:

Ephesians 5:23-24

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

The word head must not be interpreted to mean "dictator" or "boss," but one who is entrusted with the well-being of another. Just as Christ's great concern is the welfare of His church, the Christian husband will dedicate himself to the well-being of his wife. Likewise, for the wife to submit to her husband does not mean that she must obey him without question, as a slave. Submission means that she respects and appreciates her husband's concern for her. Jesus expects the Christian's submission to Him to be motivated not by fear of punishment or desire for reward, but by a heartfelt appreciation for what He has done and is doing; wives are to submit to their husbands in the same way.

But this works only when both husband and wife are controlled by God's agape-love and walk in the Spirit:

Galatians 5:16

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Only then will the husband's treatment of his wife reflect Christ's treatment of the church; and only then will the wife's behavior reflect the church's relationship to Christ. Paul, therefore, counsels husbands:

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....

Wives, in turn, are to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord":

Ephesians 5:22

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.

Later, in his letter to the Ephesian believers, Paul gives similar advice on parent-children relationships:

Ephesians 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" — which is the first commandment with a promise — "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The Power of the Gospel

This brings us, now, to an important question: "How can Christians behave this way, when unconditional, selfless agape-love is still beyond their natural ability?"

This is where the power of the gospel comes in. After the Fall, human nature became naturally selfish, polluting every decision with thoughts of personal benefit. The prophet Isaiah succinctly puts it:

Isaiah 53:6a

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way....

This "own-wayness" lies at the foundation of all relational problems.

The only way Christians can escape this selfish behavior is to surrender to the demands of the cross of Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to take over their lives:

Luke 9:23

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Human love, even at its very best, is conditional, self-centered, and reciprocal — that is, we love and expect love in return. No matter how hard we try, we cannot change this, for the simple reason that no amount of human effort can alter the basic nature of sin. As Scripture declares:

Jeremiah 13:23

Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.

The apostle James presents a similar idea:

James 3:11-12

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

The Holy Spirit's supreme gift to all believers is God's agape-love. This divine love, Paul says:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

What an effect this kind of agape-love has on marriages and families! And, though Christians may not yet possess agape-driven personalities, they can begin to experience its fruit as they practice faith obedience to the Lord, Jesus Christ Himself. It begins with surrender to the cross of Christ and the confession:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The Importance of Compatibility

If a marriage is to succeed, there must be some compatibility in three areas — spiritual, social, and physical. Of these three endowments given the human race by its Creator, the most important is the spiritual:

Amos 3:3

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

Problems arise, especially if only one partner is a believer. This is why the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual prohibits an Adventist pastor from conducting a marriage service for such a couple. At its very foundation, such a union is spiritually incompatible.

Social and physical differences may be overcome if the spiritual level is sound. Agape-love can do wonders, despite major areas of incompatibility. But if divine, self-sacrificing love is missing, the couple may find itself eventually headed for the divorce courts. Some countries may prohibit divorce, but, in reality, such a couple is psychologically divorced anyway, and the marriage is only one of outward appearances.

Marriage, as intended by God in the beginning, is the bonding of two lives in such a way that, for practical purposes, the two act and behave as one person. This was God's ideal for Adam and Eve and their descendants:

Genesis 2:24

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

But the Fall ruined this ideal, and husbands began insisting on more and more control:

Genesis 3:16

To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

This state of affairs continued for centuries, until around the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, with the arrival of the "Age of Enlightenment," when women began to say, "Enough is enough."

This shift in thinking expanded the role for women and, in time, led to what became commonly known as the "Women's Liberation Movement." Today, especially in so-called developed countries, women call for equal rights with men and protest mistreatment caused by male domination. Although the women's movement has achieved some worthwhile goals, it has not had the effect of strengthening marriage relationships; in fact, during these years, the quality and permanence of marriages has grown statistically worse. Divorce is now epidemic, as is spousal abuse. The sin problem remains as strong as ever in marriage.

The grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, is still the only solution to marriage problems caused by selfish behavior. Declares the apostle Paul:

Romans 5:20b-21

But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When the power of the gospel is experienced by God's people in these last days, then, and then only, will marriage relationships be restored to their original ideal, in which "the two become one flesh":

Ephesians 5:31

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

I believe God wants strong families in the Advent movement that He raised out of the rubble of the Great Disappointment of 1844. Through the pure and complete gospel that God commissioned them to restore, the earth will be illuminated with the glory of the Lord, Jesus Christ, even in their marriage relationships. But as long as the divorce rate in the church is not far behind the national average, the power of the everlasting gospel will not be seen as it should be.

Certainly God longs for the day when His followers will put self aside and let the Holy Spirit take over. When this happens, the world will witness the power of the gospel — man's only hope for solving the sin problem. May that day come soon.

Chapter 21

Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

Fundamental Belief #24

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it, Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of Investigative Judgment, which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service, the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The Investigative Judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and, therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.

[Hebrews 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16-17; Daniel 7:9-27; 8:13-14; 9:24-27; Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6; Leviticus 16; Revelation 14:6-7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12]

After the apostles passed from the scene, Christian church leadership fell into the hands of Gentile believers, commonly known as "Church Fathers." These Gentile leaders saw little value in studying the Jewish Sanctuary service. As far as they were concerned, God had given the Sanctuary system exclusively to the Jewish nation, under the Old Covenant. So the Sanctuary and its message gradually lost its significance and was generally considered obsolete.

In the mid-19th Century, however, the newly formed Seventh-day Adventist Church resurrected the importance of the Sanctuary message. Today, one of the Church's 28 fundamental beliefs deals with this subject.

Many Adventists consider this doctrine to be one of the two major contributions their church has made to 21st-century theology. The other is the seventh-day Sabbath. The doctrine of the Sanctuary, however, has been proclaimed for more than a century and a half and has had little positive impact on Christianity as a whole. Most non-Adventist Christian scholars, in fact, give it a negative evaluation.

Whose fault is this? Theirs, or the doctrine's? Or is it possible that the fault lies with the way it has been presented? Have Adventists followed the example of the Jews and put emphasis on buildings and rituals rather than on the Person the Sanctuary represents? The Jews, of course, focused on the earthly temple, while Adventists focus on the Sanctuary in heaven. But the words of Ellen G. White point out the mistaken approach of both groups:

Christ's Object Lessons, Pages 34

The Lord Jesus was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. Its [the temple's] imposing services were of divine appointment. They were designed to teach the people that, at the time appointed, One would come to whom these ceremonies pointed. But the Jews had exalted the forms and ceremonies and had lost sight of their object. ...And when the Reality came, in the person of Christ, they did not recognize in Him the fulfillment of their types, the substance of all their shadows. They rejected the antitype, and clung to their types and useless ceremonies.

As we examine this fundamental belief, we will discover that it encompasses more than one, single, major truth. Besides the Sanctuary truth itself, this fundamental belief also includes the date 1844 and the Investigative Judgment, both of which are major Church doctrines. All have come under fire, both from within the Church and from outside it, and it is now impossible, in a single chapter, to cover enough material to do justice to these vital truths that have made Adventism what it is as a denomination.

The Sanctuary Truth

So I have divided the study of this major fundamental belief into three parts, and will limit our study of this chapter to the Sanctuary message itself. In the appendices, then, we will consider the significance of 1844 and examine the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. As we have done throughout the book, we will consider all these doctrines in the light of the everlasting gospel.

When God gave the Sanctuary and its services to the Israelites of the Exodus, He was providing a visual aid to reveal vital aspects of the Plan of Salvation. It was His "show-and-tell." Through this visual aid, God showed Israel the whole Plan of Redemption, from beginning to end. The Sanctuary and its services modeled God's master plan to save lost humanity. Had the Jews fully understood its significance, they would have recognized Jesus Christ when He came to earth as the fulfillment of the message they had been learning in the Sanctuary. (For a detailed study of the Sanctuary message, read The Sanctuary, God's Show and Tell.)

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, tried to get this concept across to the Jewish leaders of his day. Notice his words, just before his martyrdom:

Acts 7:44-51

"Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'

"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

Stephen calls the Sanctuary model "the tabernacle of witness." For what did it witness? Clearly, it witnessed for the gospel truth as it is in Christ:

Hebrews 4:2

For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.

But, as Stephen pointed out, the Jewish nation resisted the convictions of the Holy Spirit, and they did so again, as they rushed upon Stephen and stoned him to death. This unprovoked murder drew the Jewish nation across the line of no return, described in Scripture as "the abomination of desolation":

Daniel 11:31; 12:11

"His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. ...From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days."

During his final visit to Jerusalem, Christ Himself predicted that the Jewish nation would commit this final sin of unbelief:

Matthew 23:37-39

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Christ, The Reality

While on earth, Jesus gave the Jewish leaders a final opportunity to accept Him as the Messiah. In doing so, He pointed them to the Jerusalem temple as the ultimate sign that He was the One sent of God to redeem them. The apostle John describes it as follows:

John 2:13-22

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture [the Old Testament] and the words that Jesus had spoken.

This incident reveals several things. First, it points out where the Jews went wrong in their understanding of the Sanctuary message. They put the emphasis on the temple building and its services rather than on the realities to which these things pointed.

Second, Jesus' declaration that He would raise the temple (His body) in three days referred to His resurrection, the ultimate sign to the Jewish nation that He was the Messiah and confirmation of the covenant God had made with them through the Sanctuary message. The stoning-to-death of Stephen in 34 A.D., then, provided the final, outward evidence that their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah was deliberate and final — that, as a nation, they had reached the point of no return. The prophetic 70 weeks of years predicted by Daniel the prophet was finished:

Daniel 9:24

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people [the Jews] and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place."

Third, Christ's disciples were also victims of the teachings of Judaism and failed to understand what Jesus meant until after His resurrection. When they eventually saw the light, they "believed the scripture," the Old Testament that described the Sanctuary of witness, God's visual aid of His Plan of Redemption:

John 2:22

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Finally, the "temple" Jesus was referring to was the temple of His body:

John 2:21

But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

The book of Hebrews clearly brings out the significance of this truth:

Hebrews 10:5-7

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you [the Father] did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll [Old Testament] — I have come to do your will, my God.'"

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers in New Testament times, its purpose to convince them that Christ was the complete fulfillment of the Old Testament Sanctuary model. The passage quoted above comes from Psalm 40:

Psalm 40:6-7

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire — but my ears you have opened — burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll."

The very next verse in Psalm 40 states:

Psalm 40:8

"I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart."

The body God prepared for Jesus in Mary's womb was the corporate body of the human race. This legally qualified Jesus to become man's substitute and Redeemer, whom the apostle Paul refers to as the "last Adam":

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

As we have seen already, the word Adam in Hebrew means "mankind." When Paul calls Jesus the "last Adam," he is saying that Christ assumed our corporate humanity at the incarnation, met the full demands of the law on mankind's behalf (both its positive demands — obey and live — and its demands for justice — disobey and die). Thus Paul could declare to the Roman Christians:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination [end or fulfillment] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The Significance of the Sanctuary Model

With this background, let us now examine the true meaning of the Sanctuary message, God's Master plan of Salvation given to the Israelites, through Moses.

First we come to the courtyard, 100 cubits long by 50 cubits wide (approximately 180 feet by 90 feet), made of two joined squares (see diagram at end of this chapter). The eastern square represents Christ's earthly mission; the western square His heavenly ministry. Together, they point to the complete Plan of Redemption in Christ.

In the very center of the eastern square is the bronze altar, or altar of burnt offering. On this altar, the sacrificial animals are consumed by fire. This fire has been kindled by God Himself and is kept alive throughout the Exodus journey. It represents God's wrath against sin in the world — the sin heaped on the crucified Christ:

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

God is described as a "consuming fire" and, on the cross, sin was consumed forever in Christ:

Hebrews 12:29

...For our "God is a consuming fire."

This is the good news of the gospel:

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

In Gethsemane, Jesus pled three times with His Father to deliver Him from the ordeal to come. With blood pouring down His brow, He prayed:

Matthew 26:39

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Jesus was not referring to the physical torture of the cross, but to God's wrath against sin:

Revelation 14:9-10

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb."

Because God so loved the world:

Romans 8:32a

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all....

The bronze altar in the Sanctuary plan is placed at the center of the eastern square of the courtyard for it represents the central message of the gospel — Christ and Him crucified.

In further review of the Old Testament Sanctuary, the ark of the covenant is placed in the center of the western square. In this ark are two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments are inscribed — the law that condemns sinners, for all have sinned and stand guilty before it:

Romans 3:19, 23

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

On top of the ark of the covenant lies the mercy seat, which covers the sins of God's people.

I find it significant that the Greek word translated "atoning sacrifice" ["propitiation" in the KJV], used in the New Testament to point to the atoning sacrifice of Christ, is the very same Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) to refer to the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant.

Romans 3:25

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood — to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished....

1 John 2:2

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The mercy seat, then, represents Christ's atoning sacrifice. On the basis of this atoning sacrifice on the cross, Christ is able to cleanse all human sin and unrighteousness:

1 John 1:7, 9

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The blood of Christ — that is, His life laid down in death — is the means by which the Savior is lawfully able to forgive sins in His priestly ministry in the heavenly Sanctuary.

Leviticus 17:11

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

1 John 2:1

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Animal Sacrifices

Now we turn to the system of animal sacrifices in the Sanctuary service. These sacrifices occur in the eastern square of the courtyard, and God emphasizes two important requirements in the Old Testament. First, the sacrificial lamb must be spotless; second, it must be completely consumed by fire on the bronze altar. These two important requirements point to two essential truths of salvation, both of which Christ accomplished in His earthly mission. The spotless lamb represents His perfect obedience, from birth to manhood. On mankind's behalf, this perfect obedience met the positive demands of the law (obey and live).

But Christ came to save sinners, so this perfect obedience alone was but the first step in redeeming fallen mankind. Christ then took His body — a body that contained the fullness of corporate humanity — and surrendered it to the full wages of sin. On the cross, Christ tasted death for every person, and the sins of mankind were fully consumed, once and for all:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Romans 6:10

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

The Priestly Ministry

The priestly ministry, carried out in the western square of the earthly Sanctuary, points to Christ as great High Priest in the heavenly Sanctuary. It involves two services — the daily and the yearly. The daily service represents Christ's continual intercession for humankind and is necessary because Satan, as the accuser of the brethren, presents his case before God day and night:

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Revelation 12:10

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."

The blood of the Lamb is the only weapon that counteracts these accusations:

Revelation 12:11

"They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

In the ancient Jewish system, the second service is conducted only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and points to Christ's final, concluding work in the Plan of Redemption. This work includes the Investigative Judgment of the believers (see Appendix C), the last-day judgment of the wicked, the final disposition of Satan and his angels, and the final eradication of sin and onset of everlasting righteousness in the earth made new:

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The two goats used on the Day of Atonement to cleanse the Sanctuary point to the fact that, although Christ is the sin-bearer, the ultimate blame, or responsibility, for sin falls on Satan, its originator. On the cross, Christ, the sin-bearer, experienced the guilt and punishment for humanity's sins, and is represented by the sacrifice of the Lord's goat on the Day of Atonement. God has assumed this responsibility until the antitypical Day of Atonement when the actual responsibility for all sins will be placed on Satan, where it rightfully belongs.

One of the final issues God must address before bringing sin to an end is the determination of who is responsible for the sin problem. This is represented by the scapegoat in the service of the Day of Atonement. Lucifer was created perfect but, somehow, a bent toward self entered his heart and, thus, began the great controversy between God and Lucifer/Satan.

Ezekiel 28:15

You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Isaiah 14:12-14

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

When Adventists talk about the Day of Atonement as the "final atonement," it is important that this not be confused with the perfect, objective, and finished atonement accomplished by Christ on the cross. When Christ cried out, "It is finished," He was announcing to the universe that the atonement that reconciles a holy God to sinful man was indeed finished:

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Romans 5:10

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

But this objective truth of the atonement must not be confused with the subjective application of the atonement. The final atonement, or at-one-ment, symbolized by the Old Testament Day of Atonement, refers to the ultimate eradication of sin from the universe and the ushering in of everlasting righteousness. This is still future, today, and will be realized when the antitypical Day of Atonement will have done its work:

Romans 5:19b

...So also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

The final atonement is best described in the closing paragraph of Ellen G. White's classic, The Great Controversy:

The Great Controversy, Page 678

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in the unshadowed beauty and perfect joy declare that God is love.

Because of what Christ accomplished in His earthly mission, represented by the spotless lamb being sacrificed and consumed by the fire, He is able to present believers without spot or wrinkle to His Father as He ministers in the heavenly Sanctuary as High Priest:

Ephesians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

To this heavenly reality, the daily and yearly services of the earthly Sanctuary pointed. Ellen G. White expresses it well:

The Acts of the Apostles, Page 14

The whole system of type and symbols was a compacted prophecy of the gospel, a presentation in which were bound up the promises of redemption.

The Sanctuary Message Fulfilled

Everything in the Sanctuary God gave the Israelites through Moses — the building itself, the furniture, the various sacrifices, and the daily and yearly services — pointed to Christ, the Savior of the world. The whole Plan of Salvation, depicted by the earthly Sanctuary, was accomplished within the white linen curtains of the courtyard. What happened in this enclosure represented the truth as it is "in Christ." Outside the

courtyard stood the sinners. But the moment a person entered the courtyard, either personally or through the priest who represented him, he was hidden by the white robe of Christ's righteousness. This is justification by faith, represented by all that took place within the courtyard.

In Adam, humanity was defiled and marred and no longer fit for God's indwelling. But, in Christ, that same humanity was redeemed, reconciled to God, and cleansed. That is why Paul can say that, in Christ, the believers are already sitting in heavenly places:

Ephesians 2:5-6

[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

This redemption applies to all, but is made effective individually when that person professes faith in Christ, enabling them once again to become God's temples:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

2 Corinthians 6:16-18

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Ellen G. White explicitly links the cleansing of the Jerusalem temple with Christ's earthly mission:

The Desire of Ages, Page 161

In the cleansing of the temple, Jesus was announcing His mission as the Messiah, and entering upon His work. That temple, erected for the abode of the Divine presence, was designed to be an object lesson for Israel and the world. From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple for God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the Divine One. But by the incarnation of the Son of God, the purpose of heaven is fulfilled.

Application of the Sanctuary Truth

The good news of the everlasting gospel makes it possible for sinners to once again become temples of God, as revealed symbolically in the Old Testament Sanctuary and its ceremonies. God met sinners in the Sanctuary:

Exodus 25:22; 29:42-43

"There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites. ...For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the tent of meeting, before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory."

Today He meets us in Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:19

...That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God revealed Himself to sinners in the Sanctuary:

Exodus 29:46

They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.

Today He reveals Himself in Christ:

John 14:7-9

“If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

The Sanctuary was where God dwelt with sinners:

Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ...Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”

Today He dwells with us in Christ:

Matthew 1:23

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

John 14:23

Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

God spoke to sinners in the Sanctuary:

Exodus 29:42

“For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the tent of meeting, before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you....”

Leviticus 1:1

The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

Today He speaks in Christ:

Hebrews 1:2

...But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

John 8:43, 47

“Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ...Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

God accepted sinners in the Sanctuary:

Leviticus 1:4

You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.

Today He accepts them in Christ:

Ephesians 1:6

...To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

God forgave sinners in the Sanctuary:

Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35

...And do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the community, and they will be forgiven. ...He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the leader's sin, and he will be forgiven. ...They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. ...They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the food offerings presented to the Lord. In this way the priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven.

Today He forgives them in Christ:

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace....

Everything in the earthly Sanctuary pointed to Christ; therefore, those who present the Sanctuary message must emphasize the truth as it is in Jesus. Preachers in the past have tended to emphasize the Sanctuary's effect on the individual, or subjective, experience — and this is not unimportant. But the objective facts of salvation — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ — are the foundation for all subjective experience:

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

The Sanctuary, above all, pointed to Christ as Savior of the world and High Priest in Heaven. The Sanctuary presents in microcosm the complete Plan of Redemption — which is why it remains relevant as a guide, right down to the end.

Below is a diagram of the Sanctuary model, as God described it to Moses. This diagram will help you appreciate the gospel (especially if you are visually inclined) as foreshadowed in the earthly Sanctuary and its services.

Chapter 22

The Second Coming of Christ

Fundamental Belief #25

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected and, together with the righteous living, will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are, therefore, exhorted to be ready at all times.

[Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Matthew 24:14; Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:43-44; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:8; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:11-21; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6]

The Second Coming of Christ is a cardinal Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, and, like the Sabbath, is built into the church name. Church pioneers believed and proclaimed the imminent coming of Christ. From the very start, it was the focus of their preaching.

As the church established its central doctrines in the 19th Century and for several years thereafter, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the only denomination that proclaimed Christ's soon return. The rest of Christendom, while believing in the Second Advent, taught that it would occur in the distant future. Today, however, most Christian denominations readily acknowledge that the Second Coming of Christ will happen soon. Everywhere, the signs of the times demand it. So Adventists no longer stand alone on the matter of the Second Coming, though the belief that "the Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide" is not held by all.

Now let us consider the relationship between this belief — the Second Coming of Christ — and the everlasting gospel. Most are confused about the connection, believing that Christ's Second Coming is part and parcel of the gospel message. In fact, this is not true; the Second Coming of Christ is "the blessed hope of the church." Scripture states

clearly that the gospel is the incredibly good news of salvation, realized in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Nothing must be added to this central message, lest the objective facts of salvation be confused with the subjective experience of salvation achieved in the believers' lives.

The Incredibly Good News

The New Testament states clearly that the entire human race was reconciled to God by the death of His Son:

2 Corinthians 5:19

...That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, the incredibly good news of the gospel must be shared with everyone:

Mark 16:15

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

As pointed out in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of this book, this is the objective, or universal gospel.

But the subjective experience of the gospel applies only to believers — those who have, by faith, received Christ as their personal Savior. Only those walking in the light of the gospel will experience the blessed hope of the Second Coming:

Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ....

To the unbelievers, the Second Coming is neither good news nor a blessed hope; it is, for them, the day of God's wrath:

Revelation 6:15-17

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

Lest we forget, the gospel is the good news of Christ's accomplished salvation for all mankind. In Him, the entire human race was redeemed, justified unto life, and reconciled to God:

Romans 5:18b

...So also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Timothy 2:6

[Christ Jesus], who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

1 John 2:2

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

This cannot be overemphasized. This salvation is God's supreme gift to the world and, like any gift, it has to be received if it is to be experienced:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Justification by faith makes effective the good news of the gospel in one's life:

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have [present continuous tense] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

The process of sanctification, or holy living, that follows justification by faith and the new birth, carries no merit and contributes nothing to salvation. Sanctification is important, however, for it is the fruit of the gospel. It is the inevitable outgrowth of true justification by faith:

Titus 3:8

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

James 2:14-20

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

Failure to produce such fruits indicates than an individual has not fully understood the gospel or its demands on his or her life.

Again, the experience of glorification, realized by all genuine believers at the Second Coming of Christ, is the hope of the gospel:

1 Peter 1:1-5

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Second Coming will bring to fruition the salvation the believers already have in Jesus Christ, by faith. The apostle Paul says:

Ephesians 2:4-6

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive [past tense] with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved [past tense]. And God raised us up [past tense] with Christ and seated us [past tense] with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

Justification, sanctification, and glorification were all obtained for mankind in Christ during His earthly mission; we all received this together [this is emphasized in the NKJV, where use of the word together occurs three times in the text].

God planned this "before the creation of the world" and fulfilled it in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

But not until the Second Coming of Christ will believers experience:

Ephesians 2:7

...In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

The Blessed Hope

Meanwhile, Christians are to regard themselves as citizens of heaven who are living, temporarily, in enemy territory. For though Satan is a defeated foe, he is very much alive and able to make life difficult for believers. Like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, he constantly tries to destroy the Christian's faith:

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Because of the hardships Christians face in the world, the apostle Paul penned these words to the Corinthian believers — especially those who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead:

1 Corinthians 15:19

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The hope of all Christians is the Second Coming of Christ:

Romans 8:24-25

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

But here we face another problem concerning the Second Coming of Christ, especially the younger generation of Adventists. The church has been preaching the soon return of the Lord in glory for more than 150 years, and many are beginning to ask, "How soon is soon?" Human beings by nature are time-bound and define "soon" quite differently than God does. God, after all, lives in eternity. The early Christians experienced this same impatience, as they looked ahead to the Second Coming of Christ. Note how Peter addressed the problem:

2 Peter 3:9-13

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise [His soon return], as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Because the Second Coming of Christ is the blessed hope of believers, who tend to be impatient, the Bible presents Christ's return as a soon-coming event for believers of all

ages. Keeping focused on it keeps faith alive. Note how the writer of Hebrews encourages Christians to maintain their faith:

Hebrews 10:35-38a

So do not throw away your confidence [faith in Christ]; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For,

"In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." And,

"But my righteous one will live by faith."

The statement, "in just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay," was penned almost 2,000 years ago. So those who now live in the last days should not give up their conviction that Christ is indeed coming soon, in their day — though they have been proclaiming it for the past 150 years. In God's eyes, a thousand years is as one day:

2 Peter 3:8

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

Adventists today face the same danger the antediluvian world experienced before the universal Flood. They were thrown off guard, not only because they did not believe Noah's message, but because it took so long (some 120 years) for the prophecy to be fulfilled.

Jesus warned that His Second Coming would catch many off guard, as a thief who comes when the owner of the house least expects it:

Matthew 24:43

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

This warning applies especially to those who live in the time of the end, for Scripture warns that, just before the Second Advent, many will cry, "'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them":

1 Thessalonians 5:3

While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Note also:

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

The writer of Hebrews encouraged the Jewish believers of his day not to give up their hope in Christ's coming under any circumstances. Likewise, Jesus urged His disciples:

John 14:1-3

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am

going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

The blessed Christian hope says nothing about the departure of the soul to heaven at death. It focuses entirely on the Second Coming of Christ to take the believers to heaven with Him.

Salvation Versus Reward

Indeed, not until Christ comes the second time will Christian believers receive the rewards of justification by faith. Christ Himself told John, the beloved apostle:

Revelation 22:12

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."

Here some Adventists go wrong in their understanding of the good news of the gospel. They confuse the word reward with the word salvation. So many have been trapped in a subtle form of legalism, believing that salvation comes partly as a gift, by faith, and is partly earned, by works. This is the same perversion of the gospel that deceived the Galatian Christians:

Galatians 3:1-5

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain — if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

"Reward" and "salvation," although related, refer to different things. Salvation is a free gift from God to sinners and cannot be earned:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

But when Scripture talks of rewards, it is referring to recognition of the works that believers allowed the Holy Spirit to do in and through them:

Matthew 16:27

"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."

The apostle Paul expresses the same idea:

1 Corinthians 3:8

The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.

See also:

Revelation 20:12

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

When God talks of rewards, He is not referring to material things, though heaven will be filled with material blessings. In God's eyes, rewards are the privilege of serving Him and others. He that is greatest in God's kingdom, said Christ, will serve those who are the least:

Matthew 23:11

The greatest among you will be your servant.

Luke 22:25-26

Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”

John 13:13-17

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

The greater the reward one is blessed with in God’s kingdom, the more one will have the privilege to serve.

Another area to consider when discussing the Second Coming of Christ in light of the gospel is one’s attitude toward this great event. One can be motivated either by carnal desires — living in mansions and walking on streets of gold (this to many is the reward) — or by a spiritual hope, longing to be delivered from the law of sin and the sinful passions.

Romans 7:24-25

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

At first, Christ’s disciples followed Him out of selfishness. Prior to the cross, they continually argued among themselves over who would be the greatest in God’s kingdom:

Luke 22:24

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Their goals were purely material. Peter once spoke out on behalf of the group, demanding:

Matthew 19:27

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Paul had an altogether different attitude toward the Second Coming. His one great longing for the Second Advent was to be delivered from the evil body that was preventing him from living fully for Christ. He wrote to the believers at Philippi:

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

This is mature Christianity — the ability to say:

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The Purpose of the Second Advent

Christ's Second Coming will liberate the believers from their sinful natures, one of the greatest stumbling blocks to Christian living:

Romans 7:14-23

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

Writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul tells them what will actually happen to their sinful natures at the Second Advent:

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

Paul reminds his readers in Rome:

Romans 8:19

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Like the rest of creation, Christians are constantly groaning inwardly, waiting to be liberated from their bodies of sin. They are to patiently await this transformation at the Second Coming of Christ:

Romans 8:22-25

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,

groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

But such a desire can be experienced only when they fully understand the everlasting gospel and the goodness of God leads to repentance:

Romans 2:4

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance [turning away from a life of sin]?

As long as believers remain insecure about their salvation, the gospel is good advice, rather than good news, and the Second Advent is cause for fear, rather than a blessed hope. But once Christians realize that their salvation is a free gift, obtained at infinite cost by God, their attitude will harmonize with these words of the apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Preparing for the Advent

How does one prepare for the Second Coming of Christ? This question is uppermost in the minds of many Adventists, and last chapter we dealt with a similar question related to the Great Time of Trouble.

Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 24:42, 44

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ...So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Too often, we have used this text to scare people about the Lord’s coming. I remember, when I became an Adventist, I was told that my guardian angel would not go with me into places such as taverns and theaters and, if Christ were to come while I was in such a place, I would be eternally lost.

Adventist children often grow up with such views, and it damages them spiritually. The Church Ministries Department of the North American Division has published guidelines to counteract these legalistic teachings (after determining that, in the late 1980s, some 82 percent of Adventist youth had no assurance of salvation).

On page five of this material, we find these unfortunate examples of legalistic teaching:

Guidelines for Writers and Producers of Children’s Ministry Resources, August 1993

“Can I go to heaven too?” asked Bobby. “Of course you can,” answered the Sabbath School teacher. “If you are a good boy, Jesus will invite you to spend eternity with Him.”

Jesus invites everyone who believes in Him. But He knows the names of those who really believe. And He knows the people who only say they believe in Him. The Bible is very clear on this point: if we don’t keep God’s commandments, every one of them, we won’t be saved.

“I’m worried about getting to heaven,” said Maria. “I know that in order to be saved I should follow God’s rules. But sometimes I make mistakes.”

The children stared at the beautiful cloud. “Don’t you wish Jesus was coming right now?” Steve whispered. “Yeah,” Mike agreed. “But it’s scary. What if you’re not ready?”

Let's not forget the part we play in our salvation. We must act like Christians. We must look like Christians. We must eat and drink like Christians. We must even think like Christians. Only then will Jesus know that we are safe to save.

The Valuegenesis study of Adventist youth has clearly demonstrated that the great majority of Adventist young people still have no assurance of salvation and feel unprepared for Christ's Second Coming. When children are reared with the idea that only those who live up to God's rules will be saved when Christ comes, they become terrorized by the prospect of failure to perform to God's expectations. The good news of salvation becomes a gospel of fear.

Then, as teenagers recognize that their parents, school teachers, and even their pastors are struggling to be good, they think to themselves, "If these adults are still struggling to make it to heaven, what hope is there for me?" They see no reason to remain in the church, and vast numbers leave.

To prepare for the great Time of Trouble and the Second Coming of Christ, Adventists young and old must be grounded in two great truths:

First, they must accept the unconditional agape-love of God, revealed in Christ and Him crucified.

Romans 5:5-10

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And second, they must clearly understand the incredibly good news of the gospel, the truth as it is in Christ.

Once believers understand these two pillars of salvation and are established on the rock, Jesus Christ, they will be prepared to stand and be used by God to fulfill the global mission of illuminating the world with the glory of Christ. May that day come soon!

Chapter 23

Death and Resurrection

Fundamental Belief #26

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day, death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later.

[Romans 6:23; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6; Psalm 146:3-4; John 11:11-14; Colossians 3:4; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:1-10]

Seventh-day Adventists reject the popular belief that the human soul is immortal and leaves the body at death, bound either for the bliss of heaven or the tormenting fires of eternal hell. Such a view not only contradicts the truth of the gospel, but paints a horrible picture of God. This belief has no clear Scriptural support, but the Bible does clearly state that:

Ecclesiastes 9:5-6

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

In both Old and New Testaments, the primary meaning of the word “soul” is “the life principle with which we are born.” The original languages of the Bible (Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New) apply the same word “soul” to both human beings and animals. In fact, the first time the word soul appears in Scripture it refers to animals created on the fifth day of Creation week:

Genesis 1:20

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures [Hebrew “soul”], and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”

When God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, Adam became a living “soul” — a living being:

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [“lives,” actually, as it’s plural], and the man became a living being.

Most Christians believe that every human being has an immortal soul; though the human life principle, or soul, created in Adam was only conditionally immortal. God made it clear that, the day human beings ate the forbidden fruit, they would surely die (that is, the life principle, or soul, would become mortal, subject to death):

Genesis 2:16-17

And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

This is exactly what happened when Adam sinned. According to Paul, Adam’s sin not only led to his death, but spread death to the entire human race:

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Scripture tells us that God “alone has immortality”:

1 Timothy 6:16

[God...] who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

But the good news of the gospel is that He so loved the world that He:

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has [eternal] life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have [eternal] life.

Immortality, or eternal life, is, therefore, a gift experienced only through faith in Jesus Christ:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Paul writes:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The idea that human beings possess immortality comes from Greek paganism that infiltrated quite early into the church. After the apostles died, Church Fathers of primarily Greek extraction assumed leadership, and the idea of an immortal soul took root in Christian theology. In Greek mythology, the god Zeus struck his enemies, the Titans, with a lightning bolt and reduced them to ashes as punishment for tearing apart and eating his immortal son, Dionysus. Out of these ashes, Zeus created man. Hence,

part of man, the soul, belongs to Dionysus and is, therefore, good and immortal. But the body, made of the Titans, is evil and mortal. The Church Fathers introduced this dualistic concept of man into the Christian church.

Controversy Over Immortality

Several years ago, a famous Protestant theologian, Oscar Cullman, published a book in which he contrasted the death of the great Greek philosopher Socrates with that of Christ. The title of the book said it all: Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body? (Epworth Press, 1958). Because Socrates believed the soul is immortal, but imprisoned in an evil body, he believed death was something to celebrate. He held a banquet on his death bed. Christ, on the other hand, suffered severe mental anguish as He faced death in Gethsemane, for he faced the possibility of permanent death — a good-bye to life forever:

Luke 22:39-44

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Cullman's book produced a great deal of controversy among Protestant scholars and forced them to re-study the long-held belief that humans possess an immortal soul that leaves the body at death. Many came to see that such an idea has no biblical support, and evangelical scholar Edward Fudge went on to publish a book, The Fire That Consumes (Providential Press, 1982). In his book, Fudge presents a biblical and historical study of the doctrine of final punishment. Inserted in the first edition of this book is a separate letter from the author to his fellow scholars. In part, it states:

Edward Fudge, insert in The Fire That Consumes

Dear Colleagues: For 1,500 years, most Christians have assumed as true a doctrine which is nowhere to be found in the Word of God, sprang from explicitly pagan pre-

suppositions, slanders the character of God and the blessed Trinity, prevailed in Protestantism for political not biblical reasons, and has been rejected by an increasing number of such faithful scholars as Graham Scroggy, John R.W. Stott, Phillip Hughes, F.F. Bruce, John Wareham, Dale Moody, and Pluck....

Would you be as startled as I was to discover these facts from Scripture and church history? The Old Testament uses or utilizes some 50 Hebrew words and 75 figures of speech to describe the ultimate end of the wicked, and every one sounds exactly like total extinction. When our Lord taught on this subject, He generally used Old Testament language which most naturally describes complete disintegration of the entire person in the fire of the age to come. No passage of Scripture teaches the inherent or natural immortality of the soul, or of any other aspect of the human creature. The notion of everlasting torment appears explicitly in Christian literature for the first time in writings of the Apologists, who expressly based it on the platonic assumption that the soul is immortal and cannot be destroyed.

God is surely moving the Protestant world in the right direction on this important subject. As long as the Christian church holds onto the idea that humans possess an immortal soul, it will continue to undermine the gospel and the true sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Christ's Abolishment of the Second Death

For if a man possesses an immortal soul, death must be defined as the separation of the soul from the body. But Scripture defines death as the cessation of life. The wages of sin is death, good-bye to life forever — what the New Testament calls "the second death":

Revelation 20:12-15

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

On the cross, Jesus tasted this second death for everyone:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Paul, therefore, can conclude that Christ:

2 Timothy 1:10b

...Our Savior, Christ Jesus, ...has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Since Christians still experience the first death (a state of unconscious "sleep"), the death Christ abolished on the cross can only refer to the second death — the eternal death that is the wages of sin:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Note how Ellen G. White so beautifully describes the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the cross, a truth the devil has enshrouded in darkness by convincing the Christian church to believe in an immortal soul:

The Desire of Ages, Page 753

"Upon Christ our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with a consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners

was His [Christ's] theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Savior in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

"Satan, with his fierce temptations, wrung the heart of Jesus. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."

Furthermore, if man does possess an immortal soul, and if the wages of sin is eternal torture of the soul in the fires of hell (as most Christians believe), then Christ, who suffered the wages of sin for mankind, should be burning in hell today and must continue to do so for eternity! Otherwise, God is being unjust in letting Jesus' soul suffer in hell for only three days, while the unrighteous have to experience this torture throughout eternity!

By convincing the Christian church that man possesses an immortal soul, Satan has laid the foundation for the greatest deception to come, spiritualism. Already the teachings of the New Age movement, based on the idea that man possesses an immortal soul, are sweeping across the United States and infiltrating the church. The idea that humans possess an immortal soul is not only incompatible with Scripture, it creates major problems regarding the truth of the everlasting gospel.

Scripture clearly teaches what happens when a person dies. David, for example, pens these words:

Psalm 115:17

It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to the place of silence....

The "gospel prophet" Isaiah of the Old Testament contrasts the dead with the living:

Isaiah 38:18-19

For the grave cannot praise you [God], death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living — they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness.

The Hope of the Resurrection

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul dedicates almost a whole chapter to the issue of death and resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:12-58

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day — yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at

the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Apparently, some believers in the Corinthian church did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. In response, Paul clearly states that the blessed hope of the Christian is not death, but resurrection. Paul's whole argument is based on the death and resurrection of Christ Himself, the foundation of all Christian experience:

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Notice what Paul writes on this subject:

1 Corinthians 15:12-23

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in

your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Clearly, for Paul, the Christian's hope has nothing to do with a soul departing the body and going to heaven at death. His hope lies in the resurrection, as he writes the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

From these passages, and others, two things become absolutely clear

Christians who die are considered to be sleeping in Christ until the resurrection morning. This truth clearly appears in the Gospels, in the raising of Lazarus from the dead:

John 11:1-26

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who

poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

As we have already seen, all Christian experience should be based on the truth as it is in Jesus. That which Christ has obtained through the gospel is to be the experience of all who receive Him by faith:

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work.

If Christ’s soul went to heaven at death, this would be the experience of the saved, and the blessed hope would be realized at death, rather than at the Second Coming. But Christ is emphatic, for example, in telling Mary right after His resurrection that He had not yet been to the Father — His soul had not been with the Father while His body was in the grave:

John 20:11-17

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Some Christians claim that Christ’s soul did, indeed, go to hell during the three days His body was in the grave. But this idea comes from a misinterpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20:

1 Peter 3:18-20

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the [Holy] Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits — to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water....

If “imprisoned spirits” means “souls in hell,” it would make no sense for Jesus to preach to them, since these spirits are already lost. Peter says that Jesus was made alive “in the Spirit” (verse 19).

The phrase “imprisoned spirits” refers to men and women who lived at the time of the Flood, who were prisoners of sin and disobedient to the call of Noah while he was building the ark.

In Scripture, the word spirit does not mean ghost or disembodied person; it refers, instead, to living beings:

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Peter is saying that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus in Old Testament times "preached" to those who were prisoners of sin in the days of Noah, attempting to influence them to accept Noah's message and repent. Peter's words have nothing to do with Jesus visiting hell after His death and preaching to fire-tormented souls.

According to the gospel, the human bios-life that Christ assumed at His incarnation died the eternal, second death on the cross, as the full wages of sin. This bios-life encompassed the Adamic life of the entire human race, which Christ had come to redeem. Thus, on the cross, the world (mankind) was judged, or executed, in Christ, meeting the just demands of the law in mankind's substitute, Jesus Christ:

John 12:31-33

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

In Christ's resurrection, God gave the world the immortal zoe-life of His Son, which He laid down. Thus He raised the human race to eternal life in Him.

The Great Exchange

This is the great exchange that took place in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord, Jesus Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:14, 17

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

This death to sin and resurrection to newness of life is experienced by all who — by faith — have obeyed the gospel and have been baptized into Christ:

Romans 6:3-8, 17-18

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ...But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

All this would make no sense if at death Christ's soul, or life principle, had departed from His body.

Scripture says categorically:

Ezekiel 18:20a

The one who sins is the one who will die.

Consistent with that truth, Jesus counseled His disciples:

Matthew 10:28

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus was warning His disciples against those whom Satan uses to try to rob believers of the eternal life they have in Christ. The enemy does this by destroying their faith in Him:

Hebrews 6:4-6

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Likewise, the apostle James writes:

James 5:20

...Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

All these texts tell us that no part of man is capable of separate existence. When a person dies, the whole of him — spirit, soul, and body — ceases to exist. Yes, the power of the life-giving breath that comes from God goes back to the Creator, but the individual returns to the dust from which he or she was originally formed:

Ecclesiastes 12:7

...And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Mankind's only hope of eternal life is through faith in Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, all is sin, condemnation, and eternal death.

Scripture uses the terms "eternal fire" or "everlasting fire" to describe the final punishment of the wicked:

Isaiah 33:14

The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?"

Matthew 18:8

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.

Revelation 20:10

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

This has led many to believe that the punishment of the unrighteous condemns them to eternal torture in hell. What they fail to notice is that the words eternal and everlasting

have two distinct meanings in Scripture. The two adjectives can indeed refer directly to the noun — in this case, "fire." Or, they can describe the effect being everlasting.

When we consider the many texts that deal with the final punishment of the wicked, we can only conclude that it is not the fire itself that is eternal, but the effect of the fire. This is to say, when the wicked are destroyed by fire, their destruction will be permanent:

2 Peter 3:10, 12

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ...As you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

Take Jude 7, for example:

Jude 7

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Today, modern archaeology has confirmed that both Sodom and Gomorrah lie in ashes. The fires that destroyed those cities are no longer burning, but the effects are permanent. Sodom and Gomorrah remain destroyed.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Many Christians cite one of Jesus' parables as biblical proof that sinners will be tortured eternally in hell. We read in Luke 16 of a rich man and Lazarus — a story in which Christ's primary concern is the stubborn unbelief of His listeners:

Luke 16:19-31

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Not all of Jesus’ parables were based on true stories — among them, this one. If we are to take this parable as literal fact, we must accept that heaven is Abraham’s bosom and that hell and heaven are situated so close to one another that residents of both can converse with one another. How enjoyable will heaven be for the saved if they must forever see and listen to their loved ones and acquaintances writhing in hell, a few yards away? Clearly the story is illustrative, not descriptive.

The Incompatibility of the Gospel and an Eternal Hell

Let us sum up, then, seven reasons why the belief in an eternal hell for the wicked is incompatible with the good news of the everlasting gospel:

Such a belief undermines the justice of God. If the punishment of the wicked is to burn forever, and if Christ paid that price to save mankind, Christ should be burning in that fire today. But the wages of sin is death, not eternal torture. The punishment for sin is saying "good-bye" to life forever. This is what Christ tasted for everyone on the cross:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

If the soul goes to heaven or hell at death, the last-day judgment is pointless. Yet, according to Paul, the final judgment does occur at the coming of Christ. He says:

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

Romans 2:16

This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Not only does the last-day judgment become meaningless if a person is rewarded or punished at death, the resurrection of righteous and wicked becomes likewise pointless. Scripture teaches clearly that the righteous will be rewarded at the Second Coming of Christ, while the wicked will be punished after the millennium — after the thousand years of Satan's exile is complete and Christ returns the third time to eradicate sin and usher in everlasting righteousness:

John 5:28-29

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.”

Revelation 20:7-9

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

If the souls of the righteous are already in heaven, the Second Coming of Christ ceases to be the blessed hope of the gospel. Yet, all through the New Testament, Christians are admonished to keep their eyes focused on the Second Coming of Christ as their blessed hope:

John 14:3

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Colossians 3:4

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Titus 2:13

...While we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ....

According to the apostle Paul, at the Second Advent:

1 Corinthians 15:53

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

The word “incorruption” [in some translations] is equated with the word “immortality”; but if human beings already possess immortal souls, the blessed hope becomes meaningless. Having an immortal soul also implies that there is something inherent in mankind that is good. The result of this false teaching leads to legalism and salvation by works. Scripture makes it plain that human beings are sinners from head to foot and that:

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

The Bible makes it clear that eternal life, or immortality, is a gift of God to sinners, through the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:10

...But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

They do not possess immortality but by His grace. According to the apostle John:

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Finally, every heresy that has crept into the Christian church originates with Satan, the enemy of the gospel, who wishes to distort it. By convincing the Christian church to believe that mankind possesses an immortal soul, the enemy has enshrouded in darkness the supreme sacrifice of Christ.

For if humans possess immortal souls and "do not surely die," and death is simply the separation of soul from body, then Christ's humanity did not die the second death, and His sacrifice consisted primarily in His physical suffering. Yet, the suffering of crucifixion is consistent with the suffering of millions of men and women who have been tortured to death. The two criminals crucified on either side of Christ, in fact, suffered longer than He did, and their legs were broken while they were still alive. Their suffering certainly equaled that of Christ, and perhaps surpassed it.

Christ's supreme suffering consisted of experiencing the second, or everlasting death, as the wages of sin. He is the only human being who has ever truly tasted it, and He tasted it for all. The belief that men and women have immortal souls is an extension of the first lie Satan invented to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden. In tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, Satan urged:

Genesis 3:4-5

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Ever since, Satan has urged the human race to believe likewise and has blinded the eyes of millions to the glorious truths of the gospel. Note Paul's concern for the Corinthian believers:

2 Corinthians 11:3

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that "death is an unconscious state for all people," but the gospel frees all believers from the fear of the enslavement of death:

Hebrews 2:14-15

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Because Christ conquered the grave, all believers can confess in full assurance with Paul:

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Human beings naturally fear death, but this natural fear is unlike the fear of those who have no hope. The love of God and the hope of the resurrection neutralize the terrors of death:

1 John 4:16-18

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

The resurrection hope led men and women of faith to valiantly face death during the first three centuries of the Christian church, when many were persecuted and martyred. They would sing hymns as they faced their executioners. They were not super-beings, but ordinary people who had experienced the joy of salvation in Christ and had been delivered from the fear of death (see Hebrews 2:14-15, above).

The last generation of Christians will demonstrate this same steadfastness as they face the great tribulation. They know in whom they have believed. They know that He is able to save them to the uttermost, for He ever lives to make intercession for them:

Hebrews 7:26

Such a high priest truly meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

May this be our experience in Christ as we face the uncertain future.

Chapter 24

The Millennium and the End of Sin

Fundamental Belief #27

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time, the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close, Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected and, with Satan and his angels, will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever.

[Revelation 20; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; Jeremiah 4:23-26; Revelation 21:1-5; Malachi 4:1; Ezekiel 28:18-19]

Another major end-time event brought to view in the Bible is the millennium. The word millennium comes from two Latin words together: mil, meaning "a thousand," and annum, "a year." It may surprise some that the millennium is mentioned explicitly in only one passage of Scripture, Revelation 20. Certain Old Testament passages are also seen by some Bible students as referring to the millennium — but these references are not specific.

Suffice it to say, this topic has led to great speculation and dispute in the Christian church through the centuries.

Three Views

Three main schools of thought exist today regarding the millennium: pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, and a-millennialism. For the most part, each is tied to one of three approaches to interpreting the prophetic book of Revelation: historicism, preterism, and futurism.

Let's first outline what each school of thought believes, then turn to the standard Adventist interpretation of the millennium. What we said, early on in our study, is that

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the only correct way to understand the millennium is to examine it in the light of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the broader picture of the everlasting gospel.

Pre-millennialism teaches that the Second Coming of Christ and the attendant resurrection of believers who have died will precede the millennium. Then, after the thousand years, a second resurrection will occur — in which only the wicked will come back to life. While Adventists accept this general interpretation, they differ from pre-millennialism on one major point: Adventists believe that, during the thousand years, the saints will dwell with Christ in heaven. Most pre-millennialists believe that, when Christ comes the second time, He will set up a kingdom on earth, where the saints will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Post-millennialism, as a school of thought, regards the thousand years as being either a literal or an indefinite period of time preceding the Second Advent of Christ. To post-millennialists, the first resurrection is simply a spiritual revival of the Christian church prior to the Second Advent. This revival will overthrow evil and peace will reign on earth during the millennium. This, in turn, will usher in the Second Coming of Christ; hence, the Second Advent is to come after the millennium.

A-millennialism asserts that Revelation 20 is making no literal reference to a period of time, but is simply teaching spiritual truths in symbolic language. To a-millennialists, the two resurrections — one of the righteous, the other of the wicked — will take place at the same time, when Christ comes the second time to judge the world.

As members of the pre-millennial school, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the millennium represents a literal thousand-year period between the two resurrections. The first resurrection takes place at the Second Advent, when the dead in Christ are raised to join the living saints and together ascend with Christ. The second resurrection takes place at the end of the thousand years, at the third coming of Christ, when the wicked are raised to be judged and destroyed.

The Millennium and the Great Controversy

To correctly interpret the millennium, one must look at it in the setting of the great controversy. Revelation 19 and 20 present a continuity of thought about the Second

Coming of Christ. Chapter 19 focuses on the marriage feast of the Lamb that will take place in heaven following the Second Coming.

When Jesus comes the second time, the Bible declares that the wicked will be destroyed by His brightness, while both the living and resurrected saints will be taken to heaven. This marks the beginning of the millennium:

Revelation 19:1-8

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!"

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!"

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

According to Revelation 20, at this time the wicked are destroyed by the brightness of Christ's glory, and Satan and his angels are restricted to a desolated earth for the next thousand years. The apostle John describes it this way:

Revelation 20:1-3

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

During the thousand-year period, the saints will reign with Christ in heaven and judge the wicked:

Revelation 20:4-5, 11-15

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

...Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Their future is guaranteed, and the second death — the wages of sin — no longer has any power over them...

Revelation 20:6

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

...since Christ experienced this death on the cross as their substitute:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

At the end of the thousand years, however, all hell breaks loose at the resurrection of the wicked — those who have rejected God's free gift of salvation since the Fall. They will be called back to life, and Satan will once again attempt to use them to destroy God's people. This is known as the "second resurrection," which takes place at the third coming of Christ, when He descends from heaven with the saints in the holy city, the New Jerusalem (literally, "city of peace"):

Revelation 21:10

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

John describes the dramatic scene in these words:

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured [destroyed] them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

This final battle in the great controversy between Christ and Satan is the continuation of the War of Armageddon which began at the beginning of the great tribulation. It is interrupted by the Second Coming, but resumes when the wicked are raised. Satan will

now have the entire unrighteous population, from all time, on his side. Even so, he is no match for Christ. In this final showdown, Satan and all who have joined him will be destroyed forever:

Matthew 25:31-33, 41

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ...Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

This scenario represents the culminating events in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which began first in heaven and continued on earth, at the Fall:

Revelation 12:7-9

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

This conflict of the ages (see Chapter 5 in this book) began in the mind of Lucifer, the most-honored angel in heaven. He envisioned a new philosophy for happiness — one completely at odds with the nature, character, and government of God.

The prophet Ezekiel describes what happened:

Ezekiel 28:15

You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Then the gospel prophet Isaiah tells us what that iniquity (Hebrew, "to be bent") was all about:

Isaiah 14:12-14

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

Isaiah writes that the rebellious idea in Lucifer's mind centered around elevating self to the highest level of importance in life. This, in time, transformed Lucifer, a holy angel, into Satan, the enemy of God. But Lucifer's downfall was internal — in his mind, where all sin begins. The great controversy began inside Lucifer. And how will the great controversy end? The prophet Isaiah makes it clear that it also ends with Satan:

Isaiah 14:15-16

But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: "Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble...?"

The End of Satan

Revelation 20 tells us that, at the beginning of the millennium, an angel of the Lord chains Satan and throws him in the Abyss (NIV) or "bottomless pit" (NKJV):

Revelation 20:1-3

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

The word Abyss or the phrase “bottomless pit” describe the very conditions that existed on earth before Creation:

Genesis 1:2a

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep....

The earth was both shapeless and lifeless — as it will be for a thousand years following the Second Coming.

Out of the original chaos, God created a perfect world in six days, and gave Adam and Eve dominion over creation:

Genesis 1:3-31

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the second day.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights — the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

But then Satan came along and deceived them and stripped them of their dominion, claiming it for himself and, in turn, offering it back to Jesus, if Jesus would become his vassal:

Luke 4:5-6

The devil led him [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.

Jesus openly acknowledged Satan's claim and called him prince, or ruler, of the world:

John 14:30a

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming.

Satan's purpose in taking control on earth was to demonstrate the superiority of his philosophy. He argued that he could improve on what God had created and make life more enjoyable. He attempted to do this by introducing the principle of self-first — the concept he had introduced in heaven and for which he was expelled. But now the great controversy rages on earth, where self-interest is now acknowledged as the prime motivator in society. Yet however natural it now seems, it lies in complete contradiction to the principle of God's agape-love, which:

1 Corinthians 13:5

It [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Contrast this with:

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.

Philippians 2:21

For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

One purpose of the millennium, then, is to give Satan a chance to contemplate what his principles have wrought on earth. Instead of improving creation, it brought deterioration, bringing it back full cycle to the way things were before Creation — shapeless and devoid of life. Thus, the true character of sin is expressed graphically to the universe, and all will confess to God that "just and true are your ways":

Revelation 15:3

...And sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations."

Like the theories of Karl Marx, which proved disastrous in practice, the principles of Satan will be seen for what they are — a failure in actual experience.

This is why God allowed sin to enter the world and play itself out, to the bitter end, under Satan's dominion. Satan will realize the extent of his failure during the millennium. The wise Solomon declares:

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

When all is said and done, sin produces chaos and death.

Living for self may sound good in theory, but it leads to greed, strife, wars, and self-destruction. The millennium will give the originator of sin and his angelic followers an opportunity to realize just how poisonous the principle of self really is.

But a thousand years of contemplation will do nothing to change Satan's nature or character. He is a victim of his own invention and, when the wicked are resurrected after the thousand years are finished, Satan and his angels will manifest the same spirit as before. This will be true, as well, of the wicked, who will be resurrected with the same dispositions they possessed when they died.

They will attack God and the saints, as they come down from heaven in the holy city, proving beyond all doubt that Satan and his followers are unfit to dwell with the righteous in the earth made new. God destroys out of mercy, in a world where there is no longer room for self.

When Christ came to earth some 2,000 years ago, He set out to deliver mankind from the curse of the law as well as from the principle of self — which the apostle Paul calls the law of sin and death. This deliverance is part of the good news of the gospel. In Christ, the entire human race was set free from this law of sin and death:

Romans 8:2

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

In receiving Christ by faith, therefore, his followers surrender their sinful, selfish nature to the cross:

Galatians 5:24

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The cross of Christ is God's verdict on sinful flesh, dominated by the principle of self. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that the flesh cannot change or be saved:

John 3:6

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

It is fit only to be consumed.

The millennium is clearly part of God's Plan of Redemption, to dispose of sin and its effects on creation. Up to that point, God Himself will have assumed blame for sin's terrible effects, for He has allowed it to take its natural course. But the millennium and the resurrection of the wicked will prove, beyond a shadow of doubt, the viciousness of sin, even after a thousand years of quarantine. Clearly God is not the author of the rebellion; Lucifer and his seductive system have deceived millions, and now that system is being fully exposed for what it is, to the universe.

That which happens in the millennium was prefigured in the ceremonies of the Old Testament's Day of Atonement, when the blame for sin was finally heaped on the scapegoat, who represents Satan:

Leviticus 16:20-22

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites — all their sins — and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness."

The issue on this solemn Day of Atonement was this: "Who is really responsible for the sin problem on earth?" God, because He is sovereign, has assumed the blame all along, admitting:

Isaiah 45:7

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster ["evil" — KJV]; I, the Lord, do all these things.

But on the antitypical Day of Atonement, the blame for the sin problem finally comes to rest on the head of its true author, Satan. This solemn day reveals that:

Leviticus 16:22

The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man [an able-bodied goatherd] shall release it in the wilderness.

This service of the two goats, performed once a year on the Day of Atonement, points to the millennium, when Satan will be let loose on a wilderness-like earth, in payment for the sin problem he alone introduced.

But while Satan whiles away the eons on earth, the saints in heaven will be studying how God has been dealing with the problems created by sin. Every facet will be scrutinized, every act of God examined. The saints will even judge the unfallen angels — those who have played a vital role in the affairs of men. Paul himself reminds us:

1 Corinthians 6:3a

Do you not know that we will judge angels?

By the end of those thousand years, righteous and wicked alike will confess that God's way is right. In light of the evidence, Satan himself will admit to God's justice and superiority. As David wrote:

Psalm 119:7

I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

What a glorious day when all doubts about God and His dealings will be cleared away!

Then, and only then, will God eradicate sin and usher in everlasting righteousness. The great controversy that began in heaven closes, and the claims of the gospel give Christ the right to make all things new. This is how Ellen G. White describes the end of the conflict:

The Great Controversy, p. 678

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable

space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.

The millennium is clearly the culmination of God's great Plan of Redemption and, in the end, every knee will bow and confess that God's ways are best. John the Revelator saw all this in vision and penned these words:

Revelation 5:11-13

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

Amen!

Chapter 25

The New Earth

Fundamental Belief #28

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen.

[2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 35, 65:17-25; Matthew 5:5; Revelation 21:1-7, 22:1-5; 11:15]

In this final chapter we briefly examine the crowning goal of the Plan of Redemption — Eden restored. God drove Adam and Eve from the garden, after sin, barring their access to the Tree of Life:

Genesis 3:22-24

And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

But He did not leave them without hope; He promised that one of their descendants would save the world:

Genesis 3:15

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

This descendant is Jesus Christ. His earthly mission and heavenly ministry guarantee that sin will ultimately be eradicated, and the earth will be restored to its original perfection. The twenty-eighth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms that glorious hope.

While the first two chapters of the Bible describe God's perfect creation, the last two foretell the crowning act in the Plan of Redemption. Sandwiched between is the account of sin's introduction, of its effect on mankind, and the ongoing story of redemption. The Bible presents a historical picture of sin-produced degradation and "devolution."

Beginning with Cain's murder of his brother, sin spread explosively until mankind at large turned against God. Wickedness became so pervasive that God sent a universal Flood to clear away undiluted iniquity and begin again with the eight members of Noah's family — the only ones on earth who accepted God's refuge from the Flood.

But sin had penetrated their natures as well, and mankind's downward trend continued in them and their children. But, at the lowest point in history, God sent His Son to save the world. The angels first announced His divine intervention to shepherds with their flocks at night, declaring:

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

The Word had become flesh and was now dwelling with mankind:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

At the cross, the entire human race was executed in Christ, and the prince of this world — that old serpent — was cast out:

John 12:31-33

“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Mankind now had hope that sin could be stamped out and righteousness restored forever.

From Adam to the coming of Christ, individual believers were saved by faith in God’s promise of a coming Redeemer — a promise repeated many times and in different ways in the Old Testament. One of the most effective was through the Sanctuary and its services, God’s visual aid of salvation, delivered to the Children of Israel in the days of Moses.

Then, some 2,000 years ago, the fullness of the time arrived when:

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

This is the good news of the everlasting gospel, the central focus of all biblical doctrines.

Since Christ, mankind’s only hope for salvation has been through faith in the righteousness of Jesus, obtained for the entire human race by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. This is the everlasting gospel, the incredibly good news of salvation.

The Gospel Division

This gospel will eventually divide mankind into only two camps — believers and unbelievers, or sheep and goats. Those faithful to the convictions of the Holy Spirit and the light He has given them will stand in contrast to those who have grieved the Holy Spirit by their unbelief and disobedience. The Scriptures describe the first group as the children, or sons, of God...

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God....

...the second group as the children of the devil:

John 8:44

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The believers include men and women, boys and girls from all walks of life and from every race and culture — those who have been faithful to the light they have received. The unbelievers, on the other hand, have deliberately and definitely rejected the light, in whatever form it came to them.

Adam's sin made sinners of all, and no one will be lost only because they are sinners:

Romans 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

God does not hold mankind responsible for the sin problem. Christ Himself spelled out to Nicodemus the one and only reason sinners will be lost:

John 3:16-18, 36

For God so loved the world [the entire human race] that he gave [not loaned] his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's

one and only Son. ...Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Sinners will be lost because they have refused to believe in Jesus Christ or whatever light has been given to them. We must keep in mind that millions, through no fault of their own, have never heard the gospel but have been faithful to the light given them, whatever that light may be:

Romans 2:14-16

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Desire of Ages, p. 638

"All who have been born into the heavenly family are in a special sense the brethren of our Lord. The love of Christ binds together the members of His family, and wherever that love is made manifest there the divine relationship is revealed. 'Everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.' 1 John 4:7.

"Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the

light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God.

"How surprised and gladdened will be the lowly among the nations, and among the heathen, to hear from the lips of the Saviour, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me'! How glad will be the heart of Infinite Love as His followers look up with surprise and joy at His words of approval!

"But not to any class is Christ's love restricted. He identifies Himself with every child of humanity. That we might become members of the heavenly family, He became a member of the earthly family. He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam. His followers are not to feel themselves detached from the perishing world around them. They are a part of the great web of humanity; and Heaven looks upon them as brothers to sinners as well as to saints. The fallen, the erring, and the sinful, Christ's love embraces; and every deed of kindness done to uplift a fallen soul, every act of mercy, is accepted as done to Him."

God's Just Judgment

In the judgment, no one will be able to blame Adam or God for their lost condition; they have only themselves to blame. "Your house is left to you desolate," Jesus told the Jews, after they had rejected Him; so it will be for those who are finally destroyed:

Luke 13:34-35

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

God will be able to say, "How often I pled with you to receive my free gift of salvation in Christ as your only hope of salvation, but you would not! Now you must endure, for your own sakes, what my Son already suffered for you. But you rejected Him as your substitute."

As already mentioned, millions of people through time never heard the good news of the gospel in Christ, but God will not hold this against them. Rather, He will judge them by the light they had, whatever that light may have been. Still, it is the redeeming grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, that saves — there is no other name under heaven capable of doing what He has done for the world:

Acts 4:12

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

There will be those who will hear Jesus' name for the very first time, in heaven, and then they will give Him the glory:

Romans 2:10-16

...But glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

There will indeed be rejoicing during the millennium in heaven, but there will be crying and mourning, too. For, during those thousand years, the saved will not only review the way God has dealt with the sin problem, they will also judge the lost. Jesus told His disciples that in heaven they would:

Luke 22:30

"...So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In this judgment process, during the millennium, the saints will review the cases of loved ones and mourn their loss.

Ezekiel gives another reason for tears in heaven during the millennium:

Ezekiel 3:17-19

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked person, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself."

The neglect of God-given duties on earth will not be passed over lightly, and will produce deep, heartfelt sorrow in heaven.

According to the apostle Paul, those who accept the good news of the gospel become ambassadors for Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:20

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you [the unchurched] on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

As the righteous judge the wicked during the millennium, they will mourn every time they discover the effects of their failures to represent Christ.

According to the writer of Hebrews, leaders of the church will be held accountable for failing to fulfill their God-given duties:

Hebrews 13:17

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Likewise, the apostle James writes:

James 5:19-20

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Failure to do so will produce much pain during the judgment of the lost.

Not until the saints set foot on the earth made new will the prophecy be fulfilled:

Revelation 21:4a

He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Not until the third coming of Christ, when the saints descend with their Savior to witness the end of sin and experience the earth made new, will the Plan of Salvation be fully accomplished. At that time, all memory of the lost will be wiped away, and the only reminder of the sin problem will be the nail prints in the hands of the Savior.

A New Creation

After the wicked are consumed by fire, Jesus, the One who created the perfect world in the beginning and who later redeemed it by His life and death, will once again speak and create a new heaven and a new earth. This new heaven and new earth will not be "brand new," but will be re-created out of the rubble of the old. But since the damage wrought by sin is irreparable, the earth is reduced to ashes before God restores it to its original perfection. Here is the inspired description of the process:

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem [Hebrew: “City of Peace”], coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

John was also shown:

Revelation 22:1-2

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

The prophet Isaiah records another interesting description of life in the new earth:

Isaiah 66:22-23

“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the Lord, “so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord.

At Creation, God established the Sabbath as the day of worship for mankind, but, apparently, in the earth made new, He will add a new moon feast day every month. Why? The new moon represents the new zoe-life received through the redemption — something not needed by humanity before the Fall. The Sabbath will provide a weekly reminder of humanity’s total God-dependence, while the new moon festival reminds the human family of the saving grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

God’s Throne on Earth

But the major difference between the first and second creations is that God will establish His throne in the new earth. In Revelation 21 we read:

Revelation 21:3

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

John was further shown:

Revelation 22:3-5

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

God originally created the world for humanity, while He dwelt in heaven and visited His creation on a periodic basis:

Genesis 3:8

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But, in the earth made new, God will move His throne to this earth and make it the capital of the universe, the central focus of creation.

In view of such a glorious hope, what should be the believers’ attitude regarding the sin problem and its hardships? The best answer comes from the words of Peter:

2 Peter 3:10-14

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him.

Only in the earth made new will the believers fully realize that what they went through on the sin-cursed earth was nothing compared to the joy of spending eternity with their God and Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the glorious hope of the gospel. God has raised up the Advent Movement to proclaim with a loud voice the matchless charms of the Savior. Ellen G. White writes that, of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in lifting up Christ to a perishing world. The everlasting gospel is mankind's only hope of salvation, and Adventists are to present every fundamental belief in the light of this glorious truth. When that happens, this earth will be lit with God's glory. Then, and only then, will the end come:

Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 415

"It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth.

"...Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love."

We have examined in this book the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the light of the everlasting gospel. As we conclude this study, let us keep in mind that the most valuable thing the believers possess on this earth is not their bank accounts or any other asset, but the faith they have in Christ. Faith is not tangible in this life — we cannot see it or touch it. It is hidden away in the character, though we and others can witness the works it produces.

Faith alone makes the gospel effective. Faith provides the eternal hope of experiencing the fullness of salvation in the earth made new. Nothing must take its place — not even church doctrines. Everything the Christian believes must point to that saving faith in Christ. As they do so, Christ and Him crucified will become their central message.

May this be the experience of the Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world, and of each of its members. Amen.

Appendix A

The Significance of 1844, Part One

In 1888, Ellen G. White penned these words:

The Great Controversy, Page 409

The scripture which above all others had been both the foundation and the central pillar of the advent faith was the declaration: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" Daniel 8:14.

Eighteen years later, in 1906, she made a similar statement:

Evangelism, Page 221

The correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith. [Letter 208, 1906.]

Both have to do with what took place in 1844.

Yet, quite early in Adventist church history, some leaders questioned the validity of this doctrine. The first to do so was Dudley M. Canright, in 1887, followed by Albion F. Ballenger, in 1905. Then came Louis R. Conradi, vice president of the General Conference for the Central European Division. He first questioned the 1844 doctrine in 1928. Not long after that, in 1930, a Bible teacher in Avondale College in Australia, William W. Fletcher, objected to the doctrine. Finally, W.W. Prescott, a distinguished Adventist writer and scholar, saw serious flaws in the 1844 doctrine.

The main objections voiced by these men had to do with context and linguistics.

Daniel 8:14

He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

They claimed that Daniel 8:14 is not dealing with the cleansing of the heavenly Sanctuary (as the church traditionally teaches) but is answering the question of verse 13:

Daniel 8:13

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled — the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?"

Daniel 8:13 has to do with the prosperity of the Little Horn of verse 9, as it casts the truth of the Sanctuary (the gospel in type) to the ground.

Daniel 8:9

Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land.

Furthermore, the word translated "cleansed" in Daniel 8:14 ["reconsecrated" in some translations] is not the same word found in Leviticus 16:30, in reference to the cleansing of God's people on the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:30

...Because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.

Then, beginning in the 1950s, evangelical scholars began attacking the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of 1844. One scholar said: "If Seventh-day Adventists cannot prove 1844 from the Bible, they have no right to exist as a denomination," a statement that reflects thoughts penned many years earlier by Ellen G. White in The Great Controversy.

Another who attacked the doctrine was the late Walter Martin, who wrote in his book:

The Kingdom of the Cults

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of 1844 is the greatest face-saving lie in the history of the Christian Church.

Finally, on October 27, 1979, a prominent Adventist scholar, Desmond Ford, challenged elements of the 1844 doctrine at an Adventist Forum symposium at Pacific Union College, in Angwin, California. There he claimed that 1844 as a beginning date for an end-time judgment could not be proved from the Bible. His ministerial credentials were subsequently revoked.

The most significant recent attack, however, has come from the late Raymond Cottrell, a main contributor to the Daniel section of the Seventh-day Adventist Commentary. At a meeting in Loma Linda, February 9, 2002, he said: "The 1844 doctrine is a liability to the church and should be discarded."

Dealing with the Objections

These attacks on the 1844 doctrine raise two very serious questions:

Has the church been following cunningly devised fables?

Was Ellen G. White wrong in her statement about Daniel 8:14 and 1844, that it is the foundation and central pillar on which Adventism stands?

If so, surely the church would appear to have little reason for continued existence.

I believe, however, that there is another way of looking at the 1844 doctrine, one that supports this pillar of the church while acknowledging the difficulties some have had in understanding the church's traditional exegesis of the texts. What is that approach?

Before presenting this alternative, I must assert categorically that this new way of looking at 1844 in no way opposes or denies the traditional teachings of the church. Rather, it defends Ellen White's statement that 1844 is "the foundation and central pillar" of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. With this understanding, let's look at 1844 from this different perspective.

First, the Great Disappointment of 1844 is a historical fact no one denies. Second, while this disappointment took the Millerites by surprise — they were fully expecting Christ to return in glory on October 22, 1844 — it did not take God by surprise. He not only knew all along that the Great Disappointment would occur, but even predicted it in Revelation 10:8-10:

Revelation 10:8-10

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it [absorb the message]. It will turn your stomach sour, but 'in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.'" I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.

No event in church history fulfills this prophecy as precisely as does the Great Disappointment of 1844. The only book in all of the Old Testament that God asked to be shut and sealed until the time of the end was the little book of Daniel:

Daniel 12:4

"But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there [through the book of Daniel] to increase knowledge."

For some 1,800 years the Christian church anxiously awaited the blessed hope of the Second Advent, and news that this was finally to happen on October 22, 1844, was indeed "sweet as honey." But, when it did not take place, it was indeed very bitter.

When we examine the history of the Millerite movement, we see clearly that not only did God prophesy the Great Disappointment of 1844, He deliberately allowed it to happen. In the first place, God made no attempt to correct the erroneous conclusion William Miller had drawn regarding the interpretation of Daniel 8:14, though Miller had prayerfully studied the text. God, in fact, actually opened doors so Miller could proclaim his findings publicly.

Miller told the story of falling to his knees and pleading with God that he could not proclaim the good news of the Second Coming, for he was only a farmer. He told God that he would proclaim his discovery only if the doors were divinely opened to do so.

He got up from his knees and shortly heard a knock on the door. He opened the door, and there stood a young lad, the son of a pastor, with an invitation from his father for Miller to come and share his discoveries with his church members. Thus began the Millerite Movement; it ended with the Great Disappointment of 1844.

Why would God allow the Great Disappointment of 1844 to occur? There are good reasons. First, it sifted the superficial followers from the genuine. Though Miller had indeed misinterpreted Daniel 8:14, a small group of believers (Ellen G. White refers to them as "the little flock") still believed that God was leading them.

Second, God intended to raise up a movement from the Great Disappointment to put the finishing touches on the restoration of the gospel. This restoration had begun during the Reformation of the 16th Century; it ceased, unfortunately, not long after the introduction of the historical critical method of Bible interpretation. This method questioned the Sola Scriptura [Scripture Alone] rule established by the Reformers, and this falling away is the main reason I believe God allowed the Great Disappointment to occur.

I base this conclusion on Revelation 10:11, where God commissions the little flock that came out of the Great Disappointment of 1844:

Revelation 10:11

Then I was told, "You must prophesy [proclaim] again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

This commission, given to the Advent Movement of 1844, was intended to help them fulfill Matthew 24:14, the prophecy of Christ Himself made about His coming:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

This "gospel of the kingdom," which is Christ our Righteousness, is spelled out in more detail in Revelation 14 and is referred to there as the eternal or everlasting gospel:

Revelation 14:6

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people.

Ellen G. White notes:

Sons and Daughters of God, Page 259

As Christ's ambassadors, they [Adventists] are to search the Scriptures, to seek for the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other — Christ our righteousness....

This is the Three Angels Message of Revelation 14:6-12, the central focus of the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its history:

Revelation 14:6-12

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.

They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

The Various Gospels

This raises two questions: What is the everlasting gospel? And is it not being proclaimed by all denominations in Christianity?

Let's begin by considering the second question. Actually, theologians recognize three main variants of the gospel, as taught today. The first is taught by Roman Catholics.

The Roman Catholic Gospel

This is the oldest of the three and is based largely on human-derived philosophy, rather than on the Word of God. The Roman Catholic gospel teaches that God cannot take sinners to heaven unless He first makes them righteous. He accomplishes this by authorizing the church to infuse sanctifying grace into the believers, through the seven sacraments. Only those who attain 100 percent righteousness become saints and go directly to heaven. Those Christians who fail to reach 100 percent righteousness while on earth must spend time in the fires of Purgatory, where they will be purged of all defilement. Their time in Purgatory can be reduced through the extra merits of the Saints deposited on their account.

This so-called gospel actually offers comparatively little good news to sinners.

The Calvinist Gospel

The Calvinist gospel is the most popular approach being proclaimed within Protestant churches today. This gospel is based on the thinking and teaching of Swiss reformer John Calvin. Calvin strongly believed in God's sovereignty, which to him meant that

whatever God decides simply happens. Had God decided that all mankind should be saved, all would be saved, no questions asked!

The Bible is clear, however, that some will be lost, and this led Calvin to conclude that God arbitrarily selects some to be saved — His elect; those not chosen are simply lost. This process is known as Predestination. In this teaching, Christ did not redeem the entire human race on the cross, only the predestined, or elect. The gospel of Calvinism may be summed up in the acronym TULIP:

T for Total depravity of man.

U for Unconditional election.

L for Limited atonement.

I for Irresistible grace.

P for Perseverance of the saints.

While this gospel may be defined as good news, it is good news only for those predestined for salvation — the elect. It does exclude part of the human race and, therefore, must be defined as limited good news.

The Arminian Gospel

This third gospel variant derives from the teachings of Jacob Arminius, a Dutch reformer contemporaneous with John Calvin. According to Arminius, Jesus died for all on the cross. Calvin, in turn, protested that Arminius made God unjust by punishing the same sin twice — once in Christ on the cross and at the end of time by destroying the wicked. Arminius then took a wrong turn in his teaching and claimed that Christ actually saved no one on the cross, only providing the potential or provisional chance of salvation.

For this provisional salvation to become a reality, he taught, one must believe in Christ, repent from a life of sin, and confess all past sins. Only then will God place such a person into Christ, allowing the provisional salvation to become reality. Arminians,

therefore, to this day, apply the In Christ motif only to believers, even though the apostle Paul applies the In Christ concept to the entire human race:

Romans 5:15-18

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Ephesians 1:4; 2:5-6

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. ...[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

This gospel variant clearly includes a subtle form of legalism, since man must take the initiative by fulfilling the above requirements (faith, repentance, and confessed sins) before this provisional salvation can become a reality.

This so-called gospel is reminiscent of Galatianism; that is, salvation through Christ plus me, or faith plus works, or grace plus law-keeping:

Galatians 1:6-8

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!

Adventists traditionally belong to the Arminian group, and most have been trapped within this perverted gospel that says, "I must do my best and Christ will make up the rest." This was clearly demonstrated some years ago in the Valuegenesis report, where the majority of youth interviewed admitted they had no assurance of salvation, because they knew their conduct did not measure up to God's requirements.

The Everlasting Gospel

In complete contrast to the three gospels outlined above, the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 is based on the unconditional, self-emptying agape-love of God...

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:5-10

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

...and the objective facts of the In Christ motif, or idea:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Ephesians 1:3-6, 2:4-6

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

Out of pure agape-love, God united the divine zoe-life of Christ to the corporate bios-life of the fallen human race [also see two verses just above]:

Hebrews 2:14-17

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Thus, Christ became the second, or last, Adam ("adam" in Hebrew means "mankind"):

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

This legally qualified Christ to become mankind’s representative and substitute, not only to save it from its acts of sin, but also from the law of sin and death in their members, or nature:

Romans 5:19a; 7:14-25; 8:1-3

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

...We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

...Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh....

Thus, by His perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, Christ rewrote mankind’s history and created a new humanity out of the old:

2 Corinthians 5:14, 17

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

This is the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel. Through it, Christ brought redemption that fully and completely justified unto life and reconciled to God the entire human race:

Romans 5:15-18

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Accordingly, this everlasting gospel proclaims that, while humans were helpless, ungodly, still sinners, and even enemies of God, they were (past tense) reconciled to God by the death of His Son [also see John 3:16]:

Romans 5:6-10

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person

someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Furthermore, this Plan of Redemption is eternal; it has existed in God's mind from time immemorial, long before Creation itself:

Revelation 13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Hence, it is an "everlasting gospel." Because of it, mankind as a whole stands holy and blameless in Christ:

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

All was accomplished some 2,000 years ago in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ — period. It is God's supreme love gift to the entire human race [see John 3:16] and is made effective in the life of every individual by or through faith alone:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Romans 5:17

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

When this everlasting gospel is ultimately proclaimed with a loud cry, in the power of the fourth angel of Revelation 18, the earth will be illuminated with the glory of God's unconditional agape-love and His redeeming grace in Christ. This is the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Only when this everlasting gospel is proclaimed worldwide will "the hour of His judgment has come" be fulfilled for the entire human race. At that time, it will become inexcusable for anyone to be lost. Every individual who has reached the age of accountability will have to make a deliberate decision either for Christ or against Him. The end can then come.

This, I believe, is the significance of the 1844 doctrine in Adventism. God has raised Adventism up as a movement to be the third Elijah — to prepare the world for the Second Advent of Christ:

Revelation 14:6-7

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Appendix B

The Significance of 1844, Part Two

Having laid the foundation for the true significance of Daniel 8:14, we can now study it exegetically — point by point. To establish the right context, we will begin with an overview of the vision the angel Gabriel gave Daniel in Chapter 8.

In this version, Daniel sees four major symbols. The first is a ram:

Daniel 8:3-4

I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns, standing beside the canal, and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as it charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against it, and none could rescue from its power. It did as it pleased and became great.

This symbol is identified as the kingdom of Medo-Persia:

Daniel 8:20

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.

The second symbol is a he-goat, with one horn. The horn is broken off and replaced with four other horns:

Daniel 8:5-8

As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. It came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing beside the canal and charged at it in great rage. I saw it attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against it; the goat knocked it to the ground and trampled on it, and none could rescue the ram from its power. The goat became very

great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

According to verses 21 and 22, this symbol represented the kingdom of Greece, which split into four kingdoms after the death of Alexander the Great, the one horn:

Daniel 8:21-22

The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power.

The third symbol, the one linked with Daniel 8:14, describes a little horn coming out of one of these four kingdoms, but which "grew exceedingly great towards the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host (Christ) and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered" (Daniel 8:9-12).

Daniel 8:9-12

Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens [Christ], and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

Clearly from this description and from Gabriel's interpretation, in verses 23-25, the little horn is more than a political power (i.e., the Roman Empire). It also has ecclesiastical power to cast down the Sanctuary truth to the ground and to prosper in the midst of doing so (verse 12).

Daniel 8:23-25

"In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power."

As we already saw in Chapter 21, the earthly Sanctuary was God's visual aid of the entire Plan of Salvation, of Christ's earthly mission, as well as His priestly ministry in the heavenly Sanctuary. According to the prophecy of Daniel 8:12, the little horn power is successful in perverting the truth as it is in Christ, His earthly mission, as well as His heavenly ministry as High Priest.

Daniel 8:12

Because of rebellion, the Lord's people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

This was accomplished by substituting the all-sufficient single sacrifice of Christ on the cross with the Mass, a daily, bloodless sacrifice. The little-horn power also substituted a human priesthood on earth in place of Christ's heavenly ministry.

The Reformers of the 16th Century were absolutely correct in identifying this little-horn power with the Papacy, or Papal Rome. The Papacy (Magisterium, or teaching church) must not be confused with the lay members of the Roman Catholic Church.

It is in this context that we must interpret the fourth symbol, the 2,300 days. According to Daniel 8:13, the question is raised by a holy one:

Daniel 8:13

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled — the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord's people?"

The little horn is an ecclesiastical power that came out of pagan Rome after the ascension of Christ. Therefore, the Sanctuary truth that it cast to the ground is not the earthly Sanctuary, but Christ's earthly mission (the objective gospel), as well as his heavenly ministry — the fulfillment of the Old Testament Sanctuary.

So the question of verse 13 could be expressed this way: "God, how long are You going to allow this ecclesiastical power to continue to pervert the gospel, the truth as it is in Christ and Him crucified, and His heavenly ministry?"

God's answer came back through another holy one, saying words to this effect: "For two thousand three hundred days; then the Sanctuary [the gospel truth and Christ's heavenly ministry] shall be cleansed [Hebrew "tsadaq": vindicated, put right, restored]":

Daniel 8:14

He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated."

But did Daniel understand God's meaning? As one reads the final verses of Daniel 8, along with Daniel's prayer, recorded in Chapter 9, the answer is a definite "No!" At the time Daniel received the vision of Daniel 8, the earthly Sanctuary in Jerusalem was lying in ruins. This was Daniel's concern. We will see this when we come to Chapter 9, where Daniel is given the interpretation of the words of Chapter 8, verse 14.

While the angel Gabriel interpreted the meaning of the first three symbols of Chapter 8, all that Daniel was told concerning the fourth symbol, the 2,300 days, was:

Daniel 8:26

"The vision of the evenings and mornings [i.e., Daniel 8:14] that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

Because Daniel understood the cleansing or restoration of the Sanctuary to mean the restoration of the earthly Temple in Jerusalem, this statement devastated him:

Daniel 8:27

I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.

The fact that the earthly Sanctuary in Jerusalem would be cleansed, put right, or restored in the distant future was more than Daniel could bear. Why so long? According to Jeremiah's prophecy:

Daniel 9:2

...In the first year of his [Darius son of Xerxes] reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.

At the time Daniel received the vision recorded in Chapter 8, these 70 years were almost up. But now it seemed to Daniel that God had changed His mind and postponed the restoration of Jerusalem and the earthly Sanctuary into the distant future.

In Daniel's day, nations fought in the name of their gods. When an army lost a war, it was seen as evidence that its god was weaker than the god of the victorious army. Ever since the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, the name of Daniel's God had been cast to the ground.

It is this that concerns Daniel. A careful examination of Daniel's intercessory prayer, recorded in chapter 9, shows that his main burden is to see the city of Jerusalem and its temple restored. Note especially:

Daniel 9:17-19

"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive!

Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

Apparently, Daniel understood the prophecy of Chapter 8:14 to mean that God had delayed the restoration of the earthly Sanctuary from 70 years of desolation to long into the future.

Daniel 9 Explains Daniel 8:14

Because of Daniel's sincere prayer, God once again sends the angel Gabriel to visit the prophet, this time to explain the meaning of the prophecy of the 2,300 days of Chapter 8:14. Daniel reports:

Daniel 9:21-22

...While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision [Chapter 8], came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding."

Since no vision is recorded in Chapter 9, the only vision the angel Gabriel can be referring to is the unexplained one of Chapter 8:14. But God faces a problem. As we saw earlier, the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 does not refer to the restoration of the earthly temple or the city of Jerusalem; it is referring to the restoration of the truth about the gospel and Christ's heavenly ministry, perverted by the little horn.

In harmony with the great stone of Daniel 2 and the Investigative Judgment of Chapter 7 (these parallel with Chapter 8), the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 also deals with an end-time event. So Daniel is told to "seal up the vision" since it has to do with "the distant future," that is, the time of the end:

Daniel 8:26

"The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

But how is God to explain to the prophet that the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 has nothing to do with the restoration of the earthly Sanctuary? It would be more than Daniel could understand. So God chooses not to explain; instead, He does what Jesus later did in Matthew 24, when His disciples linked the destruction of Jerusalem (which took place in 70 A.D.) with His still-future Second Coming:

Matthew 24:3

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this [destruction of Jerusalem] happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Notice how Ellen G. White describes Christ's reply to their question:

The Desire of Ages, Page 628

Christ's words had been spoken in the hearing of a large number of people; but when He was alone, Peter, John, James, and Andrew came to Him as He sat upon the Mount of Olives. "Tell us," they said, "when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish the world for their iniquity, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth's history.

Likewise, God combines details about the restoration of the earthly Sanctuary and the city of Jerusalem with the information about the restoration of the gospel truth and Christ's heavenly ministry, which would take place after the 2,300 days were finished — that is, after 1844 A.D.:

Daniel 9:24

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place."

In other words, if the meaning of Daniel 8:14 is really explained in Daniel 9:24-27 [see below], as the angel Gabriel claimed he had come to do (Daniel 9:22), that explanation must be given a dual application for it to be valid, for the explanation found in Daniel 9:24-27 makes no mention of what will take place at the end of the 2,300 "days." It refers only to the 70 "weeks" set aside for the Jewish nation. (We should not confuse this dual meaning with the multiple applications taught by Desmond Ford, which he calls the "apotelesmatic principle.")

Thus, on the one hand, God satisfied Daniel's concern regarding the restoration of the earthly Sanctuary, but, at the same time, outlines the restoration of the everlasting gospel truth and Christ's heavenly ministry, after the 2,300 days are finished — in the distant future, from Daniel's point of view. Only by taking this dual approach do we find the explanation of Daniel 8:14 in Daniel 9:24-27.

The Five Events of Daniel 9:24-27

Daniel 9:24-27

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that

causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

In Daniel 9:24-27, the angel Gabriel informs Daniel of five key events that will take place in connection with the restoration of the earthly Sanctuary, culminating in the close of probation for Daniel's people, the Jewish nation. These five events are:

The command to restore Jerusalem and the temple:

Daniel 9:25

"Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble."

The Jews would have to return to Israel from Babylon. (This event is implied, since the command to restore Jerusalem could only be fulfilled by the return of the Jews from Babylon to Israel.)

Having arrived in Israel, the Jews would rebuild and restore Jerusalem and the temple, both of which were lying in ruins. This restoration, however, would take place in "troublesome times" [verse 25, above].

Christ would confirm the covenant that the Sanctuary pointed to, the coming of the Messiah and Him crucified, the true Sanctuary:

John 2:19-22

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Hebrews 10:5-10

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, my God.'"

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" — though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

This would take place during the last week of the predicted seventy weeks period:

Daniel 9:27

"He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

Daniel's people, the Jewish nation, would commit the "abomination of desolation" by rejecting the Messiah and crucifying Him in the midst of the last week (verse 27). Jesus Himself predicted that this would happen when He said:

Matthew 23:38

"Look, your house is left to you desolate."

When Christ rose from the dead, He provided incontrovertible evidence of His Messiahship. The book of the law, Deuteronomy, taught that a person hung on a tree (crucifixion was so regarded) was cursed by God with no hope of resurrection:

Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29

The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead — whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ...We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and

in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross.... When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

But when Christ rose from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, there could no longer be any question of His Messianic role or authority.

Romans 6:4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Ephesians 1:19-20

...And his [God's] incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms....

The rulers had asked Him by what authority He cleansed the temple:

John 2:13-22

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

This was the final answer. Any rejection of Jesus Christ from that point onward was deliberate and unambiguous. The stoning of Stephen confirmed the Jewish leaders' unalterable decision to reject Jesus:

Acts 7:44-60

"Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him — you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

This was Judea’s unpardonable sin, “the abomination of desolation”:

Matthew 24:15

“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel — let the reader understand —....

Matthew 23:37-38

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.”

Daniel 8:13, 9:26

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, “How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled — the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord’s people?” ...After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

The Second Application of the Five Events

If these five events explain Daniel 8:14, how do they provide an outline for the restoration of the everlasting gospel and Christ’s heavenly ministry since 1844, after the close of the 2,300 days? [In the original, Daniel 8:14 actually reads “It will take two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings,” then the Sanctuary will be cleansed or reconsecrated. Since the Day of Atonement was conducted once a year, the 2,300th Day

of Atonement would be equivalent to 2,300 years, just as my 70th birthday marks the day I complete 70 years of life.]

The first event has to do with a command to restore, or put right, the Sanctuary. In this case, it refers to the restoration and proclamation of the gospel truth and Christ's heavenly ministry (which has been perverted by the little-horn power). This event happened after the Great Disappointment of 1844. In Revelation 10:11, God commands this disappointed flock:

Revelation 10:11

Then I was told, "You must prophesy [proclaim] again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

This proclamation fulfills Matthew 24:14, the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14, and the requirements of the everlasting gospel:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Revelation 14:6-12

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

A second angel followed and said, "'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the

Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

For the everlasting gospel to be fully restored and proclaimed, God's people must come out of spiritual Babylon. Most Adventists equate the word "Babylon" with "confusion." Although the word "Babylon" does sound like the Hebrew word for "confusion," however, the root word for "Babylon" actually comes from two Semitic words joined together. These two words are Bab, meaning "gate," and el, meaning "God." When combined, these two words become the basis for the word Babylon and refer to man trying to reach the gate of God, or heaven, by his own strength, using artifices such as the Tower of Babel.

Babylon clearly represents self-righteousness or legalism — elements of the Old Covenant. Spiritual Babylon, then, has to do with all man-made religions based on salvation by human works. The little horn of Daniel 8 had perverted the gospel by its teaching of salvation through infused grace, a subtle form of legalism. It is this legalistic mentality that God's people need to abandon. Any form of legalism and salvation by works is a distortion of the true gospel — the truth as it is in Christ:

Galatians 5:4

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

All through the New Testament, especially in Paul's epistles, the formula of the gospel is always "Not I, but Christ":

Galatians 2:16, 19-20

[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. ...For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now

live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Philippians 3:3-9

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh — though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

On the Day of Atonement, God's Old Testament people were required to do two things: If they were to be vindicated in the judgment by their High Priest, they were to deny self or "afflict their souls," and, second, keep the Day of Atonement as a solemn day of Sabbath rest:

Leviticus 16:29-34

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work — whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you — because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins. It is a day of sabbath rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the tent of meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the members of the community. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

And it was done, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 23:26-32

The Lord said to Moses, "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the Lord. Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people. I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a day of sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

These two requirements parallel that which the truth of the gospel asks of believers today — "Not I" (denying all forms of self-righteousness), "But Christ" (resting entirely in Christ's righteousness):

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Philippians 3:7-10

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....

Only then can the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, vindicate them in the Investigative, or Pre-Advent, Judgment against the accusations of Satan:

Revelation 12:10-11

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

In Daniel 4 we read these words, uttered by King Nebuchadnezzar:

Daniel 4:30

[King Nebuchadnezzar] said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven:

Daniel 4:31

Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you."

After spending seven years in the forest with the wild animals, eating grass without salad dressing, Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that a supreme God in heaven controls the affairs of men. Only then did Nebuchadnezzar repent and become converted.

But some years later, his great-grandson, Belshazzar, defied the God of heaven by desecrating the sacred vessels of the Sanctuary. A divine hand then appeared and wrote his judgment sentence on the palace wall:

Daniel 5:1-6

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and

silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

In interpreting this divine judgment to Belshazzar, Daniel first reviewed the history of Nebuchadnezzar, then said:

Daniel 5:22

"But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this."

Belshazzar's sin was deliberate and inexcusable. He had reached the point of no return by committing the "abomination of desolation" and, that very night, Babylon fell into the hands of Darius the Mede:

Daniel 5:30-31

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

The fall of literal Babylon resulted from deliberate self-exaltation. Likewise, spiritual Babylon stands for any religion that exalts the principle of self. Any good deed the believer performs to enhance his chances of salvation is an act of spiritual fornication. This is the sin of spiritual Babylon and is still prevalent in Christianity today. Many in the Seventh-day Adventist Church fall prey to its allure — and the rebuke is clear in the Laodicean message (see Revelation verse below) and admonitions penned by Ellen White.

Revelation 3:17-19

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.

For a detailed study of the Laodicean message, read The Laodicean Message on this website.

God raised up the Advent movement, out of the Great Disappointment of 1844, to restore the pure gospel of Christ our righteousness — this was His purpose. The following quote bears repeating:

Sons and Daughters of God, p. 259.3

"As Christ's ambassadors, they [God's people] are to search the Scriptures, to seek the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of error. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other, Christ our righteousness."

For this to truly happen, Ellen White writes that Adventist Laodiceans will have to cast their glory and self-righteousness to the ground:

Testimonies to Ministers, Page 456

"What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust."

Like the apostle Paul, we, too, must confess:

Philippians 3:7-9

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything [self-righteousness, verses 3-6] a loss because of the surpassing

worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

In explaining the meaning of Daniel 8:14, Gabriel says that the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple will be finally accomplished in "troublesome times":

Daniel 9:25

"Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble."

So it will be with the restoration of the everlasting gospel in our day. I believe we are living in such a time. After more than 160 years of existence as a church, Adventists must confess with shame that they are still not united in what constitutes the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14.

The Adventist Church today is polarized. The majority still proclaims an Arminian type of gospel, taught by Jacob Arminius, a contemporary of John Calvin. This gospel limits salvation at the cross to a provisional, or potential, salvation, available after the sinner fulfills certain requirements — such as professing faith, repenting, and confessing past sins. Only then is salvation a reality. This is a form of legalism that has robbed many Adventists of the joy and assurance of salvation.

Other Adventists are preaching a Galatian-type gospel, a mixture of faith-plus-works, or of grace-plus-law-keeping. A third group, the liberals, are emphasizing the social gospel — another form of legalism. Since the 1960s, the evangelical gospel has been introduced into Adventism. While this gospel contains much truth, it limits the doctrine of righteousness by faith to justification only; it focuses primarily on man's egocentric concerns without voicing the call to sanctification as the fruits of righteousness by faith.

Finally, a few are desperately trying to restore the most precious message God brought to this church in 1888. This message of righteousness by faith was identified by Ellen G. White with the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14 (Testimonies to Ministers,

p. 92). This true gospel is to illuminate the world with the glory of Christ before the end comes. This message, however, still receives some opposition, as it did in 1888. Troublesome times continue in the God-given task to restore and proclaim the everlasting gospel to the world, with a loud cry.

Just as the earthly Sanctuary and Jerusalem were eventually restored, so the true and complete gospel will be restored. When this happens, the fourth angel of Revelation 18 will light up this world with the glory of Christ — His unconditional and self-emptying love. According to this everlasting gospel, the entire human race has already been reconciled to God by the death of His Son:

Romans 5:6-10

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Since man's part is only to receive this perfect gift through faith, there is no real excuse for anyone to be lost. When this message reaches the ends of the earth, the end can come. Jesus prophesied that this would be a final sign of His Coming:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Unfortunately, while it is God's desire that no one perish...

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

...the Gentile world as a whole will reject this good news of the gospel, just as the Jewish nation did. This is the abomination that will cause this whole world to be made desolate at the Second Advent. Thus, the history of the Jewish nation will be repeated in the Gentile world, and the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 will be ultimately fulfilled as explained by Gabriel:

Daniel 9:24-27

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

This, as I understand it, is the significance of 1844, and that is why we must consider this date as "the foundation and central pillar of the Advent faith" (The Great Controversy, Page 409).

Appendix C

The Investigative or Pre-Advent Judgment

Both the doctrine of 1844 (covered in Appendix A and Appendix B) and the Investigative Judgment form part of the 24th Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary." Since these two beliefs play a very important role in the theology of the church, however, we will study them separately. We now turn our attention to the Investigative, or Pre-Advent, Judgment.

The doctrine of the last judgment of the human race is a key teaching of Scripture. Almost every book in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, mentions or alludes to it. The doctrine teaches that the lives of the believers will indeed be scrutinized before Jesus comes:

Romans 14:10

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

Revelation 20:12

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

This review of the lives of the saints is referred to as "The Investigative Judgment," or "The Pre-Advent Judgment," in Seventh-day Adventist Church teachings. To be

correctly appreciated, the Investigative Judgment must be understood in the context of the everlasting gospel:

Revelation 14:6-7

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

This is especially true of the Investigative Judgment of believers since, more than other doctrines, it has produced fear and insecurity in some members' lives. Note the observation of the late evangelical scholar Walter Martin who, at one time, categorized Adventism as a cult:

Kingdom of the Cults, by Walter Martin, Page 479

Holding as they do to the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment, it is extremely difficult for us [evangelicals] to understand how they [SDAs] can experience the joy of salvation and the knowledge of sins forgiven.

By studying the Investigative Judgment in context of the everlasting gospel and the truth of justification by faith alone, we will discover that this belief is good news indeed.

Judgment Defined

According to Scripture, the judgment — whether of believers or unbelievers — involves three steps:

The work of investigating or scrutinizing the lives of the human race, which is equivalent to a trial:

Romans 14:10

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

The rendering of a verdict by a judge, or jury, regarding the person on trial:

Deuteronomy 25:1

When people have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.

Romans 5:16

Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

Revelation 16:5-7

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

The execution of the verdict in the form of a sentence, rewarding the just and punishing the wicked:

Jude 14-15

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Revelation 22:12

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."

Three different words appear in the original languages of Scripture to describe and distinguish the three stages of judgment. Most English Bibles, however, translate them all as "judged" or "judgment." This can make it difficult to distinguish which of the three stages is being addressed in Bible passages.

The Objective Facts of the Judgment

To correctly present the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment as a function of the gospel, we must begin with what the Bible teaches about the objective facts of the judgment. According to Romans, sin entered the human race through one man, Adam:

Romans 5:12, 16, 18a

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people....

Accordingly, Adam's sin brought the judgment of condemnation on all humanity.

This condemnation on all of mankind was executed in Christ on the cross. This is how Christ Himself expressed it:

John 12:31-33

"Now is the time for judgment on this world [human race]; now the prince of this world [Satan] will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

By Christ's death on the cross, the sentence of condemnation to death was changed to justification to life for all mankind:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

This is the incredibly good news of the gospel!

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

This good news of the gospel has made it possible for every individual to change his or her legal status from condemnation to justification:

Acts 17:30-31

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

This is the foundation of the judgment of individual believers that takes place in the Investigative Judgment:

Hebrews 2:2-3

For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a

salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

This legal change, or justification, is realized the moment one accepts the good news of the gospel from the heart:

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Through Christ, every believer passes from death to life, from condemnation to justification:

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Wherever the everlasting gospel is proclaimed in context of the hour of His judgment...

Revelation 14:6-11

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

A second angel followed and said, ""Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the

Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

...the gospel demands a human response, either for or against Christ:

Hebrews 10:26-29

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

The end of the world cannot come until this gospel of the kingdom has been preached in all the world for a witness:

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The Two Main Objections Against the Investigative Judgment

Critics of the concept of an Investigative Judgment generally object to the teaching on two grounds. First, they note that the New Testament suggests that the judgment of both believers and unbelievers takes place at Christ's Second Advent:

Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Why then, they ask, do Adventists teach a pre-advent judgment for believers?

In response, we must point out that, to God, time is insignificant, since He works in the framework of eternity:

2 Peter 3:8

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

Major prophesied events are often lumped together in the Bible, though their fulfillment may be separated by centuries. A good example is Matthew 24, where Jesus combines the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. with the end of the world, which is still future. Another good example is the first, second, and third comings of Christ. Often, in the Old Testament, these are lumped together, especially in the book of Isaiah.

A second important point in favor of the Investigative Judgment is that the New Testament states that believers will receive their reward at the Second Coming of Christ:

Revelation 22:12

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."

Their judgment, therefore, must have taken place prior to the Second Advent. Daniel 7, which deals with the Investigative Judgment, clearly implies this very thing:

Daniel 7:9-10, 22, 26-27

As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

...Until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

..."But the court will sit, and his [the little horn's] power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the

kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him."

And finally, Christ is now High Priest for humanity (intercessor and advocate) in the heavenly Sanctuary:

Hebrews 7:25, 8:1-2

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. ...Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

1 John 2:1

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Before He comes to earth, He will remove His priestly robes and come as King and Conqueror. The question that we must ask is this: If the believers are judged at the Second Advent itself, who will serve as their advocate?

The second objection to the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment is that, since all believers are already justified by faith in Christ, apart from law-keeping or any good works...

Romans 3:28, 4:5

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ...However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

...what is the purpose of an investigation of their behavior, since "God knows those who are His"?

2 Timothy 2:19

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

In response, we must remember that the Investigative Judgment of Christians is supported by the Bible itself:

1 Peter 4:17

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

The New Testament clearly states that even the believers will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ:

Romans 14:10

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Second, the purpose of the Investigative Judgment is not to determine which of God's saints deserves heaven, but to vindicate the saints against Satan's accusations:

Revelation 12:10

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”

The Father and the Son are both on the believer’s side in the judgment:

Romans 8:31-34

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

This is equally true of the Holy Spirit:

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

As already mentioned, Satan accuses the saints day and night. That accusation has to be silenced before Christ can lawfully take the saints to heaven:

Zechariah 3:1-4

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."

Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you."

The Problem Facing the Investigative Judgment

The New Testament contains two groups of texts that seemingly contradict one another. On the one hand, the Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by grace alone, offered to sinners as a free gift, through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from law-keeping or any good works they have done:

Romans 3:28; 4:5

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ...However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

1 Timothy 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

Titus 3:5

...He [Jesus] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit....

On the other hand, we read in other verses that believers who are justified by faith alone in the doing and dying of Christ, are judged and rewarded according to their works:

Matthew 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

John 5:28-29

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

1 Peter 4:17

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Revelation 20:12

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

How do we reconcile these two groups of apparently contradictory texts? Many Christians ignore the problem by emphasizing one group of texts at the expense of the other. But the unity of Scripture will not allow such a solution for, in some cases, the very same Bible author seems to write in favor of both sets of texts. Certainly there must be an underlying harmony that eludes us on first reading.

We discover that harmony in yet a third group of texts, which explains that, while salvation is a free gift to undeserving sinners, genuine faith is always manifested by

good works. In other words, the gospel saves the believers from condemnation itself and leads them forward to a life of good works:

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

John 14:12

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Titus 2:14; 3:8

[Jesus Christ] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ...This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

This is why the apostle James condemns those who claim to have faith in Christ, yet do not manifest this faith by works:

James 2:17-19

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will

show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder.

He continues:

James 2:20

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

James does not contradict Paul when he declares:

James 2:24

You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

According to James, Abraham's offering of Isaac (which took place more than 40 years after Abraham was justified by faith) simply proved that his faith was perfect:

James 2:22

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

According to Hebrews 11:17-19, God was testing Abraham's faith when He commanded this father of all believers to sacrifice "his one and only son."

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Works, while they do not save or contribute toward salvation, nevertheless prove that one's faith is genuine and, therefore, vindicate one's justification by faith. This is James' point:

James 2:20-26

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Like James, Paul also upholds works of faith:

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Titus 3:8

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

What Paul condemns is "works of the law," that is, legalism — using law-keeping as a method, or means, of salvation.

Vindicating the Saints in the Investigative Judgment

In the Investigative Judgment, Satan's accusations are rebuked and the saints' justification is vindicated. How does Christ — the High Priest, Intercessor, and Advocate — accomplish this vindication?

The believers' works of faith are investigated in the judgment not to prove they are good enough to go to heaven (they will never be good enough for that) but to prove that their faith is genuine. In other words, their works of faith are used in the Investigative Judgment as a witness to their faith, not as a means of salvation.

Once the believer's faith in Christ's righteousness is established, it gives Jesus (the Advocate, Substitute, and Representative) the lawful right to vindicate their justification by faith. This is why the apostle John declares:

1 John 4:17-18

This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears [the judgment] is not made perfect in love.

In analyzing the Investigative Judgment, as portrayed by the prophet Daniel in chapter 7, we notice that all three steps of the judgment are mentioned. Verses 9 and 10 describe the investigation, or trial:

Daniel 7:9-10

As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

Verse 22 gives us the verdict:

Daniel 7:22

...Until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

Verse 27 mentions the reward:

Daniel 7:27a

"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High."

This will take place at the Second Advent:

Matthew 25:31-34

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"

And since Daniel 7 parallels Chapter 8, we can link the date 1844 of Daniel 8:14 with the Investigative, or Pre-advent Judgment of Daniel 7.

We may, therefore, conclude that the Investigative Judgment is an integral part of the good news of salvation. At last Satan's accusations will be silenced and the believers' justification by faith will be vindicated forever. Their iniquity (sinful nature) will be subjectively blotted out and replaced by the glorified nature of Christ, which He obtained for humanity in His earthly mission and will be fully imparted to the saints at the Second Advent:

Zechariah 3:1-4

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke

you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.”

Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.”

Romans 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:20-21

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

Appendix D

The Humanity of Christ, Our Savior

While no official action has ever been taken by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to define the human nature of the Savior, the question is vitally connected with the good news of the everlasting gospel. Furthermore, since the humanity of Christ is closely linked with the ninth Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief, "The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ," the purpose of this final section is to examine what the New Testament has to say about this crucial topic.

Since 1957, when the book Questions on Doctrines was published by the church, the humanity of the Savior has become a very hot issue. It has effectively divided the church into two opposing groups, one insisting that the human nature of Christ was like Adam's before the Fall (the pre-Fall or pre-lapsarian theory), while the other insists that Christ assumed the selfsame, sinful nature all mankind receives at birth (the post-Fall or post-lapsarian theory).

To resolve the problem, we cannot simply ignore it, as some do, but must examine it in light of the everlasting gospel, as we have done with all fundamental beliefs. Ellen G. White has made it clear:

Selected Messages, Vol. 1, Page 244

The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study.

Since the primary reason Christ came to this sin-cursed world was to save mankind...

Matthew 1:21

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

1 Timothy 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

...His humanity must be studied in the context of the universal sin problem that has plagued the race since Adam's Fall. This is our point of departure.

Only against the background of man's total sinfulness and depravity can the everlasting gospel become meaningful and attractive. A true understanding of the universal sin problem is the only sure way to destroy all confidence in self and elevate Christ as the only righteousness, hope, and surety for humanity. Apart from Him and His righteousness, there is no future beyond the grave. He is mankind's only hope.

The Biblical Definition of Sin

While the Bible defines sin many ways (twelve different words are used in the Old Testament, five in the New Testament), all sin may be divided into two main categories. The first is the verb to sin (harmatano in the Greek). Since to sin as a verb deals with action, harmatano refers exclusively to sinful behavior. The second category of sin appears in the Bible as a noun (harmatia in the Greek) and refers to a state of being — a condition. Sin as a noun has to do with the sinful nature, or what the New Testament calls "the flesh" (John 3:5-6; Romans 7:18).

John 3:5-6

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

Romans 7:18

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature [some translations say, “in my flesh”]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

We might call this “Sin with a Capital S.”

It’s sinful nature that places all humanity under the curse of the law and is why even newborn children need a Savior.

Romans 5:12, 18-21

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Just as the appearance of apples on a tree provides simple evidence of what kind of tree it is, so the manifestation of sinful behavior proves that human beings, by nature, are sinners.

But this brings us to a major problem. Just as the Bible says that an Ethiopian cannot change his skin or a leopard its spots, sinners cannot change their inner nature:

Jeremiah 13:23, 17:9

Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. ...The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

They can alter their external behavior by force of will and habit, but inside remain the same. All the self-righteousness in the world cannot alter what God sees inside:

Romans 3:9-20

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The gospel prophet of the Old Testament puts it well:

Isaiah 64:6a

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags....

Karl Marx, founder of Communism, made his biggest fundamental mistake in assuming that selfishness was an acquired trait gleaned from an evil culture and that, by cleaning up society, people would naturally prefer to put others first in their lives.

Marx came to believe that Capitalism was the great cause of selfishness — that it taught greed and acquisitiveness from the cradle — and that, if Capitalism were overthrown, human nature would improve accordingly. So he proposed a new form of society — Socialism — and wrote that this was the natural, scientific solution to social and economic injustices in the world. Socialism, in turn, would lead to Communism. If people were given no alternative but to share, he wrote in his Communist Manifesto, sharing would become the natural behavior of all.

Russia tried this method for some 75 years, until things got so bad there was hardly anything left to share with anyone! Cuba faces similar problems, as do North Korea and other so-called Communist countries.

A Solution for the Sin Problem

Man's natural selfishness is inborn and indelible. The only antidote is the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and it is here that the humanity of Christ comes into play. Since Christ did not participate in or commit sins (in thought, word, or deed), we can say that He vicariously redeemed humanity from its sins (sinful behavior). But He had no immediate avenue for saving humanity from its nature, unless He identified Himself, personally, with the sin problem. He had to meet head-on the law of sin (a constant force dwelling in our sinful natures, according to Romans 7:22-24):

Romans 7:22-24

For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

The only way He could do so was by assuming mankind's fallen nature.

Sincere Christians may hate sin, want to do good, have the will to or chose to do the right things, and even delight in the law of God. But, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, they are incapable of carrying out those choices:

Romans 7:15-23

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

No wonder Paul concludes this passage with the desperate cry:

Romans 7:24

What a wretched man I am [present continuous tense]! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Then he immediately answers his own lament:

Romans 7:25

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

That solution appears in the first few chapters of Romans 8 (in the original, an unbroken continuation of Chapter 7). Identifying himself with the believers of Rome, the apostle Paul proclaims:

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

The world law, which appears twice here, is referring to a constant force, such as the law of gravity.

Gravity, a constant force, has the effect of pulling things toward the center of the earth. NASA [the National Aeronautics and Space Administration] has not yet conquered gravity, but its orbiters escape gravity with the help of powerful rockets that produce an opposing force greater than that of gravity.

Paul likens "law of sin at work within [us]"...

Romans 7:23

...But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

...to a gravity-like force that holds human beings captive to selfishness. The Old Testament word for this force is iniquity:

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Only a constant force greater than the law of sin can liberate human beings from its clutches. That constant force, according to Paul, is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus:

Romans 8:2

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

These two constant forces met in the humanity of Christ, and the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus won the battle, hands-down. This is part of the incredibly good news of the everlasting gospel, realized when Christ assumed humanity's post-Fall sinful nature, dominated by the principle of self. This is why the humanity of Christ is everything to the believer.

Christ came primarily to save humanity from this law of sin, and John the Baptist introduced Him with these words:

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin [singular] of the world!"

The word sin here is the noun, not the verb. By condemning the law of sin, Christ struck at the very root of the universal sin problem.

The apostle Paul expresses it this way:

Romans 8:3

For what the law [of God] was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin [singular] offering. And so he condemned sin [the law of sin] in the flesh....

In the Likeness of Man

Those who insist that Christ assumed human nature as it was before the Fall single out the word likeness, insisting that the human nature of Christ resembled sinful flesh, but, in fact, was not. They admit that His physical human nature was that of an ordinary man (prone to fatigue, to aging, and so forth), but that spiritually His human nature was like that of Adam before the Fall. The problem with this argument is that the word translated likeness, in the same dative case, appears in Philippians, where we read:

Philippians 2:7

...Rather, he [Christ Jesus] made himself nothing by taking the very nature [Greek: "substance"] of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Did Christ just look like a man, or was He really a man? The answer is obvious.

Why then does Paul use the word likeness in Romans 8:3 [just above], referring to the human nature of Christ? Why does he not say that Jesus came in sinful flesh? The International Critical Commentary provides an excellent answer:

International Critical Commentary, 1982 edition

We conclude that the most probable explanation of Paul's use of likeness here, and understand Paul's thought to be that the Son of God assumed the selfsame fallen human nature that is ours, but that, in His case, that fallen human nature was never the whole of Him — He never ceased to be the eternal Son of God.

We must keep in mind that Christ was unique. He was both divine and human. As God, He possessed an eternal, sinless, divine nature by native right; at the same time, He was a man with a sinful human nature, which He took on at the incarnation. These two natures are defined in the New Testament by the terms "Son of God" and "Son of Man."

This is why we must never say or teach that Christ had a sinful human nature when we refer to His humanity. Otherwise, we make Him into a common sinner, like us, in need of a Savior Himself. Whenever the New Testament speaks of Christ's human nature, it always uses qualifiers:

John 1:14a

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

2 Corinthians 5:21a

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us....

Hebrews 2:17a

For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way....

All these qualifying words tell us that Christ assumed what mankind is in order to become legally qualified to serve as its Savior and Substitute. But that sinful nature He assumed was never His but ours — a nature He came to redeem. By right, Jesus' nature is divine.

Assuming Mankind's Fallen Nature

Understanding this becomes easier if we analyze the word assumed. Suppose you have a sister in Salem, Oregon, near where I reside. You discover that she is struggling financially and, out of kindness, you decide to send her $1,000. While I am visiting in your city, you come to me with an envelope containing cash and ask me to deliver it to her when I return home. I agree and put the envelope into my pocket. Your money is now in my possession, but I am not a thief. I have assumed the money in order to deliver it to your sister. Someone who sees me with your envelope in my pocket containing $1,000 cash may mistake me for a thief. But I have not stolen your money; I have assumed it to myself in order to help you.

Likewise, Christ assumed at the incarnation mankind's sinful nature. Had He consented to the desires of that nature, even by a thought, He would have become a sinner Himself. But the good news is that, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, He never succumbed to the urgings of sin — as it were, the money stayed in His pocket. Though tempted in all points, He never gave in:

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin.

See also the three temptations of Christ in the wilderness:

Luke 4:1-14

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

These three temptations summarize the three basic drives of sinful flesh — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life:

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

By assuming mankind's sinful, fallen nature, Christ was able to fully redeem the entire human race. By His perfect life, during His 33 years, He fulfilled the positive demands

of the law (obey and live) and, by His sacrificial death, He met the justice of the law (disobey and die). Thus, Christ redeemed mankind from the universal sin problem and forever became its righteousness. Paul writes:

Romans 10:4

Christ is the culmination [Greek: "fulfillment"] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This means that, when a person accepts Christ as personal Savior, God sees him or her as being complete, or perfect, in His Son:

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Such a person stands perfect in performance, in justice, as well as in nature in Christ. For Christ fully met the demands of the law on man's behalf, through His death on the cross and by His resurrection. He totally redeemed mankind from every aspect of the sin problem, including His sinful nature:

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

The sinful human life inherited at birth from fallen Adam is referred to in the New Testament by the Greek word bios. Here are a few examples where the word “life” in English Bibles comes from bios:

Luke 8:14, 21:4

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ... All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — comes not from the Father but from the world.

The divine, sinless, and eternal life of Christ is referred to in the New Testament by the Greek word zoe. Here are a few examples where the word “life” in our English Bibles comes from zoe:

John 1:4; 8:12

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ...When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Romans 5:10

For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

In the incarnation the bios-life of the corporate human race was united with the divine life of Christ in Mary's womb. This legally qualified Christ, the God-man, to be the last Adam and mankind's representative and substitute.

1 Corinthians 15:45

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

In the humanity of Christ, two powerful opposite, constant forces (or laws) met in combat. On the one hand was the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. On the other was the law of sin and death, dominated by Satan. This was the final showdown in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. And, in every instant, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus won, hands down:

Romans 8:2-3

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh....

On the cross, Christ tasted, or experienced, the eternal death:

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

But the wages of sin could not lock Him in the grave. The resurrection proved, once and for all, that the power of the Spirit is more powerful than the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:11

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Hence, by His death and resurrection, Christ abolished the second death and replaced it with immortal life through the good news of the gospel:

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The Gospel of the Cross

On the cross, the bios-life of the entire human race died in Christ — died not for three days (that would not satisfy the law) but forever, the second death. Thus, the justice of the law which hung over the heads of every human being was met, once and for all:

Romans 6:10

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

But, since God so loved the world, He gave (not loaned) the zoe-life of His Son to mankind in the resurrection:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This is how Christ shared, or laid down, His divine, eternal zoe-life for mankind. This is the incredibly good news of the gospel, which is made effective by faith in the lives of everyone who obeys the gospel:

Romans 6:17-18

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Before the cross, Christ is referred to as the "only begotten of the Father" (in some translations). The word "begotten" means one who is special, or one of a kind.

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

After His death and resurrection, however, Christ is referred to as "the firstborn (or begotten) from the dead":

Revelation 1:5

...And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

What is the distinction between these two terms — only and first begotten? Before the cross, God only had one special Son, Jesus Christ, but, since the cross and the resurrection, God has many special sons and daughters, of whom Christ is the first.

1 John 3:1-2

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

The doctrine of adoption makes this possible:

Galatians 4:4-6

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

The word "faith" in the New Testament, by the way, means more than a mental assent to the truth, as it is in Christ; it means obeying the gospel from the heart:

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

The apostle Paul makes this very clear in his epistles; for example:

Romans 10:16-17

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Galatians 5:7

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

2 Thessalonians 1:3-8

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

So does Peter:

1 Peter 4:17

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

To obey the gospel from the heart means to surrender one's bios-life to the death of Christ on the cross. In exchange, such a believer, who has truly obeyed the gospel, receives the eternal zoe-life of Christ, through the new-birth experience:

Romans 6:2, 11

By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ...In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Righteousness, or justification by faith, naturally will produce holiness of living, if allowed to do so:

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Obeying the gospel is to confess with Paul:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This is the true gospel; it leaves no room for "cheap grace."

In view of this, the humanity of Christ is everything to believers, if they are to truly understand and proclaim the everlasting gospel and experience its full power. This is the message of the three angels of Revelation 14, which I believe God raised the Advent Movement up to restore and proclaim:

Revelation 10:8-11

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but 'in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.'"

I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

It is this message that is to enlighten the earth with the glory of Christ, through the power of the fourth angel of Revelation 18.

Scholarly Conclusions

In 1962, the British scholar Harry Johnson published his London University doctoral dissertation on The Humanity of the Savior (Epworth Press). He proved both historically and biblically that what Christ did not assume, He could not redeem. He wrote:

The Humanity of the Savior, flyleaf

The eternal Son of God became man for our salvation; but what kind of human nature did he assume? The answer of this book is that He took human nature as it was because of the Fall. Despite this, He lived a perfect, sinless life, and finally redeemed this 'fallen nature' through the Cross; in this victory is the basis of Atonement.

I believe Johnson was absolutely right in his conclusion. That is why many reliable New Testament scholars today are proclaiming that Christ assumed the selfsame fallen human nature with which we are all born. The following names of other reliable New Testament scholars who have written on this topic: Anders Nygren, James Dunn, Thomas Torrance, C.E.B. Cranfield (editor of The International Critical Commentary), and Leslie Newbigin.

We must also especially note the late Adventist scholar and member of the E.G. White Estate, Jean Zurcher, who clearly demonstrated in his book Touched with Our Feelings: A Historical Survey of Adventist Thought on the Human Nature of Christ (Review and Herald, 1999) that, prior to the publishing of the book Questions on Doctrines, the

Adventist Church proclaimed the post-fallen human nature of Christ in its publications (such as Bible Readings for the Home) and its Sabbath School lessons.

This brief study of the Savior's humanity is intended to show the vital importance of this truth and its connection to the everlasting gospel. For a more detailed study, I suggest my book Savior of the World, originally published by Pacific Press Publishing Association but now on this website.