

**BEYOND
ADVENTISM**

The “Truth” Re-examined

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PROLOGUE

Welcome to this brief and candid tour that gives you an inside look at Seventh-day Adventism today. At first glance, some SDA readers may view certain theological elements in this exposition to be utterly shocking, unbelievable, and even grossly overstated. It is my heartfelt prayer, that as the readers probe the depths of Adventism, they will ultimately come to the conclusion that the information presented herein is indeed concise, objective, and factual.

With intentional ambiguity and complexity, many facets of Adventism are most difficult to examine, understand, and expose (i.e., their stance on abortion, their exclusive *investigative judgment*, etc.). Many of their leading apologists widely differ in their understanding of the doctrinal pillars in their belief system. It is not uncommon to find two opposing views, on many topics, in the writings of Ellen White. Therefore, whatever “Spirit of Prophecy” evidence you may present, the Adventist apologists can cite yet another contradicting quotation as also being a “continuing and authoritative **source** of truth.” In short, Ellen White is “all over the road” on many key doctrines. Consequently, the fragmenting of Adventism can be observed everywhere. Members of their conservative and liberal theological societies have been known to even refuse dining together when their meetings were held in the same vicinity.

Since the 1950s, Seventh-day Adventists have had a deep yearning to appear as Evangelicals. The book, *Questions on Doctrine*, published in 1957 with no author listed, is a prime example of this desperate strategy to appear Evangelical—thereby hoping to remove their cult stigma. Since then, however, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has officially replaced and deleted key words in some doctrinal statements (e.g., the words “all-sufficient” and “unerring” were **removed** from their statement on the authority of Scripture). This action allowed room for the extra-biblical writings attributed to their revered messenger and prophetess, Ellen G. White.

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After being devout, third-generation Seventh-day Adventists for more than forty years, my wife Sylvia and I requested our names to be removed from their membership records. Following several delays, the College View Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Lincoln, Nebraska, finally honored our request eight months later on October 16, 2000. We joyfully consider this date our Freedom Day from spiritual, psychological, and monetary abuse. Having anchored our lives in the New Covenant teachings of Jesus Christ, we thank God continually for removing the “veil” from our hearts (2 Cor. 3:15,16).

Belief transitions, at best, are not without trauma. Our journey in Adventism included dedicated service in both this country and overseas. My wife spent part of her early years in Baghdad, Iraq with her missionary parents. She was baptized in the Jordan River during one of her trips to the Holy Land. I have served the SDA denomination as a credentialed literature evangelist, credentialed missionary, and licensed minister. Consequently, our lives reflect an intense denominational identity.

First of all, we dearly love the Adventist people. They will always be in our hearts and prayers. Many of our friends and relatives still remain in the complicated grip of Adventism. I actively conduct an online, chaplaincy ministry to reach struggling Adventists with the awe-inspiring gospel of Jesus Christ. Many times, while engaged in exit counseling, there are those who threaten to throw me out of chat rooms and message boards. Worse yet, sad to say, they employ very unkind remarks whenever their legalism is challenged. Sometimes I feel like Paul when he was repeatedly thrown out of the synagogues of his day. Even though God called and commissioned Paul to preach to the Gentiles, he had a real burden for the struggling legalists he knew so well.

Amid the vastness of cyberspace, many honest-hearted Adventists are discovering, for the first time, that Jesus Christ is indeed our true Sabbath Rest. Jesus is the reality and substance of the Old Covenant shadows, that included the festal, weekly Sabbath given exclusively to the Hebrew people (see Col. 2:16,17; Deut. 5:3). According to Leviticus 23:2-3, the weekly Sabbath was one of the seven appointed feasts mandated for the “sons of Israel.” Certainly, we are not required to observe the Jewish festivals in order to obtain or maintain our salvation. There are no holy days in the Christian calendar. To observe any of these shadows of the Cross would deny the reality of Christ. Still others are threatened with the thought of losing their salvation if they leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is exciting to know that heaven has a party when Jesus is born in a new heart.

Sylvia and I were very busy with raising a family (we have three daughters), working wholeheartedly for the denomination, and later operating a family business. Someone aptly stated that “a wise man changes his mind seldom, but a fool never.” Regrettably, we were too busy to even get into theological matters. Satan truly delights in our excessively busy lives. After all, we were constantly taught that we were the only ones who had the “truth.” We were arrogantly pleased that we were a part of heaven’s exclusive franchise, God’s last-day Remnant Church, with its suppositional advantages that “outsiders” could only wish they had.

We were comfortable and savvy in a doctrinal proof-text system or “inner canon.” Outside of this so-called “inner canon” that reflects serious hermeneutical errors, we were lost in Scripture—especially in the New Testament Epistles. It always seemed easier to quickly consult the writings of Ellen White than to personally study the Bible in depth. Our home was saturated and imbalanced with stacks of books attributed to Ellen White. These books were beautifully bound with matching color schemes. Some of her books are now being rewritten into a contemporary English style. Unfortunately, this maneuver will make it much easier to hide her rampant plagiarism.

Having fervently believed that her “inspired” writings are a “continuing and authoritative **source** of truth,” our former devotion to her ministry

can rightfully be called Ellenolatry and/or Ellenology—a veneration akin to Mariology in Catholicism. Ellen White’s problematic and blasphemous role, as a latter-day coredemptrix in salvation, is officially verified by the SDA Church requiring that candidates for baptism confess her as being the “Spirit of Prophecy” **before** they can be baptized into Christ. For example, Ellen White’s authoritative and dominant role in creating distinctive SDA dogma is seen in her embellishment of the Fourth Commandment to include the legal Sabbath also being a “final test” and “seal of God.” In reality, there are no current SDA beliefs that Ellen White did not sanction or create. The Bible always had lots of competition from other Adventist publications as well. With any spare moments, we were engrossed in literally scores of books, periodicals, and newsletters that largely dictated our subculture. We thought we knew everything; you would only have had to ask us for all the right answers.

“Seventh-day Adventism is incredibly complex”

Unlike the basic tenets of the Christian faith, Seventh-day Adventism is incredibly complex. With an aberrant closed theology, it is no surprise that we found virtue in our closed minds. It was considered meritorious and even salvific to become “settled in the truth.” We felt sorry for the ignorance of those poor “non-Adventists” or “Sunday keepers” who were described in-house as heathen, outsiders, apostate Protestants, whores of Babylon, and their clergy as false shepherds. Sadly, we even made fun of people who believed in biblical Christianity like we do now. Utilizing typical cultic methodologies, Seventh-day Adventism employs the following spiritually-abusive strategies:

- Extreme authoritarian accountability, top-heavy organizational structure, and a closed belief system.
- Information control that **denigrates** or cuts off outside sources of information—especially if critical of the group. Consequently, they develop a voracious appetite to hear the latest behind-closed-door maneuvers and scandals of their hierarchy. Cognitive dissonance, the anxiety resulting from simultaneously holding contradictory and incompatible beliefs, plays a dominant, troubling role in their mindset.

- Discouraging critical, rational thoughts and questions; for example, comments like, “Satan is the cause of all doubt; he wants to keep you from the truth,” or “Those **former** Adventist ministers and lay persons are actually full of **pride**. They think they know more than the entire church.”
- Excessive financial obligations that comprise a two-tier membership system (e.g., *only* “tithers” are allowed to hold church offices or positions of influence, no tithe funds can be used for local church needs like building expansion, maintenance, and church school needs). One hundred percent of the tithe funds go directly to several levels of hierarchical, administrative organizations. The local church properties are wholly owned by the Conference. Ministers are appointed and paid by the Conference. Generally, only one offering per month is allowed for church expense—many non-tithe contributions are also remitted to the Conference treasury. The hierarchy essentially exerts almost total control over the local churches.
- Language manipulation—ascribing new “inside” or “in-house” meanings in ordinary words or use an excessive vocabulary subtly moving a person to want to become an insider. Largely, these aberrant linguistic problems have roots in their faulty hermeneutics. Others, like their exclusive “investigative judgment” and “shut door” terminology, are solely reflective of their subculture.

As a young minister, father, and departmental leader, I had little time to even think about questioning anything as I weekly preached perfectionist and promotional type sermons to a receptive Adventist audience. The Lord has graciously forgiven me. Truly, God redeems our past to advance His kingdom. Additionally, He faithfully restores the years that “the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25) and nothing is lost. Soli Deo Gloria!

“Information is a tool that empowers and enriches...lives”

Eventually, with an empty nest, we found extra time to delve into the essentials of the Christian faith. We soon discovered that sincerity of belief is no substitute for Biblical truth. Our exodus from Adventism took several years of diligent prayer and intensive Bible study. Even though we were deeply involved in Adventism, we knew very little of

what was going on. It was very difficult to obtain information about anything that the church hierarchy did not see fit to divulge. All of this changed, of course, with the dawn of the Internet. The arrival of online religion is as consequential as when the printing presses brought the written word to medieval Europe. With religious literacy dramatically on the upswing, cyber-Christians find new appreciation for personal freedom in Christ. Cyberspace affords us the priesthood of all believers—an equal playing field. Information technology is a tool that empowers and enriches the lives of even the lowest social class in our society. While cyberspace is no equal substitute for in-person relationships, it does avail us of meaningful, worldwide Christian fellowship. The Internet was a significant and valuable tool in our quest for truth.

A wide spectrum of Seventh-day Adventists know very little about their history, doctrines, organizational structure, and governing policies. When an inquiring member determines that even one doctrinal pillar is not Biblical, it clearly creates concern that other teachings may not pass close scrutiny as well. Being born in the Millerite deception of the early 1840s, Adventism shortly thereafter imposed a vast assortment of cultic views on its disillusioned adherents:

- The exclusive *investigative judgment* doctrine, as the central core of their faith, teaches that **the atonement was not completed at the Cross**—initially delayed for 1800 years, it is still in the process of being completed [an anti-Gospel message indeed].
- The “*shut door*” teaching, later abandoned, that grace for sinners ended on October 22, 1844.
- Only 144,000 people would be saved—later abandoned as membership exceeded this number.
- Soul sleep, conditionalism, and annihilationism were brought from the liberal Christian Connexion Church, a restorationist group related to the Stone-Campbell movement, by James White and Joseph Bates, early SDA pioneers.
- Those worshipping on Sunday will ultimately receive the *mark of the beast*.

- The final test will be Jewish Sabbath observance—even though the word “Sabbath” does **not** appear in the entire books of Genesis or Revelation. Adventists insist, however, that both books are somehow significant in supporting their Sabbatarian views. Jesus is not their final test. Instead, they warn that the final test is all about a day of worship—creating a dividing wall in Christendom. The final test centers upon the **created** instead of upon the **Creator** Himself.
- That the Law of Moses (also known as the “Pentateuch” or “Torah”) is **not** defined as a mixture of 613 ceremonial, civil, judicial, and moral laws that are basically summarized in the Decalogue as **both** moral and ritual declaratives. Consequently, Adventists utilize a pick-and-choose tactic to impose Jewish dietary, Sabbath, and tithing laws on the uninformed as being morally-binding. Importantly, the weekly Sabbath never was a **moral** directive, but rather it was a ceremonial, festal convocation given to “the sons of Israel” (see Lev. 23:2,3). On the other hand, God’s timeless **moral** laws never take a break, and they were never trumped by ritual law for any reason (i.e., circumcision on Sabbath, shewbread replacement every Sabbath, and special priestly sacrifices on Sabbath). Furthermore, **moral** commandments are valid 24\7 (every nanosecond of time) and not merely once a year, season, month, or week. Unlike ceremonial laws, moral laws never allow exceptions for works of charity, mercy, or necessity.
- In the context of an imminent, forthcoming “National Sunday Law,” a **death decree** will be issued upon all loyal Sabbatarians. In the final crisis, they warn, “Sunday keepers” are going to actually kill the “Sabbath keepers.”
- **Satan bears our sins** as typified by the scapegoat on the annual Day of Atonement. Thus, Satan has an atoning, **salvific role** to perform for our salvation by finally having to suffer, through his meritorious annihilation, for all our sins that are meticulously recorded in heaven as merely conditionally-forgiven (see *Great Controversy*, pages 422 & 485; *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, page 475). Only through Satan can our sins be finally blotted out. In the truest sense, Adventism teaches that God rewards Satan for his busy devilry—the more people he can keep from becoming

Christians the less suffering he will have to endure for confessed sins that were only conditionally-forgiven. Eternal bliss is ultimately conditional upon the atoning role of Satan. Paradoxically and sadly, official Adventism claims to have **two** sin-bearers; namely, Christ and Satan.

- **Arianism**, a belief held until the mid 1890s, teaches that Christ was created or “derived from the Father” as Ellen White would say it. Most current SDA beliefs were formulated by their Arian pioneers. Consequently, some of their doctrines are still tainted by this heresy.
- The latter rain or special outpouring of the Holy Spirit is still in the future—a denial of Pentecost.
- The extra-biblical authority of their prophetess, messenger, and co-founder, Ellen G. White—acclaimed to be the “Spirit of Prophecy.” She remains the apple of the Adventist eye, and she fills the role of being the infallible interpreter of Scripture.
- That fallen humankind can reach perfection with divine assistance and flawlessly keep the Ten Commandments—a **partnership** for salvation (see COL, page 69). In other words, they believe that God helps us to save ourselves.
- That the created archangel, Michael, is actually Jesus Christ (akin to the Jehovah’s Witnesses view). This view seriously compromises the divinity of Jesus Christ.
- In spite of their official claims of now being Trinitarians, they are actually teaching Tritheism instead (three *separate* Beings or Gods united in purpose). They still have no consensus on the nature of Christ. They further believe that Jesus had the **fallen** nature of Adam. Consequently, they insist that perfection is possible for them as it was for Jesus in his sinful flesh. This view makes Jesus Christ primarily an Exemplar instead of a Substitute.
- Our sins, once confessed and forgiven, **may haunt us again** and be held against us until the “blotting out” of sins occurs after the final phase of their exclusive *investigative judgment* that began in 1844; there are literally scores of other aberrant teachings, traditions, and unpublished standards that foster wholesale legalism and create uncertainty of one’s identity and position in Christ.

- Ellen White’s unique “**Great Controversy**” theme implies that Satan is not a defeated foe, that there is still somehow an equal rivalry between Christ and Satan, and consequently Satan has the possibility of winning over Christ. The Biblical truth is that there is no “Great Controversy” between Christ and Satan—never has been. The divine Creator and his created being, Lucifer, have never been on an equal par. The superiority and victory of Christ over Satan has never been in doubt from day one.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was not formally organized until 1863. Since then, however, Adventism has fathered numerous unsavory offspring with names like the Urantia Foundation, Shepherd’s Rod, Pilgrim’s Rest, and the infamous Branch Davidians. It truly boggles our minds how we could have believed all these things for so many years. We give praise to our Lord Jesus for our priceless freedom from the slavery and bondage of legalism. Having thoroughly studied Ellen White’s writings, we have come to the conclusion that her works are best characterized as a “multiple guess” type of inspiration. Her largely plagiarized writings cover the delights of vegetarianism (with a strict two-meal-a-day regimen that disallows even a tiny morsel of food between meals), to declaring masturbation the same as “self-murder” or suicide.

Many of her “inspired” books are inspirational and informational; after all, most of her writings comprise the copied or rewritten thoughts of uninspired authors from diverse fields like education, health, history, medicine, and religion of her day. Believing that the “*lesser light*” will somehow lead us to the “*greater light*” is like trying to find the sun with a flashlight. The Holy Spirit is fully able, willing, and anxious to lead us into Biblical truth. Jesus is not merely a part of our life (as an intellectual assent), as we formerly experienced, but rather He is the central focus of our life. We have an entirely new identity in Christ. Thankfully, Jesus didn’t leave us where he found us. With His own timing, God called us out of Adventism.

“Christ becomes secondary in many of their doctrines.”

My wife Sylvia and I are most grateful for the meaningful insights gleaned from many Christian authors and personal friends. Foremost

and best of all, the inerrant Holy Scriptures, in their original autographs, provide us with an unparalleled, all-sufficient revelation for Christian faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:15-17). All Scripture is fully inspired—meaning “God breathed.” Indeed, God is the ultimate author of the Bible in that He had complete control of his inspired penmen. Moreover, the Bible is God’s voice speaking to us. Often even one word in a passage makes the difference between life and death. Adventists, on the other hand, hold to merely thought inspiration. This non-verbal view allows many mistakes and contradictions like Ellen White has in her writings.

The New Testament, being the later, clearer, and final revelation to man, must be allowed to augment the Old Testament teachings on topics less clear as progressive revelation. Growing up as an Adventist in western North Dakota, I well remember an elderly, German-speaking SDA evangelist who emphatically declared that the partition of Scripture into Old and New Testaments was purely “man-made.” Similarly, with the covenants, Seventh-day Adventists regard the New Covenant simply as a warmed-over Old Covenant. Thus, Jesus Christ becomes secondary in many of their doctrines to this very day—a point they would readily deny. The fact is that most of their doctrines were formulated under the direction of their Arian pioneers. This heretical legacy continues to taint and complicate many of the 28 fundamental beliefs they hold today. For example, it is most difficult—if not impossible—for them to exalt Christ above the importance of the weekly, festal Sabbath.

Ellen White sternly declared, “I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, the **separating wall** between the true Israel of God and unbelievers...And if one believed, and kept the Sabbath,...and then gave it up...they would shut the gates of the Holy City against themselves, as sure as a God that rules in heaven above” (*A Word to the Little Flock*, page 18). Gratefully, under the New Covenant, there is **no** “dividing wall” (Eph. 2:14,15). This is a primary characteristic of the New Covenant. Sadly, according to Seventh-day Adventist understanding, Jesus Christ is not the unifying factor among God’s elect. Instead, **it is the Jewish Sabbath**. Notice that Ellen White, in the statement above, emphatically declares that **former** Sabbatarians will be excluded from entering “the gates of the Holy City.” Almost every religious conversation with an Adventist will automatically turn

to Law observance, **not** to Jesus being our atoning Substitute and Savior. If in doubt, simply give it a try! We rest where God rests—in Christ and His finished work (see Hebrews 4:10). Jesus is our true Sabbath Rest.

Unquestionably, the SDA doctrine about the state of the dead is one of their most aberrant and deceptive beliefs. Soul sleep and conditionalism, together with their exclusive investigative judgment alibi, affects the nature of Christ, the nature of man, and the nature of salvation (soteriology). This further accounts for the elective abortions performed in some Adventist hospitals (notably in the days when abortion procedures were very lucrative to hospitals). Without believing in the dualistic nature of man, body and spirit, it is not difficult for Adventists to view the fetus as merely “body tissue” that can be sucked into a sink. Obviously, with this heretical and immoral view, there is a vastly diminished respect for the sanctity of human life. Conversely, how can Adventists loudly proclaim to be “commandment keepers” when they fail to even observe the Sixth Commandment? It is fair to say that they got hung up on the Fourth Commandment (considered the Third Commandment by some Christian communities). Interestingly, a large segment of Seventh-day Adventists are pro-life, but their official church position is pro-choice. This confirms the fact that there are many, conscientious, honest-hearted Adventists that challenge hierarchical statements and position papers from their General Conference.

It can be argued that the SDA emphasis on physical health stems from their view of the nature of man—the body entity being all they really have. Adventists define the soul as merely their breath (air) or life principle (spark of life) in their nostrils that automatically returns to God at death. They further believe that their body becomes nonexistent, yet somehow sleeps. In real life, a person that sleeps is not “dead, dead” as Adventists put it. Something that does not exist in any form certainly does not await anything—much less a resurrection. Their view provides absolutely no continuity of personhood. At best, they are in the memory of God like a fallen sparrow. They further believe that they die just like animals, with the only difference being that they are in the remembrance of God. To them, the soul is not a separate entity that God calls home at death. On the other hand, the apostle Paul clearly affirmed that he “would

prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8 NIV).

Seventh-day Adventists repeatedly fail to utilize and/or ignore accepted principles of hermeneutics in defining biblical figures of speech, metaphors, places, and words (e.g., Abraham’s bosom, pits of darkness, death, destruction, devour, eternal, everlasting, fire, forever, gehenna, grave, hades, hell, perish, sheol, and tormented). Biblically, death is defined as separation from God (e.g., the fall of Adam). Linguistically, the same words in Scripture do not always mean the same thing in various time frames. Words must be studied not only etymologically, but comparatively as well, to comprehend the biblical writer’s intent. The context, grammar, and syntax, together with other pertinent tools of interpretation, must always be considered when reaching a theological conclusion. With their proof-text system of interpretation, they repeatedly incorporate selective and prejudicial evidence to support an extra-biblical hypothesis. Unfortunately, this flawed methodology is frequently employed by their apologists and historians as well. They routinely analyze historical documents and Biblical passages in light of their cultic presuppositions. Their primary focus is to align historical data in such a manner that it fully supports their worldview.

Adam still had an intact physical body immediately after the Fall, but his soul suffered separation or death as God had promised in the event of disobedience. Adventism attempts to make God into a liar when He warned Adam and Eve about the immediate consequence of sin, “...for **in the day** that you eat from it **you will surely die**” (Gen. 2:17 NASB). Interestingly, Adventists agree with the serpent, “You surely will **not** die” (Gen. 3:4 NASB). Official Adventism denies the fact that the souls of Adam and Eve died on the **very day** of their disobedience. Unlike the animals, man was created to possess the immortal image of God—the crowning act of creation. Remember, at creation, the Creator was spirit not body. Adam was fashioned into the eternal “spirit” image of his divine Creator. Therefore, we see the dualistic nature of man at creation—body (material) and soul (immaterial)—revealed right from the beginning in Genesis. Also, unlike the animals, God specifically “breathed” the soul or spirit into man (see Gen. 2:7). Human beings, as the crowning jewels of

creation, are most honored to be divinely-endowed with the immortal spirit image of God Himself, the Creator and Designer of all life.

“Satan and his hosts never have a good day.”

An important church council, the Council of Chalcedon in A. D. 451, was largely convened to correct the heresy of soul sleep and annihilationism. Centuries later the great Reformer, John Calvin, devoted his first literary work, the *Psychopannychia*, to debunk this aberration of the Christian faith. The theory of annihilationism in which the wicked pass into nonexistence either at death or at the resurrection was first advanced by Arnobius, a fourth-century “Christian” apologist [see *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, page 184]. Satan still does not want sinners to be concerned about eternal punishment—merely a slap on the wrist will suffice as a quick-fix to culminate a profane life. “The magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin...Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the sin and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore, an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against him” [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*; Blackfriars ed., 1a2ae.87.4]. Interestingly and strikingly, the Scriptures portray how the wicked will actually beg for annihilation in asking for the rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide them “from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16). However, in spite of their frantic pleas, suicide and/or annihilation will not be permitted to substitute for their “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46).

The lead argument is that God is “too kind and loving” to extend His justice forever. This view wrongly teaches, in effect, that God does not view sin as being that big of a deal after all. With the resulting quick fix of annihilation at the end of a profane life, one may easily reason to accept a hedonistic lifestyle. If such a transitory fate were true, many would opt to embrace the worldly view (Ecclesiastes 8:15) to just eat, drink, and be merry today and quickly be extinguished tomorrow. Annihilation does not constitute the ultimate punishment. Rather, annihilation would constitute the **end** of punishment. The ungodly in hell would like for annihilation to be true. Hell’s worst feature is its duration. Obviously, with this view, the corrupt pleasures of a lifetime of wickedness would far outlive the toughest penalty that the worst criminal in history would have to endure, under

the momentary timeline of annihilationism. Indeed, the Bible teaches that we have a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

God does not view wickedness lightly. The primary reason why our Savior told us so much about hell is that He doesn't want anyone to claim that they were not warned. Jesus Christ spoke of hell four times more often than he spoke about heaven. Hell is so hard for people to believe that it required Jesus Himself to verify its existence. It reveals His great love for us. Those persons who end up in the eternal torment of hell are without any excuse. The unregenerate in hell not only realize that they deserve their fate but that they actually chose it as well. In fact, heaven would be hell for the ungodly. God doesn't owe us anything. The fact that God even elects or saves anyone makes his grace even more amazing. Our loving Father effectively makes friends out of his enemies in the election process. His choosing the elect is not based upon any human merit. Throughout redemptive history, our sovereign God has always reserved the right to select the members of His wonderful family. Truly, salvation is from the Lord alone.

The only alternative for annihilationism is quarantine. And that is exactly what hell is. Our righteous God has created a place of eternal separation for those in perpetual rebellion against him. How could a just and loving God eliminate his crowning jewels of creation simply because they were not divinely-chosen? Since human beings are fashioned into the very image of God, zapping them out existence would do violence to his nature. "For believers death means being 'away from the body and at home with the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:8). That is why He promised the penitent thief, 'Today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43). That is why Paul described departing the body to be with Christ as 'better by far' than remaining in the body (Phil. 1:23). And that is why Scripture speaks of deceased human beings as souls 'under the altar' (Rev. 6:9) and as the 'spirits of righteous men made perfect' (Heb. 12:23)" [Robert A. Peterson; *Two Views of Hell*, page 171].

Adventists frequently like to say, "My God is too kind and loving. He would **never** eternally torment the ungodly." By not believing what our sovereign God says about death and the afterlife, Adventists make Him into their own image. They arrive at this conclusion based

primarily upon human sentiment instead of from biblical teaching. Therefore, they unknowingly worship an idolatrous deity that fits their humanistic perceptions. The sovereignty of God is not considered when something doesn't mesh with their esoteric views. By creating their own god, they can conveniently sidestep anything that counters their theological comfort zone. What blatant blasphemy to assert that one knows the thoughts and ways of God! Let us review the depressing plight of the devil. God has placed Satan and his angels under conscious torment ever since he cast them out of heaven. And note this, Satan and his hosts **never** have a good day. They exist without any hope of regaining their original state. Their constant anguish and despair is merely a foretaste of the reality of hell they will soon experience forever. Is God "too loving and kind" to allow Satan and his angels to suffer ever since their expulsion from heaven?

Furthermore, Satan knows what awesome, unspeakable splendor exists in heaven. The thought of loss is greater than the thought of gain. If the SDA supposals are true, Satan should have been annihilated or obliterated immediately after his rebellion in heaven, because God is "too loving and kind" to cause him to endure such intense anguish and discomfort for thousands, perhaps millions, of years already. The truth is that heaven only gets better while hell only gets worse. Adventist dogma is very suspicious and distrusting of God's motives and justice. Consequently, they are planning to put God on trial during the Millennium to verify and audit his records. According to the SDA view, God is depending upon redeemed humankind to vindicate his righteous character and justice by their meticulously going through all the juicy details of those not found in heaven. Adventists vividly surmise that engaging in this type of gruesome, detailed investigation of the unsaved will somehow alleviate their sorrow and loneliness in heaven. In other words, the spotlight in the theater of the universe will focus upon human beings instead of Jesus Christ during the Millennium. With the reality of Calvary, God certainly doesn't need any further vindication of his character. What possible credentials do created beings have to judge their Creator? This is yet another example of an SDA teaching that diminishes the glory and honor due to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let us remember the Adventist depiction of God, being “too kind and loving,” who would never allow Satan and his evil angels to endure such a severe, constant suffering all these many, many years. I can well envision my Adventist friends asking, “How could a kind and loving God inflict such horrific punishment upon a former leader in heaven?” Furthermore, they would likely add, “Only a tyrant would do such an awful thing. I would never worship nor respect a God like that!” Dear friend, we serve a just, righteous, and sovereign God. The unconfessed and unforgiven sins of the ungodly are **forever** before the Father. The intentional parallelism in Jesus’ statement, recorded in Matthew 25:46, is too obvious to miss. Indeed, we can fully place our trust in the Bible! Others will continue to deny any literal interpretation of Scripture because they don’t want to face the literal realities that would reveal. Humanly speaking, God’s ways may not always seem right or appealing to us. On the other hand, why not just believe what He says? Which view of punishment do you think Satan wants us to believe in—eternal agony in hell or the momentary quick-fix of annihilation after living a profane life (try to be objective)?

“We persevere because God preserves us.”

The gift of our eternal security in Christ should be a most serious consideration (1 John 5:11-13). We are admonished not to be merely “hope so” Christians, but rather to be “know so” Christians. “For the gifts and calling of God are **irrevocable**” (Romans 11:29 NIV). The apostle John, confirming our eternal security in Christ, clearly says, “These things I have written to you who **believe** in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Furthermore, Jesus declared, “My sheep hear My voice, and I **know** them, and they follow me; and I **give** [present tense] eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and **no one will snatch them out of the Father’s hand**. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27-30 NASB). These passages, plus many others, certainly do not entertain the notion that our eternal security in Christ is merely “presumption” as our Adventist and Catholic friends like to tell us. The assurance of our salvation, here and now, is vital to our spiritual lives. Without it, our growth is retarded and we are assailed with crippling doubts.

Thankfully, we no longer adhere to a “roller-coaster” religion that teaches a fall from grace with every act of sin. This translates into Seventh-day Adventists living in fear of losing their salvation **several times a day**. Let us, instead, embrace the promise of “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6 NIV). After all, we are sinners saved by grace. The central core of the Gospel is the assurance that we can be right with God right now. This is good news, indeed! Truly, we can trust God’s Word. No true believer ever loses his salvation. To be sure, Christians fall at times seriously and radically, but never fully and finally. Jesus is our Savior and Ark of Safety—not our probation officer. We persevere because God preserves us. Christianity, in the truest sense, is not a religion but rather a relationship with Jesus Christ. The rebellious sin problem is of utmost concern to our Heavenly Father.

In his classic book, *Chosen by God*, Dr. R. C. Sproul summarizes this topic very well: “With respect to the assurance of salvation there are basically **four** kinds of people in the world. (1) There are people who are not saved who know that they are not saved. (2) There are people who are saved who do not know that they are saved. (3) There are people who are saved who know that they are saved. (4) There are people who are not saved who “know” that they are saved” (page 163). Truly, salvation is a very personal matter. We cannot fool God about anything. Dr. Sproul further adds that, “False assurance stems chiefly from false understanding of what salvation requires and entails” (Ibid., page 164). The apostle Peter gives us an important mandate, “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to **make certain** about His calling and choosing...” (2 Peter 1:10 NASB). “To be lacking in assurance is a grave hindrance to spiritual growth. The person who is not sure of his state of grace is exposed to doubts and terrors in his soul. He lacks an anchor for his spiritual life. His uncertainty makes him tentative in his walk with Christ” (Ibid., page 168).

Adventist apologists cannot allow souls to be in heaven before their “investigative judgment” scenario clears their names. Just when Adventists will need Jesus the most, shortly before His glorious appearance, He will be unavailable to them according to their unbiblical hypothesis. This esoteric view actually teaches that fallen

mankind, prior to glorification, will ultimately be capable of facing a holy God **without the intercession of a mediator**, due to their achieved perfection status. The Bible clearly teaches that everyone will **consciously** spend eternity in either heaven or hell. Most of what we know about hell was taught by Jesus Himself. Please note His clear message, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46 NASB).

By the way, the New Testament authors, under divine inspiration, had ample access to the exact Koine Greek words they needed to relate where we will consciously spend eternity. The intentional parallelism in Jesus’ words quoted above are too obvious to miss. Indeed, this passage describes an unending condition for all. The same word “eternal” (Gk. αἰώνιον) describes **both** heaven and hell (see also the usage of “αἰώνιον” in John 3:16 and 2 Thess. 1:9). How can the adjective “eternal” be correct in regard to heaven and not be correct in regard to hell? “Those that teach soul sleep and conditionalism know it is contrary to many Scriptures, as is vividly portrayed in the SDA’s Clear Word Bible with over 50 passages changed by additions, deletions, or rewording, so readers won’t see what God says about man and death” [Verle Streifling, Ph.D.; *The Nature of Man and Death*, page 7].

Thankfully, we don’t have to endlessly try to explain away what Jesus meant by “eternal.” Since God is the ultimate author of Scripture, it is apparent that the original biblical languages were determined by Providence to provide the best communication with the human family. We can always trust a passage when the hermeneutical structure and context is fully applied. It is most important to understand what a passage does **not** say as well as what it **does** say. This example highlights the importance of seeing that all Christian teachings fit neatly together like a completed puzzle.

In the larger picture, authentic Christian dogma is interrelated to the extent that it reveals unity of thought on the essentials of salvation. Because of their extra-biblical authority, based on the voluminous writings attributed to Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists do **not** officially believe in the all-sufficiency and inerrancy of Scripture. Therefore, they cannot be considered to be truly Protestant. Let us wholeheartedly embrace the Five Solas (or slogans) that became the

battle cry of the Protestant Reformation; namely, Sola Scriptura (“by Scripture alone”), Sola Fide (“by faith alone”), Sola Gratia (“by grace alone”), Solus Christus (“by Christ alone”), and Soli Deo Gloria (“Glory to God alone”). The Gospel **plus anything else** is no longer the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Socrates once said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” It is equally important to say that unexamined religion is not worth practicing, and unexamined faith is not worth believing. Belief usually does not stand still. It grows, develops, regresses, stagnates, and changes. With His precise timing, God called us out of Adventism with a sacred design for our lives. Our journey out of Adventism was completed with the Biblical discovery that Jesus Christ is indeed our true Sabbath Rest (Col. 2:16,17; Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:9,10; Gal. 3:11, 13, 19, 23-25; 5:1, 18; Phil. 3:9,10; Rom. 10:4; 14:5).

Under the New Covenant teachings of Jesus Christ, we have a **higher standard of righteousness** than the Old Covenant could provide. Through His indwelling Spirit, we are a new creation “sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). Our focus no longer centers on the fading shadows of the sun, but rather upon the unsurpassing glory of God the **Son**. We are not saved by a sunset calendar. The legal Sabbath could not save us nor provide divine rest for our souls; however, the True Sabbath saved us through His amazing grace. To God be all the glory!

Being transformed by truth, we became members of an evangelical, Bible-believing church. Moreover, Sylvia and I have come to greatly appreciate the high view of God and Scripture as expressed in Reformed theology. The doctrines of grace are aptly expressed in the acrostic TULIP; namely, total depravity, unconditional election, limited (particular) atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. As many are painfully aware, *Calvinism* is a bad word in Adventist circles. For example, it would be unthinkable for a five-point Calvinist to embrace Adventism’s “investigative judgment” alibi with its heretical teaching that Jesus’ death did not fully atone for our sins. In biblical Christianity, the finished work of Christ on the Cross is nonnegotiable.

Theologically, Seventh-day Adventists are most accurately described as semi-Pelagianists (named after the British monk who went against the doctrines of grace when Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo in Africa). Indeed, salvation is from the Lord! We are not the captains of our eternal destiny as we formerly believed. Our sovereign God is certainly not at the mercy of the fallen human will. Our Heavenly Father is calling ever-increasing numbers of Adventists out of legalism and fear and into the freedom and security found only in Jesus Christ. Consequently, those who are intent upon accurate answers will no longer remain in a toxic-faith system. Moreover, they are no longer content with observing the ritual shadows pointing to the Cross. Walking in the light, words fail to adequately express our joy and peace that we have found in Jesus. Our Savior graciously declared, “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:30 NASB). Having sipped enough nectar from the roses of life, my wife Sylvia and I do not regret a mile we have traveled for the Lord. We love and serve an awesome God. Yes, indeed, there is an abundant, wonderful life **beyond Adventism**.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

www.desiringgod.org

www.ellenwhiteexposed.com

www.forthegospel.org

www.gty.org

www.ligonier.org

www.monergism.com

www.spurgeon.com

www.towertotruth.net/audio.htm#radio

(38-minute radio show interview on Seventh-day Adventism)

www.truthorfables.com

www.whitehorseinn.org

EPILOGUE

The primary purpose in relating my theological journey out of Seventh-day Adventism is to give all the honor and glory to our awesome and sovereign God. Now that I have shared my spiritual journey with you in the preceding pages, it is my prayerful request that you join me in singing my testimony in song, **“He touched me, and I will never cease to praise Him.”**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlgErxNu6X4>)

May the inspiring words of this song, penned by Bill Gaither in 1962, reflect the true nature of your heart as well. Our Heavenly Father is efficaciously calling many out of false gospels as never before witnessed. Indeed, He specializes in things thought impossible. A soteriological stance that makes one’s heart to sing with gratitude and praise is truly God-centered and God-exalting.

The most loving and compassionate deed that anyone can do is to warn others against toxic belief systems—especially the most subtle ones masquerading as Evangelicals. This is why the inspired writers of the New Testament devoted so much time and effort to dispel and expose numerous heresies. The greatest fortress against any heresy is to be thoroughly grounded in Scripture. The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us. It is most noteworthy, throughout redemptive history, that our sovereign God never goes on a rescue mission that fails. After all, Jesus came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21 NASB). Remember, friends don’t let friends become Adventists.

Your comments and questions are always welcome. May God continue to abundantly bless your quest for biblical truth. Soli Deo Gloria!

In awe of His saving grace,

Dennis J. Fischer, Director and Founder
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