

Seventh-day Adventism

ANOTHER GOSPEL?

MARCH

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HAROLD J.
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Seventh-day Adventism

William Miller, a Baptist minister, was a zealous Bible student who yearned for the return of the Lord. As he studied the Scriptures he interpreted Daniel 8:14 to mean that Christ was to return sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. Thousands who had accepted his teaching waited eagerly during this time for the return of the Lord, but they saw no evidence of His return. A new date—October 22, 1844—was set by some, but again the date passed without the appearance of the Saviour.

Disheartened, William Miller declared that he and his followers had been wrong. Before he died in 1849, he said, "We expected the personal coming of Christ at that time; and now to contend that we were not mistaken is dishonest. We

should never be ashamed frankly to confess our errors. I have no confidence in any of the theories that grew out of the movement" (*History of the Advent Message*, p. 412).

Ellen G. White—who with her husband, Elder James White, was a part of the date-setting movement in 1843 and 1844—became the prophetess of the Seventh-day Adventist movement. (The name, Seventh-day Adventists, is derived from the cult's observing Saturday as the day of rest and also from the cult's emphasis on the advent of Christ.) Her writings are considered to be "inspired counsel" on the Scriptures. The leaders of the movement do not teach that Ellen G. White was inspired in the same sense as the authors of the Scriptures, yet for all practical purposes the difference lies only in the terms they use to describe her writings. With few exceptions, the Seventh-day Adventists follow Mrs. White's teachings with as much preciseness as they follow the teachings of the Bible.

It has been said that the Seventh-day Adventists have changed their beliefs from what Ellen G. White originally taught. But her book, *The Great Controversy*, which sets forth many of her strange beliefs, is still referred to by the Seventh-day Adventists as "one of our standard books" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 421).

Investigative Judgment

A basic doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventists is the teaching that Christ, as part of His atoning work, has been conducting an "investigative judgment" in the heavenly sanctuary since 1844. This doctrine was formulated after Christ failed to return, as had been predicted, on October 22, 1844. The next day, it suddenly occurred to one of the group—Hiram Edson—"that instead of our High Priest *coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the 2300 days, he for the first time entered on that day*

the second apartment of that sanctuary and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth" ("Life and Experience" by Hiram Edson as cited in *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Vol. IV, p. 881, by Le Roy Edwin Froom).

That Christ's investigative judgment in the heavenly sanctuary is considered to be a part of His atoning work in Adventist doctrine is seen from such statements as "Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ" (*The Great Controversy*). To claim that Christ is presently doing something to complete His work of redemption is to disregard the words He uttered from the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30). The Greek tense employed in this verse indicates something that had been completed and remained so. A literal translation is "It has been finished." Also, Hebrews 10:12 clearly indicates that the atoning work of Christ has been completed: "But this man, after he had offered

one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." Christ finished His work of redemption on the cross, and nothing needs to be added to it.

In *The Great Controversy*, Ellen G. White explains the investigative judgment that Christ is supposedly conducting at this time: "As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed on Jesus come in review before God. . . . When any have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven, their names will be blotted out of the book of life, and the record of their good deeds will be erased from the book of God's remembrance. . . . All who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon entered against their names in the books of heaven; as they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be

accounted worthy of eternal life" (p. 483).

It is scriptural to state that a person must place his faith in Christ for the forgiveness of his sin, but it is not scriptural to say that anyone who has sins they have not repented of will have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. Jesus Christ completely paid the penalty for sin—past, present and future—and He has said that anyone who believes on Him "shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). If, after receiving Christ as Saviour, one commits a sin, he is not in danger of having his name blotted out of the Book of Life if he does not repent of it. Confession of sin after salvation is necessary to maintain fellowship with the Father but not to retain salvation—the salvation question has already been settled.

A faith-plus-works type of salvation is revealed in Mrs. White's words: "As they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are

found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life." According to the Scriptures, character does not determine one's salvation; rather, one's salvation determines his character. It is not until a person receives Jesus Christ as Saviour and becomes a "new creature" (II Cor. 5:17) that he can have a character that pleases God. Such a person is Christ's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). But there cannot be good works that please God until a person has salvation by receiving Christ as Saviour.

The Scriptures speak of individuals being judged, but the time of these judgments is in the future, not the present. Those who know Jesus Christ as Saviour will someday "appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). However, this is a judgment to determine rewards, not salvation.

Only those who have salvation will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. All who do not have salvation will appear before the Great White Throne to have their works evaluated and then will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Satan—The Sin-Bearer

Not only do the Seventh-day Adventists teach that sin is not fully atoned for as yet but they also teach that Satan has a part in the bearing of our sins.

Writing in *The Great Controversy* about the sin offering and the scapegoat of Leviticus 16, Ellen G. White says, "As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so Christ will place all these sins upon Satan, the originator and instigator of sin. . . . Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God's people to commit, . . . will at last suffer the full penalty of sin in the fires that shall destroy all the wicked" (p. 485).

Mrs. White taught that as the priest symbolically took the sins from the people and placed them on the scapegoat in Leviticus 16, so also Christ's death removed the sins from the people and He will later place them on Satan. The Scriptures teach that Christ bore the full penalty of our sins because He became the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins and for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2). Those who refuse to receive Christ as their sin-bearer will suffer everlasting punishment because of their rejection of Him (Luke 13:5; John 3:18,19; Matt. 25:46). Speaking of Christ, Isaiah 53:6,12 states: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

In His agonizing hours on the cross, Christ was actually "made . . . to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21). Since all our sins were placed on Him, we were able to be delivered from all condemnation by receiving Him as our Saviour. Christ did not die to take these sins from us in

order to place them on another; He died to suffer the full condemnation for our sins. Satan will be judged for his own sin, but Christ "bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24).

Annihilation of the Wicked

The Seventh-day Adventists are also firm believers in the annihilation of the wicked—that the wicked will cease to exist and not suffer everlasting punishment. Much of the weight of their teaching is placed upon the beliefs that, as a God of love, God would not permit anyone to suffer for eternity and that eternal existence is promised only to the Christian.

It is true that God is a God of love—the Scriptures abound with verses that give us this truth (John 3:16; I John 4:7-10; etc.). It is for this very reason that God provided His Son to bear the penalty for our sin so we would not have to suffer condemnation. God has made provision for every person's salvation, but if a person rejects what Christ

has accomplished in his behalf, then he will be punished for his own sin.

God's Word clearly reveals that unbelievers will experience everlasting punishment: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46). No distinction can be made in this verse between "everlasting" and "eternal" for they are only different translations of the same Greek word. If the "everlasting punishment" of this verse is to be denied, then logically one must deny the "life eternal" that it proclaims.

Revelation 19:20—20:10 reveals that the wicked do not cease to exist. The two individuals who will deceive many during the Great Tribulation are characterized as a beast and false prophet. They will be cast into the lake of fire before Christ begins his 1000-year rule on earth. At the end of this 1000 years Satan will also be cast into the lake of fire and the beast and false prophet will still be there even after

a thousand years—they will not cease to exist.

Soul-Sleep

Seventh-day Adventists also teach the doctrine of soul-sleep—the belief that there is not conscious existence from the time of death until the resurrection from the dead. They teach that no believer, while living, really has eternal life—for such a quality of life will not be given to him until he is raised from the grave. However, God's Word declares the possibility of present assurance of salvation (John 5:24; Rom. 10:9; I John 5:11-13).

The Adventists base their teaching of the unconsciousness of the dead on such a statement as "the dead know not any thing" (Eccl. 9:5). It must be remembered that the Book of Ecclesiastes was written from man's viewpoint, not from God's. The writer even says, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (1:2). This book has been included in the canon of Scripture to reveal

the hopelessness of life unless it is dedicated to God. Ecclesiastes 9:5 shows that as far as natural man is concerned the grave is the end. But the Scriptures reveal that this natural view is not correct because judgment occurs after death (Heb. 9:27).

Such Scriptures as Luke 16:22-30; II Corinthians 5:1-8 and Philippians 1:23,24 show there is a consciousness after death for both believers and unbelievers. First Thessalonians 4:14 also reveals that the Christian goes to be with Christ at death. When Christ comes to rapture the Church, He will bring with Him the believers who have died so they may receive their bodies from the grave.

Sabbath-Keeping

When most people think of the Seventh-day Adventists, they usually think first of the Adventists' worship on the seventh day of the week—from which practice the group gets part of its name. The Adventists normally make more of

an issue of this doctrine than any other. Our greatest concern is not that they desire to worship on a different day but that they make the keeping of this day, as well as the keeping of other laws, a criterion of a person's relationship with the Lord—even as to his salvation.

In a letter in *Present Truth* James White wrote: "The keeping of the fourth commandment is all-important present truth; but this alone, will not save any one. We must keep all ten of the commandments, and strictly follow all the directions of the New Testament, and have living active faith in Jesus. Those who would be found ready to enter the saints' rest, at the appearing of Christ, must live wholly, WHOLLY for Jesus now" (cited in *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* by Le Roy Froom).

In their literature the reader will find it stressed over and over that the Adventists believe salvation to be by faith in Christ. However, to this belief in Christ they add their works of the Law. This is the same error for which Paul con-

demned the Galatians. Seventh-day Adventism is 20th-century Galatianism, and the Book of Galatians needs to be studied carefully to see the proper relationship of the Law to salvation. Paul condemned those who were teaching a gospel of faith plus works (Gal. 1:8).

Salvation cannot be by both faith and works. Ephesians 2:8,9 makes this clear. Romans 11:6 shows it is impossible for anything to be obtained by both faith and works because one excludes the other. The Word of God teaches that salvation can be obtained only by faith in Christ—apart from the works of the Law (Rom. 3:21-24). A person produces good works because he *has* everlasting life, not in order to obtain it.

If a person does not keep the seventh day of the week holy, then it is obvious to the Adventists that he is not deserving of everlasting life. In fact they believe this so strongly that they believe "Sunday-keeping" will be the mark of the beast during the Great Tribulation. The Seventh-day Adventists

accept the statement of Ellen G. White: "Sunday-keeping is not yet the mark of the beast, and will not be until the decree goes forth causing men to worship this idol sabbath. The time will come when this day will be the test, but that time has not come yet" (*The Great Controversy* as quoted in *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 184).

The Sabbath was given as a token of the covenant between God and Israel (Ex. 31:16,17). Sabbath-keeping has never been commanded of the Gentiles, and with the setting aside of Israel came also the setting aside of God's token with them—the Sabbath.

The New Testament teaches that for the Body of Christ, the Church, the special days of the Old Testament were only a type of things to come. Therefore, believers are not to let anyone judge them "in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (Col. 2:16,17). The Old Testament rest of the Sabbath Day was only a picture of the rest that one enters when he places his faith in Christ

and ceases from his own works (Heb. 4:9-12).

In commemoration of the day upon which Christ rose from the grave, the New Testament Christians met for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:6,7). Paul also instructed the Corinthian Christians to set aside their offerings on the first day of the week for the work of the Lord (I Cor. 16:2). These practices were not performed in order to merit salvation. They were performed because the individuals knew Christ as their Saviour, and they wanted to fellowship together in the things of the Lord. It was also their purpose to use offerings to help other Christians and to take the gospel to those who had not yet received Christ as Saviour.

The distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not normally presented on their radio and television programs. Many people listen to the radio program "The Voice of Prophecy" and view the telecast "Faith for Today" without realizing these are

Seventh-day Adventist programs. After one begins to receive their literature he becomes aware of the differences between their teaching and that of the Word of God.

Christians should know what books are published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When in doubt, a person should check who the publisher of the book is. Three of the major publishing houses for Seventh-day Adventist literature are Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California; Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C.; and Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, Tennessee.

Certain evangelical leaders have endorsed the Seventh-day Adventists as "fellow evangelicals." But their teaching about the investigative judgment and Satan's part in the bearing of sin is sufficient to show that the Seventh-day Adventist gospel is different than the gospel taught by the Scriptures. Because of their deviation from the Scriptures, the Seventh-day Ad-

ventists cannot be called evangelicals. This does not mean that every person in the Seventh-day Adventist movement is unsaved. Any person who trusts Christ *alone* for salvation has eternal life, regardless of his religious affiliation. However, it is regrettable that most of those in this movement are blind to the Galatianism which their church teaches and which has never been renounced by its leaders.

Are Seventh-day Adventists true evangelicals who just happen to worship on Saturday? Or are they followers of teachings which do not agree with the Bible?

The presentation of their message by television, radio and literature often emphasizes that salvation is by faith in Christ—but to this belief they add their works of the law. And salvation cannot be by faith *and* works.

This book also explores other aspects of error—annihilation of the wicked, Satan as our sin-bearer, and soul-sleep.