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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

Preview of the first chapter of Dale Ratzlaff's new book **First things first**

DALE RATZLAFF

For the transitioning Adventist it will be very helpful to outline the order of study topics. Having personally transitioned out of Adventism and communicated with hundreds of others who have done the same, I have found that most, if not the vast majority, of Formers followed nearly the same subject order in their experience. For many of us it was not an intentional order; rather, it just happened to us that way. The fact that so many of us followed the same path lends credence to it. Therefore, no matter where one is in one's personal journey or inquiry, it is highly recommended that this order be followed. As in

Nearly every former Adventist I have communicated with first discovered the simple gospel.

mathematics, so it is for the transitioning Adventist. One must master one step before advancing to the next.

The big three

Granted, many of the study topics are interrelated, and one might say that several need to be studied together, but here are the most important in the order they usually become issues to questioning Adventists.

The gospel

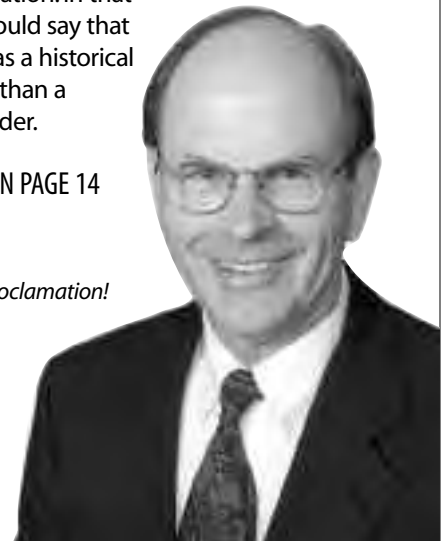
Nearly every Former I have communicated with first discovered the simple gospel. Perhaps this discovery was the result of the early (for us) pioneers such as Robert Brinsmead and Desmond Ford who brought the message of righteousness by faith to the front and center of Adventist thought and clearly explained the difference between justification and sanctification. In that sense, one could say that this order was a historical order rather than a necessary order.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

Dale Ratzlaff is president of Life Assurance Ministries and founding editor of *Proclamation!*

In the 1980s, while nearing the end of his doctoral program at Andrews University, Dale did an in-depth study of the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. When he became convinced he could no longer teach this doctrine in good conscience because it was scripturally unsupported and contrary to the gospel, he and his wife left the denomination.

Dale and his wife Carolyn live in Peoria, Arizona, and worship at Calvary Community Church.



Life Assurance Ministries, Inc

MISSION

To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

MESSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast."
Ephesians 2:8,9

CONTENTS The journey home 3
Vicky, where are you? 5
Dear Conference President 7
Finding a family **Back page**



Studying and leaving

It was the summer of 1998. Richard and I sat alert, barely tasting our salads. Outside, the sidewalks shimmered in the Southern California heat, but we didn't notice. The man who had been our pastor for the past six years sat across from us. He couldn't let us leave the church, he said, without asking us why we were leaving.

Carefully—hopefully—we outlined what we had learned over the past four years as we had studied the Bible. We explained how we had discovered the gospel, the finished work of Christ, and how that security had transformed us. We talked about the new covenant and how Jesus had fulfilled the law—

even the Sabbath. We told him we had come to believe Ellen White was a false prophet, and we could no longer maintain integrity if we stayed in the Adventist church.

He listened graciously, and although a few times he seemed about to counter what we said, he did not. Finally he spoke. "I can let you go," he said, "as long as I know you are not angry."

We assured him we felt absolutely no anger. When we had finished lunch, we drove together back to Loma Linda, chatting lightly with this man we had come to know during our terms as church officers and board members. We were grateful; most people who leave the Seventh-day Adventist church never hear from their pastors again. At the same time, we felt strangely distant; although he had been gracious, he did not understand why we had to leave. He did not understand that the love of Jesus had won our hearts, and we could never be the same again. He did not understand that we had found Truth in God's living word, and no day or doctrine could ever again command our loyalty. We had studied our way out of Adventism, and now we belonged to Jesus.

We had just shared with the man who had been our pastor the singular experience of our new birth, and his reaction had simply been relief that we were not angry. We were not surprised, but we knew we had just walked through a door through which we could never return.

Most Adventists have assumed that it is impossible for someone to study his way out of Adventism.

When one has "the truth," after all, how can one study the Bible and disprove it? Further, over the years, most people who have left did so because "the truth" wasn't working for them: it was impossibly demanding, or it fostered a critical spirit, or unscrupulous people hid behind it while perpetrating various forms of fraud or abuse—in short, "the truth" produced cognitive dissonance and countless wounded or bitter people.

Today, information is much more universally available than it was twenty or even ten years ago. More and more people are discovering the truth about Adventism, "the truth" that shaped them and defined their worldviews. Loyal Adventists, however, still assume that people only leave the church because they've been hurt or angry or because they're rebellious. The idea that Bible study disproves their "truth" and reveals the Lord Jesus is a fact they cannot embrace without threatening their identities.

In this issue we hear from several people who have studied their way into Truth. Dale Ratzlaff, founding editor of *Proclamation!*, introduces the three main topics transitioning Adventists must address: the gospel, authority, and Ellen White. Jeffrey Helsius, a pastor in the Lake Union district until May of this year, shares his resignation letter addressed to his Minnesota conference president. Chris Lee and Lydell Oltmans let us glimpse their experiences of coming to faith and learning to walk with the Holy Spirit. Angela Bullard is an evangelical Christ-follower who calls out to her Adventist friend from high school days—wherever she is.

We want you to notice that the address of Life Assurance Ministries has changed; it is now P.O. Box 905, Redlands, California, 92373. All donations and manuscripts for consideration for the magazine should now come to this address, and you'll find the return envelope in your magazine will have this address on it. Email regarding *Proclamation!* and Life Assurance Ministries should now come to LifeAssurance@aol.com.

Those wishing to order books or to be in touch with Dale Ratzlaff should still send their email to dale@ratzla.com or telephone (623) 572-9549.

I praise our Father for giving us salvation through His Son Jesus, and I thank Him for sending us the Holy Spirit to draw our hearts from darkness into light and to reveal to us the Truth in His living word.

—Colleen Tinker, editor

We had just shared with this man the singular experience of our new birth, and his reaction had simply been relief that we were not angry.

Proclamation!

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The journey home

CHRISTOPHER A. LEE

I was an accident, an embarrassment, a poster child for using birth control when conducting extramarital affairs.

It grew darker as I gazed out the windows of LAX. The day had started out dark with severe thunderstorms, but now the blackness of night was descending. The weather mirrored my mood as I felt the old darkness engulfing me, swallowing up reason and meaning. Just hours before I had come from my father's funeral, a man I had met once, only to see him die a few months later. The sense of loss I felt seemed irrational and yet undeniably overwhelming, and the depression was back.

I was an accident, an embarrassment, a poster child for using birth control when conducting extramarital affairs. Today I probably would have been aborted, but in 1969 girls were sent to live with a relative or friend, and the babies were discreetly adopted out, sometimes to whomever would take them.

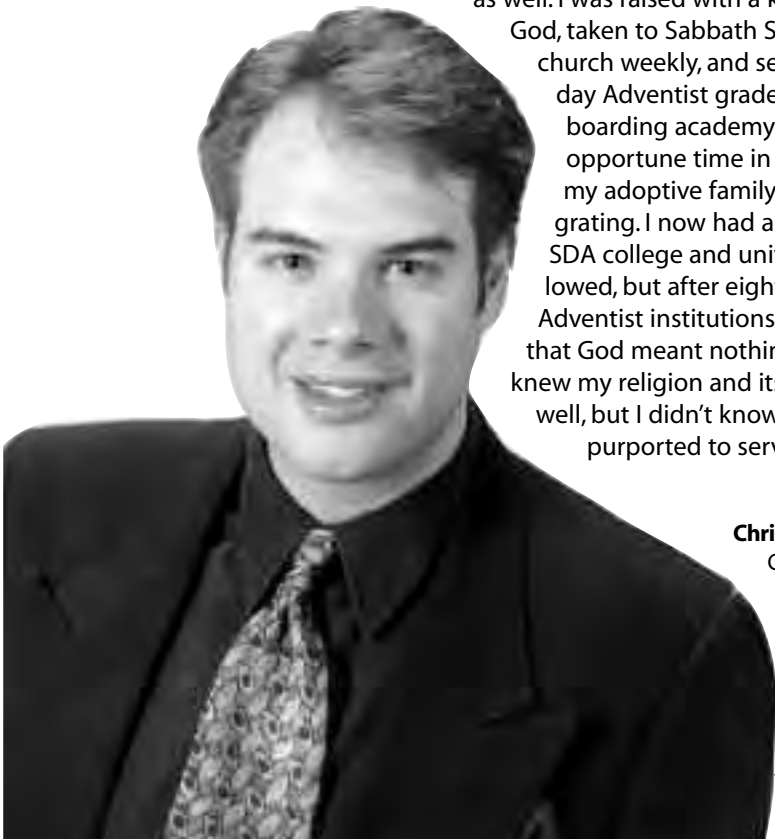
To use the language of pop culture, I was raised in a dysfunctional and abusive adoptive family. However, the reality was probably something more complex than that. There was good as well. I was raised with a knowledge of God, taken to Sabbath School and church weekly, and sent to Seventh-day Adventist grade school. SDA boarding academy came at an opportune time in my life, just as my adoptive family was disintegrating. I now had a new home. SDA college and university followed, but after eighteen years in Adventist institutions I had to admit that God meant nothing to me. I knew my religion and its doctrines well, but I didn't know the God it purported to serve.

Having gone through a period of hedonism, inspired by the conviction that I was lost no matter how hard I tried, I finally settled down to marriage and parenthood. I still sometimes prayed that God would make it all mean something to me, but had mostly resigned myself to trying to raise my kids as good Adventists in the hope that they might be saved even if I could not be. And then my world turned upside down.

My biological father had suffered several heart attacks and a stroke. Knowing he would not live much longer, he confessed to his daughter that he had once had an affair and that as a result she had a half-brother out there somewhere. Knowing that it might cause her family embarrassment and her mother pain, my sister chose to search for me. When she found me she embraced me as a brother. By the time I met our father, he was in a nursing home and was not cognitively able to acknowledge my presence. And yet, for the first time in my life, I gazed into eyes that looked like my own and glimpsed where I had come from. He passed away not long after that.

I journeyed to California to be with my sister and her mother as we observed a small family gathering at the graveside. When it was over I felt overcome by loss and a sense of what might have been. I felt the secure and stable world I had so recently built for myself slipping away. The deep dark depression from my youth was rolling in like a black malevolent fog to smother the small measure of happiness I had experienced as an adult. My moorings were breaking loose, and I felt myself wildly grasping for my lifelines—my wife and daughter. I had to get home and get home now, before my defenses shattered and the blackness descended.

Chris Lee is a graduate of Sunnydale Academy, Union College, and Andrews University. Chris and his wife Carmen left Adventism after 30 years, along with their daughters Ashlyn and Alyssa, to pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. For the past two years the Lee family has been involved in planting and growing a contemporary church designed to reach the unsaved. Chris is currently the discipleship coordinator for CrossBridge Christian Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, and is also a physical therapist directing Inpatient Therapies at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln.



I heard in my spirit, "I AM HERE." Just that, but along with the words came a sense of His presence that I had never before experienced. All of the fear and anxiety vanished, the black fog rolled away.

Nature seemed to work against me. Heavy thunderstorms delayed my flight from the Ontario airport to LAX. I became more and more anxious as time passed. When the flight finally left I had to endure a sickening carnival ride through the turbulent atmosphere. After touching down at LAX, I sprinted O.J. Simpson style to my connecting gate, only to find the flight to Denver badly delayed as well. Catching my flight from Denver to Lincoln, Nebraska looked like a slim proposition at this point. As I waited and gazed out the windows of LAX, it grew darker.

When the flight boarded an hour later I still retained a tiny hope of making it back to my wife and daughter that night, then we sat on the tarmac for an additional hour and hope fled. There were no more flights from Denver to Lincoln that night. I would not see my family. The darkness would descend far from home with no lifeline to hold to.

With fear and anxiety in the fore of my mind and deepest depression threatening to crowd in from somewhere in the depths, I cried out to God, "God, I have to make it home tonight. I don't know what You can do, but maybe You could just give me a tail wind or something. All I know is that if I don't see my wife and daughter tonight I'll come apart at the seams. You have to help me! I've been told that if someone has faith as small as a mustard seed that anything is possible. I don't have much faith, not much at all, but maybe just that much. I'm going to claim that promise, just please help me. Please!"

In that moment something happened that would forever change the course of my life. In that moment I finally understood what others meant when they spoke of hearing the "voice" of God. It wasn't an audible voice. It was something within and yet not from me. It was more a cognitive experience than an auditory one, but it was just as clear and just as real. I heard in my spirit, "I AM HERE." Just that, but along with the words came a sense of His presence that I had never before experienced. All of the fear and anxiety vanished, the black fog rolled away. In their place a surreal peace surrounded me. I cannot adequately describe it, but it was a sense of being utterly secure, afloat on a placid sea, wrapped in light and love. At that moment it did not matter if I made it home that night. It did not matter if I slept on the floor of the Denver airport. I knew with certainty that everything would be all right. God was there and He was real! He was no longer an abstract idea that I had heard about. He existed and He was with me.

Wrapped in a warm dreamy peace, I felt myself drifting off to sleep as I leaned against the plane window. Just as I was fading off I heard the pilot come

on the PA system to announce, "Uh folks, we seem to have picked up a pretty strong tail wind. We're probably going to gain a good twenty minutes. Some of you might make your flights yet." I just smiled from behind closed eyes. I felt like I could no longer be surprised by anything. The stiff tailwind from nowhere seemed like a pretty small thing in comparison to the miracle I had just experienced.

When we arrived at the Denver airport the departure time for the last plane to Lincoln had long since passed. Somehow I felt very calm about this news. I and another passenger from Lincoln deplaned and approached an airline employee. I asked at what gate the plane to Lincoln was loading. The employee checked her schedules and apologized to me as she told me that the flight had left the gate fifteen minutes ago. I politely asked her from what gate it had left. She said, "But Sir, it's confirmed. It's gone. I can help you find another flight tomorrow!" I politely but insistently asked again what gate it had departed from. When she shrugged her shoulders and told me, I took off running in that direction. The airline employee and the other passenger from Lincoln stared after me with incredulous looks. For the first time in my life I was running on faith.

Arriving at the gate out of breath I was not at all surprised to find my plane still there. I slipped on the plane and was reunited with my wife and daughter that night. My luggage made it home the next day, along with the other passenger from Lincoln.

Sometime later, a package arrived. In it was my father's Bible. My father's wife, the person who was perhaps the most injured by my father's affair and my existence, had wanted me to have her husband's Bible. Just inside the cover was a picture of my father sitting at his desk, studying the very book I held in my hands. In its pages I found my true Father. The notes and markings told me something about my earthly father, but the words told me about my Heavenly Father. I discovered Him through the glorious revelation of His Son Jesus Christ contained in the pages of scripture. In these pages, and through the loving acts of my sister and her mother, I also discovered grace.

As the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to me through scripture and the lives of others, I experienced a grace awakening. This awakening led me on a journey out of the bondage of legalism, out of Adventism, and into the Body of Christ. I will never be the same. I am still on a journey. This journey leads me Home, but unlike that night years ago, I now have absolute assurance that I will reach my destination, not because of anything I've done or can ever do, but because He is with me. !

Vicky, where are you?

ANGELA BULLARD

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. [...] Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Colossians 2: 13b-15, 17

My first remembrance of Vicky* is sitting in front of Redlands High School eating lunch together and listening to her explain how upset she was that her parents, when she turned sixteen, were buying her an Acura Integra instead of the red BMW she really wanted. I just couldn't understand why God gave me Vicky instead of the 'intellectual' Christian friend I had been praying for. Over the next several months, Vicky and I became close friends. We were both new to the school and clung onto each other because we didn't know anyone else. We were an oddity to say the least; I was an enthusiastic, serious Christian, and Vicky, outgoing and popular. Yet we both grew and matured through our developing friendship. She taught me how to loosen up and meet new people, how to dress and wear my makeup. I taught her how to see beyond the superficial cares of the day and about the deeper issues in life. Eventually she would look back and admit how silly she had been and how lucky she was to have a car at all.

At Redlands High School, I joined the Alternative Club, the Christian club on campus. Vicky would sometimes go with me, often asking me questions. As our friendship grew, so did her interest in spiritual things, and she began to attend church and youth group with me. After a year, she began to open up

and share her feelings with me, telling me about her experience as a Korean Seventh-day Adventist and what it meant to her and her family, in particular how her parents weren't "good" Adventists because they worked Saturdays.

The more I came to know Vicky, the more I became curious about Adventism and began asking my father, an evangelical minister, questions about the faith. Yet no matter what my father told me, he could not prepare me for what I learned from Vicky. Vicky had mixed reactions to her faith; at times she would hate it, and at times she would want to reform it. I asked her about the dietary laws, which she never seemed to adhere to, and she replied that no one she knew actually practiced them outside of church. She also said Ellen G. White was only some woman who was mentioned every once in a while.

There were many things that bothered Vicky in our later years together, including the lack of Biblical understanding by the people in her church and the lack of any real spiritual substance being taught. But the one thing that bothered Vicky the most was what she repeatedly expressed as the "social club" atmosphere. The people were not concerned with spiritual issues. They went to church, according to Vicky, to see each other and confirm an identity and bond with each other. Marriages were made and jobs gained through the church and its functions. A couple of times, she even went so far as to ask the pastor himself questions she had regarding the faith. I don't know their exact conversations, but I do know she was never satisfied.

Vicky had mixed reactions to her faith; at times she would hate it, and at times she would want to reform it.

Angela Bullard is currently finishing her M.A. in English Composition at California State University, San Bernardino. She also teaches English at Arrowhead Christian Academy and attends the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church in Redlands. She resides in San Bernardino with her husband and two sons.



...depression set in as she tried to conform to her parents' and church's standard, a standard she somehow could never quite reach.

Vicky never felt accepted by the church, the same church she grew up in. Curiously enough, it had nothing to do with the questioning of her faith, but more to do with her parents' career status as convenience store owners and their lack of church attendance. For this reason, Vicky never felt fully included and many times she felt angry with the church for making her father and mother feel inferior.

Vicky complained so much that I finally encouraged Vicky to find a new church, but she didn't feel comfortable going to unknown churches by herself—and more importantly, her parents wouldn't approve. Since she liked the youth group at my church, I invited her to come to my church. She always enjoyed our youth group whenever she came, and for a while she would go to her church on Saturdays and my church on Sundays, but she could never leave her church altogether.

In our senior year of high school, Vicky and I grew apart. We still hung out together, but things weren't the same. Vicky became more involved in her church than ever before, and I think she just resigned to her fate as an Adventist member, despite her qualms.

After high school, we lost contact. By chance, three years later, we met again at California State University in San Bernardino. It turned out she was transferring to Loma Linda University next quarter to become a dental hygienist. After talking with her, she revealed that this was her parents' dream for her. Besides, she told me, everybody in her church went into a medical or health profession. She secretly admitted she hated even the thought of working on people's teeth, but hygienists made good money, she conceded.

For the first time, she felt compelled to marry only a Korean Adventist. I remember asking her if she would consider marrying a Korean who was a Christian, but not Adventist. "No," she replied. I remember asking her if she would consider marrying a non-Korean Adventist. "No," she said. I guess it was then I knew her church and cultural background, not her faith, reigned supreme in her life.

I wasn't surprised when I received a phone call six months later from a sobbing Vicky. She told me she was kicked out of dental school due to low test scores. She was relieved, but she was scared of what her parents and her church would say after they discovered she had been kicked out. So Vicky kept up the lie of attending dental school until she could keep it up no longer. At which point, she decided that it was time she moved out of her parents' home and lived on her own. Returning to Cal State San Bernardino, Vicky studied Psychology—a field and a

school, she said, which is not considered proper by her church. More than this, however, depression set in as she tried to conform to her parents' and church's standard, a standard she somehow could never quite reach. In the midst of her depression she dropped all of her closest friends, even me, and I have never seen nor spoken to her since.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Colossians 2:8

My own experiences differed greatly from Vicky's, and I did not fully understand why Vicky felt so emotionally involved in Adventism, until I met a friend who shared with me her own experiences and what she had to go through before being able to leave the Adventist church.

As a believer in Christ, I am only too aware that my church, or any other church, cannot save me. Each person must come to his/her own realization that he/she is a sinner in need of a Savior.

The Bible says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" Acts 4:12. Christ is our all in all, the Alpha and the Omega. When any church or person takes precedence over or claims equality with Christ, it is idolatry. And when any other book (*Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, The Desire of Ages*, and the oral traditions of Catholicism) is elevated to equal status with the Bible, then we are telling God that his word is not sufficient.

Vicky, wherever you are, I hope you have persevered. Most of all, I hope that Christ is the center of your life and that whatever church you belong to, I hope it supports you in your quest to serve God and know Him. Most of all, I hope you understand that none of us deserve God and his goodness, but thank God, Christ paid our penalty in full in his work on the cross. There is nothing we can do to deserve our forgiveness or earn our way to heaven—"that work my Lord has done!"*

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch. These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Colossians 2:20-23 !

*Note: Vicky is not my friend's real name.
Horatius Bonar

Dear Conference President

J E F F R E Y H E L S I U S

The following is the first part of the letter of resignation (edited for publication) written by Jeffrey Helsius to William Miller, president of the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on May 24, 2004. Because of its scope and depth, we will run this letter in two installments; the first deals largely with the heresies endorsed by the church by its printing of The Clear Word. The second part of the letter, which deals with unbiblical statements of Ellen White, will run in the next issue of Proclamation!

Dear Bill:

I want to thank you for the many ways you inspired me to be a passionate leader for Jesus within the Seventh-day Adventist Church here in Minnesota! I promised I would explain more fully why I resigned my position as pastor of my four churches a month ago. I want you to understand how our journey to become authentic in our walk with Jesus has led us to where we are today.

Virginia and I believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is at the most important crossroad of its history; as a result of much Biblical study, and under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we came to the sad and persistent conclusion that we could no longer ignore the reality of what could be best described as a tale of two churches. Today the

Seventh-day Adventist church remains represented by two separate and distinct churches; the first being the historical, not fully disclosed, oftentimes dysfunctional church kept alive by misguided religious zealots, and the second, being represented by those who truly know Jesus Christ as their all sufficient Savior, Lord, and best friend, and who are sometimes brave enough to reject the heretically non-Biblical, non-Christ centered positions and emphases of the church's historical past. A war is raging between these two "churches" for the very "theological soul" of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Consider this theological war as it becomes translated into practical, "rubber meets the road theology."

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who enthusiastically embrace every line of historical Adventism still believe they must become literally perfect to survive the "time of Jacob's trouble," a supposed time in which the living remnant of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be abandoned to stand alone before Almighty God without a mediator brought about by the cessation of Christ's mediatory work within the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary. This cessation of mediation lasts from the moment Christ leaves the Most Holy Place, until He reaches earth to

Jeffrey Helsius was born into a Lutheran family. His pastor, C. Raymond Holmes, left the Lutheran church and became a Seventh-day Adventist minister, eventually accepting the post of Associate Dean of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Jeffrey, a teenager, followed his pastor, and in 1988 graduated from Andrews University with a BA in religion. Before accepting a call to the Adventist ministry, Jeffrey worked as a nursing home administrator, a career he and his wife Virginia are now pursuing in St. Augustine, Florida. He also writes, sings, and records music in his home studio.



herald His Second Coming. (It is a historic Adventist belief that this trip requires seven days of traveling. See *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, page 33.)

Why must the "remnant" be perfect during this supposed "time of Jacob's trouble"? Because at the very moment that Christ no longer intercedes on their behalf, they sincerely believe that their only hope of salvation will be their own intrinsic perfection; such a work of sanctification will mean that even their "inner man" will be perfect, even as Christ is perfect. Not only

Dr. Jack Blanco had done surgery to God's word, forcibly inserting doctrine and interpretations into scriptural verses which could never linguistically support such insertions.

in deeds, but even in every thought they will be perfect. Since Jesus will no longer be actively applying His blood during this time of travel from Heaven to earth, such a remnant must be able to stand alone before God, in their self-obtained perfection. Their perfection will be the perfect emulation of the perfection of Christ, and will qualify them to be treated as the special "remnant," the special entourage of Jesus forever.

Does the Bible ever say that sinful man will become totally perfect this side of the Second Coming? Does the Bible ever say that Christ will abandon the final generation to stand alone before Almighty God? Biblically based Christians know that such theological dogmas are simply not supported by the Bible. The Bible tells us: [emphasis supplied]

"If we **say that we have no sin**, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8. NKJV

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and **it has not yet been revealed what we shall be**, but we know **that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is." 1 John 3:2. NKJV

"...For He Himself has said, '**I will never leave you, nor forsake you.**' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" Hebrews 13:5-6. NKJV

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, **since He always lives to make intercession for them.**" Hebrews 7:25. NKJV

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I

am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen." Matthew 28:18-20. NKJV

And who could ever forget these words:

"...It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, **who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?** As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that **neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Romans 8:34-39. NKJV

So what can we conclude from the aforementioned scriptures? "Never leave" means exactly never! Being with us "always" means always! "Nothing can separate us" means that nothing can come between us and Christ for even a millisecond! The Bible says that if we think for a second that we are without sin, we are liars, and the truth is simply not in us! Belief in the attainment of a 100% intrinsic perfection before Jesus comes makes one a liar. The Bible teaches that we remain redeemed, growing in grace sinners, *until He is revealed!* The Bible teaches that *we shall not put on incorruption until the Second Coming!* (1 Cor. 15:52-54). How long, dear Lord, shall it be before the SDA Church decides to take a stand against the continued teaching of un-Biblical heresy?

Another example of troubling historic Adventist theology has to do with the entrenched Adventist belief that the exact date of Christ's coming is dependent upon human performance. For example, remember the Adventist postulation that if Seventh-day Adventists in 1888 had accepted the 1888 message, Christ would have come? Do you remember hearing in church school that the Second Coming of Christ was contingent upon the character of Christ being perfectly reproduced in His people?

Does the Bible teach such theology? Did the Apostle Paul or John the Revelator ever say that the Second Coming was dependent upon human performance?

God the Father already knows when His mercy will come to an end, and since He already knows exactly when Christ will come, the aforementioned Adventist belief that Jesus would have/could have come in 1888, is not Biblically supported, nor is it even theoretically possible within the context of God's omnipotence. Such a concept is an insult to the sovereignty and majesty of God! Regarding His Second Coming, Jesus said:

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. **But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.**" Matthew 24:35-36. NKJV

Clearly a fiasco of Biblical proportions!

About two years ago I began hearing my church members begin to discuss how much they liked *The Clear Word Bible*. That raised my curiosity, so I began to read my wife's copy of it. What I discovered shocked me! Dr. Jack Blanco had done surgery to God's word, forcibly inserting doctrine and interpretations into scriptural verses which could never linguistically support such insertions. Consequently he has taken the Word of God captive, sadly with the church's blessing.

To be fair we must note that Dr. Blanco claims he has written a paraphrase. Can we agree that a paraphrase is a Bible that uses conversational language to describe what is foundational in the root language of each verse? So would not the fruit of Blanco's work be determined by an analysis of the hermeneutical rules he either employs or does not employ in the production of his "paraphrase"? The proof is in the writing.

Virginia and I believe that God has allowed the publication of *The Clear Word* to awaken Seventh-day Adventists to a re-examination of what God's Word alone teaches! Tragically, since the publication of *The Clear Word* in 1994, the eyes of most Seventh-day Adventists have remained closed to the continued peddling of premeditated blasphemy within its ranks. [I wish I could say it in a nicer way, but the "no jot or tittle" theology is quite clear in Matthew 5:18.]

In addition, *The Clear Word* has clearly demonstrated that Dr. Jack J. Blanco is one of the many Seventh-day Adventists who hold fast the belief that Ellen White's interpretations of scripture take precedence in the sense that Ellen White's writings serve as the pre-eminent source of authority and comfort for the church, providing a more recent revelation of the meaning and interpretation of God's Holy Word, regardless of the fact that sometimes her statements seriously conflict with and/or oppose the words of the Bible.

Consequently, Dr. Blanco's loyalty to Ellen White and his loyalty to the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church most likely combined to form the rationale behind many of the inconceivable changes he has made in the wording of his version of the Bible.

Instead of letting the Bible say only what it says, Dr. Blanco has manipulated texts to make them appear to contain more theology than they presently contain. For example, Blanco adds over 80 brand new words to Daniel 8:14, and over 300 new words to Daniel 9:23-27. With such obvious attempts to manipulate key verses to support Adventist theology, other denominational scholars must just shake their heads and roll their eyes at such sectarianism.

The Clear Word, a sectarian interpretation of the Bible, is currently providing a major contribution to the diminishing reputation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as

a Bible based, Christian denomination. *The Clear Word* has placed the SDA Church aboard a fast train to the same distinction that other denominations such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Roman Catholics already possess: the distinction that they too have created their own blasphemous books and Bibles.

This move to publish a sectarian Bible is not surprising considering the number of Seventh-day Adventists who consider Ellen G. White's writings to be on the same canonical level as any other Bible writer or Biblical prophet. Inadvertently or providentially, the production of Dr. Blanco's Bible truly provides the SDA church with a heaven-sent opportunity to purge itself of anything that

***The Clear Word* has placed the SDA Church aboard a fast train to the same distinction that other denominations such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Roman Catholics already possess: the distinction that they too have created their own blasphemous books and Bibles.**

is not solidly based in scriptural truth! Doing nothing about it is a sin, because liars and fabricators, according to Revelation 21 & 22, will not enter the pearly gates.

"He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Rev. 3:22.

For those who would like to rationalize rhetorically that *The Clear Word* is not a Bible, I would like to propose this question, "Can you look up John 3:16 in *The Clear Word*?" If so, then was it not indeed designed to functionally serve as a Bible, instead of as a Bible commentary? The first published cover identified Dr. Jack Blanco's Bible as *The Clear Word Bible*.

Some say he never intended it to be read in church, or he never intended it to be a study Bible. I would like to ask respectfully, "What do his intentions have to do with the drastic additions and deletions he has made to the content of the Holy Scriptures?" How he intended it to be used does not allow him a "Pontius Pilate moment" to wash his hands of the consequences of changing God's Word. The bottom line is he created it, and with the assistance of the denomination, he has potentially placed it in the hands of millions.

I would like to appeal to the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to reconsider their tacit endorsement of Blanco's Bible. I give you some poignant examples: (emphasis supplied)

To Tell The Truth

Deut. 5:3 "The Lord **made not this covenant with our fathers**, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." KJV

Deut. 5:3 "**It wasn't only with our ancestors that He made a covenant**, but with us and with all who are alive today." Dr. Jack J. Blanco's *The Clear Word*

In addition to the King James Version, every translation I have in my library interprets Deut. 5:3 in the same way: that the covenant was not made with the ancestors. But when I pick up *The Clear Word*, I discover that Dr. Blanco obviously believes he can change the Bible and state that the covenant was made with the ancestors.

The change Dr. Blanco made to Thomas' statement about Christ would not only be considered blasphemy by Greek scholars, but would also be considered a theological step back, in line with such denominations as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Before I share any more examples, I would like to point out that the Old and New Testaments are very clear regarding the holiness of God's word and changes to it:

From Revelation 22:18-19, we are warned,

"And I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. And if anyone removes any of the words of this prophetic book, God will remove that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book."

In Christ's prayer to the Father in John 17, Jesus prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." John 17:17.

Deut. 4:2 teaches, "Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you from the Lord your God. Just obey them."

The Divinity of Christ

Probably because of the Arian views of early Adventist church leaders, and because such Arian influences can be found in the writings of Ellen White, I was not surprised when I read the numerous references in Dr. Blanco's Bible that water down the deity of Christ for no apparent reason.

In other words, if even the King James Version already utilizes succinct words that unquestionably declare

Christ's deity, why would Dr. Blanco use words and phrases that either change, or modify theologically, those declarations? Many examples exist, but I would like to share the following:

John 10:30. "I and my Father **are one**." KJV

John 10:30 "You see, my Father and I **are so close, we're one**." *The Clear Word*

In the KJV (and other translations in my library), Jesus is declaring that his nature and essence is exactly the same as the Father's. He is telling us, "I am the Lord, your God!"

Dr. Blanco, on the other hand, changes the emphasis and meaning of this verse from that which unabashedly declares Christ's claim to oneness in deity with the Father, to that which declares that the reason for oneness was not based on essence, but rather on their relationship.

Because Jesus is our Lord and our God, we cherish the truth of His word. From the gospel of John we read:

John 20: 28 "And Thomas answered and said unto him, **My Lord and my God**." KJV

John 20: 28 "Thomas stood there speechless. Then he fell to his knees and said, 'Lord, you're alive! They were right! I believe! **You are the Son of God!**'" *The Clear Word*

In the KJV, we have Thomas declaring in no uncertain terms that Jesus is fully his Lord and God! This declaration coming from "doubting Thomas" is an especially powerful testimony in light of Thomas' documented struggle with belief! Why then did Blanco add words to this verse that are completely contrived out of mid-air? And why did he choose to replace the words, "My Lord and My God," [*mon kurios kai mon Theos*], which declares Jesus to be Jehovah, with the words; "You are the Son of God"?

Regarding *kurios*, I share the following quotation from *Strong's Expanded Concordance*: "thereafter, except in Acts 10:4 and Revelation 7:14, there is no record that *kurios* was ever again used by believers in addressing any save God and the Lord Jesus." (Vines as quoted in *Strong's Expanded Concordance*, p. 147 of the Greek Dictionary)

Considering the effect that the word *kurios* had on the believers of Christ following Thomas' declaration, it is truly sad that Dr. Blanco takes the punch right out of John 20:28 by giving Jesus a different title than is literally found in this verse. We can only guess that Dr. Blanco's odd decision to water down the theology of this verse by inserting "Son of God," in place of "My Lord and my God" has something to do with his belief regarding the divinity of Christ. The change Dr. Blanco made to Thomas' statement about Christ would not only be considered blasphemy by Greek scholars, but would also be considered a theological step back, in line with such denominations as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Interestingly, Jehovah's Witnesses would also prefer Dr. Blanco's choice in title for Jesus, because the title "Son of God" does not in itself declare that Christ has always been. Those uncomfortable with Christ's divinity prefer

only the “Son of God” title, because they can use it to defend their belief that Jesus is the result of a creative act sometime in the distant past; not a part of “The I Am” construct of God.

The following verses are critical in the understanding of Christ’s divinity:

Colossians 1: 15-19 “Who is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created**, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should **all fullness dwell.**” KJV

Colossians 1: 15-19: “He is the visible likeness of the invisible God, and **as God’s firstborn, He has the right to be placed over all creation. Through Him the Father created** all things to begin with, both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. All order and power was instituted by Him, whether spiritual or secular, including the order of governments, rulers, and various levels of authority. All things were created by Him and are intended to serve His purposes. He existed before anything was created, and by Him everything that exists continues to hold together. He is also the head of the church and controls the church as the head controls the body. Although He existed from the beginning, He was the only human who ever died and conquered death. Therefore, He is worthy to be given first place above everything in heaven and on earth. With pleasure the **Father acknowledged Him as fully God, in spite of His human nature.**” *The Clear Word*

In spite of the many changes *The Clear Word* makes to this passage, I have chosen to review only three key questions that *The Clear Word* forces us to address: 1. What is meant by Christ being the firstborn? 2. Was Christ only a channel through which God the Father created all things, or was He able to create, because He too is God? 3. What is meant by the fullness of God dwelling within Christ?

In answer to the first question, the word “firstborn” in Greek, *prototokos*, as applied in Col. 1:15, means that Christ first existed before anything was created, and that He is the source of creation. (The genitive case is objective as verse sixteen makes clear. See Vines on *prototokos*.)

Dr. Blanco’s interpretive phrase in verse 15, “*He has the right to be placed over all creation*,” has no scriptural foundation. If I said, “John has been working here for twenty years and has the right to be placed in charge of production,” wouldn’t every rookie in the plant realize that he had not yet earned that right? We must conclude from reading Dr. Blanco’s interpretation that he believes that Christ, at some point in time, moved from not having “the

right to be placed over all creation,” to having “the right to be placed over all creation.”

Can God be placed? Only a created being can be placed, for God is in charge of His universe. This is plainly stated in Romans 13:1, “...For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” Blanco’s theology destroys Christ’s claim to deity within the Trinity and places Jesus within a theological context to be viewed as the created, instead of as the Creator.

There is no room in the concept of “The I Am” for a beginning to any aspect of God, or for a part of God to demonstrate growth to the other parts of God. Such theology has no place in Christianity but would find a home amongst the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons.

Blanco’s theology raises the question of whether Jesus was the source of creation, or only a channel of creation. We need look no further than these Greek words in verse 16: “*hoti in auto ektisthe ta panta*,” [because in Him were created all things]. The Greek is very clear that Jesus is the source of creative power: (“in Him, [*in auto*], were all things created”).

In contrast, *The Clear Word* states, “Through Him the Father created all things to begin with...” I’m puzzled as to how Dr. Blanco justifies his translation? The word for Father is not in the Greek text of this verse.

Finally, what is meant by the fullness of God dwelling within Christ? Again let us look at the Greek in verse 19: “*Hoti in auto pan to pleroma endokesen katoikesai*,” (because in Him all the fullness was well pleased to dwell).

The meaning in Colossians 1:19 is quite straightforward. Within Christ dwelt the fullness of “The I Am”! In Hebrews 1:10, the writer quotes Psalm 102 and applies it to Christ. The aforementioned citation from Psalm 102 was originally written as a Psalm about Yahweh; therefore the writer of Hebrews is making a profound theological statement when he addresses Christ as “Yahweh”: “And, You LORD, [Yahweh], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.”

Finally, as we close out our study of this passage in Colossians, we cannot leave without confronting Dr. Blanco’s interpretation of verse 19. Dr. Blanco chooses the following words to interpret “*hoti in auto pan to pleroma endokesen katoikesai*” (because in Him all the fullness was well pleased to dwell): “With pleasure the Father acknowledged Him as fully God, in spite of His human nature.” I’m sad to have to say that Dr. Blanco’s interpretation of verse 19 is pure fiction.

In concluding our study of texts that address Christ’s divinity, we can make this observation: Dr. Jack Blanco is apparently not comfortable with the Bible’s teaching regarding the divinity of Christ.

“Caution, You Are About To Enter A No Spin Zone”

The following text clearly warns the reader to fear going to hell—that is, until you read Professor Blanco’s version.

Matthew 10: 28 “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell.**” KJV

Matthew 10: 28 “Don’t be afraid that you might be killed. They can kill your body but not your spirit of loyalty to me. Now if there is something to be concerned about, **it’s that you don’t lose your faith in God.**” *The Clear Word*

The KJV uses the words, “destroy both soul and body in hell” because the translation is founded on the Greek manuscripts which state in Matthew 10:28, “to destroy both *psuche*, [breath / soul], and *soma*, [body], in *gehenna*, [hell].”

Dr. Blanco completely changes Christ’s words. The verse changes Christ’s strong warning about avoiding destruction in hell, to a gentle reminder not to lose your faith in God.

The Place of Grace

We continue with two texts that assure the Christian direct access to God, because the writer of Hebrews tells us that we may boldly enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Hebrews 10: 19-20 “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to **enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus**, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” KJV

Dr. Blanco completely changes Christ’s words. The verse changes Christ’s strong warning about avoiding destruction in hell, to a gentle reminder not to lose your faith in God.

Hebrews 10: 19-20 “Therefore, my brothers, we have complete freedom **to come to the Sanctuary in heaven and with confidence come into the very presence of God through the blood of Jesus and what He has done for us.**” *The Clear Word*

As demonstrated in the KJV, Christians of the apostolic age, steeped in the symbolism of the sacrificial system, were given complete assurance that Christ’s death was once and for all an acceptable sacrifice; the reader is told that he may now have access to the holiest place in heaven because the blood of Jesus has created a living way to enter into that place, i.e. the throne of God.

The word *hagion* means sacred, holy place, most holy place, holiness, or sanctuary. The context of the verse declares which holy place. The obvious context of Hebrews 10:19-20, tells us that the word *hagion* is referencing the fantastic news that Christ’s shed blood and broken body has cut the curtain, enabling our souls to gain by faith bold access to that Holy place which was once off limits to 99.99% of mankind! Dr. Blanco didn’t choose the obvious contextual interpretation of *hagion*; he opted instead to interpret *hagion* as a generalized description of the Sanctuary building—probably for the same reason that Dr. George R. Knight, in his book *Exploring Hebrews*, preferred the word Sanctuary over “Most Holy Place” in his translation of Hebrews 10:19.

Who do you suppose hates the idea of direct access to The Most Holy Place?

We will look at another sanctuary reference in Hebrews, chapter six:

Hebrews 6: 19-20 “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which **enters the Presence behind the veil**, where the forerunner **has entered for us**, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” NKJV

Hebrews 6: 19-20 “This hope is a sure and steady anchor for our souls. Our hope is not in ourselves; it is in Christ. This is the hope that **allows us into the Sanctuary behind the curtain** where **Christ now serves** as our High Priest after the eternal priestly order of Melchizedek and not after the transitory priestly order of Aaron.” *The Clear Word*

The NKJV translates the Greek word *esoterous*, which in combination with the Greek word *katapetasma*, means “that which is within the veil.” The object of this phrase, as so aptly translated by the New King James Version, is “the Presence behind the veil.” So why do you suppose Professor Blanco didn’t come up with a translation that more closely resembles “that which is within the veil”, or “that which is within the curtain”, or “that which is within the inner Sanctuary”?

Dr. Blanco probably chose the word sanctuary so that his use of the word curtain could be interpreted within the context of the entire Sanctuary building; thus his curtain could either refer to the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, or could simply refer to the entrance curtain to the first apartment.

Further, Dr. Blanco’s decision to replace the word *eiselthen* [entered], for the phrase, “Jesus now serves”, was probably done to accommodate Seventh-day Adventist theology regarding Christ’s ministry in the Sanctuary at the time this verse was written.

Since Dr. Blanco’s interpretation ignores *esoterous katapetasma*, consequently defying hermeneutical logic in light of Ex. 26:33, Lev. 16:2, 12, 13, Ex. 27:21, 30:6, 40:22-26, Lev. 4:6, 17, 16:15, 24:3, Num. 18:7, and Matt. 27:51, and since he ignores *eiselthen*, we can only conclude that

Hebrews 6:19-20 challenged him in a way that he could not accept at face value.

I want to finish this section regarding Professor Blanco's changes in the book of Hebrews, with a curious deletion he makes of the Greek word *thronos* in Hebrews 8:1-2, and the curious addition of the word "earth":

Hebrews 8:1-2 "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, **who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens**; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." KJV

Hebrews 8:1-2 "The whole point of what I've said is this: Our new High Priest is so great that He **took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty of heaven and earth**.

He serves in the Sanctuary in heaven which is the original Sanctuary, set up by God and not by man." *The Clear Word*

I would love to ask Dr. Blanco why he removed the Greek word *thronos*, [throne], from his translation. And why did he add the word "earth" when it wasn't there? Maybe the reason behind Blanco's changes to Hebrews 8:1-2, is so that Christ's seat at the right hand of God can refer to all of heaven and earth in a general way. But is that what the Bible says in Hebrews 8:1-2?

The writer of Hebrews included the word for throne for a reason. It distinguishes the place where God has accepted the sacrifice of my Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. It distinguishes Christ's rightful place in heaven, after giving His life for me and you! Who desired to usurp the throne of God in heaven? Do you suppose he would still like to remove Christ from His throne even now?

Who Is Michael the archangel?

We will complete our overview of *The Clear Word* with a final example of Professor Blanco's work:

Jude 1:9 "Yet **Michael the archangel**, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, **The Lord rebuke thee.**" KJV

Jude 1:9 "In contrast to these ungodly men is **the Lord Jesus, also called Michael the Archangel, for He is in charge of the entire angelic host. When He was chal-**

lenged by Satan about His intentions to resurrect Moses, He didn't come at Satan with a blistering attack nor did he belittle him. He simply said, '**God rejects your claim to his body.**'" *The Clear Word*

In the KJV, Jude 1:9 is clear. What Dr. Blanco has inserted into Jude 1:9 is serious linguistic fiction. There are five Biblical references to Michael. Look them up and you will not find the Bible calling Jesus, Michael the archangel. (Daniel 10:13, 10:21, 12:1, Jude 9, and Revelation 12:7)

Since we have previously studied some of Dr. Blanco's problematic translations on the divinity of Christ, it should not surprise us that he not only lowers Christ's title in Jude 1:9, by referring to Him as an angel, but consequently places Jesus in a direct confrontation with Satan where in Christ's hands are tied. Jesus cannot pronounce a railing judgment against Satan, nor can He rebuke this author of sin because according to this verse, only the Lord can do that: "The Lord rebuke you!" By putting Jesus in this situation and having Him refer to God outside of Himself, he again denies Christ's divinity.

Scripture teaches us that Jesus is superior to any angel! Hebrews 1:3-14 clearly explains the ways in which Jesus is above them.

To call Jesus an angel, is—well, to call Him a created being. And if He was once created, He cannot be my Savior, for only God could pay the penalty for my sins. I would love to know why Dr. Blanco's Bible has to make Jesus into an angel. What angel do we know who would like to lower Christ down to his level?

Every Christian within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is facing the same challenge as faced Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Will we bow our knees to the image of church authority, as evidenced in the publication of the *The Clear Word* by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, or will we stand straight and tall upon the Word of God, counting it a privilege to enter the furnace with Christ; not stopping to count the cost in family and friends? **!**

We conclude this letter in the next issue of *Proclamation!*

DISCUSSION FORUM • BIBLE STUDIES • TESTIMONIES

for former Seventh-day Adventists

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First things first CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Nevertheless, for most of us, once we clearly understood the gospel, we began to see cracks in the Adventist theological paradigm that caused us to continue our study.

Not only is gospel clarity an important study for the process of transition, it is also the subject of utmost importance! After all, if there is one topic that needs to be clearly understood it is, "What must I do to be saved?" Therefore, we put this as the first order of business for the transitioning Adventist. One must be absolutely clear here. Misunderstanding the gospel at best will rob us of assurance; at worst, it might keep us from experiencing eternal life. The importance of this subject cannot be overemphasized.

However, before we actually discuss this subject we must look at the rest of the big three.

Authority

How is one to determine the essence of the pure gospel? For Adventists this is not always an easy answer. Some will say, "Just read *Steps to Christ* by Ellen White. It will become clear." Other Adventists who still use the KJV might answer, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. 22:14.

There are many Adventists who would agree with either or both of the above. However, there are major problems with either. Few Adventists know that the real author of *Steps to Christ* was Fanny Bolton. True, Miss Bolton was working for Ellen White as her secre-

This translation error is why it is best to use a modern literal translation when doing serious Bible study...

tary when Miss Bolton gathered and arranged the material for *Steps to Christ*. So in that sense it could (and is) said that Ellen White was the author. However, one must not trust their eternal destiny to a person working for Ellen White.

Next, few Adventists—especially those who still use the KJV—know that the translation of Rev. 22:14 is not the correct translation. Modern literal translations such as the NASB or the NIV have "wash their robes" in the place of "keep his commandments" in this verse. Why? Scholars are quite certain how the variant reading of "keep his commandments" came into being. In Greek there is only a slight difference in spelling between "keep his commandments" and "wash their robes." And these two words sounded identical in Greek at the time the Greek manuscripts were copied. The method sometimes used in copying manuscripts was to have a reader who would read the text, and then there were several scribes who would transcribe it. As the two words sounded identical and both, in a sense, made sense within the context, one scribe wrote "keep his command-

ments" when it should have been "wash their robes." The earliest manuscript witness we have reads "wash their robes." This translation error is an illustration of why it is best to use a modern literal translation when doing serious Bible study as it will reflect the most accurate translation based upon the best manuscript evidence. Most Adventist evangelists know that it is easier to "prove" Adventist theology from the KJV. That is the reason many give away a free KJV Bible to those who attend. While there are several other aspects of concern dealing with the topic of authority, we now identify the last of the big three, and then we will come back to each for further development.

Ellen White

The transitioning Adventist must once and for all come to grips with Ellen White. Either she was a true prophet (or inspired messenger) of God, or she was not. If she was, then we must all return to Adventism, for she repeatedly states that those who leave the Adventist church will end up becoming infidels and lose their souls.¹ If she was not, then we need not be bound by her many statements damning those who question Adventism.

This is no little matter for Adventists. It must be resolved. I remember the months of turmoil Carolyn and I went through seeking the answers regarding Ellen White. Fortunately, there is a lot more easily accessible information available today on Ellen White than there was for those of us who left in the 80s.

Expanding on the big three

Authority

While the gospel is usually the first discovery most transitioning Adventists make, that discovery leads them quickly to the question of authority. As they learn that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus alone, they begin to compare what they've read in the Bible with what they've learned from Ellen White and also from church doctrines. Whatever we decide is our authority for truth will determine what we believe the gospel to be. Because the issue of authority colors one's perception of the gospel, I will address this issue first even though the Gospel is usually the discovery that leads to this question.

When I was struggling with the issue of authority, I reached my conclusion based upon the Bible, Ellen White and church doctrine. While there are contradictions in both the writings of Ellen White and church doctrine on this matter, the Bible witness is clear.

The Bible Witness

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." 2 Tim. 3:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Rom. 1:16

"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 Jn. 5:13

"...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." Jn. 20:31

"...and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 3:15

The witness of Ellen White

"But 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. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support."²

There are many conflicting statements in the writings of Ellen White on this topic. At one time she will point to the Bible as the ultimate authority. At other times she puts her writings in that place.³

The witness of church doctrine

The Adventist church is also somewhat unclear. For example, point number one in the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists states:

"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."

However, having stated this, we now turn to point number 17 in the same statement of beliefs where we read:

"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."

Summary

If we believe we stand in the heritage of the Protestant Reformation, it seems clear that we must take the Bible and the Bible only as our single authority in testing the "truths" of Adventism. According to the passages above, however, both Ellen White and official church doctrines claim her writings to be authoritative in a way most Christians consider the Bible to be authoritative. No author, however, can claim the kind of inspiration Ellen White claims for herself and be considered credible according to biblical standards.

There is yet another aspect of the topic of authority that we must consider. Having accepted the Bible as our only authority, we must next understand the function of hermeneutics, a subject which deals with the presuppositions and principles of interpretation.

Adventism was founded on the "proof-text" method of Bible interpretation.⁴ When in academy I was taught to study the Bible by the "here a little and there a little" method. And that is the method often used to prove most of the unique teachings of Adventism. However, that hunt-and-peck method is not how the Bible should

be studied. We must learn to study the Bible in context, verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, book by book. While there are times when doing a topical study one must gather together a number of Bible references, nevertheless the ideal way is to read and interpret passages in their own context.

Our doctrine and beliefs should come from passages that deal with the subject matter. They should be didactic passages, such as we find in the New Testament and especially in the epistles of Paul. For example, if one wants to understand salvation, turn to the book of Romans where Paul deals with this subject thoroughly and in the correct order of subtopics. If one needs information regarding the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament sanctuary, read Hebrews. If one wants to understand the difference between the covenants, read Galatians and 2 Corinthians 3 as well as Hebrews.

Whatever we decide is our authority for truth will determine what we believe the gospel to be.

Doctrine should seldom, if ever, come from the visionary passages of Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation or other such apocalyptic sections. Most of these books are open to numerous interpretations.

It is also important to realize that we do not have to have all the answers, especially to questions dealing with the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecies! Rather, where the Bible is clear, we can and should be certain. Where the Bible is unclear we must be tentative. To be dogmatic in the interpretation of Scriptures that are unclear or are honestly open to more than one interpretation is the foundation of the disunity within the Christian church and the recipe for cultic teaching.

When we have established that the Bible alone is our authority for knowing the will of God and the way of salvation, we can rest in its clear, simple teaching, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) Understanding that the Bible is our only authority also calls the integrity of Ellen White into question. If her writings cannot be considered authoritative for salvation, doctrine, or practice, then we must be willing to give up our dependence on them as unreliable at best and soul-destroying at worst and look to the Bible only for our standard of living.

Once a transitioning Adventist has determined what the Gospel is, once he has established the Bible as the only source of authority for knowing God's will and the way of salvation, and once he has dismissed Ellen White as a reliable source of instruction for a Christian, he will find the reality of Jesus and the certainty of salvation anchoring his soul in Sabbath rest. **!**

Endnotes

¹ See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 189, 190.

² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

³ See *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 31–42.

⁴ See *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 51–82.

How does a former Adventist find a new church? CONTINUED FROM BACK

to our faulty theology. We totally surrendered to His will and voice. We intently listened for His answer and began to get immediate, confirming responses privately directing each person to verses of scripture addressing His trustworthiness. Among them was Isaiah 30:21, "You will hear my voice behind you when you turn to the right or the left saying, 'This is the way, walk in it!'"

Within a very few days, He began physically to move us. Each individual felt impressed to attend a non-denominational community Bible study. We sensed it was important that we obey His promptings quickly rather than questioning what we were feeling. We prayed, "Lord, if this isn't the right thing to do, send someone to give us a direct invitation, because we seem too stupid to get it right," and we took our first steps away from our isolation.

That first evening at the Bible study, four people invited us to visit the same church. We responded to this direction quickly, attending a service the following night. When we entered that church, we were struck by a tangible sense of the presence of God. The people were very friendly and joyful. The electric guitars and drums were a surprise, but the words of the contemporary worship songs were like living water to our dusty souls. The teaching was straight from the Bible. The following Wednesday night we returned to hear a message taken from the Song of Solomon about the trustworthy love of God for His children. At the end of the service the pastor made a statement that took our breaths away: "I believe the Lord wants someone here to know that it is time to come in out of the wilderness." That statement was a direct confirmation of where we knew we were. We have been attending that church, one that meets on Sunday, ever since.

Like we were, many former Adventists are surprised to learn that Christianity is not ignorant of the "Sabbath question," contrary to Adventism's teaching. The truth is that Christianity long ago recognized that a believer is not required to observe a certain day. In humility we had to acknowledge that the New Testament church's moving away from the seventh-day Sabbath observance has resulted in God's blessing, not in the condemnation imposed by Adventism. The gospel, uncluttered by legalistic reasoning or requirements, is being openly preached in Christianity, and peoples' lives are being transformed.

It makes sense that the Lord has separated salvation from the Sabbath so that there would be fewer stumbling blocks to salvation. If it is God's desire to re-impose the Sabbath on the church, it follows that His blessing on the Sunday congregations should be diminishing. Such diminishing is not the case. Once we realized that God has always been moving in Sunday churches, the Sabbath became a moot point. Church history records that when God deems an issue important, He is quite effective in confirming His point by pouring out His Spirit "on all flesh" as He did when people turned to Him during the Reformation with the preaching of righteousness by faith. Similarly, the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit among believers worshiping Jesus and studying His word on Sunday confirms His blessing and His presence among them.

The question remains: how is the former Adventist to judge the soundness of the doctrines of a church body? We discovered that, fortunately, Christians have long agreed on the primary points of orthodox Christianity: God is Creator; Jesus is His Son and was born of a virgin; Christ lived and died to provide the only way for our salvation; Christ was resurrected and is coming again; the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity, and the Bible is our only trusted standard of faith. We discovered it was very important to recognize that all Christian churches are a part of the body of Christ rather than there being only one true denomination or group.

To these essentials of faith we added some lessons learned from Adventism: a church should not be focused on the externals of dress or so called "divinely inspired" extra-Biblical commentary. We learned that a healthy church is one that is outwardly focused and shares the whole gospel rather than concentrating on a pet doctrine. We also learned that it was imperative that we, as former Adventists, keep an open and teachable attitude. Adventist theology leads one to the circular reasoning of E. G. White. Her doctrines, traditions, fictions, and counsels are set in the Adventist church as if in concrete. The freedom from these restrictions became obvious when we found ourselves in the right church body—one to which God had led us, one which honors the essentials of the Christian faith, where the gospel is taught, where Christ is central, and where the Bible is the foundation of all teaching.

We learned that what we needed was not a particular denominational affiliation, worship style, or socio-economic profile; what we needed was a place where God showed up. Our new identities in Christ finally began to grow when we chose to stop focusing on non-essentials and parted company with false doctrines.

Most formers will realize, as we did, that they have been totally isolated from true Christians and must now place themselves in a position to be vulnerable and transparent with other Christ-followers. If you are in the position of wondering where to go now that you have left Adventism, allow the Lord to lead you to meet the people with whom he wants you to grow. He may lead you to try attending concerts or special services at area churches or to attend a community Bible study. Ask the people there what they like about their churches and what activities their churches are doing. Perhaps you might invest time volunteering to work with a nondenominational Christian ministry in your area.

Above all on this journey we must remember God is to be trusted as our Guide and Protector. We have His promise in Psalm 68:6: "God sets the solitary in families. . ."

He has a family prepared and waiting for you. **!**

Lydell Oltmans and her husband David live in southeast Alabama. David is a helicopter pilot-instructor training Air Force students. Lydell is a homemaker and caregiver for her elderly mother. They are active members of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship where they are leaders in servant evangelism outreach.

God bless you

God bless all of you in the former Adventist ministries! I feel certain this will be very helpful not only to the people who attend Adventist churches but also the disillusioned youth who were raised Adventist and do not realize how different the teachings are from the Christian churches, [and who leave] believing that perhaps God has abandoned them because they cannot buy into the church's (or should I say EGW's) version of the Bible. They really believe that if they leave the "truth," they are going to hell, and they live life thinking "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." God bless you all; it takes a great deal of courage to do what you all are doing.

This is God's work, so He will sustain it

I would like to convey my sincere appreciation for placing me on the mailing list to receive your magazine *Proclamation!* It was indeed a very pleasant surprise to find it waiting for me at my hotel last Friday afternoon. I have read it and enjoyed every article as I was able to identify with so much in all of them because of my Adventist past. Having also read the "Letters to

the Editor" section, I can see why your magazine receives either thankful praise or condemning criticism from Adventists; why they love it or hate it. Because [the magazine] exposes Adventism for what it is—a soul-destroying cult—there is no "on the fence" or middle road position one can adopt towards it. One is either set free from Adventism by reading it, or he is confirmed in Adventism more than ever by siding against it. There is also no other way I can describe Adventism than a soul-destroying cult. I was an inmate in its house of bondage for twenty years until set free by the Gospel in 1980! I would also like to encourage you and your staff to continue your liberating ministry amongst Adventists and members of other cults. This is clearly God's work you are engaged in, so He will sustain it until it has served its divine purpose. Therefore look to Him for all your needs. He is faithful and will see you through to the end. Be assured also of my prayers for you and your staff.

Pitcher makes too much of Knight's comment

Stephen Pitcher makes too much out of George Knight's comment (Review of QOD

[Annotated Edition] March, April 2004) that Ellen White's trinitarian statements drove Adventists back to their Bibles. He writes: "This provides great insight into the methodology used by Adventist scholars... they were reading the writings of Ellen White, then looking for biblical support for her statement."

I can just hear those who rejected the Apostle Paul's preaching put the same interpretation on the Bible study of the Bereans. (Acts 17:10-11) Pitcher is "reaching." *Proclamation!* needs to be more careful about editing this sort of thing out of that which it publishes. It is one thing to be a critic. It is another to be confused by one's negativism.

Editor's Note: The difference between the Bereans/Paul and the Adventist pioneers/Ellen White is that Paul preached from the Scriptures and explained how Jesus fulfilled them. He did not first preach another gospel and then change his teaching to the Bereans. They went to the same Scriptures Paul proclaimed to verify for themselves what he had already taught them. Ellen White had previously negated Jesus' deity. The early Adventist pioneers, including James White, had actively taught non-trinitarianism. The leaders in place when her trinitarian statements appeared in print went to the Scriptures to research this issue after she changed her stance and said Jesus was fully God. They went to the Scriptures to validate their prophet's change of stance, not to study for themselves the Scriptures already proclaimed to them.

Freedom In Prison

Thank you for sending me *Cultic Doctrine* and past issues of *Proclamation!* I have been reading and rereading them over and over again. They have really helped me grow in grace and knowledge.

My mother, a 25-year SDA member and one of this world's deepest lovers of Jesus Christ, will someday thank you also. She does not know it yet, but due to you and your team's efforts, the burden of Seventh-day Adventist's teachings will be lifted from her shoulders, as it was from mine.

The greatest relief, nay blessing, was to finally KNOW I was saved. And this came about, for me, in the revealing of E.G. White's false claims to be a prophetess. It's so easy to get caught up in the idea one must do something to secure one's salvation. My soul has been unburdened knowing all that is for me is a changed heart. No outward ordinance or food restrictions have anything to do with my salvation. Keeping it simple, as Christ intended. He has done all there is to do.

My cell-mate has recently accepted Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Your ministry truly is from above. I could never stop telling you "thank you" for all your support. Thank you, Jesus, for Life Assurance Ministries!

First annual conference of former Adventists convenes in July

The first annual conference of former Seventh-day Adventists will be held July 30 and 31, 2004. Join conference organizer Rey Cantu and twelve guests, mostly former Adventist pastors and physicians, who will be sharing their testimonies. The conference will be held at Calvary Chapel, 200 West Park Row, Arlington, Texas. Telephone: (817) 903-6731.

Speakers include: Antonio Lopez, physician and clinic director from Montemorelos, Mexico; Ricardo Carreon, dentist, from Texas; Hervy Alcorta, physician from Mexico; Kenneth Brantley, president and CEO of Brantley Broadcasting Network from Tennessee; Dale Ratzlaff, author of *Sabbath in Christ* and *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*; Dirk Anderson, author of *White Out* and founder of www.ellenwhite.org; Paulino Marquez, former Adventist pastor from Corona, California; Claudio Inglenon, former pastor from Corona California; Abram Benitez, former pastor from Texas; Eddis Velasquez, former pastor from Victoria, Texas; Saul Gonzalez-Cantu, veteran of the Gulf War, Kosovo, and Iraq conflict, currently stationed in Germany; William Castillo, former church elder, Texas; and conference organizer Rey Cantu, motivational speaker and former pastor, Keene, Texas.

The first meeting will be from 6:00-9:15 on Friday evening and will include introductions, speakers Dale Ratzlaff and Paulino Marquez, and a closing by Pastor McDaniel. Saturday morning meetings begin at 9:15 and continue until 1:00. The afternoon meetings will begin at 3:15 with worship and will continue until 9:00 P.M. with a variety of speakers and a roundtable discussion.

The goals of the conference are to reaffirm the assurance we have of salvation through Jesus Christ, to share how to witness to those in bondage, and to share experiences and testimonies. "We are not alone!" is the conference slogan.

I would like to request the book *Sabbath in Christ*. My cell-mate and I, plus a few other brothers in the yard, will be doing a study on the Sabbath, and I believe your book would really be a major contribution to directing us to an appropriate study. Thank you.

Please keep me on your mailing list, and keep *Proclamation!* coming. I can't wait for the next issue. Thank you for caring and helping me walk closer with Jesus Christ. I love you.

Please Remove Me

I am receiving *Proclamation!* at my home. While I am a former Adventist, I am not a Christian nor a believer in the Bible, so the messages in your publication are of no interest to me. They seem to be just so much internal squabbling among factions of believers. Please remove me from your mailing list.

Many Kinds of Adventists

I get your magazine and read it all. My husband was an Adventist minister for twenty years, then quit on his own. He became an entrepreneur; I am a nurse. We both studied and came to the conclusion, "You tell me what you think an Adventist is, and I'll tell you whether I am one or not." There are many kinds!

I want the book *Cultic Doctrine*. I will read [it]. I have sent money and will send more next month.

Time to study

I was raised in the church at Oakwood College and lived the chalked road of Adventism. I am now a 34-year-old married mother of four who has raised her children to be Sabbath-keepers. I have come to regret that training when I look at my two oldest boys who could have been professional basketball or football players. However, that is not my argument with the church.

I have found, like most former Adventists, that I had no knowledge of the Bible that I could share with others that was not from the words of E. G. White. I can say that I am very disappointed in the time and energy I spent teaching my children and family about a false prophet and am really tearing myself up over keeping the Sabbath holy. I am not working now because of a three-car collision that has cost me three surgeries and my job. However, this situation is exactly what I had asked God for: being able not to work and to spend all my time studying His truth. This studying is how I stumbled onto your web site and learned what my former co-worker had been trying to show me for the last year while on the job.

Please send me the book *Cultic Doctrine*, and if you can, please send me pamphlets and other supporting information that can help me in my new studies. I really appreciate any and every-

thing that you could send to help me and my teenagers better in our transition.

Reaction to Ratzlaff's Response to Clifford Goldstein

I am glad you have responded to Clifford Goldstein's *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies*, because it shows clearly where the battle is, from your perspective. I would like to comment on that and on the matter of personal responsibility in the quest of truth. Then, an appeal.

Let us settle one thing about truth: Truth is vital; it is dangerous to lightly regard truth. Jesus declared that He is the way the truth, and the life. Our respect for truth is the same as our respect for Jesus. When we consider our relationship to the quest for truth, we are considering the quest to know God and Jesus. According to Jesus, this quest is eternal life itself. So, can any of us think that we are a faithful follower of Christ, if we are careless in the quest for truth? By careless I mean taking the position that it matters not what the truth is. If we agree this far, then it seems obvious that it would be a most serious error to leave to another to determine what is true. To let someone else do our study of the Bible would be the same as letting someone else do our praying. Both are our responsibility and duty alone, and it is dangerous, if not sinful, to rely on other's praying and studying.

Your response to Brother Goldstein contains a recommendation that those who want answer to the DARCOM series see works by Cottrell and Mazzaferri. That is fine. We do well to consider what others have to say. But the challenge that Goldstein laid down for you was that you yourself show from the Bible that you have considered and can refute the DARCOM series. And now I am ready to come to my two points:

1) The battle for you is clearly a battle over Ellen White's position. Are Ellen White's views more important to your understanding of the investigative judgment than they are to Goldstein? Your whole basis of attack, as evidenced in your reply to Goldstein, is based on what she said. Yet, as you know, she clearly never wanted anyone to limit their understanding of doctrine to only what she said. She tells you to base everything on the Bible. Your comment that "Adventists are scurrying about making numerous reinterpretations... designed to make it appear that this doctrine is biblical..." show that you will not allow the Bible to answer the question of whether the investigative judgment is true. This is not your interest. The battle for you is all about Ellen White. As such, you have the same problem as those ultra conservative Adventists who limit their understanding of various passages of scripture to what she wrote.

2) You have not shown that you have personally grappled with the evidence that supports the

investigative judgment. Those who have read Dr. Ford's or Dr. Cottrell's or anyone's challenge to this doctrine and let these settle the matter for them are making the dangerous mistake of letting someone else think and study for them. I ask you to remember that how we handle the quest for truth tells us our level of respect and devotion to Him who is the truth.

I am sure that you gave up on the biblical quest for the truth about the investigative judgment doctrine far too soon.

Dale, do us all a favor and at least answer Goldstein's arguments in chapter three of his book. That is, his arguments against your view that the little horn of Daniel 8 is Antiochus IV. You and Dr. Ford give no good biblical or historical reasons for your contention that the little horn is Antiochus IV. Goldstein has overwhelming biblical support for his rejection of the Antiochus IV interpretation. Others have also dealt death blows to this idea. But all you have is your reliance on the views of "nearly all Bible scholars." As I say, others have also given powerful reasons why your view is incorrect (e.g. Dr. William Shea). However, limit yourself to Goldstein if you want, but please show us that you are willing to grapple with exculpatory evidence with respect to the investigative judgment—personally grapple with the exculpatory evidence.

I would appreciate it if you would give my full name and the fact that I am a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church instead of just my initials. I am very glad to let people know who wrote the foregoing.

Brad Williams

Pastor, Colton-Fontana district, California

Ratzlaff's response: I appreciate your taking the time to write. Have you read *Cultic Doctrine*? If not, I will send it to you if you promise to read it. You will see that I have spent hundreds of hours, if not thousands, researching this question. I have talked to many key leaders in Adventism including people at the General Conference, local conferences, and Adventist scholars who were on the top secret committee that met for five years to try to solve the problems regarding this question.

I have found no one who can logically get from Daniel 8:14 to 1844 using sound principles of interpretation. If you think you can do this, please correct me and show me how to do it.

I believe that Goldstein's work does not show how to arrive at 1844 from Daniel 8:14; rather it is an attempt to make it look like it can be done.

Just give me a Bible study. Give me the references necessary to prove this doctrine, and I will become an Adventist again.

Regarding Ellen White: I have come to the studied conclusion that she is not a true prophet; she contradicts herself numerous times, has

made false prophecies, and contradicts the Bible numerous times.

Lifeline

Your magazine is my lifeline as I transition out of nearly 50 years of Adventism. I want to thank you for your prayers and praise God for bringing my child out of drug addiction. She's finding her spiritual pathway and is excited about life in Christ.

It's a crying shame

I have begun to study the Bible for myself again after a period of backsliding. I have read parts of *The Clear Word* and looked it up on the internet. I found the site where you share what you have been led to believe. I wasn't surprised.

I just wanted to thank you for being open and honest about the path you have been led down and for confirming what Bible prophecy says what will happen in the last days! It's just a crying shame that so many people who know to do right and do it not will come up sadly and deadly mistaken when the end of one life comes and eternity begins!

You have succeeded in concreting in my soul what I knew for a long time that I needed to do!

Jesus died to vindicate God's character?

My husband just resigned from being an elder. We have been having problems with some of the doctrines floating around. We were both raised Adventist, but I was raised much more

strictly than he was. Since both of us have been getting into the Bible and only the Bible, we have noticed that Jesus Christ seems to be minimized by a lot of Adventists. One of the theologies going around is that you do not need to go through Jesus to get to the Father, and that God sent Jesus to die for our sins only to vindicate His character. [This belief] shakes the whole foundation of God's character. I find that people who only use Ellen White seem to be off on their theology, and that's because they let her do the thinking for them. We were always told to study and think for ourselves, but the minute we do, and possibly disagree, we are branded "heretics". It's sad. If we could keep our eyes on Jesus, we could get through all this. He promises us that.

Deep in religion, shallow in spirituality

Many thanks for sending me your magazine *Proclamation!* which I do appreciate very much.

When my church (the Worldwide Church of God) decided to adopt the new covenant doctrine, I thought my life was over (smile) because I was a Sabbath Keeper from my youth. However, after reading *Sabbath in Crisis*, which is in our church's library and was recommended by one of our regional pastors, I felt relieved, because it was the very first time that I heard anyone explain to the full extent the meaning of the Sabbath.

I have friends and close relatives who are members of the Adventist church, and I have personally noticed that they are deep in religion, but very shallow in spirituality.

I think what has shocked me most of all are replies you received from some Adventist members wishing you would burn in hell, etc., instead of doing like the Bereans did. Then they would have seen that what you are saying came directly from God's words, the Bible, and not from a human being who has proven to be wrong time and time again.

Thank you once again. Keep up the good work you are doing, and may God richly bless you.

Appreciate your magazine

Just a quick note to encourage you to keep up the good work. I have not been in Adventism for a number of years now, but I really appreciate your magazine. In fact, I place it as one of the better theological journals that I read. The reason is that in the evangelical world there is a very heavy emphasis on sins, not sin, and less on the work of the Holy Spirit working the life of Jesus Christ as our life. So, even though you have touched on more meaty doctrinal issues, it is the milk of the Word you emphasize. This emphasis is what the evangelicals are stumbling over, despite their having a proper understanding of the more meaty doctrinal issues.

As a Christian I had to relearn all my doctrinal views that were incorrect in Adventism, but despite my understanding of the rapture, state of the dead, hell, etc., I still stumbled over the fact that Jesus Christ came to give His life for me, so that He could live His life through me. What is more important than a good understanding of the gospel?

Treated as heretics

Thank you for sending me the March/April issue of *Proclamation!* I read it from cover to cover. Today, while waiting for somebody, I re-read the Letters to the Editor. I could send you several similar notes, but would not for fear of being identified and paying dearly for it. However, the following paragraph is general in character and would not lead to speculation.

Mrs. White has stated many a time that her writings are meant—among other things—to lead to the Word of God. However, the opposite has taken place. Those who best know her writings are the ones who are least familiar with the Bible; and those who regularly study the Scriptures and look into them for answers to their questions are, in their sight, a bunch of heretics. And they treat them as such, openly!

God bless you, and those who work at your side!

Mail letters and donations to:

Life Assurance Ministries
PO Box 905
Redlands, CA 92373

Correction

In the last issue of *Proclamation!* we published an editorial error in Dennis Fischer's article, "Should Christians Practice Tithing?" The following sentence was added during editing and is incorrect: "The Levites not only did not tithe, but Israel's tithes supported the Levites." Following is Dennis Fischer's explanation:

"Although the Levites were required to give a tithe of the tithes received from the people to the priests, the priests themselves were not required to tithe anything. Only a relatively small percentage of the Levites served as priests in the temple. Actually, Israel's tithes never completely supported the Levites in their 48 cities. At least four square miles of land belonged to each Levitical city. Therefore, the cumulative amount of land equaled almost 200 square miles for pasturing and cultivation. It is interesting that this amount of Levitical land was very near the square mileage assigned to the tribes of Benjamin and Zebulun.

Since some of the cities that the Levites inherited were the most prosperous in the nation, their combined property value would almost equal that of the lesser Israelite tribes. These facts ought to put to rest the belief of some church leaders who imagine that the Levites lived solely off the tithe of the other tribes. In no way was this true. The Levites had to work for their living as anyone else. Only when Levites attended the service of the Tabernacle (whether on a full-time or part-time basis) was the tithe expected to support them (Deuteronomy 18:6-8).

We apologize for not checking the editing change with Dennis Fischer before publication. We now have instituted a policy not to go to press without having edited manuscripts checked and approved by the authors.

—The editor

Finding a family: How does a former Adventist find a new church?

LYDELL OLTMANS

In 1989 our family left our local Adventist congregation after the Lord had made us aware of certain doctrinal problems. Only gradually we learned that the haunting echoes of our old beliefs—"We are the only true church, so there's nowhere to go if you leave," and "To worship on Sunday is to accept the Mark of the Beast"—were huge stumbling blocks in our spiritual progress. Today we understand that by leaving, we had taken only our first step on a spiritual journey. Back then, however, we arrogantly believed ourselves to have some greater grasp of truth than "other Christians" who met on Sunday. We may have left our local church for good doctrinal reasons, but we still believed ourselves superior to all non-Sabbatarians.

Once we are indoctrinated into Adventism, we become unaware of the baggage of Adventist error that we carry. Our journey out of Adventism was a process of recognizing those errors and of learning truth to replace them. As a result of our indoctrination, we experienced what others who have also left have discovered: we faced an identity crisis once we took our initial steps to leave the church. The immediate question we faced after leaving was, "What do I do about the Sabbath and church attendance?" Our search for a church home underscored this question clearly and raised some related ones: Where are we to go now that we have left the true church? How are we to judge the Biblical soundness of a church? Is there a church out there that we can be a part of safely?

Our arrogant belief that Sabbath-keeping was superior to Sunday worship led us to meet together as a home church with friends who had also just left Adventism. While it was God's intention for us to meet together for study and support, our fellowship was not intended to take the place of a church body.

Our process of unlearning error began during our "home-church time," but there were no mature believers present to point out the Scriptures we had long overlooked and thus challenge many false beliefs to which we still clung. Consequently, for eight dry, joyless years, we muddled along in our own understanding.

God, though, is a Father who loves His children and declares that

He will never leave us nor forsake us. He has given us the Holy Spirit as a guide and teacher, and He names Himself the Provider of our needs. In fact, the 2,000 years of church history testify that He has faithfully kept His promises by bringing His children together into healthy church bodies. After all, Jesus said that true believers would worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, and this type of worship has been happening for centuries in congregations—Sunday congregations at that!—throughout the world. God our provider was about to wake us up to our true spiritual condition.

As our home group time stretched on, we reached the point of being miserable and disgusted with ourselves. We saw our children growing indifferent to the things of God and of the Bible. Looking back, we see clearly now that God's design for His church has always been that of "family" and accountability. He uses fellow Christians with differing experiences to help us grow. What we didn't understand then but know now is that for former Adventists to meet exclusively with other former Adventists is to prolong the spiritual disorientation they experience as they leave the church. There is spiritual stretching which can only come from being connected to true believers who have not been burdened by legalism. (1 Corinthians 12:12-21)

We missed so much because of our isolation in those years. We were rather proud of meeting as we understood the churches of Acts had met. Unfortunately, we overlooked the important characteristics of those churches. Rather than being isolated islands, they had contact with other groups and with the apostles. They willingly received instruction and rebuke to prod their growth. We overlooked the importance of accountability. We chose to ignore the fact that those churches, unlike ours, grew.

We finally realized that we were in a very dry spiritual wilderness, in danger of starving to death. After self-examination, we confessed to God that we didn't have all the answers and that it was obvious that our plans were not His plans. There was something liberating about that confession.

We desperately wanted to hear His thoughts and have His confirmation of His plans for us. We became pregnant with the expectation of His faithfulness to answer our hearts' cries uttered from the center of our wilderness. We decided to step out in faith with a determination to stay the course of His directing whatever the cost

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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