

The Truth About Seventh-day Adventist “Truth”

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The Adventist Dilemma

We are often asked why we write material which *appears* to be attacking the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is a valid question that deserves a thorough answer.

Many current Adventist leaders have been in communication with our ministry and have encouraged us to keep doing what we are doing. These leaders include at least one (often many) of the following: Adventist pastors, conference presidents, Adventist evangelists, Adventist theologians, General Conference personnel, other Adventist organizations, including people in well-known mass-media organizations, and self-supporting Adventist groups. Most of the people who have contacted us state that they remain in the SDA church for one or more of the following reasons: (1) Help Adventists to understand the gospel. (2) Try to change the church from the inside (3) Want to stay for job security and retirement. (4) Want to stay for family and reputation. Most of these people want to remain anonymous and we will grant their request.

We want to focus on the simple gospel of faith in Christ and by God's grace help the Adventist church make the transition from its cultic past into a Bible only based church and jettison its unbiblical doctrines.

Thousands of former Seventh-day Adventists who have made the transition to the simple gospel of Christ and have become Bible only believers have expressed the joy of the freedom they experience in Christ. They have a deep desire to help free others from the bondage of Adventism. At a recent Former Adventist Pastor's Conference in Texas, many of the speakers stated that they did not know the extent of Adventist bondage they were under until they had transitioned out of Adventism. Many felt they had been brain washed and looking back could not understand how they could have believed what they did.

There are a large and ever growing numbers of Adventist scholars, pastors, administrators and laity who know that many of the historic teachings of Adventism are unbiblical, anti-gospel and should be rejected. Many more, however, tenaciously hold to traditional teachings of Adventism as *the* truth. Today the Seventh-day Adventist church faces a dilemma. To renounce its cultic past and jettison its unbiblical teachings would split the church, erode its financial support and could damage the many good things that Seventh-day Adventists do. However, to cling to and try to defend the historical teachings which many know to be unbiblical is to continue to give reasons for informed members to exit Adventism.

As former Seventh-day Adventists who have many, many friends within the Adventist church it is our prayer and purpose to help those who are seeking to change the church from the inside. Those of us who have transitioned out of Adventism know from personal experience the trauma involved in changing one's theological paradigm. We also know from the recent history of the Worldwide Church of God that doctrinal change would bring a period of uncertainty and chaos to the whole organizational structure of Adventism. The horns of the dilemma are sharp indeed. The good news, however, is that after the transition is made, there is a deeper

relationship with Christ, a new appreciation for Biblical truth and a new kindred spirit with other Christian brothers and sisters in the Christian church at large.

In seeking to promote change we want to be kind to our “mother church” yet we must be open and honest in facing the errors that are embedded in Historic Adventism.¹ From our perspective it appears that the Adventist church is chameleon. In its public relations it seeks to appear to be a mainstream Christian church. Yet in the latter stages of most Adventist evangelism or doctrinal teaching, it teaches that the Seventh-day Adventist church is the “remnant church of Bible prophecy”, that the seventh-day Sabbath is the seal of God mentioned in Revelation that all true believers in the last day will need to escape the seven last pelages, that the Catholic Church or its Pope are represented by “Babylon” in the book of Revelation and that the Sunday keeping churches are “the daughters of Babylon” and all true Christians in the last days are to be called out of churches who worship on Sunday so they will not receive the mark of the beast.

In conversations with many current Seventh-day Adventists and former Seventh-day Adventists we² have decided that the method that has the most potential to bring needed doctrinal reformation is to expose the teachings of Historic Adventism to the Christian community. It is our hope and prayer that this will in some small way encourage the Adventist church to face these issues openly instead of trying to cover them up with good public relations. If the Adventist church continues to hold its historic teachings, then our efforts in exposing these to the church at large will be beneficial to Christian pastors and arm them with information to keep their members from being caught in the legalistic yet enticing evangelistic net of Adventism. Most Evangelical and other Christian pastors, to say nothing of the laity; have no idea of the cultic nature of some of the doctrines of Adventism. With this introduction we now turn to what we believe are the main errors of Adventism.

Seventh-Day Adventists believe the writings of Ellen G. White are “an authoritative source of truth...”

This is perhaps *the* underlying error of the SDA church. The *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, No. 17, includes the following statement.

...As the Lord’s messenger, her [Ellen G. White’s] 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 tested³ (Emphasis added).

SDAs⁴ believe the writings of Ellen G. White (EGW) are inspired on the same level as the Bible.⁵ Because she is the later inspired writer, many SDAs hold that her interpretation of the

¹ I use the term, “Historic Adventist” to apply to those who believe the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Adventism.

² Former Adventists on the outside of the church.

³ For a complete listing of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists, see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 1996, pp. 5–27.

⁴ Historic SDAs.

⁵ In recent years much new evidence has surfaced which demonstrates the many problems associated with the writings of Ellen White. In order to keep these as “inspired writings,” SDAs have had to liberalize their concept of inspiration to allow for such things as massive plagiarism which was denied, historical errors, suppressed visions, inaccurate statements, and contradictions to the Bible.

Bible is to be preferred.⁶ While it is true that the writings of EGW contain much very good material,⁷ it is equally true that they contain gross error.⁸ Her early writings⁹ are legalistic and very condemning of nearly all other churches. She, with others of her time, saw the Catholic Church as “Babylon” and the “Harlot” of Revelation, but she did not stop with the condemnation of the Catholic Church. She called the Protestant churches which did not accept SDAs unique teaching on the three angels messages of Revelation 14 “fallen churches” and the “daughters of Babylon.”¹⁰

Ellen White did not invent SDA erroneous theology, but she cemented it into the foundation of Adventism. The writings of Ellen White support, and are often the chief support, for all of their unbiblical doctrines. And here is the Adventist dilemma: many within Adventism would like to jettison EGW as “a continuing and authoritative *source* of truth” and the unbiblical doctrines supported by her writings. To do so, however, would cause a serious crisis in Adventism. To avoid this crisis, Adventist leadership has used over a dozen different tactics of dealing with *known error* without ever admitting to the error.¹¹

The Seventh-day Adventist church claims to be the remnant church of Bible prophecy

Historic SDAs hold that they are the true, remnant church depicted in Revelation 12. The *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, No. 12, entitled, “The Remnant” reads as follows:

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. *This remnant* announces the *arrival of the judgment hour*, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. *Every believer* is called to have a personal part in *this worldwide witness* (emphasis added).

Note well that it is “this remnant.” *No* other church holds the 1844 investigative judgment hour message of SDAs. This is their unique “contribution” to Christian theology.¹² Also, note that “every believer” is called to have a personal part in “this [SDA’s] worldwide witness.”

⁶ “Adventists who deny this historic equation (Bible study + EGW confirmation = Adventist distinctives), for whatever reason, are forced to go back into the confusion....To ignore history would put us back to the same uncertain playing field where all other churches are each contending that it alone believes in ‘the Bible and the Bible alone.’ The deep doctrinal struggles within Evangelicalism today are fought by strongly convinced men and women who believe their positions rest on the Bible only. Without Ellen White, that same impasse would continue to fragment the Adventist denomination.” Quoted from Robert S. Folkenburg, *From the G.C. President*, “Off the Back Burner,” January, 22–April 22, 1996.

⁷ Much of the best material is copied from others. See Walter Rae, *White Lie* for many illustrations of plagiarism.

⁸ See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*; Cleveland, *White Washed* for many examples.

⁹ *Early Writings* is a title of one of EGW’s books. However, I use the term here to include all of her early writings, many of which contain much error.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, pp. 135, 140, 155, 156, 169, 172.

¹¹ See Dale Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, chapter, “Lumps Under the Rug”.

¹² See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine* for a thorough evaluation of this unbiblical, anti-gospel doctrine and/or Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment*, Euangelion Press, Casselberry, Florida, 1980,

All Sunday-keeping churches are a part of the great “apostasy,” or “Babylon.” So even as SDAs acknowledge that, “God has His children in all churches,” they add, “but through the remnant church He proclaims a message that is to restore His true worship by calling His people *out of the apostasy and preparing them for Christ’s return.*”¹³ A Christian, then, is not prepared for Christ’s return unless he has joined the remnant, the Seventh-day Adventist church.

This one doctrine mandates the raiding of other churches. They feel called, not only to reach non-Christians, but to convert Christians to the “truths” of Adventism. Thus, their Revelation Seminars, and other evangelistic programs, are structured to get people to make a decision to join the remnant church—meaning the SDA church. Those who do are said to have finally “come into the truth.”¹⁴

It may immediately be seen how difficult it is for *informed* Evangelicals to work with *historic* Adventists who hold such teaching. It is also difficult for Adventists to *honestly* work with Evangelicals.

Traditionally, Adventists have supported their claim to be the remnant church of Bible prophecy by linking their two “proof texts” of Revelation 12:17 and 19:10.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Rev. 12:17

From this text they seek to “prove” that the rest (remnant, KJV) have two identification marks: (1) they keep “the commandments of God” and (2) they have the “testimony of Jesus.” The commandments are interpreted to be the Ten Commandments, including the fourth commandment of the seventh-day Sabbath.

The second identification of the remnant, Adventists say, is “the testimony of Jesus.” To explain what this means, they immediately jump to Rev. 19:10 where they read,

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

From this verse they define the testimony of Jesus as the spirit of prophecy. So, they say, the remnant church will keep the Sabbath and have the spirit of prophecy. According to the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, No. 17,

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...(emphasis added).

Here, right in their doctrinal statement, SDAs list the prophetic ministry of Ellen White as “an identifying mark of the remnant church.”

The SDA claim to be the remnant church of Bible prophecy rests, then, upon their Sabbath keeping and their acceptance of Ellen White as “the spirit of prophecy.”

Adventists fail to observe that in the writings of John, the Greek word, *entole*, translated “commandment” in Revelation 12:17, is *never* used for the old covenant, Ten Commandment,

¹³ P.G. Damsteegt, et al., *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, [Washington D.C.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988] p. 168; emphasis added.

¹⁴ “Come into the truth” is a term frequently used by SDAs when speaking of other “Christians” who have accepted the teachings of Adventism.

law. Rather John *always* refers to old covenant law by the Greek word, *nomos*. Translated, “law.”¹⁵ Thus, their claim that the Sabbath commandment is in view here is without warrant.

Adventists’ use of Rev. 19:10 appears to put EGW in the place of Christ! Jesus, however, not Ellen White, is the spirit and theme of all prophecy. Note how the following Bible translations have captured this thought:

Those who bear testimony to Jesus are inspired like the prophets (*The New English Bible*).

For the truth revealed by Jesus is the inspiration of all prophecy (*Weymouth*).

For the testimony of Jesus is what inspires prophecy (*Goodspeed*).

It is the truth concerning Jesus which inspires all prophecy (*Knox*).

The purpose of all prophecy and of all I have shown you is to tell about Jesus (*Living Bible*).

Jesus is the theme and spirit of all prophecy. This text has *nothing* to do with Ellen White! Jesus said,

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of *Me*; John 5:39.

It is very clear that Adventists *misuse* both Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 in their claim to be the true, “remnant church of Bible prophecy”.

The reason this doctrine is so hurtful to the church at large is obvious. How can an Evangelical honestly see an Adventist as a brother in Christ when the Adventist subscribes to this fundamental belief? Remember it says, *every believer* [this would include the Evangelical] is called to have a personal part in *this* [SDA] worldwide witness.¹⁶

Seventh-day Adventists teach the seventh-day Sabbath is the “seal of God”

Revelation depicts a sharp demarcation between those who serve God and those who serve the “beast”¹⁷.

Adventists have traditionally held that the Seventh-day Sabbath is the seal of God. Ellen White on numerous occasions confirmed this in her writings. Ellen White wrote that Sabbath observance would be the “line of distinction” in the “final test” that will separate God’s end-time people who “receive *the seal of God*” and are saved, from those who “receive the mark of the beast”¹⁸ and are cast into the lake of fire.

The traditional Adventist support for the seventh-day Sabbath as the seal of God comes from the common understanding of what a seal is. It is a mark which shows authenticity by (1) giving the *name* of the one in authority, (2) the *title* of the one in authority, and (3) the *dominion* of the one in authority. Seventh-day Adventists show that the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment has

¹⁵ See Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, Life Assurance Ministries, 1995 Chapter 19, “The Sabbath and Seventh-day Adventists” for a thorough discussion of this topic and a complete listing of *entole* and *nomos* in the writings of John.

¹⁶ *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, No. 12.

¹⁷ Rev. 7:2, 3.

¹⁸ White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, p. 605; emphasis added. Describing a supposed vision direct from God, she wrote, “I saw that the Holy Sabbath *is*, and will be, the *separating wall* between the true Israel of God [in context, true Christians] and *unbelievers*” (*Early Writings*, p. 33; emphasis added). She also wrote that Sabbath observance “was of sufficient importance to draw a line between *the people of God* and *unbelievers*” (*Ibid.*, p. 85; emphasis added).” See www.watchman.org/sdapro.html.

all of this information: “The Lord” (name), “The Lord your God” (title), “Who made the heavens and the earth, and sea and all that is in them” (dominion).

This may be good human reasoning, but the New Testament *never* speaks of the Sabbath as the seal of God. Because the Sabbath commandment was placed in the very center of the Ten Commandments, it served as the dynastic sign of the Sinaitic Covenant.¹⁹ On several occasions *within the old covenant* we find the Sabbath called a *sign*. In context it is *always* the sign between God and the *sons of Israel*.²⁰

Never is the Sabbath called a seal or a sign within the new covenant. Rather, the Holy Spirit is said to be the seal which the Christian receives when he believes.

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us in God, who also *sealed* us and gave us *the Spirit* in our hearts as a pledge (2 Cor. 1:21, 22).

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were *sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise*, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:13, 14).

And do not grieve the *Holy Spirit* of God, by whom you were *sealed* for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

According to Scripture it is the Holy Spirit and not the seventh-day Sabbath that is the seal of God. According to the New Testament the seventh-day Sabbath is *not* the sign which is to be remembered. Rather, Christians are to celebrate the Lord’s Supper (the new covenant sign)²¹ in remembrance of Christ.

Again, the reason for pointing this out is that this teaching hinders *functional* church unity. There is no major problem with Christians worshiping on Saturday. However, when SDAs make their Sabbath keeping a sign that they are right and everyone else is wrong, then that teaching becomes very divisive. This is especially so when such great importance is placed on a divergent teaching. It is clear that the Epistles never place positive emphasis on Sabbath keeping. Never do they explain how the Sabbath is to be kept and Sabbath breaking is never included in any New Testament lists of sins.²² This certainly seems strange if the Sabbath, as Adventists claim, is to be *the* testing truth for *all* Christians in the last days.²³ The Apostle Paul teaches that the Sabbath is to be included with the other holy days of the old covenant and serves only as a shadow of Christ.²⁴

Seventh-day Adventists teach that Sunday keeping is, or will become, the “mark of the beast”

The flip side of Adventist’s teaching that the Sabbath is the Seal of God is their teaching that Sunday observance is, or will become, the mark of the beast. Remembering that the writings of

¹⁹ See Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, pp. 40–43 and Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, pp. 13, 14.

²⁰ Ex. 31:13, 17; Ez. 20:12, 20.

²¹ See Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:19, 20.

²² See Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, and D.A. Carson *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, Zondervan.

²³ “The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty...when the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve him not.” White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

²⁴ See Col. 2:16 and Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, pp. 247–258.

Ellen G. White are “a continuing and authoritative source of truth,” consider the following statement:

The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord’s memorial of creation...The mark of the beast is the opposite—the observance of the first day of the week. This mark distinguishes those who acknowledge the supremacy of the papal authority from those who acknowledge the authority of God.²⁵

On one hand, Adventists want Christians to consider SDAs to be within mainstream Christianity. On the other hand, SDAs condemn all Sunday keeping mainstream churches. Many Evangelicals, not knowing the real teachings of SDAs, consider them as mainstream Christians or even Evangelicals. Their mainstream appearance, however, is only a façade. Deeper understanding reveals their real teachings are an unbreachable “separating wall.”

The Adventist teaching that the Sabbath is the seal of God and Sunday observance is, or will become, the mark of the beast, while completely unbiblical, is one of the most effective magnets Adventist preachers have in their evangelistic tool box. Coupled with other distinctive doctrines such as the SDA church being the remnant church of Bible prophecy, it has tremendous drawing power. Adventist evangelists quote the frightening description of those who receive the mark of the beast.

And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”²⁶

Then, with this large lever of fear, they put the squeeze on those attending their Revelation Seminars and other evangelistic programs. Their appeal goes something like this: “You must come out of Babylon (Roman Catholicism) and leave the daughters of Babylon (the fallen Sunday-keeping Protestant churches) in order to avoid the mark of the beast. If you want to receive the seal of God you must begin keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath and join the Seventh-day Adventist Church which is God’s true, remnant church of Bible prophecy.” Thus, SDA *doctrine* is often the point of decision rather than faith in *Jesus Christ*. While SDAs do preach Christ,²⁷ the strong pull of their evangelistic magnet is often their exclusive, unbiblical doctrines.

Seventh-day Adventists teach that Daniel 8:14 refers to October 22, 1844, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and start of the “investigative judgment”

The *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, No. 23, “Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary,” describes this doctrine as follows:

²⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 117.

²⁶ Rev. 14:9-11

²⁷ Especially “Evangelical Adventists.”

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who, among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.

Many SDA theologians, administrators and pastors know there is *no* biblical support for this doctrine and many will admit to this fact in private conversation with trusted people.²⁸ However, this doctrine serves as the very foundation of Adventism and is strongly endorsed by Ellen White who called Daniel 8:14 “the central pillar of Adventism.”²⁹ It is the glue that holds the central message of Adventism—the three angels messages of Revelation 14—together. Many feel that to jettison this teaching would be to commit denominational suicide. After all, how can the “central pillar” of Adventism be error?

The investigative judgment doctrine is like an octopus with tentacles reaching into every aspect of SDA theology. Following is a summary of what is included in this doctrine. Those who want more detail with the supporting references quoted, not just listed, may find these in *Cultic Doctrine* in the chapter entitled, “The Sliver.”

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment teaches that at His ascension Christ entered the outer apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. From that time until 1844, he performed a ministry of intercession and forgiveness analogous to that of the earthly sanctuary’s outer apartment.³⁰ In 1844 Christ entered into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary for the *first* time^{31,32} to begin a work of investigative judgment.³³ This judgment deals *only* with those who have professed to believe in Jesus.³⁴ The wicked, according to SDA theology, will be investigated during the 1000 years³⁵ and executed shortly after the close of the 1000 years of Revelation 20.³⁶ The investigative judgment starts with the cases of the dead, reaching clear back to Adam and reviews the life

²⁸ The author has personally spoken with many SDA pastors, several SDA theologians and a few church administrators at the conference level who acknowledge this is not a biblical doctrine.

²⁹ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 409.

³⁰ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 420. See also *Early Writings*, p. 252; *Review and Herald*, 1850-03-01; 1905-11-09; *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 158.

³¹ See Knight, *Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, p. 126. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 422., *Southern Watchman* 1905-01-24.

³² Some Adventists make yet *another* reinterpretation in trying to harmonize EGW’s statement that Christ entered into the Most Holy Place in 1844 with the teaching of Hebrews 6:19. They state that Christ entered the Most Holy Place at His ascension to dedicate the Most Holy Place and then withdrew to the Holy Place until 1844.

³³ White, *Review and Herald*, 1887-03-22, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 308.

³⁴ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 483, 486. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 420.

³⁵ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 480, *Early Writings*, p. 292.

³⁶ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 662.

records of every person who has professed faith in God. Every deed is closely examined. Each succeeding generation is investigated and judged.³⁷ At some time—none know when—the cases of the dead are completed and God then moves to the cases of the living.³⁸ SDAs believe they will not know when their name comes up in judgment.³⁹ Therefore, it is extremely important that they engage in no frivolous activity or sin. Every sin must be confessed. *Sins which have been forgotten and unconfessed will stand against them in the judgment.*⁴⁰ Their characters must demonstrate perfect obedience to the Ten Commandment law,⁴¹ especially the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.⁴² Some names in this list of professed believers will be accepted, others will be rejected.⁴³ When every person confessing faith in God has come up in review, Jesus *then* pleads his blood before the Father on behalf of those who are *found worthy*, and blots out the record of their sins from the books of heaven.⁴⁴ After that, not knowing if, or when, the work of investigative judgment has been completed, the righteous, still in their human state, before the second coming of Christ, will have to live in the sight of a holy God *without an intercessor.*⁴⁵ This completes the atonement.⁴⁶ Next, Jesus takes the sins of God’s people and transfers them to Satan, who, Adventists teach, is represented by the Day of Atonement scapegoat in Leviticus 16.⁴⁷ Satan then bears the ultimate responsibility for all the sins he has caused the righteous to commit. He will suffer for these sins in the lake of fire and then be blotted from existence.⁴⁸ The investigative judgment is conducted before all the intelligences of the universe. This vindicates the character of God before all the unfallen beings.⁴⁹ At that time everyone will know the immutability of the law of God and the righteous character of God.⁵⁰

This doctrine rests upon some twenty-two assumptions. Most of these are contrary to biblical evidence.⁵¹ Not only is this doctrine unbiblical, its teachings are *contrary* to the New Testament gospel of grace.⁵² Remember, this “work of judgment in heaven” judges *believers* by their works, and that “*every believer*” is called to have a personal part in *this* worldwide witness—the SDA church. Obviously, then, no “believer” who fails to heed the call to join the “remnant” church and participate in its witness can legitimately expect to pass this judgment if one accepts historic SDA theology.

The lengths to which Adventists will go to find support for this doctrine are amazing! For example, *The Clear Word Bible*⁵³ without *any* manuscript support, at Daniel 8:14, reads SDA

³⁷ Ibid., p. 483.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 490.

³⁹ White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 315.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 331.

⁴¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 218.

⁴² White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 257, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 483.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 486. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 266. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 530.

⁴⁵ White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 432. See also *Early Writings*, p. 280; *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 198; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 614.

⁴⁶ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 422.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 422. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 266.

⁴⁸ White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 267.

⁴⁹ Adult Sabbath School Lessons, 1996, *Three Angels’ Messages*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ White, *Review and Herald*, 1901-06-18.

⁵¹ See Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment*, Euangelion Press, Casselberry, Florida, 1980, pp. 174–176; Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, pp. 167–182.

⁵² See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, pp. 205–223.

⁵³ While Adventists do not want to “own” *The Clear Word Bible*, it is none-the-less a work of their hands. It was written by the chairman of theology at Southern Adventist University. It was printed by the SDA Review and Herald

theology right into the text! Following is this text quoted from the NASB and then from *The Clear Word Bible*.

And he said to me, “for 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored” (Daniel 8:14, NASB).

He said to him, “After two thousand three hundred *prophetic days* (or two thousand three hundred years), God will step in, proclaim *the truth about Himself* and restore the ministry of the Sanctuary in heaven to its rightful place. *This is when the judgment will begin, of which the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary was a type*” (Emphasis supplied, Daniel 8:14, TCWB)

One can immediately see how this contrary-to-the-gospel, unbiblical, teaching creates an *insurmountable* wall prohibiting functional church unity.

Seventh-day Adventists teach soul sleep and those who believe in the immortality of the soul are under one of the two great errors of Satan

The Adventist teaching of soul sleep is set forth in the *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, No. 25, “Death and Resurrection” as follows:

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later.

I personally, do not believe that this doctrine, by itself, is a major point of that would separate believers. However, you may wish to read the following section that is in brackets. After the end of the brackets, however, is a vital point that must be considered.

[Most evangelicals believe the souls or spirits of deceased Christians go immediately “to be with the Lord.”⁵⁴ Then they are reunited with a resurrected body at the second coming of Christ.⁵⁵ Adventists, however, like Jehovah’s Witnesses, say that the souls are sleeping until the bodily resurrection. In either case, it appears, *the next conscious* moment after death, the righteous are with the Lord. It may seem, therefore, that this doctrine *by itself*, does not hinder functional church unity. However, this is not the end of the story.

Both Christians and SDAs acknowledge that in the Scriptures the word *sleep*, as applied to death, is imagery, or figurative language. The division comes over what, exactly, is the *reality* of which sleep is apt *imagery*. In real sleep, there is a real, living person present; one’s existence, thoughts, and emotions continue from the waking state, through the sleep state, and back again into the waking state. *One’s mind is not totally inactive during sleep*. Even more important, *one’s actual existence is not interrupted*.

Christians would acknowledge the same as being true of death. There is a real person whose existence continues, however different that existence may be from this life, and whose thoughts and emotions continue, however dissociated from this life they may be.

SDAs, however, portray the reality of which sleep is figurative as essentially non-existence. Under the heading “*The Person Returns to Dust*,” a “person” is said to be an “organic unity” in

Publishing Association (which, one may be sure, would never contract to publish non-SDA spurious translations of the Bible such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ *New World Translation*). It was advertised in SDA periodicals. It is sold in the Adventist Book Centers across the country.

⁵⁴ See 2 Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 1:21–26; 2 Tim. 1:10; Mark 12:18–27; John 6:40, 47; John 8:51; John 11:25, 26.

⁵⁵ See 1 Cor. 15:35–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18.

which, “body and soul *only exist together*; they form an indivisible union.”⁵⁶ The “soul” is not an entity having an individual self-conscious identity. It is nothing more than “breath,” or “the life principle.”⁵⁷ Its return to God is nothing more than God withdrawing the power of life. The lifeless body, which is not a “person” by itself anyway, then rots and disintegrates in the grave. SDA doctrine therefore denies that any real “person” exists between death and resurrection. A “person” only exists in a live state. In death no actual person really exists.

This creates a philosophical and ontological problem for Seventh-day Adventism. Clearly, according to such doctrine, in death a person ceases to exist. It would be highly improper, even figuratively, to speak of a dead person “awaiting” anything, as no dead person exists. And if a person ceases to exist at death, then “resurrection” can have nothing to do with any person who has lived and died, but is the creation of another being altogether. What does it matter that in creating such a being God might fashion it to look like a previously existing person who has died? To whose advantage is it if God installs all the memories, thought patterns, even DNA structure, of such a previously existing person who has died, in His new being? All such considerations entirely miss the point. It is still a new, different being. Of what interest can such a being be to one who knows his own existence will certainly come to a complete end?

Perhaps to counter this problem and the hopeless despair it necessarily entails, SDAs offer this statement:

Death Is a Sleep. Death is not complete annihilation; it is only a state of temporary unconsciousness while the person awaits the resurrection.⁵⁸

The statement that, “death is not complete annihilation,” is disingenuous. It is not “complete” annihilation, in SDA thinking, because it is not final, but only “temporary.” But *annihilation* is final, and therefore complete, *by definition*. “Incomplete annihilation” is an oxymoron. To say, “the *person* awaits the resurrection,” is equally disingenuous. The question then begging to be answered is, “*What person?* What, actually, is ‘*awaiting* the resurrection?’” Awaiting implies anticipation. Anticipation is a function of consciousness requiring a conscious existence. Both are impossible during death according to SDA doctrine. No one and no thing *dead* “awaits” the resurrection.

Virtually all SDAs would be appalled to think their doctrine constitutes a denial of the resurrection. That conclusion, however, is inescapable when one examines their soul-sleep doctrine carefully. It denies the existence of a “person” apart from consciousness, and it denies consciousness in death. There is no such thing, then, as a dead person. When a person dies the person *ends*. If a person ends at death there can be no such thing as “eternal life” for all persons who die. Those persons are gone, period. The resurrection is not a cloning process, or the creation of a new being with no previous historical identity of its own. No other persons created in the image of the formerly living, even the *exact same image*, can bring *them* back. It is not unfair, therefore, to say that SDA doctrine on the state of the dead entails a fundamental denial of the doctrine of the resurrection as taught in the Scriptures.

Hope that another being just like oneself will someday live forever is not the “hope of eternal life” of which the Scriptures speak. How can the Christian who cherishes the glorious hope of eternal life for himself have functional unity or Christian fellowship with those whose doctrine essentially denies any such hope?]

⁵⁶ Damsteegt, et al., *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*, p. 352; emphasis added.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352

Adventists also teach that the doctrine of immortality is one of the leading deceptions of Satan. Ellen White states that,

Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.⁵⁹

Christians who believe the souls or spirits of the righteous “go to be with the Lord” at death are, according to SDAs, falling under one of the “two great errors of Satan.” This, too, makes an insurmountable wall hindering *functional* unity. How can Evangelicals and SDAs work together as Christian brothers and sisters? Would not the SDA feel duty-bound to protect the Evangelical from this great “error of Satan”?

Seventh-day Adventist theology teaches “Christ + something = the Gospel”

There are two formulas that are suggested for salvation. One is the basic Christian formula. The other is the one often promoted by the cults:

Faith in Christ = Salvation + Good Works
or
Faith in Christ + Good Works = Salvation

In Ephesians 2:8–10, Paul explains that salvation is a gift of God based on faith. But even the faith itself comes from God. Then, after salvation comes good works. Why are people saved by God’s unmerited grace? One reason, Paul says, is to do good works. Salvation caused mankind to become new creatures in Christ “unto good works.” Christians will do good works, not because they must do so to gain salvation, rather it has become their new nature. Because they have become new creatures in Christ, they will desire to do good works. Hence, the first formula is biblical.

However, it is the second formula that the cults will always use. They will place works before salvation. What works? Each group will have its own unique list that must be followed to the letter of the law, or else salvation is out of reach.⁶⁰

Following are summaries of the teachings of Ellen White, whose writings “continue as an authoritative *source* of truth”: She said that William Miller’s 1843 date-setting, second-coming, message was a “saving message” and pastors who resisted this message had “the blood of souls” upon them.⁶¹ Faith in Christ was not enough. They had to add to their faith the “good work” of date setting. Churches that rejected the revised 1844 sanctuary “truth” fell from God’s favor and became “Babylon” even though they continued to have faith in Christ! She said that the people in these churches were deceived by Satan, and their prayers were useless.⁶² Ellen White said that Christians should *never* say “I am saved.”⁶³ She said that only those who keep the Sabbath will

⁵⁹ White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 405.

⁶⁰ See Rick Branch, “Profile, Patterns In The Cults,” in *Watchman Expositor*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1994.

⁶¹ White, *Early Writings*, p. 243.

⁶² White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, pp. 140, 172, 173.

⁶³ “We are *never* to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, ‘*I am saved.*’ When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayer, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher

be saved in the last days.⁶⁴ She taught that there will be no change in character at the second coming.⁶⁵ She said we are *not* saved by faith alone⁶⁶ and we must live a life of “perfect obedience” *before* God’s promises will be fulfilled to us (emphasis added).⁶⁷ While some SDAs reject this theology, it is none-the-less historic Adventist teaching endorsed by their “messenger of God,” Ellen White, whom they still hold to be an authoritative *source* of truth.

Seventh-day Adventists use deceptive practices

It is evident that SDAs hold some unique, unbiblical teachings that are quite divergent from mainstream Christianity. It should also be evident that these teachings make an insurmountable wall hindering *functional* church unity. However, Adventists do not want to *appear* to be that divergent! Rather, they want to be seen by Christendom as within the mainstream. In order to do this, they have become very subtle in their evangelism. Seldom are their Revelation Seminars advertised as Adventist evangelistic meetings. The Voice of Prophecy, Faith for Today, It Is Written, The Quiet Hour, Amazing Facts and other SDA media programs are often not advertised as Adventist programs. These programs often leave out of their messages some of the erroneous doctrines outlined in this booklet. First, they want to set the hook, then after they have the fish in the boat, they tell them “the rest of the story.” I have talked with many Seventh-day Adventists or former Seventh-day Adventists who were never told about all the unbiblical doctrines, including the acceptance of Ellen White as a continuing and authoritative source of truth, until *after* they were baptized into the church.⁶⁸

attainments, cease to exist. *No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words till Christ shall come, and we enter in through the gates into the city of God.*” (emphasis supplied) White, *The Kress Collection*, p. 120. The important thing is *why* EGW said this. “*No man can say, I am saved, until he has endured test and trial, until he has shown that he can overcome temptation.*” White, *Review and Herald*, 1890-06-17. EGW taught that only those who had *proven* they could overcome temptation could lay claim to salvation. And then she put this out of the reach of all by saying that assurance of salvation could only be had *after* the second coming.

⁶⁴ White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 123.

⁶⁵ White, *Review and Herald*, 1892-06-21.

⁶⁶ “Faith and works are the two oars with which we are to make our way in the Christian life. The Lord calls upon all who think they know what faith is, to be sure that they are not pulling with only one oar, and their little bark [boat] going round and round, making no progress at all. Faith without intelligent works is dead. *Faith in the healing power of God will not save unless it is combined with good works.*” (emphasis supplied) Ellen G. White, *Australasian Union Record*, 1905-10-15. “It is Satan’s studied effort to divert the minds of men from the one way of salvation,—faith in Christ, *and* obedience to the law of God.” *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 192.

⁶⁷ “*If we live a life of perfect obedience, His promises will be fulfilled toward us.*” (emphasis supplied) White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 122. “What God promises He is able at any time to perform, and the work which He gives His people to do He is able to accomplish by them. If they will live according to every word He has spoken, every good word and promise will be fulfilled unto them. But *if they come short of perfect obedience, the great and precious promises are afar off, and they cannot reach the fulfillment.*” (emphasis supplied) White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 148.

⁶⁸ At the recent SDA General Conference held in Toronto, Canada in June/July, 2000, a revised Baptismal Certificate and accompanying vow was adopted. If this new procedure is followed, everyone joining the SDA church should be aware of Adventist doctrine. The new instructions read: “Candidates for baptism or those being received into fellowship by profession of faith shall affirm their acceptance of the doctrinal beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the presence of the church or other properly appointed body. The Minister or elder should address the following questions to the candidate(s) whose reply may be by verbal assent or by raising the hand.” Then follows a thirteen-point vow. Included in these thirteen points are: “(6) Do you accept the Ten Commandments as the transcript of the character of God and a revelation of His will? Is it your purpose by the power of the indwelling Christ to keep this law, including the fourth commandment, which requires the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord and the memorial of Creation? (8) Do you accept the biblical teaching of

Not only are Adventists somewhat misleading in their evangelistic approach, their history is literally riddled with deceptive practices. For example, they have suppressed one of Ellen White's visions because it clearly teaches a shut door of salvation after 1844.⁶⁹ In the book *Early Writings* is recorded Ellen White's first vision. What many Adventists do not know is that part of this vision has been deleted, even though the preface states otherwise.⁷⁰ When honest Adventist leaders learned of some of these errors and left the church, they were usually castigated and given over to Satan.⁷¹ In fact, Ellen White went so far as to state,

When the power of God testifies [has told Ellen White] as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained.⁷²

In other words, once Ellen White has clearly supported a given Adventist teaching, based upon a "vision" or "instruction" from "God" that teaching is to stand forever. One now understands how difficult it will be for Adventists to admit error, especially the foundational, fundamental doctrines upon which this church was founded which received the prophetic stamp of Ellen White's approval. The horns on this dilemma are sharp indeed!

Adventists know the problems associated with their doctrines, especially their investigative judgment doctrine. When working on the SDA Bible Commentary Adventist scholars became acutely aware that this doctrine had *no biblical basis*. In fact, a super-secret committee of Adventism's top scholars was appointed by the General Conference president to solve their Daniel 8:14/1844 problem. They worked on this problem for five years, could not solve it, disbanded, left no minutes and were instructed to continue to teach the investigative judgment based upon their "traditional assumptions."^{73,74} The church has tried to make it *appear* this problem has been solved by publishing a huge, multi-volume "scholarly work." However, it is riddled with assumptions. Also, according to one member of SDAs Biblical Research Institute Committee, it either tended to ignore serious questions about Adventist doctrine, or it would turn the problem over to a naïve scholar who would defend without question the traditional teaching.

If someone presented a paper pointing toward a conclusion at variance with the church's teaching, however, it was just as quickly relegated to the denomination's archival collection, never to surface again.⁷⁵

Cultic Doctrine lists and illustrates some seventeen ways Adventists have dealt with known error. Yet the church has never, to this author's knowledge, publicly admitted doctrinal error. The reason is that it would create a crisis of faith among the members who believe its historic teachings.⁷⁶

spiritual gifts and believe that the gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church? (11) Do you know and understand the fundamental Bible principles as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Do you purpose, by the grace of God to fulfill His will by ordering your life in harmony with these principles? (13) Do you accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy and that people of every nation, race and language are invited and accepted into its fellowship? Do you desire to be a member of this local congregation of the world church?"

⁶⁹ Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 129, 130.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147, 148.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187, 188.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 188; White, Loma Linda Manuscript No. 150.

⁷³ Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, Chapter, "Lumps Under the Rug."

⁷⁴ Remember there are 22 assumptions needed to support this doctrine as taught by Ellen White. Most of these are contrary to evidence.

⁷⁵ See Jerry Gladson, *A Theologian's Journey from Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity*.

⁷⁶ See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, Chapter 11 for a complete list and explanation.

Summary:

One can readily see how these SDA teachings militate against functional church unity. For all intents and purposes, Historic Adventists,⁷⁷ who believe the twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church, cannot work hand in hand with Evangelicals and see them as Christian bothers and sisters. Rather, the Adventist will always have a hidden, or not so hidden, agenda to convert the Evangelical to Adventist “truth.” Adventists cannot see world evangelism as something that is happening through many Christian denominations; rather, it is measured only by Adventist success as others “come into the truth”—their “truth”.

If Adventists really believed their message is as important and biblical as they claim, then why not openly and publicly proclaim that message? Why not call an inter-denominational Bible Conference and invite other Christian scholars to “check out” Adventist truth? What is the need for using so much deception in Adventist evangelism?

Adventists need to be honest with their history. They are quick to promote the keeping of the “commandments of God,” meaning of course, the Ten Commandments, with undue emphasis on the fourth. Yet it appears that often this church has not been honest in the way it has dealt with those who uncovered the truth—or should it be errors—of Adventism,⁷⁸ nor has it been honest with its uninformed laity.⁷⁹

Evangelicals would do well to thoroughly investigate the beliefs of Adventists before working in unity with them in any Christian endeavor. Following are some questions that could be asked to ascertain the understanding and beliefs of those within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Remember that there are several different subgroups of theology within Adventism.

1. Do you believe that the writings of Ellen White are a continuing and authoritative *source* of truth?
2. Do you believe that the SDA church is *the* remnant church of Bible prophecy?
3. Do you believe that the seventh-day Sabbath is the seal of God for all new covenant Christians?
4. Do you believe that Sunday worship is, or will become, the mark of the beast?
5. Do you believe in the 1844 investigative judgment doctrine as taught by Ellen White?
6. Do you hold that Christians who believe the soul or spirit goes to be with the Lord at the point of death are living under one of Satan’s great delusions?
7. Which is correct: faith in Christ + good works = salvation or faith in Christ = salvation + good works?

⁷⁷ See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, pp. 23–26 for a more in-depth definition of the four groups within Adventism.

⁷⁸ Character assassination has been the pattern of dealing with leaders who have left Adventism.

⁷⁹ Many of the laity trust Adventist scholars to be totally honest and truthful in their presentations. Often, the whole truth is not told. Usually, only that which supports the SDA movement is given. See Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, pp. 241–254.