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ARTICLES

- Science and Theology 6
Martin F. Hanna
- Biblical Interpretation and Moral Authority 52
Miroslav M. Kis
- Conscience 63
Elden M. Chalmers
- A Critical Analysis of Ethics Based on the Concept of
Dominion in Genesis 1:26-28 77
Stephen Bauer

SERMONS

- Just Say the Word 109
Jay Gallimore
- Taste and See 117
Philip G. Samaan

FEATURES

- The President's Page 1
E. Edward Zinke

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THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

By E. Edward Zinke

Silver Spring, Maryland

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced a revival in its understanding of righteousness by faith. Within the last several decades, this renewed understanding has spread from classroom to classroom, pulpit to pulpit, publication to publication. It has been accepted and proclaimed by church administrators, theologians, pastors, and lay people. It has brought assurance of salvation and revival of meaning to many lives. The God of legalism with His impossible requirements and judgmental attitude has given way to a God of love and understanding.

Such revivals do not take place without debate and excesses on both sides—from a renewed attempt to reinstate legalism on the one hand, to antinomianism on the other. Such debates create ferment from time to time. But ferment creates interest and awareness, it gives us the recognition of the need to study and to make our own decisions for God. Study and discussion gives the church the opportunity to move ahead in its understanding of God's plan. We must praise God for the revival that takes place when we willingly submit our lives to the gift of His righteousness and salvation.

We stand at the crossroads in our understanding of righteousness by faith. Historically the doctrine of righteousness by faith alone cannot be sustained without the renewal of a parallel doctrine—that of “the Bible alone.” Both the doctrines of grace alone received by faith alone and that of the Bible alone accepted by faith alone rest upon the same foundation—the gift of God alone.

Let us put this discussion in historical perspective. The Seventh-day Adventist Church sees itself as fulfilling the initiative of the Protestant. The Protestant Reformation re-enunciated two

principles—the sole authority of the Bible as the foundation and guide to life, and the sole reliance upon grace through faith as the basis for our salvation. These principles shattered the thought patterns of the age. People had come to rely on the Bible along with the authority of the Pope, church councils, tradition, nature, reason, and philosophy. They had come to accept grace along with works and performance as the basis for salvation. The Reformation changed the way man thinks about himself in relation to his environment and his God by responding with the Bible alone, and by Grace alone. The foundation of our thinking does not come from the Bible and reason, or history, archaeology, science, psychology, sociology, or any other human discipline, it comes from the Bible alone. Salvation does not come by grace and works, it comes by grace alone.

Christ's response to Satan in the wilderness illustrated the principle of "the Bible alone." When asked to prove His divinity, Christ could have answered philosophically—a God of love would not allow His Son to endure deprivation for forty days in the wilderness alone. Or, He could have answered scientifically—He could have proved empirically that He was the Son of God by turning stones into bread. Instead, Christ answered with, "It is written."

By the slogan, the Bible alone, the Reformation did not deny that God could speak through nature, or reason, or science, or philosophy—it simply meant that the Bible was the basis for determining when and where God had spoken through other elements of human life. Reason was a tool to use in harmony with God's will rather than a foundation upon which to accept God's Word.

Several years ago, I had the misfortune of building a house. But through that experience I learned some things. That house was built upon a firm foundation and its construction was guided by a set of plans. The house had a number of rooms, doors, windows, and a roof. If it did not have these things, it would not have been a house. By the same token, if the house had been built upon the roof, it would have crumbled. So our lives are composed of many things—our academic disciplines, our thinking processes, our emotions, our relations with people, and so on. Our lives would not be worth living without these various aspects of them. But if we ever make reason

or some other aspect of our life the foundation or the guide to life, our lives will crumble. Our lives must be built upon and guided by the foundation of the Word of God, and upon that alone.

The humanistic world in which we live attempts to teach us to build our professions and our lives upon reason, or science, or experience. The uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist message is that it teaches us to stand up against the norms of contemporary society by basing our lives upon the "it is written"—upon the Word of God alone.

But now, a note of caution. The Bible is not an end in and of itself. The Bible is not the goal of life. The thrust of life is not the establishment of correct doctrine, as important as that may be. The goal of life, that which makes life meaningful, is the re-establishment of our relationship with God and with our fellow men. This is where we introduce the second principle of the Reformation—by grace alone through faith alone.

The miracle of salvation is that while we were yet sinners, even enemies of God, God took the initiative by sending His Son into the world in order that we might be restored to a relationship with Him. Christ defined salvation in John 17:3 when He said, "And this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." If salvation is the gift of God alone that we receive by faith alone and if the life goal is not the establishment of correct doctrine, then why should we be concerned with doctrine at all, why not just concentrate on the relationship?

Let us analyze the nature of human relationships in order to understand better our relationship with God. I would like to get better acquainted with you. What is necessary for us to have a mature relationship with one another? I propose that there are at least four components to human relationships. First of all, I must know something about you. I must also understand myself. I must know something about the proper relationship between us, and we must spend time with each other. If I do not have knowledge about you, and if I do not understand myself, the time we spend with each other will be contentless—the relationship empty.

The same is true in our relationship with God. If we are to come into a relationship with God, we must know something about Him, we must understand ourselves, and we must understand the proper

relationship that is to exist between us. Without this understanding, our relationship with God will be contentless, meaningless.

What then provides content to the Christian's relationship with God? God's self-revelation, the Bible. While the goal of life is not the Bible, the Bible is that which provides the content and the guide to the goal of life—the restoration of our relationship with God.

The principles of the Bible alone and by grace alone parallel one another. Salvation is a given—it is the gift of God, there is not a shred of human devising at its foundation. So also, the Bible is the gift of God, accepted by faith which is itself the gift of God. Just as salvation is not to be founded upon human effort, so the Bible, the Word of God, is not founded upon human wisdom. Just as salvation is not manipulated by human effort, so the Bible is not to be manipulated by human reason. Just as salvation comes by the grace of God alone, so does God's self-revelation, the Bible come by grace alone. Just as human works have their proper place as the outgrowth of salvation, so also does reason have its proper place when it is founded upon God's Word alone.

Life is like an equilateral triangle. Its firm foundation is Jesus Christ. At one corner is the principle of the Bible alone, at the other is the principle of grace alone. At its apex is its goal, restoration of relationships with God and man. If our relationship with God does not rest upon these two principles, it will collapse. If we remove the principle of the sole authority of Scripture, the relationship will collapse into meaninglessness. If we remove the principle of grace alone, the relationship will collapse into formalism and pharaseeism.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been the church of the book. The Bible was the foundation of our understanding of God, of ourselves, and of the world. However, just as our understanding of righteousness by faith was dimmed by time, so also our understanding of the authority of the Bible has been blunted by the modern world in which we live. Just as twenty years ago this church was blessed by the refreshing message of salvation by faith, so also the church is being strengthened by a renewed emphasis upon the fundamental authority of the Bible in our lives and understanding. I praise God that this powerful message is begin-

ning to be taught from classroom to classroom, preached from pulpit to pulpit, understood and affirmed by administrators, and accepted by lay people. Not only will this new understanding of the authority of Scripture sustain the message of righteousness by faith, it will also give power to the preaching of God's Word at this last hour of earth's history. I pray that the message of "the Bible alone" will continue to find renewed acceptance just as has the message of righteousness by faith.