

³² Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), speaks of a rest that followed the two Fridays of Christ's finished work.

³³ Carson, p. 346.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

³⁵ Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1891, p. 257.

³⁶ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 2: 380.

³⁷ The test will be as worldwide as the Sabbath command itself. It will be seen that the Sabbath is a "creation ordinance" and "loyalty test" for the race as was the tree in Eden. Both the Sabbath and the tree have universal implications, far beyond any national significance that might be confined to Israel.

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THE ROLE OF THE LAW IN SALVATION

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Seventh-day Adventists believe that the law has a vital role to play in the process of salvation. Implicit in our denominational name and explicit in our preaching is the assumption that the law—particularly our understanding of the Sabbath—will become the end-time test that will one day bring the world to judgment. One writer, in a thought-provoking essay, has put it this way:

Even though salvation is now accorded to many persons of many churches despite their wide and conflicting array of beliefs, we [Adventists believe that we] will set the house of truth in order so decisively that salvation will eventually be confined exclusively to those who embrace our beliefs. Our message will thus emerge as a universal test of truth and of character. . . . With complete effectiveness we will one day serve as instruments of both salvation and judgment for the entire planet.¹

Such a perspective is not unique to this one writer. In a similar (if less articulate) way, most "mainline" Seventh-day Adventists agree that our message will challenge the world with a final, catastrophically important decision about obedience or rebellion. And therein lies an irony: there is little present evidence that we are anywhere near accomplishing our objective. The writer just quoted insists urgently that "by no projection of current trends can such a future be seen for the Advent movement. We are simply one denomination

among many, slightly above average in growth rate, though not even on the road toward expectations of this order."² In other words, he says, we have not begun to live up to the potential of our faith.

His observation is illustrated dramatically in the statistics of our own youth. It is now clear that by the time they reach eighteen years of age, well over half our young people functionally "sever their church connections."³ Roger Dudley has reported some unflattering remarks by Adventist youth about the message that we believe will challenge the world at the end of time:

"No fun on Saturdays until the sun is down."

"It's just a bunch of do's and don'ts."

"Dull, and it gets in the way."

I personally remember a young relative, brought up in an impeccably Adventist home, romping gleefully through the house late one Sabbath afternoon while saying, "Oh boy! Oh boy! Only ten more minutes till sundown."

Throughout such remarks one finds a common theme: they relate negatively to the law—the same law that we believe judge the world.

A reverse (but equally illuminating) view of this problem can be found in remarks by Adventist youth who have decided *not* to leave the church. According to Dudley,⁴ even "faithful" young Adventists said the following:

"I have a lot of work to do if I want to be saved."

"I wish I could be completely good, but it's not always easy."

"I don't know if I'll be able to stand up for it when the time of trouble comes."

Once again, my memories corroborate this. I well recall the words of an academy classmate, reflecting the uncertainties we all shared:

"I wish I knew if I'm going to be saved, because if I'm not, I sure want to have a ball."

If all church members had the gift of frankness so unique

to youth, many Adventists of mature years might express similar sentiments. Indeed, some have—in a phenomenon we may have oversimplified with the term "new theology." Perhaps we have reached a point where it is time to ask a question heretofore seldom addressed among "conservative" Seventh-day Adventists: granted that the law is a vital part of our theology, have we nevertheless made a basic mistake in our relationship to it, unintentionally programming ourselves (and our young people) for failure?

The Problem

As one listens to the remarks of Adventist youth, three predominant factors stand out: a desire for heaven, a dread of hell, and a haunting fear that they might try and fail to reach heaven, thus losing this earth's pleasures as well. Put all these ingredients in a blender, mix well, and a single substance emerges: egocentricity. Religious interest (or lack thereof) comes to depend upon what religion can do for "me" at any given moment. Implicit in such an outlook is the real danger that, when confronted by a self-centered temptation, one's religious motivation crumble.

We might be tempted to dismiss religious egocentricity as a frailty peculiar to young people. In fact, it is not. Young people have, after all, learned their religion largely from us. They have heard us tell mission stories—then watched us spend our money. Heard us pray—then heard us argue. Heard us plan for the time of trouble—with heavy emphasis on our own survival, and all-too-little genuine concern for a world full of souls soon to be "judged" by our theology. When one examines the basic motives that seem to have driven our youth, a disquieting truth emerges: these same motives have often driven adults as well.

Our Motives Deserve Examination.

1. *Desire for Heaven.* Scarcely a Sabbath passes in any Adventist church without prayerful requests for the soon

coming of Jesus so that we can go home to heaven. There is nothing inherently wrong with this; any rational being would naturally want to be there. But upon examination, the motive is basically self-centered. We want heaven's freedom from pain and worry, reunification with departed family members, and freedom from temptation. Rarely do we dwell on heaven's other attributes: a realm where supreme joy is found in selfless service; angels who longed to be in the King's entourage but who lingered instead on stony Olivet with a few bewildered and lonely disciples; infinite Deity imprisoning Himself forever within human tissue for a sacrifice that only a handful would even recognize let alone accept.

A desire for heaven based only on selfish benefits not only distorts heaven but contains a defect that predisposes us to failure. If our only motive for religion is a selfish desire for reward, Satan can overwhelm us with temptations that appeal to the very same motive—and he has the advantage of proximity. His rewards can appear to be immediate.

I suggest that we have too often given our young people this motive, thus programming them to fail. On Sabbath morning they hear about the rewards of far-off heaven. In their own way, they want to be there. And on Saturday night the devil presents a self-centered temptation with a more immediate reward. In giving them a basically selfish reason for religion, we have not equipped them to face temptations that appeal to selfishness.

2. *Fear of Hell.* Unlike the desire for reward, fear of hell is negative rather than positive. There is nothing inherently wrong with it; no one wants to face the terrors of eternal destruction. But in the same way that the reward motive is self-centered, this one is too—sometimes powerfully so. Fear will drive even the meekest citizen to acts that under other circumstances would be murder. A struggling swimmer will stand on the lifeguard's head, if given a chance, to avoid the terrors of drowning. And a crowd will readily trample fellow

human beings to escape fire in a crowded theater. No offense is intended. Those doing the trampling simply want to survive.

If fear is not an intrinsically evil motive, neither is it a good one. Like the desire for reward, it is essentially selfish. And it certainly is not *stable*.

If we are driven by fear, we are likely to succumb to whatever threat is most immediate—the fear of present ridicule, for example, rather than the more distant threat of hell. Motivated by it, we may superficially appear to “keep” the law—until a more immediate and intense fear challenges us with a conflicting demand.

For the Adventist rooted in a fear motivation, I submit that the end of time will be perilous, because it will be a time of fear. There will be a loss of vital services, collapse of constitutional guarantees, and finally a death decree. By using fear as a religious motivator, are we unconsciously programming ourselves to fail in the very test we so proudly plan to pass, the “mark of the beast?”

Is it possible that this is why so many Seventh-day Adventist young people fail to stand successfully against peer pressure?

If this is so, then we may unwittingly have been trying to keep a holy law and a holy Sabbath for reasons that are basically selfish. Ellen White states bluntly that selfishness is “the root of all evil.”⁵ If we have brought the “root of all evil” to our quest for obedience, it is not unreasonable to assume that other self-centered behavior may surface in our religious life—judgmentalism, for example, harshness in applying the standards of the law to other people, and even internal dissension among those who claim to believe the same obedience-oriented ethic. Come to the law with a rotten motive, and it logically follows that the resulting “obedience” will give off a spoiled aroma.

With these things in mind, let us search for a Biblical model upon which to test our hypothesis. An appropriate place to begin would seem to be Sinai itself.

“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings . . . and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. . . . And the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex 19:16, 18).

The response of the people to this pyrotechnic display was stark terror. Because they perceived themselves to be in danger of death, they promised that “all that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex 19:8). At this point the Scriptures give no hint of insincerity. Indeed, driven by abject fear, they appear to have been every bit as serious about the law as is the average Adventist—whose view of end-time perils is, after all, still largely visualized from artistic illustrations in denominational publications.

The Biblical record reveals that this fear-motivated obedience lasted Israel for the better part of forty days—not an unimpressive record when compared with the short duration of many of our own New Year’s resolutions. *But they failed!* Motivated by fear, they *encountered* fear—the raw fear of being leaderless in a hostile desert. And with this fear came the allurements of turning to a heathen religion that sanctioned immorality. Driven by selfish religious motivations, they collapsed when confronted with selfish temptations.

Yet God chose to use this scene of intimidating fear to enunciate His law. Why?

Different Circumstances

While pondering that question, we are reminded that God visited this same mountain a second time. Five hundred years later He came here again, this time to an audience of one. The story is recorded in 1 Kings 19.

“And he . . . went . . . unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; . . . And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, . . . but the Lord was not in the wind: and after

the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still, small voice” (1 Kgs 19:9-12).

Back when I was studying law, my professors took perverse delight in choosing two apparently contradictory cases and asking the class to distinguish them. Why the difference? Was the court really saying two different things? How could the cases be harmonized? Such an approach seems useful here. It was the same mountain, the same God, the same law, but the circumstances were different. At Sinai of old, God appeared in a thunderous display and gave the law. On the same mountain 500 years later, He pointedly spurned physical force and spoke instead in a quiet voice. Why? What distinguishes the two events?

I submit that there was just one difference—the religious maturity of those present.

Israel at Sinai consisted of essentially unconverted people. They scarcely knew God. Indeed, they even had to relearn His name. Among them were non-Jewish people who had not broken away from raw paganism. To them all, God spoke in terms designed to reach the unconverted mind, using brute force, awesome power, and a negatively framed law containing more don’ts than do’s. That kind of language is necessary only for the unconverted. The converted person, like Joseph, would not even consider the prohibited things to be an option. Instead, his or her reply to temptation would be, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

Contrast Elijah, a man now only 300 earthly miles from the place of his own translation. For him the egocentric motivation of physical fear was nearly meaningless. Earthquake, wind, and fire held no inspiration for him. Instead, he recognized the quiet voice of God.

Here was a lesson that Israel in general never seemed to learn. Somehow their relationship to the law did not mature beyond that of fear-reward motivation, leaving them patheti-

cally unprepared for temptations such as licentious heathenism and the imagined glories of a human monarchy. Periodically driven to despair by foreign invasions, they were prompted by fear to several short-lived reformations. On Carmel, Elijah re-created in miniature the fiery experience of Sinai, only to lose the effects himself within a day. Fear and reward proved useless then as always in bringing Israel to true obedience.

These motivations may be equally useless in dealing with a phenomenon known as Laodicean Adventism—useless for reasons rooted deep in the human psyche.

Students in Psychology 101 routinely learn about a manifestation called the approach-avoidance gradient. Early studies by B. F. Skinner, confirmed that animals can be taught specific behavior forms through fear or reward.⁶ Later studies enlarged on this. For example, mice were placed in small runways, with a nest box at one end and a feeding dish at the other. Each day food was dropped into the dish and the mice quickly learned to run to the dish for their meal. After this habit pattern was established, the researchers introduced a variable. In front of each dish they placed wires that carried a painful but harmless charge of high tension electricity. As they heard the food drop, the mice ran expectantly to their dishes, only to be greeted by a painful shock. They began to exhibit signs of confusion. They badly wanted to eat, but they also feared pain. They did not advance toward the food, because that would increase their fear. Neither did they retreat to their nests, because that would take them farther from food. Instead, they remained halfway to their goal, paralyzed by the equilibrium of their own conflicting motives. They were stranded on the approach-avoidance gradient and went nowhere. To put it in the Adventist vernacular, they became certified Laodicean mice.

All of which leads the thoughtful student to a logical question. If fear-reward motivations are not stable bases for obedience, why does the Bible sometimes use terms that

appeal to them? Why did God give the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28? Why did He also give the occasional (if remarkably few) glimpses of heaven, with its jewelled city, its mansions, and its freedom from pain? I submit that the answer is pragmatic. The Bible, like the law at Sinai, is designed to reach even the unconverted mind.

Few people, if any, come to God for unselfish reasons. Their motivations typically are centered in their own personal needs: a splitting hangover, a failing marriage, a sense of emptiness in the soul. Like Israel in the desert, most of us look to the cross first because we know that we are dying and we want to live. It is a marvel of God's nature that He not only accepts us thus, He *seeks* us with all our objectionable traits still in place. "While we were yet sinners . . . we were reconciled to God" (Rom 5:8, 10).

But are the egocentric motivations that bring us to the cross sufficient to *keep* us there? What about Peter's admonition to "grow" in grace in 2 Peter 3:18? And what about Paul's fascinating allusion to milk and meat?

In Hebrews 5:12, Paul makes an astonishing comparison, likening the most sophisticated theologians in the world to babies. For 1500 years Israel had basked in the afterglow of Sinai, with its lucid view of law, judgment, and salvation. For a millennium, successive prophets had brought further illumination. No people in the world had come so close to truth. The Israelites were to be keepers of the flame, teachers of the world. Yet Paul tells them they have to be instructed themselves, in the most basic truths of God. Why?

"For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe" (Heb 5:13).

Like the drowning swimmer, a baby means no offense toward anyone. He cries for milk at 3 A.M., blissfully ignorant of the inconvenience doing so may cause his mother. He means no harm at all; he merely wishes to survive. He is operating quite simplistically on a fear-reward basis, and no one criticizes him for it. He is, after all, a baby.

If, however, he still exhibits these traits at the age of 10, our judgment of him will be far less tolerant. We will probably mutter something about a developmental defect.

Carry the analogy a step further. Suppose he still exhibited these self-centered traits at 40—while professing to have “the truth” that will judge the world? Our reaction would probably be one of contempt—*nauseating* contempt. “*Mello se emesai.*” “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will *spew thee out of my mouth*” (Rev 3:16). The Greek root *emesis* is the source of our word emetic. The connotation is one of impending nausea. And the allusion to lukewarmness reminds us of the conflicting motivations that paralyze someone on the approach-avoidance gradient of religious commitment. Why paralyzed? Because he or she is basically motivated by selfish reasons and cannot decide which conflicting selfish demand to meet.

“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age” (Heb 5:13, 14). Fascinatingly, the term of *full age* is rendered “perfection” in the KJV margin.

Like babies, most of us come to the Lord for selfish reasons. In His mercy, He accepts us as we are. But we cannot live on milk forever. Somewhere we must learn that there are better reasons for the second coming that escape from arthritis and property taxes. What about heaven? What about the pain felt there every day as long as sin goes on? On occasion, television news gives us a view of other people’s agony—the starving child in east Africa, the little boy blinded by an explosive device left over from the Iran-Iraq war. When we have seen all of this that we can stand, we have the option of turning off the television. Heaven does not have that option. *Heaven has to watch.*

“Those who think of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves,” Ellen White once wrote, adding:

Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ’s agony;

but that suffering did not end with His humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every cruelty, every failure of humanity, brings fresh grief to Him.⁷

Language could not be plainer. Heaven is hurting now, and so is Jesus. There are far better reasons for hastening His coming than our own selfish needs. We should long for the second advent in order to ease *His* pain as well as ours; and, if we are the mature Christians we claim to be, with a message that will send the world to judgment, we ought to see this more clearly than any other group of people in the world.

Perhaps we do, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Our generally lackluster spirituality; our own youth who complain of “no fun on Saturdays until the sun goes down” and who openly worry about failing in the time of trouble; and the bickering that goes on, even among believers who consider themselves “conservative,” are symptoms that disturbingly remind us of Israel. Somehow the words of the heavenly Witness seem to fit: Thou “knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17).

The Remedy

There is a remedy, of course, found in the uniquely Seventh-day Adventist concept of an end-time Day of Atonement.

“And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls” (Lev 16:19). The Hebrew word rendered “afflict” is the word *anah*, which suggests intense and unsparing self-examination. It occurs in other places, such as Daniel 10:12, where Daniel was chastens his soul while struggling to understand prophecy. It implies a searching for sin that includes not only acts but motives as well.

“For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you . . . that ye may be clean from *all* your sins before the

Lord" (Lev 16:30). David, one of history's experts in falling (and falling hard), expressed it this way: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps 19:12). Ellen White amplifies this idea in language that is little short of astonishing:

God's law reaches the feelings and motives as well as the outward acts. It reveals the secrets of the heart, flashing light upon things buried in darkness. . . . The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity.⁸

There is no exclamation point after the last phrase, but the astounded reader is strongly tempted to add one. The very law we preach (and try to keep) searches our hearts and reveals a reservoir of selfishness that we ourselves do not even understand. Until we find a remedy for that deep-seated egocentricity, we may linger forever on the approach-avoidance gradient of surrender, dreaming of victories that we never see. There could not be a more eloquent proof of our need for a Savior.

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ," Paul said, "that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24). The Ten Commandments, Ellen White assures us, are "ten promises."⁹ If this is so, then law keeping is a *result* of our conversion, not the cause. And the evidence suggests that many of us have unintentionally inverted that truth.

When the wind blows, the curtains shake. It does not therefore follow that if I shake the curtains the wind is blowing. Yet I think we have often made just that mistake.

Most Seventh-day Adventists agree that before the end of time there will be a visitation by the Holy Spirit called the latter rain. It will bring majestic results—great personal victories, large numbers of baptisms, and a clear vindication of truth. We long for the latter rain because we know that until it falls we will not see the Lord.

I suggest that perhaps unconsciously we have tried to create the latter rain by synthesizing its results. It will bring many people to the church, so we devise programs to bring

people into the church, assuming that therefore the latter rain has begun. Because it will bring great personal victories, we strive to "keep" the law, reasoning that if the effect is seen, the cause must also be present. And I fear that we have deluded ourselves. For every thousand souls we baptize each day, hundreds of thousands are born who do not hear the Advent message. Until we come to grips with our own wrong motivations, our efforts to "keep" the law will probably continue to confuse our young people, whose acute minds are quick to detect a gap between profession and reality. We may be shaking the curtains, but I have yet to sense the wind of Pentecost.

It is worth noting that the disciples did nothing to "force" Pentecost. Instead they engaged in deep repentance, reconciled their differences, and talked about the Lord they loved. In the lingering afterglow of Calvary's great explosion, they saw themselves *and* their motives—hot tempers, unsanctified ambition, and egotism that could turn to cowardice. They saw themselves; and then they looked again at the cross, and were converted.

Ten days of this was all that heaven could endure without a response. The upper room was filled with the Holy Spirit—*ruach*, the mighty wind out of the morning of creation. The same force that helped to form a world now energized human lives so powerfully that they took the gospel to the world in a single generation. I suggest that we do not attempt to manipulate power such as that. What we must do is get self out of the way and let it happen.

In Adventism today there is a regrettable trend toward downgrading the importance of the law of God. It is neither Biblical nor sensible, for it removes the moral standard that defines Godliness. But to a greater degree than we realize, this may be a reaction to another mistake—that of claiming to "keep" the law with unsanctified motives, forgetting that the law is proof of conversion, not the cause.

Until we recognize this fact, I fear that we will continue

to hear our own failure described in the blunt but descriptive words of our own youth.

Endnotes

- 1 Randolph E. Neall, "An Essay on the Remnant," monograph, October 3, 1983.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Roger L. Dudley, "Why Teenagers Reject Religion," *Adventist Review*, (1978), pp. 20, 21.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 226.
- 6 See, for example, Woodworth and Schlosberg, *Experimental Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1956).
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 11.
- 8 Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 5:1085.
- 9 Ibid., 1:1105.

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CHRIST-CENTERED PULPITS FOR CHRIST-CENTERED PEOPLE

A Sermon by Mervyn A. Warren
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A coterie of literary men of the Romantic Movement is meeting in a London clubroom. The conversation has veered to a discussion of famous personalities of the past when one of them asks, "Gentlemen, what would we do if Milton were to enter this room?"

"Ah," replies one of the circle, "we would give him such an ovation as might compensate the late recognition accorded him by men of his day."

"And if Shakespeare entered?" inquires another.

"We would rise and crown him master."

"And if Jesus Christ were to enter?" suggests a third.

"I think," says Charles Lamb, amid intense silence, "I think we would all kneel and fall on our faces."

Christ deserves, and reverence demands, no less than this, that at His presence "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10-11 NIV). Such reverence must be expressed in the bowed knee of every worshiper who adores Him, the bowed knee of every creature whom He created, the bowed knee of every angel who escorts Him. The occupant of every pulpit that proclaims Him must bow before Him, because Christ is center and circumference of the plan of salvation devised for us "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4).