

# Investigating some of the Seventh-day Adventist Teachings in Light of the Gospel

## Introduction

This article is written with sincere prayers for my fellow Seventh-day Adventist friends, and is intended to persuade them to focus only on Jesus Christ on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. As the Bible says: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2, Good News Bible).

I joined the SDA church as a small boy when I accepted Jesus Christ, and I have been a member of this church since then. It was this church which seconded me to Wycliffe Bible Translators for Bible Translation ministry. I am very grateful to the Seventh-day Adventist church for all its kind supports in this regard. This church particularly emphasizes the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ which is our blessed hope. However, I have observed that the SDA church is distracted from the gospel of Jesus Christ because of its passion about its doctrinal teachings, discussed in this paper. This distraction is continuously manifested by the SDA church’s reaction against any SDA church member who stands firmly on the grace of Jesus Christ and teaches others about this truth without mixing it with the SDA teachings such as keeping the law, particularly the Seventh-day Sabbath. The SDA Church always gets suspicious about such people regardless of the strength of their faith in Jesus Christ and their commitment to serve him. For example, in 2005 I was privileged to lead the Fulwoha SDA church youth Bible study program on the book of Romans, based on Pastor Jack Sequeira’s exposition of this book. The participants were very much blessed and I was also very excited by the Holy Spirit. However, the church leadership was not happy about it and eventually the church board was convened and passed a decision to halt the program and I was ordered to stop teaching. I openly confronted the contemporary pastor and an evangelist who was sent to tell me the decision, and I told them that they are pushing Jesus Christ out of the Fulwoha church by this action. I still observe that this behavior is not improving; rather it is getting worse. Besides, it is very difficult for many SDA people to accept other true believers of the protestant churches as brothers and sisters in the Lord because they do not keep the Seventh-day Sabbath. So I plead with all my fellow SDA people to be passionate about the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ without mixing his grace with keeping the law and to stop judging on others, because God is weeping over the SDA church. It is my prayer that the veil will be removed from their eyes and they will be able to see Jesus Christ clearly, and enjoy his love (2 Co 3:12-17; Acts 9:19).

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## The Law and the Gospel of Jesus Christ

The SDA teaching divides the Torah, the Biblical commandments, into two categories: the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws. Then they argue that every Christian ought to keep the Ten Commandments, but is free from keeping the ceremonial laws. But the Bible never makes such distinction (see Gal 3:10).

The following passages are the most quoted texts by the SDA people to convince people about keeping the Ten Commandments: Matt 5:17-20; Rom 3:31; John 14:15; James 2:10; Rev 12:17; Rev 14:12. These passages are used as proof texts to persuade people about keeping the Sabbath and to justify that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the only remnant Church because they keep God's commandments.

However, the Bible teaches us that no human being can keep the law which also includes the Seventh-day Sabbath (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:11). Then the question is "why was the law given?" The Bible tells us that the law was given (added, according to the book of Galatians 3:19) in order to prove that we are sinners, and consequently we are under the condemnation of death unless we receive the redemption offered by God through Jesus Christ (Rom 3:20; 5:20-21; Gal 3:19; 24). In fact, Paul tells us that the law was given so that transgression or trespass may increase, not to be kept in order to be saved (Rom 5:20-21; 4:15). Therefore, all human race is under the curse of the law (Rom 3:9-20; 4:15; Gal 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:7-9).

There are only two persons who determine our destiny: The first Adam and the second Adam. The first Adam trespassed or transgressed the commandment of God and brought sin into the world and thus all human beings sinned through him and are condemned to death. But the second Adam, who is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, obeyed God's commandments and thus all human beings obeyed through him. In this way, Jesus Christ brought righteousness and life to all human beings (Rom 5:12-21). Thus the only way we can get out of the curse of the law is through the obedience and cross of Jesus Christ (Gal 2:20; 3:13-14; 4:1-7 Rom 5:12-21; 7:1-6, 25; Acts 13:38-39). The ministry of the Law is condemnation and death but the ministry of the Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ, is righteousness, life, and freedom: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Co 3:7-17).

Therefore, the above proof texts (Matt 5:17-20; Rom 3:31; John 14:15; James 2:10; Rev 12:17; Rev 14:12) must be interpreted in the light of the obedience and the cross of Jesus Christ. Anyone who believes in Christ has been set free from the slavery of sin, law, devil, and death by the blood of Jesus Christ and has become a slave of Jesus Christ to serve him (Hebrew 2:14-15). In other words, now there is only one commandment that all human beings are required to obey: believing in Jesus Christ and loving one another (1 John 3:21-24). Since Jesus Christ has finished all the requirements of the law (Rom. 10:4), "now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1). This is the message the church should preach, and

nothing else. Teaching about the law is a disguised teaching of the devil aimed to distract people from Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:14-17; 11:13-15). We who believe in Jesus Christ are no longer slaves of the law but slaves of Jesus Christ to live guided by the Holy Spirit according to the New Covenant (Rom 7:6).

Finally, we also observe that E. G. White and many other SDA people claim that the Ten Commandments were given in the Garden of Eden even before Moses. This claim contradicts with what Paul teaches in Roman 5:13-14. The fact is that there was only one commandment given in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:16-17).

## The Sabbath

The semantic sense of the Hebrew term Shabbat mean to 'cease' or 'desist' which means a total cessation from all work. In other words, Sabbath means complete or perfect rest when the work is finished. According to the Genesis story, God rested when he finished his work (Gen 2:1-2). So the Shabbat or rest belongs to God not to man and man simply enters into God's rest by resting in him by faith (Ps 95:7-11; Number 14:22:23; Hebrew 3:11; 4:3).

After the fall of man, the Seventh-day Sabbath was given as one of the Ten Commandments and there was no such commandment known in the Bible until then. Despite this fact, the SDA Church teaches that the Sabbath commandment was given even before the fall of man in Eden<sup>1</sup>. However, there is no base for this claim because the creation story tells us that God rested on the seventh day after finishing the work of creation, but never tells us that God commanded man to keep the Sabbath before the fall (Gen 2:1-3). The only commandment given in Eden was 'not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil' (Gen 2:15-17).

Secondly, the SDA Church tends to consider that the Seventh-day Sabbath is the most important commandment of all the commandments<sup>2</sup>. This is not a valid claim. Sabbath is simply one of the Ten Commandments, and it shows that we are restless people until we enter into God's rest through our faith in Jesus Christ (Ex 16:4-5, 27-29; 20:8; Hebrew 4:1-10). Therefore, what we have discussed above about the gospel and law applies to the Seventh Day Sabbath commandment as well.

Did Paul include the Seventh-day Sabbath when he made his remarks presented in Col 2:16; Rom 14:5; and Gal 4:10-11? Yes, absolutely. This is because our true faith in Jesus Christ is the true Sabbath rest (Hebrew 4:1-10).

Many SDA people argue that the referring expression "Sabbaths" in Col 2:16: ("Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons,

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<sup>1</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Silver Spring: Pacific Press, 2005, 281-282.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

or **Sabbaths**") does not include the Seventh-day Sabbath because in Greek "Sabbath" is in plural form; so it does not refer to the Seventh-day Sabbath. This is not true because in the Bible the Seventh-day Sabbath is referred to in plural forms several times. For example, in Matt 12:5, 10; 28:1; Mark 1:21; and Mark 16:2 the Seventh-day Sabbath was referred to as "Sabbaths" in Greek. So there is no ground for such argument. Therefore, in Col 2:16 the referring expression "Sabbaths" was employed to refer specifically to the Seventh-day Sabbath.

What about the keeping of the literal Seventh-day Sabbath? The Bible tells us that God is at work now recreating the human race and the whole world at large through Jesus Christ (John 5:17). This work of recreation will be accomplished when he finishes this work by recreating new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-5). Then the true rest of the Sabbath which we have already begun by resting in Christ by faith will be consummated as happened in the Genesis story (Genesis 2:15-17). Until then, even we ourselves, who have the first fruit of the Holy Spirit, continue to labor and groan with the whole creation "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-25). It is meaningless to attempt to keep the literal day of Sabbath until our rest is fully consummated when God rests after finishing the work of recreating the new heaven and the new earth through the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the whole New Testament teachings focus on entering into God's rest by faith in Jesus Christ here and now rather than teaching people to keep the literal day of Sabbath.

Therefore, I argue that we worship our Lord Jesus Christ and God the father on Sabbath as well as in our everyday life but we are not required to keep the literal Seventh-day Sabbath as an additional requirement for entering into God's rest, which is given to us only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Is the Seventh-day Sabbath a seal? The SDA teaching claims that we will be sealed by the keeping of the Seventh-day Sabbath<sup>3</sup>. This teaching contradicts the plain teaching of the Bible which explicitly tells us that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13).

### **Did Jesus Enter into the Holy of Holies in 1844?**

The "1844" doctrine is one of the central teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This doctrine teaches that the blood of Jesus Christ secures the pardon and acceptance of the believers with the father but it does not cleanse our sins, rather it transfers our sins into the heavenly sanctuary<sup>4</sup>. So before the second coming of Jesus Christ, the removal of the sin from

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Sequeira. *Built Upon the Rock: The 28 Fundamental Adventist Beliefs in Light of the Gospel*, Salem: Jack Sequeira Ministries 2009, 236; E. G. White. *The Great Controversy*, 1973, 543.

<sup>4</sup> E. G. White. *Story of Patriarchs and Prophets*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958, 357; E. G. White. *The Great Controversy*, 355-358; *Seventh-day Adventist Adult Sabbath School lesson 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter*, Amharic version, 2013, 48-49.

the heavenly sanctuary is needed which they describe as investigative Judgment or work of the Atonement<sup>5</sup>. Thus, they believe that since every sin of all the believers in Jesus Christ is recorded in the book of judgment in heaven, Jesus needs to go through the list in order to remove the names of those who have repented their sins from the book of judgment before his second coming and preserve their names written in the book of life<sup>6</sup>. This teaching was taken from the book of Leviticus chapter 16 about the Day of Atonement and applied allegorically to the heavenly sanctuary. They claim that the Azazel goat was a symbolic representation of the devil, which will carry all our sins being responsible for our sins<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, since 1844, Jesus is doing investigative judgment in the Holy of Holies in heaven. Until 1844, Jesus was doing his priestly work in the Holy place. Their proof text for this claim is Dan 8:14 and 7:10.

The problem with this teaching is that it confuses the distinct biblical teaching of atonement and judgment. The above texts from the book of Daniel talk about the last day judgment which will be carried out by our Lord and savior Jesus Christ and it has nothing to do with the Day of Atonement. The atonement of our sin was completely fulfilled and accomplished by the blood of Jesus Christ when he died on the Cross and in his High Priestly ministry when he raised from death and entered into the Holy of Holies when he ascended into heaven to the right hand of God 2000 years ago (Heb 9:12, 24-28). Since our salvation is secured by his death and resurrection, there is no reason to be anxious about the judgment as long as we remain firmly standing in our faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18).

Hebrew 9:28 tells us that Jesus Christ carried all our sins on the cross. Since Jesus Christ carried all our sins (past, present, and future) on the cross, including sins which we may commit even after believing in Jesus Christ, and made atonement once for all our sins (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:12-14, 17-18) then there is not a single sin left for devil to carry as E. G. White says. So this teaching would steal our confidence in the assured atonement of Jesus Christ finished 2000 years ago. Besides, there is no single biblical evidence about this teaching. In fact, this teaching contradicts the biblical rule which tells us that in the Old Testament time, all High Priests used to enter into the Holy of Holies once a year directly (Heb 9:7; 10:12; Lev 16:34). Thus since Jesus Christ is our High Priest (Heb. 9:11) he entered into the Holy of Holies directly when he ascended into the heavenly glory (Hebrew 9:12, 25).

Therefore, this teaching contradicts the true teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which clearly states that Jesus Christ was sacrificed for our sin once and for all (Heb. 2:14-15; 7:27; 9:11-14; 9:21-22, 26-28; 10:12-14, 17-18; Col. 2:13-15). The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses our sins; it does not transfer our sins into the heavenly sanctuary as E. G. White says. So as noted above,

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<sup>5</sup> E. G. White. *The Great Controversy*, 358.

<sup>6</sup> E. G. White, *The Great controversy*, 357-358.

<sup>7</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 365.

Daniel 8:14 and 7:10 talks about the judgment of the world which is nothing to do with the Day of Atonement.

### **Is Sunday Worshiping the Mark of the Beast (666)?**

One of the most fabricated speculative interpretations of the Bible that I have ever read is the SDA interpretation about the Mark of the Beast (666). They claim that the mark of the beast is the Sunday worship<sup>8</sup>. Besides, the E. G. White's Prophecy represents other protestant Churches as potential persecutors of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in collaboration with the Roman Catholic Church, because they refuse to worship on Sunday which would be to them receiving the mark of the Beast (666)<sup>9</sup>. There is no single biblical evidence about this claim. The Bible tells us that people will be forced to receive the mark of the beast on their forehead or on their right hand which has nothing to do with the Sunday and Saturday worship (Rev 13:14-18). To my understanding, this interpretation is forcing the Bible to say what we want to say. It requires much time and space to show how this mistake happened in the SDA Church. I intend to discuss this issue in another article. For now, I just want to remark that the SDA Church is in dangerous path regarding understanding this prophecy (Rev 22:19).

### **Three Angels' Message**

According to the SDA teaching, the three angels' message mainly concerns calling people to worship God on the Seventh-day Sabbath and warning them not to worship on Sunday<sup>10</sup>. They consider other religious organizations who worship on Sunday as Babylon<sup>11</sup>. They believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the only remnant Church called to warn the world and other protestant believers about the mark of the beast (which is worshiping on Sunday) and about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Their proof texts about this claim are Revelation 12:17; 14:12 and 19:10. The two main concepts they draw from these passages are "keeping the commandments of God" and "have the testimony of Jesus Christ". They interpret that the first expression refers to keeping the Ten Commandments, while the second expression refers to the gift of prophecy. They contend that "the testimony of Christ" is the same as the "spirit of prophecy" because Rev. 19:10 says that "the testimony of Christ is spirit of prophecy." Then they claim that the only denomination which fulfills these two criteria is the Seventh-day Adventist Church because it observes the Seventh-day Sabbath and it has the gift of prophecy through Ellen G. White. All other Protestant Churches do not fulfill these criteria because they break the law of God by following the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that they worship on Sunday rather than worshipping on Saturday which is God's true Sabbath day.

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<sup>8</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 196; E. G. White. *The Great Controversy*, 515.

<sup>9</sup> E. G. White. *The Great Controversy*, 515, 522.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 512-520.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 512.

In order to evaluate these claims, we have to investigate what John really means when he talks about “keeping God’s commandments” and “testimony of Jesus Christ”. First, when we read John talking about the commandment of God, we have to remind ourselves about what John means when he uses these expressions in all his five books: Gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 letters of John, and Revelation. When he speaks about the commandment of God, in all these books, what he means is **believing in Jesus Christ and loving one another**, nothing else (1 John 3:21-24). Therefore, when he talks about the commandment of God in Revelation he is referring to the same thing: believing in Jesus Christ and loving one another; he was not talking about keeping the Ten Commandments (1 John 3:21-24; John 13:34-35; 14:15; 15:12, 17).

Secondly, the genitive construction “testimony of Christ” means testifying or witnessing about Jesus Christ. This semantic sense is more relevant here because it is consistent with what John teaches elsewhere: John 5:31-40; 20:30; 21:24. Accordingly the expression “the testimony of Christ is spirit of prophecy” could mean “the essence of the prophecy is testifying about Jesus Christ” or it could also mean “testifying about Jesus Christ itself is the spirit of prophecy”. The first semantic sense is more relevant in this context because Jesus himself said that the whole prophecy of the Bible testifies about him (John 5:39). Thus our close investigation of these passages shows that there is nothing specifically written about the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Therefore, this self declared “chosen Church of God” must be corrected and repented. Thus, our close reading of the passage about the three angels’ message shows that their message is all about the Gospel, about Jesus Christ, and about warning the world to acknowledge Jesus as the only King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will rule the universe forever and ever opposed to the Beast; it is not about war against the Ten Commandments and Saturday Sabbath as the SDA Church claims. This is the major content of the message of the book of Revelation. So the three angels’ message is a message about warning the whole world to worship only God by acknowledging Jesus Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, about the judgment of the Babylon (Rev 17:18; 18:16, 19-21; 1 Pet 5:13), and about warning the world not to receive the Mark of the Beast who opposes the Kingship of Jesus Christ (Rev 14:12; 17:12-14).

### **E. G. White as a Prophetess**

The SDA Church teaching claims that this church is the only denomination blessed by the gift of the prophecy as it was given through E. G. White as a fulfillment of Rev 19:10<sup>12</sup>. Because of this view they do not consider that this verse talks about the gift of the prophecy given by the Holy Spirit to all the people of God who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ in all ages and cannot be monopolized by one denomination or by one individual. This gift will continue encouraging

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<sup>12</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 247.

all true believers of Jesus Christ who are committed to proclaim the Gospel, and it is not limited for only one denomination or geographical location or ethnic group or one individual.

Besides, because of this belief, E. G. White's books are recognized as "authoritative source of truth"<sup>13</sup> and referred to as 'little lights' which lead to the greater light. However, it is very strange to claim that her books are authoritative and that we need to have her little lights while we already have the greatest light, the Bible, which is the only authoritative book about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It would be abnormal for someone to hold a torch in bright daylight in order to walk on the street. Above all, her mistaken biblical interpretations such as claiming that the Seventh-day Sabbath is a seal of God's people, Sunday worship is the Mark of the Beast, and Jesus entered into the Holy of Holies in 1844 puts her being of a true prophetess under serious question.

### **Is SDA the only Remnant Church?**

The Hebrew term(s) employed to refer "remnant" has several semantic senses. One of these senses is employed to refer to a group of people, who are left over, especially righteous people and faithful followers of God (1 King 19:17-18). The Seventh-day Adventist Church claims this meaning for itself and refers itself as a remnant Church of God<sup>14</sup>. This is because they contend that they keep the Ten Commandments of God, especially the Seventh day Sabbath. One of the proof texts which the SDA people use to prove that they are the remnant Church is Rev 12:17: "Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus." Their analogical argument is that since they keep the commandments of God, particularly the Seventh-day Sabbath, this message is about them. Consequently, it is very difficult for many SDA members to accept other believers of Jesus Christ as saved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ because those believers do not keep the Sabbath.

This claim contradicts the Gospel preached by Jesus Christ himself and by his apostles because they never employed keeping the Sabbath as one of the criteria to be saved or to belong to God's people after being saved. For example, Acts chapter 15:22-35 does not list the Seventh Day Sabbath as one of the criteria imposed on believers to be kept even in the early Church. What was required was living a holy life fully submitted to Jesus Christ to serve him only. Then, the question is "What was John referring to when he says 'keep the commandments?'" John himself tells us what he meant in his first letter 3:19-24.

The second proof text they employ as evidence that this Church is the remnant Church is Revelation 19:10 which says "the testimony of Christ is spirit of prophecy". They believe that

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 181, 190-197.

the referent of this verse is Ellen G. White because she was a prophetess. However, the question one should ask is that “was John referring to E. G. White in this passage?” Was the angel referring to E. G. White’s prophesy? There is no single biblical evidence about such claim, except their own self-declared interpretation, which is very strange.

### Correct Understanding about Food and Drink

Seventh-day Adventists emphasize so much what to eat and what to drink as well as what not to eat and what not to drink. I agree that our health is very important and that we need to do our best to take care of our health and keep ourselves healthy. But we must keep in mind that health-care has nothing to do with our salvation. There is no food type which can defile us or purify us in order to qualify us acceptable before God (Mark 7:19; 1 Tim 4:3-5; Heb 13:9; Col 2:16). So we have to teach contextualized health-teaching in order to help people to keep healthy. Besides, we must be very careful to avoid every pitfall the devil may use to distort the gospel of Jesus Christ by vegetarianism. For example, Gnosticism one of the heretic teachings of the Christian history, employed vegetarianism as one of the remedies from our evil body as Colin Brown observes: “everything material was bad; only the spiritual was good. The remedy was to be found in a variety of solutions ranging from the possession of passwords and secret knowledge to asceticism and **vegetarianism** (emphasis mine).”<sup>15</sup>

In conclusion, it is my prayer that the Seventh-day Adventist Church avoid these distractions and be passionate about knowing only Jesus Christ (1 Co 2:2), who is our Lord and Savior. He is the truth, the life, the way, and the wisdom of God. Whoever believes in him “will never be put to shame” (Rom 9:33; John 8:32; 1 Co 1:22-24). To him be glory, praise, wisdom, honor, and power forever and ever! Amen!

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Brown. *Philosophy & the Christian Faith*. Illinois: Intervarsity press 1968, 14.