

THE CSDA Signet

“And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO YAH” (Exodus 28:36)

A bimonthly publication of the CSDA Church

Questions and Answers: *The Ten Virgins*

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” (Matthew 25:1-13)

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

Q. What do the ten virgins represent?

A. “As Christ sat looking upon the party that waited for the bridegroom, He told His disciples the story of the ten virgins, by their experience illustrating the experience of the church that shall live just before His second coming.

The two classes of watchers represent the two classes who profess to be waiting for their Lord. They are called virgins because they profess a pure faith.” [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 407]

Q. What are the lamps they carry with them?

A. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Psalms 119:105)

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

Q. What is the oil for the lamps?



A. "...What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by **my spirit**, saith the LORD of hosts." (Zechariah 4:2-6)

"The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit." [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 408]

Q. What is the connection between the oil (The Holy Spirit) and the lamp (The Word of God)?

A. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

"For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (1 Corinthians 2:11-12)

"Without the Spirit of God a knowledge of His word is of no avail. The theory of truth, unaccompanied by the Holy Spirit, cannot quicken the soul or sanctify the heart. One may be familiar with the commands and promises of the Bible; but unless the Spirit of God sets the truth home, the character will not be transformed. Without the enlightenment of the Spirit, men will not be able to distinguish truth from error, and they will fall under the masterful temptations of Satan." [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 408]

NOTE: A lamp is simply a means to burn oil – the lamp without the oil is but a useless piece of metal. The lamp has no inherent value of its own; only by being filled with oil does it have the ability to shed light on the path of its bearer.

Likewise, the Scriptures of themselves have no value apart from the Spirit that inspired them. The same may be said of the words of the prophets, "for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

Possessing a lamp without oil, then, represents having the written Word of God, but no understanding of the principles upon which it is built. As the Jews who rejected Christ because He did not come as a temporal "conquering King" but a spiritual one, based upon the prophecies that He would indeed come as a conquering King, those foolish virgins will likewise be deceived

by "the masterful temptations of Satan" – and will appear to have written reason from the Word to show why.

"The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles. Its influence is not abiding." [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 411]

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

Q. Who is the bridegroom?

A. "And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days." (Mark 2:18-20)

"The coming of the bridegroom was at midnight--the darkest hour. So the coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth's history." [Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 414]

Q. What is indicated by the bridegroom "tarrying," or not coming at the expected time?

A. "By the tarrying of the bridegroom is represented the passing of the time when the Lord was expected, the disappointment, and the seeming delay." [Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy, 1888 Edition*, page 394]

NOTE: This is speaking of what was termed "The Great Disappointment" in 1844 when Christ did not return to Earth as had been expected. While the Advent people did not misunderstand the timing and principle of the prophecy, they did misunderstand the actual fulfillment thereof – specifically what the "sanctuary" to be cleansed in Daniel 8:14 signified.

Q. What is signified by "The Midnight Cry?"

A. "This parable is not a representation of open sinners, but of those who profess Christ. The bride is the church who is waiting for the second appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the proclamation of the first and second angels of Revelation 14, a special message has come to our world.

Speaking of these messages, John says: 'I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'

The first and second angels' messages are united and made complete in the third. - John says: 'And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.'

Under the proclamation of these messages the cry was made, 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh.' The believers in these messages were compelled to go out from the churches because they preached the second appearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven. The whole world was to hear the message, 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.' Many who heard these messages thought they would live to see Christ come; but there was a delay in the coming of the Bridegroom, in order that all might have an opportunity to hear the last message of mercy to a fallen world." [Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, October 31, 1899]



NOTE: The Three Angels' Messages are to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord; the "midnight cry" that instructs them to "Go ye out to meet Him" is the culmination of this same Message.

Q. If the parable was about the events of and surrounding 1844, does it have a dual fulfillment in the very last days?

A. "The first, second, and third angels' messages are to be repeated. The call is to be given to the church: 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. . . . Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.' [Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, October 31, 1899]

NOTE: Quoted above is the fourth angel's message found in Revelation 18; it is here shown to be the repeating of the first three angel's messages.

Q. Since the Three Angels' Messages are to be repeated under the Fourth Angel, can we expect the rest of the parable to be applicable to the "second sounding" as well?

A. "Many who went forth to meet the Bridegroom under the messages of the first and second angels, refused the third, the last testing message to be given to the world, and a similar position will be taken when the last call is made." [Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, October 31, 1899]

Q. What is the "Third Angels' Message" – which many refused – called the "last testing message"?

A. "And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall 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 ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:9-12)

Q. Does this mean that the "midnight cry" that awakens the sleeping virgins is related to the Image and Mark of the Beast (also called "the mark of his name")?

A. The above quotations and Scriptures leave no doubt upon this point – it is an unequivocal "Yes".

Q. What are the principles of the Word regarding what the mark and image of the beast are?

A. "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:11)

"The 'image to the beast' represents that form of apostate Protestantism which will be developed when the Protestant churches shall seek the aid of the civil power for the enforcement of their dogmas." [Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 445]

"But in the very act of enforcing a religious duty by secular power, the churches would themselves form an image to the beast; hence the enforcement of Sundaykeeping in the United States would be an enforcement of the worship of the beast and his image." [Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 449]

NOTE: The meaning of "worship" [*Heb. Shachah*] is literally to bow down in deference and acknowledgment of a superior, with the direct connotation of rendering service to that acknowledged authority. (Matthew 4:8-10)

Why, then, is the “worship” of the beast so expressly forbidden, if we are commanded to “be subject unto the higher powers”, (Romans 13:1,2) including governments, of which beasts are a symbol? (Daniel 7:17,23)

The reason is that, while rendering service to the rulers of the land is our Christian duty, when the government shall make a law that conflicts with the requirements of God, we are to “obey God rather than man”. (Acts 5:29, Daniel 3:18) The worship of the beast, then, must consist of violating the requirements of God in favor of a human enactment or decree, which is signified by “the mark of the beast.”

The beast of Revelation 13 is none other than the Papacy, as a careful study of the books of Daniel and the Revelation will show. An image to the beast must then consist of another religious organization following in the same steps as the Papacy – controlling the civil power to enforce religion by law.

The wording of the first angel’s message is nearly identical to the wording of the Sabbath commandment, which instructs us to cease from labour in acknowledgement of God’s authority over all that He has made – in essence, the Sabbath commandment is the commandment to worship God. (Revelation 14:7, Exodus 20:11) The mark of the beast, then, is a civil law that is enforced on God’s people, at the request of a religious organization, that requires them to render obedience to man’s decrees as opposed to God’s, or, to honor man’s Sabbath as opposed to God’s.

Q. Did Ellen White say that the enforcement of Sundaykeeping was the only way in which the mark of the beast could come about?

A. No. She stated the principle of the Word, that “in the very act of enforcing a religious duty by secular power, the churches would themselves form an image to the beast”. This is the equation, this is the principle. She then states, “hence”, or because of this, “the enforcement of Sundaykeeping would be an enforcement of the worship of the beast and his image”. Other statements in the Spirit of Prophecy reflect this line of thought. Sunday legislation was written of as the mark of the beast, not because there was a divine vision that “The Mark shall be Sunday worship, the Image shall be Sunday churches uniting with the state”, but because there was a divine principle, “The Mark shall be regarding a false Sabbath, the Image shall be apostate Protestantism controlling civil power”. In her day, a Sunday law was being brought before Congress for legislation by the Sunday churches; her writing in this regard was an application of the principle to present-day events.

“Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered.” [Ellen G. White, *1 Selected Messages*, page 57]

Q. Doesn’t “a false Sabbath,” or the principle of the mark being a Sabbath issue, mean that it must be a Sunday law?



A. “There remaineth therefore a rest [Gk. *Sabbitismos*; literally, a keeping of the Sabbath] to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” (Hebrews 4:9-10)

“Now I want to state a little further upon the principle that no Christian, being a citizen of the kingdom of God, can of right start any procedure in connection with civil government. After it is started by the government itself, that is another question . . . I repeat therefore, that upon the principles which govern kingdoms and governments, the very principle of the law in heaven, or law in earth, a Christian cannot start any procedure in connection with civil government. And of all Christians, Seventh-day Adventists cannot do it. The very keeping of the Sabbath forbids it.” [A.T. Jones, *1895 General Conference Bulletin*]

NOTE: The Sabbath, like all other points of the law, has a spiritual keeping and a literal keeping. The Jews were “Sabbath-keepers” after the letter of the law, yet crucified the Lord of the Sabbath while preparing for their keeping of it. Hebrews chapter 4 speaks in detail about the keeping of the true Sabbath of God, as opposed to simply the seventh day. To seek protection or vengeance at the hands of any other than Christ, then, is to violate the Sabbath commandment as surely as to keep Sunday holy in the place of Saturday.

Essentially, to take a prerogative that belongs to God alone is to put ones-self in the place of God, and to violate the Sabbath in Spirit by not ceasing from our own works as He ceased from His. “Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52,53)

Q. Is protecting the Church a prerogative of God alone, or is the Church to protect and avenge itself through secular power?

A. “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!” (Isaiah 31:1)

“But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.” (Hosea 1:7)

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19)

Q. Would being a member of a church or denomination that engages in Sabbath-breaking, be it literal or spiritual, make us guilty of that sin by association?

A. "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed." (Isaiah 9:16)

"Thus by choosing a heathen ruler, the Jewish nation had withdrawn from the theocracy. They had rejected God as their king. Henceforth they had no deliverer. They had no king but Caesar. To this the priests and teachers had led the people. For this, with the fearful results that followed, they were responsible. A nation's sin and a nation's ruin were due to the religious leaders." [Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, Page 737]

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 1:10-11)

NOTE: If to bid an evil man "God Speed" or take him into your house is to be a partaker of his evil deeds, how much more shall a man be a partaker of the evil deeds of that church whose actions he lends his time, efforts, membership, and tithes to support!

Q. Regarding the name Seventh-day Adventist, is it of men's invention, or of God's?

A. "We are Seventh-day Adventists. Are we ashamed of our name? We answer, 'No, no! We are not. It is the name the Lord has given us. It points out the truth that is to be the test of the churches.'" [Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages 2*, page 384]

"As to the name Seventh-day Adventists: I was shown in regard to the remnant people of God taking a name. . . . No name which we can take will be appropriate but that which accords with our profession and expresses our faith and marks us a peculiar people. The name Seventh-day Adventist is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world. . . . The name Seventh-day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind." [Ellen G. White, *The Early Years Volume 1*, page 438]

Q. Are there, then, any laws in place that are 1) the result of apostate Protestantism controlling civil power 2) to enforce religious duties by secular law, 3) that force believers to choose between resting in God's protection or obeying men 4) in honoring what can rightly be called "the mark of his (the beast's) name"?

A. Yes. In the trademark of the name "Seventh-day Adventist", we see all four points fulfilled:

1) The General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists, on behalf of the entire denomination, applied for and received a trademark on the name Seventh-day Adventist from the Federal government. They may (and do) invoke federal magistrates and federal punishments upon those who dissent while using this name.



2) The name Seventh-day Adventist, as shown, was given by God to His people for their use. To bring civil penalties and fines upon those who obey this instruction is to enforce religious duties by secular law in the plainest of language.

3) The enforcement of this mark forces men to choose between a) Giving up the name Seventh-day Adventist and failing to rest in the protective power of God, denying His name, b) Joining the General Conference and thus partaking of their Sabbath-violating spirit and civil actions by membership, or c) Disobeying the trademark law.

4) Not only is this law in regards to a name (Seventh-day Adventist), but the very language of trademark law is replete with the most obvious and flagrant of wording to this effect. A reading of any trademark court document in which the Conference is involved will return the phrase "Plaintiff's mark 'Seventh-day Adventist'". Repeatedly and forcefully, it is stated that the mark of the General Conference is the name "Seventh-day Adventist."

Q. Does this mean that the prophecy has been fulfilled in a way different than most have expected?

A. Yes. Those who have oil with their lamps will see the principles that govern the matter. The foolish virgins will cling to the "Sunday law" ideology, with as much apparent evidence for their position as the Jews had for rejecting Christ's earthly mission. The way of God has always been to test the hearts of His people to see who has the oil of the Spirit of understanding to make worthwhile the lamp of the Word. To cling to the Sunday law teaching regarding the mark while ignoring the Trademark law, which fulfills the exact same principles, is to have a lamp, but no oil.

Q. Why are the foolish virgins represented as having had oil in their lamps, but not extra?

A. In expecting the Sunday law application of the third angel's message and preparing for protesting against and resisting it, they are shown to have had enough oil for that fulfillment, but **only** that fulfillment. Their protest is not based upon a hatred for the violation of principle. The Bridegroom tarrying indicates a longer period than initially expected, a change in the specifics of their wait; and as they did not prepare for anything other than their expectations, they are disappointed, and left in darkness. Truly it is said of them, "They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles."

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

Q. Why could the wise not share their oil with the foolish?

A. “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in [the land], as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.” (Ezekiel 14:20)

“This is the class that in time of peril are found crying, Peace and safety. They lull their hearts into security, and dream not of danger. When startled from their lethargy, they discern their destitution, and entreat others to supply their lack; but in spiritual things no man can make up another’s deficiency. The grace of God has been freely offered to every soul. The message of the gospel has been heralded, ‘Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’ Rev. 22:17. But character is not transferable. No man can believe for another. No man can receive the Spirit for another. No man can impart to another the character which is the fruit of the Spirit’s working.

It is in a crisis that character is revealed. When the earnest voice proclaimed at midnight, ‘Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him,’ and the sleeping virgins were roused from their slumbers, it was seen who had made preparation for the event. Both parties were taken unawares; but one was prepared for the emergency, and the other was found without preparation. So now, a sudden and unlooked-for calamity, something that brings the soul face to face with death, will show whether there is any real faith in the promises of God. It will show whether the soul is sustained by grace. The great final test comes at the close of human probation, when it will be too late for the soul’s need to be supplied.” [Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 411]

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Q. If the bridegroom is Christ, and the great final test comes when human probation is closed, who are “those that sell”, the spurious vender that the foolish virgins “went to buy” their oil from?

A. “Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more [...] cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.” (Revelation 18:10-13)

Q. Where is this description of fallen Babylon found?

A. Revelation 18; it is immediately after the fourth angel’s message under which the first three angel’s messages are to be repeated, as mentioned earlier in the study.

Q. What is the Adventist understanding of what constitutes Babylon fallen?

A. “When the early church departed from God and imbibed pagan errors, she became Babylon. When she united with the state, she fell, and, as an organization, was the body of Christ no longer.” [*First Quarter Sabbath School*, Lesson IX, February 29, 1896]

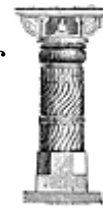
Q. What is the sure course of action when the true church falls through uniting with the state?

A. “It has ever been true that a backslidden body, one that has turned from God’s word to men, from God’s power to the state, was never reformed in itself. Invariably God’s message has called out those from the fallen church who would do His will and preach His gospel. Israel went down to Egypt for help, and their captivity and loss of power followed. Out of the captives God gathered a faithful band to do His work. The Jewish church failed, and God called out the apostolic church to do His bidding. The Roman Church failed, and out of it God called the churches of the Reformation. Some of these churches failed to advance, and God called out others to bear His gospel to the world such as the Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, Disciple, Adventists. His last ‘called-out’ people will know no standard but His word, no power but His Spirit.” [*First Quarter Sabbath School*, Lesson X, March 7, 1896]

“I tell you now that you must have divine enlightenment. If you do not seek this, Satan will set up his hellish banner right in your homes, and you will be so blinded to the real nature of his deceptions that you reverence it as the banner of Christ.”
[Ellen G. White]



The FOUNDATIONS of our FAITH



I – Introduction

This article sets forth the Creation Seventh Day Adventist position on “tests of fellowship.” This is an important and timely study, since the fragmentation that has been widespread in almost every form of Christianity has shown itself just as eager to weaken and dilute even the Advent message in these last days.

In a time when the world is more morally corrupt than ever before, in a time when the highest standard of righteousness in all of spiritual history is being offered to the saints, in a time just before the return of the Savior Himself, we find the would-be bearers of the “most solemn message” confused, divided, without anything like the influence they should have, and certainly without a testimony of victory in Yahshua on more than just a “theoretical” level.

The splitting of Churches was a problem even in the days of the apostles, although it was nothing then compared to what it is now. Still, with prophetic preparedness, we have received a rebuke handed down through the ages; “strife, seditions, heresies” and so on are listed among the “works of the flesh,” in Galatians 5:20. The word *heresy* does not mean, as many seem to believe, “a theological position with which I happen to disagree.” It literally means, “*dissensions* arising from diversity of opinions and aims,” with emphasis on the “dissensions.” A heresy is not “a bad idea,” but the conflict that results from one or more individuals holding to something that the Body of Christ has considered unsound. Another similar term in the Bible that has the same meaning is “schism,” a split in fellowship over doctrinal disagreements.

A schism is something of which, in the Body:
Christ said there should be none. (John 17:21)
Paul said there should be none. (1Cor 15:25)
John said there should be none. (1John 2:19)
Ellen White said there should be none. [*Testimonies for the Church Volume One*, page 207]

All that is recognized within Adventism as “Light,” from the Greatest, to the Greater, to the Lesser, is consonant that there must be no divisions within the Body of Christ! The Church can tolerate a lot of differences among its members, as we will see in this study – even differences that supposed Christians in the past have been willing to separate, even kill and die, for – but there is a sharp distinction between a *difference* and a matter over which a *heresy* may legitimately result.

We need to decide what our tests of fellowship must be; we need to decide where we will plant our flags, what theological hills to defend, and what areas we must leave to the individual Christian conscience and simply say, as Paul did, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” (Rom 14:5b)

There is a balance to be struck between all having the same mind, (1Cor 1:10, Phil 4:2) and the liberty that each individual believer has in Christ. (Gal 2:4, 1Cor 10:29)

If this balance is not found and maintained, we will fall into one of two ditches on the sides of The Way of Holiness. (Isa 35:8) Either we will accept individuals into fellowship who deviate from pure doctrines to such a degree that they will not only fail to attain the character of Christ, but lead others by precept and example into perdition along with them, or we will be so rigid in dogma that we become the judges of other men’s consciences. Neither of these were what the Messiah had in mind for His Bride. Both the condemnation of others’ individual, conscientious decisions, (1Tim 6:4, 1Cor 10:29, Rom 14:4) and the tendency toward ministries independent of the organized Church (Mat 12:30, Acts 15:24, 19:11-17) – the natural result of schisms – are uniformly condemned by those who spoke and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

So how do we determine our tests? Are we to come up with a creed, a list of “X number of fundamental doctrines” that our potential members are to sign before baptism? “The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And fifth, to commence persecution against such.” [*Review and Herald*, Battle Creek, Michigan, Third-Day, October 8, 1861] That the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists has followed the mainstream churches in precisely these steps that they once denounced is beyond any degree of reasonable doubt, but what of those within it who seek to find the true path? What of those from other Churches (or no Church at all) who seek to find the truth as it is in Christ Yahshua?

We must learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before us, or we will certainly make the same errors. This is a Biblical principle with a wide scope of application: “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted [...] and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (1Cor 10:6, 11)

The Three Angels’ Message, and the prayer of the Messiah in John 17 demand, absolutely *demand*, unity among Christians. We read, in the Spirit of Prophecy quote mentioned above, “God is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there, one believing this thing, another that. Angels of God are doing the work committed to their trust. The third angel is leading out and purifying a people, and they should move with him unitedly.” [*Testimonies for the Church Volume One*, page 207]

In another place, “God has a church upon the earth, who are His chosen people, who keep His commandments. He is leading, not stray offshoots, not one here and one there, but a people.” [*The Faith I Live By*, page 282] Some within Adventism, in love with their own ideas, have mused, “Ellen White saw the Christians in the last days in ‘little companies,’ so why should we unite with you in fellowship, since we disagree on *Doctrine X*?”

Ellen White did indeed see “little companies” of believers in the last days, but we must read the entire quote to get the entire thought: “Out of the large group professing a belief in the second coming of Christ, this remnant came, little companies of seekers after truth.” [*Manuscript Releases 1*, p. 52] Take note: They are not “stray offshoots,” but one “remnant,” (singular) and they seek after one “truth.” They are little companies in that they are separated one from another due to circumstance and geography; but make no mistake, the remnant is not divided in terms of its theology or beliefs. To accept that position is to take hold of the very philosophy of the Arch-deceiver, who would like nothing more than to see the apostolic commission thwarted: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions [*schisms*] among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1Cor 1:10)

A great deal more may be said on this topic, but in the interest of time and space we must restrict ourselves here to dealing with one narrow matter: On what is this great unity to be based? We cannot arbitrarily accept into fellowship anyone who claims to be “with us,” for doctrines do indeed have great value, and were given for a reason. (Pro 4:2) The number of errors in nominal Christianity has simply exploded since the days in which the Ethiopian Eunuch and the Centurion Cornelius were baptized on the very day they spoke their belief in Christ Yahshua. There must be no creed other than the Bible, but in this age of Babylonian confusion there must be clearly defined foundational beliefs, or there will be chaos. One way to address this matter, perhaps the simplest, is to ask, “Is *Doctrine X* really something worth dividing over, or can we relegate that to the realm of individual belief and practice?” This is the subject of our current study.

II – What A “Test of Fellowship” Is

There are four main elements of a valid test of fellowship, and there are four corresponding errors that can be made regarding them, as we shall see in Section III.

Tests of fellowship involve:

1) Acceptance of general principles leading to Christian character.

Since all the law and prophets is based on *Agape*, that perfect, divine love, (Mat 22:37-40) any doctrine that we accept must, if it is from Yahweh, lead the Christian to more fully reflect this principle in his or her daily deportment. From the keeping of the Sabbath to the giving of tithe, from the sharing of

communion to rejoicing in trials, all of these reflect our love and commitment to the Creator and to one another.

That last should be no surprise. A Christian accepts providence, the natural outworking of divine law, as a blessing even if trials result; this is one sure sign of the right character. A Christian bears reproach with dignity and patience, because he is in Christ, and “doth not commit sin,” (1John 3:9) by misrepresenting his Savior to the on-looking world and universe.

Creation Seventh Day Adventists do, as a matter of faith, ask potential converts if they have the testimony of victory over every known sin in their lives. This is because a character that has once been truly exposed to the saving love of the Messiah (1John 3:6) is transformed naturally into a new creature. The Scriptures tell us, in addition to what was quoted from 1 John 3:6, 9, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.” (2Cor 5:17) Yahshua Himself taught, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

As Adventists we accept the instruction of the Spirit through a relatively recent vessel: “Not one should be buried with Christ by baptism unless they are critically examined whether they have ceased to sin, whether they have fixed moral principles, whether they know what sin is, whether they have moral defilement which God abhors. Find out by close questioning if these persons are really ceasing to sin, if with David they can say, I hate sin with a perfect hatred.” [*Manuscript Releases Volume Six*, page 165]

As sin is directly tied to character, and is not so much a matter of individual acts as a condition of the heart (1 John 3:4 says that sin is literally *anomia*, a condition of “lawlessness”) this is certainly a valid test of fellowship. The Church of Christ is not a place where men learn to develop life. It is a living Body of a living God; It is a Bride, pure and vital, and It has a work to do that can only be accomplished in victory, purity and unity. This, and all other doctrines relating to a character-based principle, constitutes a legitimate area of belief worth examining in potential converts. Aside from personal victory, and an *open testimony* thereof, (Rev 12:11) other doctrines of key importance for forming a Christian character include:

- a) Gospel Order, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-20, since this deals with how we demonstrate *agape* to one another.
- b) Transparency in Church-related dealings, understanding the difference between *secrecy* and *privacy*. We must always be open and honest with our brethren. (Lev 19:11, Col 3:9) Even though some things are legitimately private, there is simply no need to hide those actions and words that affect others outside the home circle.
- c) Acceptance of Protestant Christian principles; this involves a *protest* of both the arbitrary authority of Churches and the intrusion of civil power into religious beliefs and practices. According to the Messiah we must know what belongs to Caesar and what

belongs to God, (Mat 22:21) and if we fail to make this distinction, the character will never be perfect before Heaven. Protest- ing ungodly powers that attempt to regulate the worship of the saints is one of the elements of the Everlasting Gospel of Revelation 14, since the “Beast” that attempts to enforce a mark of allegiance on the “very elect” is just such a power as this, to induce false worship by deception or force.

Tests of fellowship involve:

2) General agreement with the principles of prophetic interpretation.

This general agreement involves a basic understanding of Adventist doctrines including the Sanctuary and Day of Atonement, since these particulars are necessary for evangelism. The apostle writes, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” (1Peter 3:15) If someone asks a Creation Seventh Day Adventist, even the most recently baptized member, “What is it that sets your beliefs apart from any other Church?” the answer that he or she gives reflects the degree to which Yahweh is sanctified (or considered holy) in the heart.

One who understands the holiness of the Almighty will earnestly hunger and thirst after the knowledge of the Savior, and will have found beauty in the Plan of Salvation. The Scriptures will be searched, and the understanding will be enlightened: “blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.” (Mat 5:6) In these last days, this Plan has much to do with the activities of Yahshua as our High Priest in Heaven, as the Book of Hebrews makes quite clear; and fundamental Adventist doctrines, particularly those derived from the study of prophecy, are closely tied to this matter.

The principles of prophetic interpretation as embraced by Adventism have led us, for example, to a unique understanding of the events of the year 1844. This is based on the clearly established timeline provided by the prophet Daniel, and supported by the visions of the Apocalypse. Knowing, earnestly believing, that we are in the very last days of human history places a certain urgency on our work. Christ said, when the days remaining in His ministry were numbered, “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work.” (John 9:4) Everyone who truly belongs to His Bride must – will – be of that same Spirit. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of His*,” (Rom 8:9b) therefore an understanding of the prophecies and the times in which we are living is certainly a legitimate basis for a test of fellowship.

Tests of fellowship involve:

3) A basic standard of belief and practice.

This is also tied to character; it establishes a valid basis by which a potential applicant for baptism may be accepted or rejected, or by which an occasion of disfellowship can take place. Some Christians hold Matthew 7:1 to be an entire dogma: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” This is not, however, the

entire picture, and even those who believe that the thought ends there would not object to the removal from fellowship of a murderer, rapist or compulsive thief. Some, even among the most adamant “non-judges,” might even vote to disfellowship individuals because of personal dislike.

Matthew 7, if we read as far as verse 5, does not provide a rule, but a process. If you see an error in a brother, do not immediately rush to judgment. First, see if you are guilty of that which you perceive in another – this is the way to avoid *hypocrisy*. Next, begin to apply Gospel Order, which has already been mentioned. If you follow this process, “then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” There may indeed be motes in our brothers’ eyes, but it must be the Bible, not our individual fancy, that is used to determine what a “mote” looks like.

The Ten Commandments are the most obvious standard of righteousness; indeed, they constitute the only codified standard of righteousness in the entire Bible – *Old Testament and New*. It is the New Testament that says the Law must be used lawfully. (1Tim 1:8) It is the New Testament that defines sin (its only definition) as “a transgression of the Law,” or literally, “A state of being lawless.” (1John 3:6) It is the New Testament that shows us the penalty for transgressing the law... death such as that suffered by the Son of God Himself. It is the New Testament that quotes the Savior saying, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

Those who believe that the commandments of Christ are somehow different from the Decalogue must understand that there is no Biblical basis for such a notion. Further, we read in the Sermon on the Mount, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 5:17-19)

The “law and the prophets,” which can mean nothing but that which was stated in the Law and exalted by the prophets, is equated directly with “these commandments” that Christ is telling His followers to do and teach. The Old Testament stated just such a thing centuries earlier: “Also I will make Him my Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and His Throne as the days of Heaven. If His children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not *my commandments*; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” (Psalm 89:27-32)

Who is this everlasting King of an everlasting Throne, but Christ? Who are His seed, and His children, but Christians? What is Yahweh’s “Law” here, but the very principles upon

which His Kingdom is based, known to all who read the Psalms as the foundation of the Covenant with Israel, and the New Covenant with those of the spiritual circumcision? (Phil 3:3)

Creation Seventh Day Adventists, therefore, do make obedience to the 10 Commandments, and their obvious extensions, tests of fellowship.

One who has not forsaken adultery, stealing, blasphemy, and so on will not be accepted into fellowship. One who practices health-destroying habits, like smoking, is in slow but steady violation of the commandment against murder (for one who kills himself, and pays to have himself killed, is indeed a murderer) and also against stealing. “For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1Cor 6:20) One who does not pay tithe is likewise a thief. “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, ‘Wherein have we robbed thee?’ In tithes and offerings.” (Mal 3:8) “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay *tithe* of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; *these ought ye to have done*, and not to leave the other undone.” (Mat 23:23) Christ affirms that the payment of tithe is something that ought to be done by the righteous, but at the same time cautions against making exactness in such things of more importance than any other matter of the law, judgment, mercy and faith. These are examples of obvious extensions of the commandments.

The Church of Yahshua also considers the observation of New Moons to be a test of fellowship, primarily because they are tied to the development of the perfectly victorious character. Some have said, “If the New Moon is not in the Decalogue, it should not be made a test of fellowship.” This is merely a more subtle argument than those who say, “The New Testament never explicitly commands us to ‘Remember the Sabbath day,’ so it should not be made a test of fellowship.”

The truth is that all instructions from Heaven are important for the development of the Christian spirit and mind, and, unless they are openly repealed by a divine source, maintain every element of the purpose for which they were provided. This is true whether or not the instructions appear where individuals think they should. Both the Old and New Testaments teach us to keep New Moons as sacred days, and in fact it is the New Testament that gives us the reason why Christians should keep it (see below on Colossians 2). New Moons were often tied to Sabbaths in Israel. (2Kings 4:23; 1Ch 23:31; 2Ch 2:4, 8:13, 31:3; Neh 10:33; Isa 1:13, 66:23; Eze 46:1; Hos 2:11)

The verse in Isaiah 66 is particularly important. Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally used this verse to prove that the seventh-day Sabbath is eternal, that it is kept even after sin and sinners have passed away, even in the New Creation – therefore, they rightly conclude, it is an everlasting principle for Christians as well as for Israel of old. Yet how often the verse’s other blessing is overlooked:



“‘And it shall come to pass, that from one New Moon to another, *and* from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me,’ saith Yahweh.” (Isa 66:23)

New Moons are days of worship, (Psa 81:3) of ceasing from worldly labor, (Eze 46:1 – where they are distinguished from the regular “six working days”) and of ceasing from trade. (Amos 8:5) In other words, they are kept in a very similar fashion to Sabbaths, with the exception that light work is permitted. “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein, but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto Yahweh.’” (Lev 23:24, 25) This is said of the Feast of Trumpets, which was the seventh New Moon of the ceremonial year.

Paul tells us, in an often mistranslated and misunderstood passage, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the New Moon, or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come, but the Body of Christ.” (Col 2:16, 17) In other words, only the Body of Christ (the New Covenant Church) is equipped to decide matters of practice for its members, including those of Sabbaths, New Moons, eating and drinking. Those who read these two verses in new Bible translations may not understand how much the wording of Paul’s epistle have been manipulated; in the King James Version, at least, the words that have been artificially added are in [brackets] or *italics*, so that the genuine meaning may still be obtained if those particular words are excluded.

New Moons, as the passage states, are “a shadow of things to come,” and, being yet future in fulfillment, continue to have type-antitype significance. More on the spiritual significance of New Moons may be found in the article “The Cycle of The Moon” on the CSDA Church website:

<http://csda.us/binary/essays/emoon.html>

Ultimately, however, a violation of the New Moons does go back to a violation of the Ten Commandments, just as surely as do smoking or drunkenness, although neither of these is “explicitly stated.” It not only violates the principle of the fifth, to honor your parents, but others also. Of the fifth in particular we read a spiritual application: “Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Heb 12:9) In the interest of time, we will conclude this section with the above example, and mention that further information on the relationship between the New Moon and the Decalogue is available in the article at the above internet address, and upon request.

Tests of fellowship involve:

4) Accepting the mission of the Church as a whole.

This needs no lengthy explanation. The Scriptures ask, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3)

If the principles of prophetic interpretation are understood, if the character is right, and if a commitment is made to Christian behavior, there will naturally be an evangelistic focus held by each member of the Church of the Messiah. The commission Yahshua gave to His people was not to build big Churches, not to join hands with fallen ecclesiastical organizations, and not to employ worldly means to maintain and increase the borders of Spiritual Israel.

The work of the Church is to defend the widows and orphans, to strengthen the weak, heal the sick and uplift the oppressed. (Isa 1:17, Mat 10:8) The work of the Church, briefly told, is to win souls to the kingdom. Yahshua said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," (Mark 16:15) with the understanding that the *Good News* intimately involves all those elements listed here. If any focus other than this is held, by either the entire Church or individual members, this is a rejection of the very first principles of Christianity.

In addition to the external mission of the Church, there is also an internal family structure that must be respected if unity and focus are to be preserved. The Bible teaches us that "[God] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph 4:11, 12) Note that the structure of apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors and so on is necessary for the work of the ministry and the building of the Body as well as for the preparation of the saints. Thus, the missionary elements of the Church are closely connected to the respect of ecclesiastical order.

While it is true that no pastor or elder is given the commission to command members in matters of conscience, they do have a responsibility to guide the actions of the Body to a certain degree. We read of the respect due to those whom Yahweh has placed as the under-shepherds of His flock: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." (1Tim 5:17) "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren." (verse 1) "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." (verse 19) All must be in harmony on this matter, or time and energy will be wasted by internal conflicts, violations of Gospel Order, and petty rivalries or power struggles; "Can two [or more] walk together, except they be agreed?"

There is also, as with most spiritual concepts, a divinely ordained means by which this principle is demonstrated. In a system similar to faith and works, (visible works reveal intangible faith) the Bible provides baptism as an outward declaration of unity. Baptism, however, is not a commonly understood doctrine in these individualistic times. Some will say, "I am baptized into Christ," and mean by these words that they need make no formal commitment to their fellow man. This is, in actuality, a rejection of the principle of *agape*. Both of the root commandments are "like" one another, (Mat 22:39) absolute love for Yahweh, and absolute love for one's fellow man.

In the Bible, baptism was not merely into the "Head, even Christ," (Eph 4:15) but into His Body, His Church on earth.

We read: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1Cor 12:13) "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." (Rom 6:3, 5) "Then they that gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship..." (Acts 2:41, 42a)

In all the teachings we have regarding baptism, both the recorded precept and the preserved example, we find baptism resulting in immediate fellowship and community. Further still, we know from the words of Christ that the will of the Father is to be done on the earth "as it is in Heaven," (Mat 6:10) and Heaven is known for its meticulous record keeping. (Exo 32:32; Dan 7:10; Mal 3:16; Rev 3:5, 20:12) We find a "type" to fulfill in the work of the rebuilders of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, "And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal [*i.e.*, sign] unto it." (Neh 9:38)

We believe that it is in accord with the principle of *agape*, the precedent of Scriptural types, and the example of the apostles to unite in word and deed, and our local congregations each contain a "membership roll" of all baptized members as a "witness" to the world and universe of our unity. Many Biblical examples of this concept may be cited, (*e.g.*, Josh 24:27, Jer 32:10-12) and a book entitled *A Sure Covenant* that examines these verses and the Scriptural teachings on Church membership may be found on the Creation Seventh Day Adventist website in HTML, Word or PDF format:



<http://csda.us/binary/books/ASC/asc.html>
<http://csda.us/binary/books/ASC/ASC.doc>
<http://csda.us/binary/books/ASC/ASC.pdf>

III – What A "Test of Fellowship" Is Not

Each of the principles discussed above has a close counterfeit, or unlawful excess, associated therewith.

The first valid concept has to do with principles and character. A valid test of fellowship is not:

1) A demand for absolute conformity with all preferences and beliefs

There is a distinction that must be made between convictions and preferences. A conviction is something for which an individual would sacrifice his or her life. For the Christian,

obedience to God rather than men despite persecution and death is understood as a conviction. The apostles said, “We ought to obey God rather than men,” (Acts 5:29) yet it must be understood, even while fully accepting this, that there are some things solely between God and man.

Different levels of understanding are permitted in even the foundational beliefs, and even in the Bible you do not find rigid instructions in every particular, but principles. By way of example, the Creation Seventh Day Adventist diet is not “vegan,” or “vegetarian,” but “healthy.” Scripture says that while “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink,” (Rom 14:17) “whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1Cor 10:31) This is the balance between the two ideas.

The Creation Seventh Day Adventist style of dress is “modest.” (1Tim 2:9) The Creation Seventh Day Adventist style of speech is, “pure.” (Zeph 3:9) The style of dealing with our fellow men is “peaceably.” (Rom 12:18) Yet in none of these cases does there exist a list of transgressions to avoid or points to check off. Here the principle pointed out in Matthew 18 and 7 are applicable: we must “weed our own gardens,” as it were; and if we wish to raise an objection to the beliefs and practices of another, we must first ensure that we are clean of any wrongdoing in that area lest we be found either a false witness or an unjust judge of the servant of Another.

The second valid concept has to do with a general acceptance of prophetic principles. A valid test of fellowship is not:

2) An absolutely uniform understanding of prophecy

The details of prophetic fulfillment may vary among members. In current CSDA understanding, there are many blanks yet to be filled in regarding such areas as the “Two Witnesses” of Revelation 11, the exact means by which the twelve Tribes of Spiritual Israel are identified, the future application of the “Seven Thunders,” and so on. In general, we also have a very different interpretation of the Mark of the Beast than mainstream Adventism.

This is actually a perfect example of the balance to be found between general acceptance and uniform understanding. The principle behind the Mark of The Beast is identical in both the mainstream Adventist church and the CSDA movement. We both will claim that a union of Church and State results in the Image of the Beast, (Rev 13:14) and that this Image will enact a law for the purpose of controlling the allegiance and consciences of the saints. The mainstream Adventist church believes that this fulfillment comes in the form of a Sunday Law, involving an acceptance or rejection of the literal seventh day of the week as a day of rest.

Understanding the principle behind the formation of the Image, and being Protestants by nature, Creation Seventh Day Adventists protest *each and every* union of Church and state that enacts human laws to defend an ecclesiastical organization, or to enforce its decrees by means of civil law.

Ellen White, whose work we certainly accept, wrote, “Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered.” [*I Selected Messages*, p. 57] The testimonies do speak of a Sunday Law, but time and place must be considered. The testimonies to the nation of Israel included promises that Yahweh would never turn loose of His people as a nation, yet when these people broke that covenant, Yahweh was not bound to the already-broken contract, (Zec 11:10) and called new keepers for His vineyard. (Mat 21:41)

Similarly, Seventh-day Adventists may be willing to surrender their freedom and lives protesting a Sunday law that attempts to force disobedience to the Seventh-day commandment, yet as Paul writes, “though I give my body to be burned, and have not *agape*, it profiteth me nothing.” (1Cor 13:3) If an individual protests the Sunday Law with all his being, yet fails to see that the current SDA Trademark law that is threatening the freedom of Christians is a violation of precisely the same principle of religious liberty, he demonstrates that he does not have the mind of Christ. Understanding the principles underlying prophecy is absolutely essential; even if precise interpretations differ, one who supports true principles will naturally protest all manifestations of opposition to the right concepts.

In other words, one who stands against a religious Trademark will automatically reject a Sunday Law, but... one who looks at the Sunday Law as an evil of itself, and does not understand *why* it violates the Law of God, might *not* protest the Trademark and thus fall captive to the mind of the Dragon as it operates through various governmental “Beasts.” To obey without understanding (e.g., because “Ellen White said so,” “My pastor said so,” or “The Church believes so”) is not true virtue, and certainly not true obedience.

In this matter, humility and willingness to discuss opinions and interpretations (for no “private” interpretations are valid – 2Pet 1:20) will ensure that harmony and unity are preserved by faith, and not by any artificial means.

The third valid concept has to do with principles relating to beliefs. A perfect counter-example is this... a valid test of fellowship is not:

3) A demand for absolute uniformity in our understanding of the Godhead.

This is a somewhat “hot” topic in Adventism today, for many will (rightly) point to Ellen White’s statement that, “the personality of God [...] is everything to us as a people.” [*Letter 300*, 1903]

Yet we must understand that there is a difference between the “personality” of God, which reveals itself in His dealings with us and the infinite sacrifice of His Son for our sakes, and the “nature” of God, which is a mystery that no created mind can possibly be equipped to grasp. It must further be understood that Ellen White’s statement about the personality of God was made in a time when various Adventist teachers did disagree

about the precise nature of the Godhead, and for entirely different reasons than a compromise with any worldly or pagan interpretations of divine teaching.

The Adventist Church was not, by any means, Trinitarian in its approach to the Godhead, yet differences in opinion regarding precisely how this worked were certainly allowed. To be sure, though the Adventist church officially taught against the doctrine, we never read of any individual being rejected for fellowship simply because he or she was Trinitarian. The issue simply did not come up, even while recognizing that the “personality” of God was of supreme importance, and the Bible itself reveals that “this is life eternal: that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)

Creation Seventh Day Adventists, while not members of a Trinitarian Church, and while not establishing any Creed to say, “This is what God is like,” do not make this matter a test of fellowship. We understand that even in the days of an acknowledged prophetess of the Advent movement, differences in views about the Godhead went uncorrected, and perhaps for a very good reason. As long as we agree upon the “personality” of God, and by the Holy Spirit we emulate His character as it is revealed in Christ Yahshua, we understand from the Word that we are accepted in Heaven, for “in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.” (Acts 10:25) We are certainly responsible for all the light that comes from Heaven, but until a prophet or apostle appears who testifies, “This is precisely what the Godhead is like,” there may certainly be harmony even in the midst of diversity.

Finally, the fourth valid concept has to do with the mission of the Church as a whole. A valid test of fellowship is not:

4) A need to accept the mission of *individual members* of the Church

There is no test of fellowship structured around the question of who is or is not an apostle, a prophet, a teacher, a pastor or an evangelist. Individual missions are for individual consciences and callings, and as Yahshua said to Peter, “If I will that [John] tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow *thou* me.” (John 21:22)

Disagreements are certainly possible regarding who is to do what job, yet order may be maintained as long as we do not attempt to forcibly interfere with what others believe they should be doing for the Church and Yahshua. We read in the Book of Acts concerning a “sharp” disagreement between Paul and Silas over the suitability of John Mark as an evangelist. (Acts 15:37-41) While in these last days we would not suffer the disagreements to become so pronounced as to separate us in work even for a time, we do note that not everyone needs to be comfortable with the work of everyone else before “the grace of God” (verse 40) may settle upon the movement.

The CSDA Church has even studied with, and baptized, individuals who did not believe that Ellen White was necessarily inspired – but they did agree with all the principles that she set

forth, because they merely upheld the same concepts that are found in the Scriptures. It must be the same with the workers today, and tomorrow. If a thing is true, it is true regardless of who says it; Moses once declared, “Would God that *all* Yahweh’s people were prophets, and that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!” (Num 11:29) As long as we are in harmony regarding the mission of the Church, the work will advance by means of those members who stand in their integrity.

This idea is not limited to prophets or apostles either. Based upon the very principles of Protestantism, there need be no arbitrary acceptance of an elder’s instructions or a pastor’s decisions. Church officials exist to guide, to exhort, and to instruct, but never to force. If the behavior of an individual becomes so rebellious that it does disrupt the general mission of the Church, then a disfellowship may be in order as per the first, third and fourth valid tests of fellowship; but aside from this each individual is accountable primarily to Christ for “the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2Cor 5:10)

IV – Summary

There can never be enough said about the unity, purity and victory that is experienced by the members of the Church of Christ. There can never be enough said about the beauty of the principles underlying a Christian’s behavior and system of beliefs. The perfect “mind of Christ,” manifest in erring mortal flesh, will be the subject of study by angelic and human minds for all eternity, and the Plan of Salvation will be seen as the greatest of all sciences. Yahweh has accomplished the ultimate transformation, sinner to saint, and He has made this sublime process available, at infinite cost, to all who will come to Him and be healed.

We understand, however, that in the multitudes who stand up to be counted there may be wolves “in sheep’s clothing,” (Mat 7:15) or individuals who, while genuinely seeking eternal life, are so deficient in understanding that they may mislead others and cause difficulty for the work. Valid tests of fellowship allow us to determine who is ready to embark upon the walk of sanctification and who, for whatever reason, must first seek to be justified by a genuine acceptance of Christ before they are ready for baptism.

While the individual members of the Church cannot arbitrarily take it upon themselves to become the judges of conscience or sincerity, the Head of the Church has said to us, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven,” (Mat 18:18) and also, “by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:20)

By seeing the character of Christ in other individuals, we can recognize that they have partaken of the same Spirit that has called us out of darkness and into the light of Salvation. By seeing that they are committed to a system of beliefs and practices that leads them to holiness, by seeing that their

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understanding of prophecy will complement the work of evangelism, and that they are in agreement regarding the mission of Christ's people, we cannot do other than offer to them the "right hands of fellowship." (Gal 2:9)

We do have to be careful, at the same time, of "adding" tests to the Bible's clear instructions and enacting our own standard of righteousness, as did the Pharisees of Yahshua's day. Christ died for the freedom of every member of the human race, and if the members of His Body are not the *most* free, and the *most* ardent defenders of the liberty of others, then we are guilty of misunderstanding the Spirit that led Him through a life of self-sacrifice, a near-thankless ministry among men, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Cross of Golgotha, and the dark grave of the accused transgressor. By His resurrection, Yahshua showed that love is stronger than all these things; and by our lives, lived in harmony with His, we reveal this same enduring truth to a world that has long been deprived of the majesty and goodness of Yah, the Creator and Redeemer of all. - David P. Aguilar

We still have several copies of the new book "Finally... Out of Darkness, Into His Marvelous Light" by Pr. Walter McGill. Detailing such topics as Christian perfection, liberty of conscience, and the history and nature of the trademark persecution by the General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists, it represents the life's work of the Creation Seventh Day Adventist pastor and our dear brother who is presently the target of the dragon's ire in the Conference's latest legal persecution. To request your free copy, please write us at the address in the Contact section, or e-mail Barbara McGill at barbli@hotmail.com. Please use the subject line, "Request for New Book".

"When powerful foes were uniting to overthrow the reformed faith, and thousands of swords seemed about to be unsheathed against it, Luther wrote: 'Satan is putting forth his fury; ungodly pontiffs are conspiring; and we are threatened with war. Exhort the people to contend valiantly before the throne of the Lord, by faith and prayer, so that our enemies, vanquished by the Spirit of God, may be constrained to peace. Our chief want, our chief labor, is prayer; let the people know that they are now exposed to the edge of the sword and to the rage of Satan, and let them pray.'"

D'Aubigne, b. 10, ch. 14



Familiar Things

(The Gospel of St. John)

*I will not speak of parables
My brothers wrote of these.
I won't speak much of trials
For I hate those memories.*

*I will not speak of fury,
Although He was Yahweh's Son
I only know I'll miss Him
Till the sound of war is done.*

*They say our God is mighty
Though He always wore a smile.
He was patient with my anger
And with Peter's hasty style.
He was gracious with poor Judas
Who just never learned His way
And He blessed those who drove spikes
Into His healing hands that day.*

*Of all those there assembled
When He came to us again,
I am sure my heart leapt highest
Of the women and the men.
When He spoke to us of peace
And all the light from what was dim
It was one of those familiar things
I remember of Him.*

*And when He had ascended
It was hard to see Him go
Even though He's coming back
(He promised, so we know).
Back unto the Father
Did our blessed Teacher rise
He went to build the mansions
And the crowns that are our prize.*

*I still remember sitting
Right beside Him when we ate
That fateful last Passover
Just before that day I hate.
And the taste of new-pressed grapes
A sincerely sung hymn
The smell of bread, familiar things
Remind me so of Him.*

*He told us why He had to die
And finally we see
The meaning of the Scriptures
Like Isaiah fifty-three.
For by His scourging we are cleansed
And by His stripes made pure
And like Him we will rise again.
Praise Yah forevermore!*

*But while we wait and labor
For men both far and near
To bring to them this message
That our hope and joy they'll share,
We can't help but long to be
Among the seraphim
Discussing those familiar things
That remind me of him.*

~David Aguilar~

A Publication of the CSDA Church

Church Home Office:

1162 Old Highway 45 South
Guys, TN 38339

Editor:

Lucan Chartier
claimvictory@hotmail.com
662-287-9758

Distribution:

Barbara McGill
Barbli@hotmail.com
731-239-8000