

Am I a Seventh-day Adventist?

By Frank Zimmerman

*This was the substance of a letter I wrote
to a Seventh-day Adventist friend some years ago...*

YES, in the truest sense of the word, I am a Seventh-day Adventist. I am not ashamed of the name, and the truth it represents. However, I have not been a member of the denomination for many years now. Here is a brief explanation:

I joined the church in my early twenties, after attending some Prophecy Seminars, in which the consistency and value of the Scriptures were opened to my mind. Since my youth, I had always believed that there had to be a way in which all men could live together peacefully, and questioned why there was such strife in nations and families. The Seminars really convinced me that the Bible had the answer to these questions, so I followed the light as it shone upon my pathway.

As I put into practice the various reforms and changed my beliefs, I found after a while that certain inner sin problems still remained. Certainly, if I could not have freedom from strife, and freedom to obey God's law from the heart in my own life, how could I present the gospel to others as the answer to their problems?

Education, p. 78:

What He taught, He lived.

John 13

¹⁵ I have given you an example, [He said to His disciples;] that you should do as I have done.

John 15

¹⁰ I have kept my Father's commandments.

Thus in His life, Christ's words had perfect illustration and support. And more than this; what He taught, He was. His words were the expression, not only of His own life experience, but of

His own character. Not only did He teach the truth, but He was the truth. It was this that gave His teaching, power.

I remember a number of incidents that occurred to set me searching for answers to this question.

One incident was meeting with some Protestants who urged upon me their gospel that Christ died for us on the cross, and that if we just believed in what He did for us, we didn't have to worry about keeping the Law. They talked about the importance of salvation and not trusting to the "works of the law." I knew that they were wrong in minimizing the Law, but did not know how to present what I believed regarding salvation. I thought to myself, well here is the key doctrine of Christianity, and I am quite confused about just what salvation is! It was embarrassing, but I determined to become wiser.

Another incident occurred when I was asked to lead out for one Sabbath school lesson, the topic which was on justification and sanctification. I studied all the Adventist material I could find on this topic, both from Ellen White and others, and the more I studied, the more confused I became! I could not clearly define these terms, and exactly what these two works accomplished in the soul.

I also found that when I asked others in the church what it meant to be "born again" they also gave hazy answers.

Around this time, I purchased some books by E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones, and about the "1888 Message". These books impressed me. Ellen White had testified in her day that their message was the beginning of the loud cry, and they seemed to write in a way that was different than other Adventist authors. I knew there was something in their message, but could not put my finger on it.

It also alarmed me to hear some elders dismiss their message by saying that they had apostatized from the church (and therefore, by implication, it was dangerous to read their writings). I did not

fear the danger, because truth is what I wanted, and if God had sent them with a message, then I wanted to know what it was.

Shortly after these thoughts were stirred within me, a church member gave me a sermon tape which dealt with “Christ within you, the hope of glory.” This tape was by an Australian named Fred Wright, whom I had never heard of before, even though I had studied all the Adventist history I could find. On the tape he explained that man is comprised of three natures (just as the sanctuary has three divisions: courtyard, holy, and most holy). These are: physical, mental, and spiritual.

The spiritual nature is called the “heart,” “spirit,” or “inner man.” It is this part that is the fountain from which flow our purposes, thoughts and actions. When human nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam, it affected all the parts of man’s being: spirit, mind, and body. So we receive a corrupted spiritual nature at birth. This nature is termed in scripture the “stony heart,” “evil tree,” “old man,” “filthy garments,” etc. This is also what makes us “children of disobedience” and like the Pharisees, “of your father the devil.”

This is not to say that Satan has the ability to have children, but simply that we reproduce his character of rebellion, and thus identify with him. The solution to this problem, as clearly taught in the sanctuary (in which sin is transferred), and in Christ’s healings (in which disease is eradicated), is to remove this seed of evil, and replace it with the seed of righteousness, which is the life of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3

²⁹ And if you be Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Although it took me a while to understand these distinctions because my mind had become so confused by all the other attempted explanations that I had read, after a short time I understood that this was exactly my problem. I had been trying to bring good fruit from an evil tree. I needed to recognize that sin

was not just an action, but it was a living principle within (or perhaps “dying” principle would be more accurate).

Therefore, confession of sin must involve more than just asking forgiveness for the actions of sin (the fruit), but must involve also asking for cleansing from sin (the root). This is where I had failed, and therefore I had to admit that, in spite of my good desires, my love for truth, my sacrifices for what I believed in, I was not yet a real Christian.

This understanding made a huge difference in my experience. The struggle over my imaginations, which had defeated me again and again, was finally broken. I finally knew the power of truth as described in these words:

2 Corinthians 10

⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Naturally I wanted to know more about Fred Wright and why he had a message I had never heard anywhere else before. What I found out was that there was a revival of the 1888 message to the Adventist church in the 1950’s and early 1960’s, but that the message was ignored, rejected, and despised.

Instead, the Adventist leaders went in an opposite direction, and held conferences with some Evangelical Protestant leaders (Donald Barnhouse and Walter Martin) in which they watered down and compromised the Adventist message so as to be recognized as “brothers in Christ” by the Evangelicals. This trend has continued since that day. I don’t know how it is where you are, but up here Ellen White’s books are moved to the back corner of the Adventist bookstore, almost hidden away, while all the popular Protestant preachers (Billy Graham, Max Lucado, Chuck Swindoll, etc.) books are sold at the front of the store.

It was during this time (the early 1960’s) that Fred Wright (who was a teacher in an Adventist college) had his membership in the

Adventist church revoked for not complying with the request of the church that he cease teaching the message of righteousness that had brought deliverance to his soul and to many who listened to it. His message was squarely based upon the 1888 Message, which of course, made it more dangerous in that time when the church was resisting the revival of that message.

After he was disfellowshipped, he wondered what to do next, but calls began to come in to present his message in other places, and the work grew from that point. And so did the message. As Adventists (I speak for my two years experience in the church), we always tended to believe that we had almost all the light needed for the last days. We had the prophecies, health reform, the Spirit of Prophecy books, the Sabbath, the Sanctuary truth, what more did we need?

But as the message of living righteousness grew, we saw vast fields of truth that we were wholly unaware of and that we needed to know in order to be prepared for the final work that the church is to do before Christ will return.

Ellen White said that the message of 1888 was just the beginning of the light which was to lighten the world. Therefore, the Adventist message, in all its bearings, has not yet been half understood. Here is one small example:

When the Adventists before 1844 came up to that period when they expected Christ to return, they clearly saw that their experience had been predicted in the first and second angel's messages of Revelation 14. But they did not see that there was a third angel after the second, or did not see the importance of understanding it.

So likewise, we in our day have seen the importance of the third angel's message, and some of us have even seen the importance of the fourth angel's message...but what about the other three: the fifth, sixth, and seventh angel's messages? Surely if the first four do a very important work, the last three must likewise

be important? And yet how many Adventist books will you find on the "seven angel's messages"? None!

Two years after I joined the Adventist church, I left it to follow the Adventist truth as I clearly saw that the message of Fred Wright was a continuation of the message of 1888, which was the "third angels message in verity". The church that he started is now called the Sabbath Rest Advent Church.

So I still consider myself a "Seventh-day Adventist," in the sense that I hold to the original foundation the church was built on. And I do believe that this is the only reliable sense in which to use this label.

When the Protestants left the Roman Catholic church, they were accused of starting a new church. In their defense, they simply pointed to the truths of the apostles day, and explained that they were not a new church, but simply a continuation of the apostolic church, because they held to, and taught the same truths. They were the true church, whereas the Catholics, who had left the foundation, were the apostates.

So it is at all times. It is the truth that determines where the church of God is, and not the other way around.

*Seek for the truth,
hunger after the truth,
cling to the truth,
live the truth,
and you will always be on safe ground.*