

The Wheat and Tares

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By Frank Zimmerman

A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST man recently wrote me the following:

From the history of the Adventist church, you will agree with me that Ellen G. White, though profoundly known to be the founder, isn't—it's a group of different [people]. Imagine if Paul, for instance after his conversion and commission to preacher to the Gentiles, thought to establish his movement because he said that the other Apostles had a different view of Gentiles! What would this have caused? The church of God has two groups of people; the wheat and the tares. One should not decide to separate because of the tares. After all, Jesus said, "let them grow together."

There are two ideas presented here:

1. A church is not founded by one person going off on his own individual ideas.
2. We do not separate from a church because of some "tares."

In principle, I agree with both ideas.

A One-Man Movement

There have been, and will be, many odd individuals who claim to have special truth, and lead the people after themselves. For example, there's a man in Russia now who claims to be Jesus, and another one in Australia. There are many warnings in the New Testament about such things:

Matthew 24

¹¹ And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

²³ Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

²⁴ For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

²⁵ Behold, I have told you before.

²⁶ Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

2 Peter 2

¹ But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

² And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

³ And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not.

1 John 4

¹ Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

John 5

⁴³ I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive.

However, I disagree with the idea that a church is never built on the message of one person. What of Abraham? Isaac? Jacob? Joshua? Samson? the prophet Samuel? How often was the Lord's work represented in one person, such as in Elijah's time, while the false prophets were many.

Or coming into New Testament times, what about the one man Martin Luther? or Wycliffe? or Huss? or William Miller? Of course none of these people ever were truly alone. There were others who supported them, and some who worked beside them.

So it is today. The church I belong to was built up by the work and ministry of Fred Wright. But he was not alone in the early days of the agitation of the truth, as I will mention later in this article. And there are others today who continue the work he started.

The Time for Separation

In the case of the wheat and tares, as applied to a church, there is a time when God is working for a church body, and that is the time when we should be part of that body. There also have been times when God had to move away from a body, and begin anew with those out of that body who would accept His truth. So a church body can cease to be the "field", and at that time, we should not any longer cling to it. The parable no longer applies to the old body, and now applies to a new body.

Separation only comes after a body ceases to hold to the gospel, rejects the message from heaven, and wars against it. At that point, they are no longer the church of God on earth, and become part of Babylon: a confused group made up of churches who cling to their own ideas and reject God's ideas.

This can actually happen, and has happened to other bodies whom God has called. The most obvious example is the Jewish nation. When the apostle Paul was preaching, would it have been right to tell him that he should still be part of Judaism, because "we should not separate because there are some tares"?

Or when the Advent movement arose, should they have resolutely refused to form another body because the Protestant churches were founded by the message of the gospel?

In both these cases, separation became inevitable, because of the hostility and opposition to the true gospel manifested by those bodies who were once called to carry that message.

So apostasy from the truth can disqualify any body from being the church of God.

Conditional Promises

I knew at least one Adventist minister who declared that the promises to the Seventh-day Adventist church were “unconditional”. I don’t believe any movement called by God has an unconditional promise that they will never cease to be God’s chosen agents. It depends upon their cooperation.

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 67:

It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.

Jesus met the same spirit among the Jewish leaders and He warned them:

Matthew 3

⁹ And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

The same would be true today. Anytime we are so proud as to think we cannot cease to be God’s elect, then the warning applies to us:

*God is able to raise from the stones,
true Seventh-day Adventists.*

When the Reformation started, the Catholic church was quick to point out that they had a seeming “unconditional” prophecy proclaiming them to be God’s chosen agents until the end:

Matthew 16

¹⁸ And I say also unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

“Well,” the Catholics would say, “we are the church that traces its direct lineage to Peter, and Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against us. So you are wrong to separate, for we are, and ever will be, God’s chosen church.”

How did the Protestants answer that? Simply by replying that it was a spiritual heritage, not a carnal one, and that therefore, they (Protestants) represented the true church, because they taught the same truths as the Apostles.

Paul answered a similar problem in his day in exactly the same way. It is recorded in *Romans* chapter 9 to 11. To sum up Paul’s argument, he states that God did not cast away His people whom He chose, but that the people are found not in “Esau’s line” but in “Jacob’s line”. Very simply, it is the spiritual qualifications that determine where the church is, not the ownership of buildings, lands, governments, schools, hospitals, etc.

Living Truth is the Foundation

God commits the living truth to His people. This is what makes them the chosen agents. If they lose this truth, or persecute it to death, then the appointment passes to those who will carry that living truth.

It is not prophecies and doctrines that constitute a church, but the living power of the gospel. The prophecies and doctrines are a framework to help define how the gospel works, but by themselves, they are not the gospel. Jesus made this clear to the people of His time:

John 5

³⁹ Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

⁴⁰ And you will not come to me, that you might have life.

They thought they had everything because they had the Bible, the temple services, the priesthood, the holy city. But Jesus stated that eternal life was found in coming to Him, not in those things. They were supposed to lead to Him, but if they didn't, there was no benefit in them.

The Power of the Gospel

When I first became an Adventist, I realized my own inability to control my imaginations and some of my actions. It was this dissatisfaction with my own condition that led me to search. I found the answer in the message of 1888, but not as it was taught in the Seventh-day Adventist church, because they didn't teach it! I found it in the ministry of Fred Wright, whose book, "*From Bondage to Freedom*" contained the answer.

Initially, I was also concerned, because people in the Seventh-day Adventist church had warned me about being carried away by little groups. I feared I would endanger my salvation if I were outside the Seventh-day Adventist body.

But at the same time, Fred's teaching was so clear, and was just what I needed to find deliverance and my real new birth, that I could not ignore it. Also, I found him not only sound on all the Adventist essentials (*Sanctuary, Sabbath, State of the Dead, Second Advent, Spirit of Prophecy*), but teaching them in a much more meaningful way.

1888 Revived vs. Apostasy

As I learned the history of what happened to the 1888 message, it became clear to me that there had again been a re-awakening of the 1888 message during the 1950-1960 period, and that God's message had been refused. Those who taught that revived message were cast out, and God was forming them into a new movement that would carry the living truth.

On top of that, the Adventist leadership in those years had compromised with Evangelical Protestantism, and changed their teachings with regard to the human nature of Christ, the Atone-

ment in the Most Holy Place, and a few other things. These changes were done openly, and published in books, such as *Movement of Destiny*, and *Questions on Doctrine*. The Evangelicals changed their view of Adventists and called them “brothers in Christ”.

This could only be done if the Adventist leaders had lost sight of the “everlasting gospel” of the First Angel’s Message, for that message had caused a division between Protestants and Adventists. To heal that division could only mean that the gospel message was lost.

One of the leading Adventist theologians, M. L. Andreasen, made a vigorous protest against this, and for doing that, his ministerial credentials were taken away. He identified the changes in doctrine as “apostasy” from the truth. It was indeed the “omega” of apostasy that Ellen White had warned about:

Letter 263, 1904 “To Our Leading Physicians, July 24, 1904:

[Quoted in Manuscript Releases, vol. 7, p. 188]

Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger [*she refers to J.H. Kellogg's pantheistic teachings*]. The omega will be of a most startling nature.

At the same time that this apostasy was taking place, God was reviving the 1888 message through men like Robert Wieland and Donald Short, the Brinsmead Awakening, and Fred Wright. This revival emphasized Christ’s full identification with sinful human flesh, the power of the gospel to save from sin, the cleansing of the soul that would precede the atonement in the Most Holy Place, and character perfection as a necessity to pass the judgment of the living.

This put the Adventist leaders in an awkward place. They had just made a fair show before the evangelicals, and were finally recognized as “brothers in Christ”, and then suddenly here were all these voices calling them back to the 1888 message which

taught just the opposite of what they had represented to the Evangelicals as true Adventism.

Instead of realizing their error and repenting, they opposed and persecuted the message. People were disfellowshipped for being involved in the 1888 revival.

Matthew 22: The Two Calls

According to the parable/prophesy of *Matthew 22*, after a church is chosen, and fails to do the work, it is given two calls to come to the marriage. The Jews received their first call with the ministry of John the Baptist and Christ, and their second call after the crucifixion, by the apostles under the power of the Holy Spirit. When they refused this second call, Paul said,

Acts 13

⁴⁶ It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

This marked the separation and defined the church as a new body, although it was initially made up of faithful Jews who accepted the message of Christ. The “field” with the “wheat and tares” was no longer the Jewish nation, but passed on to the early church.

I believe the same thing has happened in our time. Adventists were initially chosen in 1844, to give the third angel’s message to the world, but failed to do that, and by the late 1850’s fell into the Laodicean condition.

In 1888, God sent the first call to come to the marriage. This was refused. We know it was refused because Ellen White identified the 1888 message as the beginning of the loud cry, but that loud cry and latter rain never took place.

From around 1950 to 1960, that 1888 message was rediscovered, reprinted, and revived. This was the second call.

Many were involved in this revival, and the reception some of them received was to find themselves disfellowshipped. They loved the church, and had no desire to leave. But nonetheless, when they preached and held to that message, they found themselves voted out of church membership. This happened to the Brinsmead brothers, and also to Fred Wright. I was not around in those days, but I have since heard of many others who lost their church membership over this.

Even M. L. Andreasen, who was not really involved in reviving 1888, but who opposed the apostasy that took place between Adventists and Evangelicals in 1955-1956, had his ministerial credentials removed. This is the way that the church dealt with those who tried to help at that time.

The Awakening Message

You can read much of the literature of the Brinsmead Awakening message. Someone has put up a website with all of it available: www.awakeandsing.com. It was squarely based on the 1888 message, although there were a few errors on some minor points. But the core of the message was true as steel.

I reformatted Robert Brinsmead's study of *Revelation 11: The Vision by the Hiddekel*. It is thrilling to read, even today so many years after it was written.

However, the Brinsmeads found themselves disfellowshipped in 1961. Should they have stopped preaching the message that Christ gave them because of this? Not at all. They continued preaching it. Some time around 1970 Bob Brinsmead lost his way and began teaching doctrines opposed to the 1888 message, and eventually he even opposed the Advent message. But in the early 1960's, he was at the forefront of the re-awakening of the Latter Rain / Laodicean message.

Fred Wright's Experience

Fred Wright was also personally revived by the 1888 message in the 1950's, and was for a time associated with the Brinsmead folk.

He also was disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist church for refusing to stop teaching the gospel that had saved him. He wasn't even agitating it in the church, but was meeting in his home at the request of others who knew he had something important to share.

But his local church wanted him to stop teaching it altogether. His reply was,

“How can I stop teaching the message that has saved me? If I can't teach the gospel, what is left to teach?”

So he refused to cease sharing the truth, and the church disfellowshipped him for “failing to obey properly constituted church authority.”

After he was disfellowshipped, he also wondered what to do, and for a time worked on a sheep ranch in New Zealand. But the requests for Bible studies still came in, and shortly after the Lord personally called him to go into full-time ministry. But he could not do this within the Adventist church, as they had rejected him. So a movement grew up around him, which is now called, “The Sabbath Rest Advent Church.”

I recently uploaded to YouTube a series of camp-meeting videos from 1984, where Fred presents studies on the theme, “The History and Prophecies of the Laodicean Message.” In the middle of the camp Fred devotes a number of studies to his personal history and the events that occurred at that time (1950-1960) in the church. This provides more historical details than I can give in this short article.

The Reason for Hostility

It was no lack of love that led these folk outside the church, but rather the opposition and persecution from the church, especially the leaders. The enmity against the 1888 message is caused because it strikes at the hidden corruption that lies in the unregenerate heart. The Laodiceans think they are fine and secure in their

supposed faith. They are sure that they are God’s chosen and loved ones, and will be so to the end.

But Christ sends a message of rebuke to strip away this false religious security. There are two possible receptions to this kind of message:

1. The first possible reception is to accept it and be broken and regenerated anew in the spiritual nature. This is not so easy, as it means to admit that all the religious works and endeavors up to this point were an Ishmael: a child of the flesh, and need to be taken away. Everything needs to begin again on an entirely different foundation.
2. The second (and more common) reception is to find flaws with the messengers in order to discredit their message, or to reinterpret the message in order to take away the pointed arrows of truth, or to simply ignore it.

But God’s message cannot be ignored forever. The purpose of His church, or any body He has ever called, is to bring that message to the world. If they refuse, then the candlestick can be moved out of its place.

The Seven Churches: Conditional Prophecies

This was the warning in *Revelation* chapter 2, to the church of Ephesus. The early church eventually became the Catholic church, and we know that this body ceased to be the representative of Christ in the world. Their “candlestick” was “removed out of his place.” *Revelation* 2:5. Do the Catholics realize this? No! They go on mis-applying the verse that “the gates of hell shall never prevail” against them.

There is only one other church in *Revelation* that is given a similar warning. That is in the message to the Laodicean church:

Revelation 3

¹⁶ So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.

To be spewed out of Christ's mouth means to cease to be His mouthpiece to the world. Do the Laodicean's think that this will happen to them? No, once again, they think that they will always and ever be God's chosen favorites, and that God will somehow magically purify the church (even if they don't embrace His purifying message), and that as long as they retain their membership they are safe.

But it is exactly this kind of false confidence that reveals the spirit of Laodicea. It is not church membership, possession of buildings and hospitals and schools, regular attendance at Sabbath school, vegetarian lifestyle, or any other outward thing that makes a man accepted in God's sight. But rather, faith, righteousness, spiritual eyesight—these are the things that determine who a real Seventh-day Adventist is.

And as it was in Jesus' day, so it is now: God is able of the stones to raise up true Seventh-day Adventists. And those ones that He raises up will inherit the promises.

Isaac vs. Ishmael

The seed is formed in Isaac not in Ishmael. Both could trace their lineage back to Abraham, but only the child of promise would inherit the promises.

The first son, Ishmael, was a result of Abraham's best work, and there was a kind of faith involved as well. But Abraham had too low a conception of what God required, and had therefore taken into his hands some of what was the Lord's part. His faith was not perfect and therefore neither were his works.

With the second son, Isaac, Abraham realized that the Lord's promise was much higher than he could perform. He finally believed that:

Romans 4

²¹ ...what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

His faith was now perfected, and so, corresponding works followed. And so God worked in and through Abraham to fulfill what only He could do.

This is exactly a picture of the dilemma that faces Laodicea, and helps to explain why Waggoner and Jones dwelt so much on the books of *Romans* and *Galatians*. It also explains why they emphasized character perfection and Christ's full identification with sinful humanity: because Laodicea needs to see that God's standard is much higher than what they can perform. What God wants to do through His people can only be done by His creative power.

In our time, everything depends upon the reception of His message. As Ellen White said, regarding the Laodicean message:

Early Writings, p. 270

I saw that the testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance; all who truly receive it will obey it and be purified.

In the parable of the talents, we see an illustration of how people respond to what God gives. The greatest talent He commits to us are His messages of truth. But one man thought God was a "hard man" and therefore hid the talent in the ground. This man represents Laodicea. The 1888 message has been hid in the ground. It has been thought that God's standard of perfection was too high, and that it was impossible to reach, and would over-burden the people. This is but to accuse God of being a "hard man."

Couldn't Abraham have said the same thing?

"Oh Lord, what a hard master you are, after all my efforts to bring forth this son for you, you still refuse him. You expect an old man and woman to bring forth a son, which they do not have physical strength to perform. What a hard master you are!"

But thank the Lord, Abraham never did that! He knew the Lord better than that. But Laodicea, the church who is to fill the earth

with the glory of God, which is the knowledge of His character, does not even understand that character, and thinks God is a “hard man”! Therefore, the message is buried in the ground.

Into the Highways

But it cannot stay there forever. Continuing further in the wedding parable of *Matthew 22*, the king gave two calls to “those who were bidden to the marriage” but they would not come. Finally he sent his servants into the highways to call in “as many as you shall find,” for “they who were bidden were not worthy.”

We all start as “unworthy” and Christ makes us “worthy” as we receive His messages into our hearts. But the vast majority in Laodicea refuse to be “made worthy.” Nevertheless, the message must go forward. So when the bidden refuse it, it goes into the highways and hedges, to all who will come.

Is it “lack of love” that causes the king to bypass those who were bidden and go straight into the highways for new guests? No, it cannot be, for the king represents God, and He is the very Author of Love.

I was a Seventh-day Adventist for a few years, in my early twenties. After an earnest search for personal salvation (because I was not content with my own condition), I found the 1888 message, especially as taught by Fred Wright. I recognized Christ’s voice in it, found it to be the answer I was looking for, and although I was sad to leave some of my church friends, I never regretted following that message. And it has grown over the years, well beyond the initial message of personal salvation and righteousness.

A few years ago, at the invitation of a Seventh-day Adventist minister, I attended his church for a while. After about 30 years, I still found that the 1888 message has no real acceptance and that the idea of character perfection is even regarded as a heresy. But the whole purpose of the heavenly sanctuary is “to make an end of sins” (*Daniel 9:24*). Without that, the service is quite meaning-

less. If that is the way the 1888 message is still accepted today, then what of the advance truths that spring out of it? They will also be rejected. Ellen White predicted this:

The Review and Herald, May 27, 1890

The third angel's message will not be comprehended, the light which will lighten the earth with its glory will be called a false light, by those who refuse to walk in its advancing glory. The work that might have been done, will be left undone by the rejecters of truth, because of their unbelief.

If we want to be God's ambassadors to the world, we must stand where He is sending His light.

Prophetic Justification

But is there justification in prophecy for another movement? Yes indeed.

1. The Fourth Angel's message of *Revelation* 18 introduces a new phase. Each of the previous 3 angels marked a change in leadership. Very few that were in the first and second angel's movement went on to join the third. The same happened with the fourth.
2. The Laodicean message contains a very serious warning: "So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." (*Revelation* 3:16). Does this mean what it says? Or have we re-interpreted it so that we could put confidence in our flesh? When Christ spews out of his mouth, it means that the Laodicean body, who will not repent, are no longer His mouthpiece. The message passes from them to those who will repent and be healed.
3. Ellen White also indicated that the destiny of the church hung on how it received the 1888 message:

Manuscript Releases, vol. 11, p. 229

I was confirmed in all I had stated in Minneapolis, that a reformation must go through the churches. Reforms must be made, for spiritual weakness and blindness were upon

the people who had been blessed with great light and precious opportunities and privileges. As reformers they had come out of the denominational churches, but they now act a part similar to that which the churches acted. We hoped that there would not be the necessity for another coming out.

Early Writings, p. 270

I saw that the testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance; all who truly receive it will obey it and be purified.

If you read further in this chapter (“*The Shaking*”) from *Early Writings*, she makes it clear that the testimony to the Laodicean church causes a shaking, or separation. Those who come out on the right side of this shaking are those who plead for “victory,” and “prize salvation enough to perseveringly plead and agonize for it.” Those who rediscovered the 1888 message were of this class. They were earnestly looking for salvation over sin, to be ready for Christ’s coming. I believe this shaking has taken place.

The message of truth given to the Seventh-day Adventist church will triumph. The gates of hell will not prevail against the truth. True Israel will never cease to be God’s people. But whether we are among that group depends on our personal reception of that message which God gave in 1888, and which message continues unfolding today through those who will teach and practice it without shame.

Following the Lamb

Now let me close with this. In our church, we do not normally talk about separation, because we recognize the principle laid down in *Revelation* 14 that the first angel (gospel) must come before the second angel (separation from Babylon). It is absolutely hopeless to talk to people about prophecies and separation, if they have not experienced the true gospel. But if they have expe-

rienced the true gospel, then they will know where they should be. They will follow the voice of Christ, wherever it leads.

If today, you think that the gospel taught in the Seventh-day Adventist church is perfectly fine, then you will think I must be some strange schismatic. If you think it is okay that Adventists sell popular Protestant books in their bookstore, and that there is no difference between their gospel and the Adventist gospel (except for the Sabbath day), then you will see no need of anything more. You are “rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”

But if you are not satisfied with your soul condition, and something nags at your conscience telling you that what God promises and what you are experiencing are not the same thing, then you will find the answers in the message God gave to heal the Laodicean church. And when you find those answers, and they work in your life, you will want to be where that message is cherished and taught openly, and without shame, even if it costs you your earthly friends and associations.

Revelation 14

¹ And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him a hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.

² And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

³ And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

⁴ These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

⁵ And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

