

Bible Studies for Adventists



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December 27–January 2

Commentary on “Heaven's Means of Communication”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, December 27, 2008

This brief lesson identifies general revelation as God’s “revelation of Himself to all people through nature and conscience (see Ps. 19:1, Rom. 1:20).” It further identifies special revelation as “God’s revelation through the prophets as recorded in Scripture, especially His revelation through Jesus Christ.” The lesson further states, “Then later, He sent His Son, who, in the garb of humanity revealed the Father in a unique and powerful way.”

In the *E.G. White Notes* is this quotation from page 20 of *Conflict and Courage*, a collection of White’s quotes compiled for a “morning watch” devotional in 1971:

“There was to be co-operation between man and God. But this plan was greatly interfered with by Adam’s transgression. Satan led him to sin, and the Lord would not communicate with him after he had sinned as he did when he was without sin.

“After the fall Christ became Adam’s instructor. He acted in God’s stead toward humanity, saving the race from immediate death. He took upon him the office of mediator. Adam and Eve were given a probation in which to return to their allegiance, and in this plan all their posterity were embraced.

“Without the atonement of the Son of God there could have been no communication of blessing or salvation from God to man. God was jealous for the honor of His law. The transgression of that law had caused a fearful separation between God and man. To Adam in his innocence was granted communion, direct, free, and happy, with his Maker. After his transgression, God would communicate to man only through Christ and angels.”

Problems

This first lesson presents Jesus not as Almighty God but as an agent of God. The quote from *Conflict and Courage* states that after the fall, Jesus communicated with man instead of God communicating with him.

Jesus was not merely another revelation of God and His will in a category with the prophets and the angels. In Jesus all the fullness of deity dwelt bodily (Colossians 1:19). Jesus was God (John 1:1), not merely one-third of God or an emanation of God or even one whom God exalted to the position of His Son As E. G. White stated in *Spiritual Gifts*, Vo. 3, P 37 and *Early Writings* p. 145.

While some of the angels joined Satan in his rebellion, others reasoned with him to dissuade him from his purposes, contending for the honor and wisdom of God in giving authority to his Son. Satan urged, for what reason was Christ endowed with unlimited power and such high command above himself! He stood up proudly, and urged that he should be equal with God. [...] At length all the angels are summoned to appear before the Father, to have each case decided. Satan unblushingly makes known to all the heavenly family, his discontent, that Christ should be preferred before him, to be in such close conference with God, and he be uninformed as to the result of their frequent consultations. God informs Satan that this he can never know. That to his Son will he reveal his secret purposes, and that all the family of Heaven, Satan not excepted, were required to yield implicit obedience. Satan boldly speaks out his rebellion, and points to a large company who think God is unjust in not exalting him to be equal with God, and in not giving him command above Christ. He declares he cannot submit to be under Christ’s command, that God’s commands alone will he obey” *Spiritual Gifts*, Vo. 3, P 37.

In fact, Jesus incurred the wrath of the Pharisees because He claimed the identity of God and used God’s name, I Am (John 8:58).

Further, the Bible never implies that Christ acted “in God’s stead toward humanity”. Genesis 3 reveals God speaking face-to-face with Adam and Eve after the fall, telling them the consequences of sin and giving them the promise of a coming Redeemer who would crush the serpent’s head. Jesus further stated the complete unity he had with the Father in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one,” and John identifies Jesus this way: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18, ESV).

Moreover, the Bible does not even hint that Adam and Eve “were given a probation in which to return to their allegiance.” Rather, God stated in Genesis 3 exactly what would happen to Adam and Eve and the human race, and He promised a Redeemer and covered their shame with the skins of animals—as He covers our shame with the literal righteousness of Jesus when we believe.

In addition, the last paragraph in the Conflict and Courage excerpt above states, “God was jealous for the honor of His law.” Never does the Bible suggest that God was jealous for the honor of His law, nor does it hint that anyone ever questioned His need to vindicate His right to give the law to humans. Rather, Romans 3:20-26 clarifies that no human is justified in God’s sight by works of the law, “since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. God, however, defended His own righteousness—not the law—by displaying Jesus as a propitiation for sin, thus demonstrating God’s righteousness in leaving the sins committed before the cross unpunished. Through Jesus’ death God demonstrated His own righteousness so “he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Finally, the lesson closes with a question: “What can nature teach us about God? What can it not teach us? How does the revelation through Jesus Christ differ from God’s other revelations?”

Romans 1:20 states exactly what nature reveals: “his invisible attributes his eternal power and divine nature” (ESV).

Jesus, on the other hand, is “the only God, who is at the Father’s side” (John 1:18), and while “the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, ESV). Jesus came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and God publicly displayed Jesus as “a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that [God] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26, ESV).

Summary:

1. Jesus is God, not an agent of God in the category of prophets or angels.
2. God continued to communicate with mankind directly after the fall (see Genesis 3; Genesis 4:1-16; Genesis 6:7-7:5) without using an “agent” in His stead.
3. The concept of a time of probation is nowhere in the Bible.
4. Jesus revealed the Father’s forgiveness, justice, and mercy.

Day 2: Sunday, December 28, 2008

This lesson looks at the change that occurred between God and humanity after Adam and Eve sinned. The Bible Study Guide states, “However, after that fateful day, when they blatantly disobeyed their Lord, they no longer were allowed to enjoy His presence (Gen. 3:23, 24), and their face-to-face communion with Him ended.”

The next paragraphs mention times when the Angel of the Lord or the Angel of God spoke to people in the Old Testament, specifically mentioning Moses at the burning bush, Gideon, and Samson’s parents. Then the Quarterly states this: “In John 1:18 John says, ‘No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.’ The Divine Being, therefore, who appeared to the people in the Old Testament must have been Jesus, not the Father. Ellen G. White tells us that ‘after the transgression of Adam, the Lord spoke no longer directly with man; the human race was given into the hands of Christ, and all communication came through Him to the world. It was Christ who spoke the law on Mount Sinai.’—Fundamentals of Christian Education, pp. 237, 238.”

The lesson ends with thought questions including these: “What has been your own experience regarding what sin and rebellion do between you and God? That is, when you do something that you know is wrong, that you know is sinful, how does that impact your relationship with God?”

Problems

First, the opening paragraph uses Genesis 3:23-24 to support the statement that God no longer spoke to humanity face-to-face. While the relationship between God and man changed drastically, this text does not describe God cutting off face-to-face communication. The text says this:

“...therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (ESV).

This text overtly states that humanity was driven from the Garden of Eden and prevented from access to the tree of life. It makes no limiting statement about God's means of communicating to them. This text underscores that Adam and Eve did die when they disobeyed God. It does not give any insight into God's method of speaking to them. In fact, God subsequently speaks to Cain directly (Genesis 4:6-16). Genesis 5:22 and 24 specifically state that "Enoch walked with God", and there is no indication that God communicated to Enoch through an agent. Moreover, God spoke directly to Noah (Genesis 6:13; 9:1-17), and to Abraham (Genesis 12, 15).

It is true that theologians generally agree that references to the Angel of the Lord throughout the Old Testament do refer to the pre-incarnate Jesus. The problem in this day's Sabbath School lesson, however, is that it assumes Jesus is not the same substance as the Almighty God. The third paragraph quotes John 1:18 from the KJV: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him]."

Word-for-word translations from the oldest manuscripts, however, render this verse with somewhat more clarity:

ESV: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

NASB: "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained {Him.}"

The lesson explains this text in the quotation from Fundamentals of Christian Education quoted above. Ellen White's statement implies that Jesus is not the same as God. It assumes God sent Jesus as His agent to communicate with man. Jesus, however, was not merely a "divine being", a mouthpiece and representative of God who was given the title of His Son. Jesus is God, of the same substance, "eternally begotten" as the NASB states.

Moreover, her statement that "it was Christ who spoke the law on Mount Sinai," not God, is nowhere suggested in the Bible. Exodus 20:1-2 clearly state, "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery'" (ESV).

The giving of the Mosaic covenant and the exodus from Egypt cannot be limited to "Christ". Further, God cannot be subdivided. Israel's famous cry found in Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Jesus is no mere spokesperson for God. Israel knew they were dealing with the eternal, almighty God on Sinai, and neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit nor the Father can be dissected out of the Trinity. It was not "merely" Christ who gave the law; God Himself—the triune, eternal God—gave the law.

Finally, the thought questions miss the point of the spiritual death that is our legacy as children of Adam. Ephesians 2:1-3 clearly states our natural condition: we are naturally "dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." We are "by nature objects of wrath." We have no ability to keep from sinning.

Only when God brings us to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:5) and seals us with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14) and we pass from death to life, no longer to come into judgment (John 5:24), can we have a personal relationship with God. Our sinning or not sinning is not what defines whether or not we are in a relationship with God. Only our belief or unbelief and submission to the Lord Jesus—the eternal God who is now also eternally human—and being washed and covered by His blood of atonement can bring us into relationship with God (Hebrews 10). It is God who transfers us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

Summary

1. Genesis 3:23-24 does not support the notion that God ceased direct communication with mankind. Rather, it explains humanity's banishment from the Garden of Eden and their access to the tree of life.
2. Jesus is not "separate" from the eternal, almighty God. Jesus is not an agent sent by God to communicate with mankind. Rather, Jesus is eternally God, and the eternal God—indivisible and triune—is the One who delivered the covenant at Mt. Sinai.
3. Our natural condition is "objects of wrath". We are born dead, and we come alive by a miracle of God who brings us to life with Christ, seals us with His Spirit, and transfers us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of His Son. By this miracle we pass from death to life and will not come into judgment. Our relationship with God is not defined by our sins but by whether or not we are covered by the blood of Jesus through faith by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Day 3: Monday, December 29, 2008

This lesson looks at the ways God reveals Himself through nature. The lesson opens with this paragraph: "The Bible tells us that the world that God created was perfect in every way (Gen. 1:31). But Scripture also reveals that sin has altered the natural world (Gen. 3:17, 18). Prior to the Fall, only beautiful or useful plants were found upon the earth. God 'never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan's work, the result of degeneration. ' —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 186. Nevertheless, there is still great beauty in the changing of the leaves in autumn, in a vivid sunset, and in the opening of a rosebud on a sunny morning."

Facts about creation comprise the next three paragraphs, and the final paragraph states that nature “isn’t enough to reveal the fullness of God’s character.” It cites the predatory practices of cats and killer whales as example that make it “hard to see God’s love reflected”.

In the “Learning Outline” in the Teachers Comments, “The Lesson in Brief” (P. 7), point B under “The Need for Revelation” asks this question: “How has sin limited God’s revelation to us through creation? Our conscience? The Bible and other prophets? His son Jesus?”

Moreover, p. 9-10 of the Teacher’s version of the Bible Study Guide states this: “Nature’s arrangement and beauty powerfully argue for God’s existence. Paul says that God uses the visible things of nature to reveal the invisible things, such as His Godhead and His eternal power. The mind may comprehend these invisible truths through the help of the created works. Despite being warped by sin, the natural world still witnesses to us God’s power and His love. God’s revelation of Himself through His created works is enough to reveal to us what He requires of us, leaving us without any excuse for neglecting duty.”

Problems

The statement by E. G. White in the first paragraph, that God “never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan’s work, the result of degeneration,” is not supported in the Bible. In fact, the Bible clarifies that God is the One responsible for cursing the earth and for the fact that it now bears thorns.

Genesis 3:17-18, ESV: “And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”

Furthermore, Romans 8:20-22 explains that creation has been “subjected to futility” and to the “bondage of decay” by God Himself. The results of sin in nature are not the product of Satan’s wiles; nature’s bondage to decay is by divine fiat as described in this passage: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (ESV).

God cursed the earth when Adam sinned, and God bound creation to the futility of decay. Satan, a creation of God, did not have the authority or power to alter God’s creation. God Himself bound creation to decay and declared that the earth would bring forth thorns. By His own command creation is groaning “in the pains of childbirth”.

Furthermore, the comments and questions in the Bible Study Guide about how sin has “limited God’s revelation to us through creation” are founded on the false premise that Satan is responsible for nature’s decay, a premise that creates false assumptions. Romans 1:18-22 explains that creation as it is now, in a sinful world, reveals God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature.” In fact, verse 20 says these attributes of God “have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”

Sin has not limited creation’s witness of God’s eternal power and divine nature. The reason people have failed to see these qualities and recognize God is not because Satan has besmirched creation. Rather, men and women have suppressed the truth (v. 18) which “is plain to them, because God has shown it to them” (v. 19). People are “without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.” They “became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (v. 21).

It is our own sinful nature, our natural condition as “objects of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) that has caused humanity to suppress the knowledge of God which has been made plain in creation from the beginning until now. Satan cannot be blamed for nature’s decay, and he cannot be blamed for the fact that humans are born dead in sin and subsequently suppress the knowledge of God that is evident to them. God reveals Himself, but sinful mankind suppresses the truth.

This comment in the Teachers Comments, “God’s revelation of Himself through His created works is enough to reveal to us what He requires of us, leaving us without any excuse for neglecting duty,” warps what the biblical text actually says. Romans 1:20 does not say people who suppress the knowledge of God have no excuse “for neglecting duty.” The text says simply, “So they are without excuse.” The context is clear; they are without excuse for failing to recognize and acknowledge the eternal power and divine nature of God. They are without excuse for submitting themselves to the eternal, sovereign God who has clearly revealed Himself, even in a decay-bound creation for which He takes full responsibility.

Summary

1. Satan did not create the thorns, thistles, or tares. God decreed them when He cursed the ground (Genesis 3:17-18). Furthermore, God bound creation to the bondage of decay by His own sovereign fiat (Romans 8:20-22). God, not Satan, is responsible for the curse of death in response to sin and for the effects of His curse on all creation—including Satan.
2. God’s invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen “since the creation of the world”. The effects of sin have not obscured God’s self-revelation through His creation. Rather, people have suppressed the knowledge of God by their own wickedness. The decay present in nature is not the cause of suppressing the revelation of God. (See Romans 1:18-22).

3. Those who suppress the knowledge of God are “without excuse”. They are not guilty for “neglecting duty”, as the Teachers Comments state; rather, they are held responsible for suppressing the very knowledge of God—for refusing to see His own witness of Himself revealed through creation. It is not neglect of “duty” for which humans are guilty; they are guilty for refusing to acknowledge God as He reveals Himself to be (Romans 8:20-21).

Day 4: Tuesday, December 30, 2008

This lesson introduces the concept of prophets as mouthpieces for God. The lesson begins with this statement: “After the Fall, when God no longer spoke to humanity directly, He communicated with them through men and women whom the Bible calls seers or prophets (1 Sam. 9:9).” The lesson continues by discussing the Hebrew and Greek roots of the word “prophet” and establishes that a prophet is “one called [by God]” or one who “speaks for” God.

The lesson introduces Moses who felt unable to speak for God before Pharaoh, so God appointed Aaron to be his spokesman. It says this, “As Moses was to be the spokesperson for God, so Aaron would be the spokesperson for Moses. Thus, a prophet speaks for someone. The prophet may speak to humankind on behalf of God or vice versa. The primary task of a biblical prophet was not to predict the future but to declare the divine will.”

The Teachers Comments (p. 11) under “God Communicates Through the Prophets” says this: “Ironically, Moses’ reluctance to speak before Pharaoh reveals a very telling detail about the work of a prophet. The specific work that Moses feared to do is at the heart of a prophet’s work: serving as a divine spokesperson, a voice that articulates Heaven’s will on earth.”

The lesson ends with “thought questions”: “Notice the humility of Moses and the sense of his own weakness. Why is that a good attitude for anyone, not just a prophet, to have? What dangers do we face if we get a sense of our own self-sufficiency?”

Problems

First, this day’s discussion assumes as its premise that “God no longer [speaks] to humanity directly.” As discussed earlier in this week’s commentary, the Bible never hints that God ceased to communicate directly with mankind. Sin brought spiritual death to humanity, and they lost their ability to be literally in the full presence of God and live. God, however, never stopped His own direct communication with mankind. He Himself spoke to those who trusted and believed Him. People such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham and the patriarchs, Job, and all the prophets heard directly from God. Moses, in fact, was a prophet “whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10, ESV).

Further, we cannot separate God from Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God is One, and when God speaks, no matter which member of the Trinity is doing the direct communication, it is God who is speaking. No one heard “merely” from Jesus or the Holy Spirit. When any member of the Trinity speaks, the message is from the almighty, eternal God.

Second, the lesson suggests that reluctance, which they call “humility”, is a characteristic of a prophet. The biblical account of Moses, however, reveals that Moses’ reluctance to speak to Pharaoh was not a positive quality or an indication of humility. Rather, it was a self-protective lack of trust in God. Exodus 4:14 states, “Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.”

God accommodated Moses’ fear, but his reluctance was not pleasing to God. Moses’ timidity was a weakness, not a sign of humility or spiritual maturity. It cannot be used to provide biblical support for the timidity or reluctance of any modern-day, extra-biblical prophet or messenger.

Third, although the lesson addresses God’s call of Moses and also His appointment of Aaron to be Moses’ mouthpiece, it fails to mention God’s further instruction to Israel through Moses concerning the tests of a true prophet. Deuteronomy 18:20-22, for example, identifies a prophet who speaks words in God’s name that He has not commanded or that do not come to pass, such a prophet “has spoken presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”

Summary

1. The assumption that God no longer speaks directly to humanity is false. Scripture nowhere declares this idea. In fact, it declares God spoke to many people directly, including Moses whom He “knew face to face”, Enoch Noah, Abraham, Job, and many more.
2. Moses’ reluctance to deliver God’s message to Pharaoh was not “humility”; it was a lack of trust in God which drew God’s anger (Exodus 4:14).
3. The Torah not only reveals God’s call of Moses as His prophet, it also gave instructions for recognizing false prophets.

Day 5: Wednesday, December 31, 2008

This lesson discusses the role of Scripture in revealing God's will and purposes. It opens by stating that during the primordial period of history, God revealed himself by means of "dreams, visions, or epiphanies." From the time of Moses (c. fifteenth century BC) onward, many of God's revelations were written down.

The lesson makes three central points about Scripture: its unity, its historical portrayal, and its survival. Regarding its unity, the lesson states that although written by approximately 40 authors over nearly 160 years, it is unified in its revelation of "the plan of salvation", the Messiah, and its doctrines. Historically the Bible "embodies the oldest history of any people in the world." Nothing like it exists in any other tradition. Finally, the Bible has more ancient manuscript evidence than does any other ancient work of literature.

The author makes the point that the reason for this remarkable unity is "the Holy Spirit, the real author of God's Word, who inspired all the human authors. He ensured that the biblical historians presented a accurate picture, and He watched over the history and preservation of the Bible."

In the Teachers Comments, p. 13, first paragraph, are these words: We can look back to Adam for a clue. Adam, the first man, was "God-breathed," meaning that God literally breathed life into him. Thus, Adam's life was God-inspired; it is the reason he became a living soul. The Bible is called the Living Word of God because it has power to teach, convict, correct, and instruct us how to grow into the fullness of God. The Bible is the thought of God communicated to humanity."

In the E. G. White Notes for Wednesday's lesson are these words excerpted from the 1989 devotional guide compiled from White's writings, *Lift Him Up*, p. 117:

"The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14)."

Further, the Notes include this quotation from *The Great Controversy*, pp. Vi, vii: "God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth."

Problems

The details presented in the main copy of the lesson are fairly straightforward. The Teachers Comments, however, need attention. The creation of Adam has nothing to do with the way Scripture is inspired except for the underlying fact of God's initiation. God's breathing life into Adam is comparable to His giving us new birth, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6, ESV). He breathed the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul—as we also become "living souls" when the Holy Spirit gives life to our own dead spirits (Ephesians 2:1, 3) when we are born again (John 5:24) and sealed with the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Bible is the revelation of God's will and purposes made known by the Holy Spirit to the authors whom He chose to record His words. The quotation above from *The Great Controversy* says that God allowed the Bible writers to imperfectly express His divine ideas in human language. This understanding of "thought inspiration" rather than of "verbal inspiration" allows for human error to creep into the biblical writing. It suggests that God allowed men to interpret God's thought inspiration according to their best understanding without His correction and control of the text.

2 Peter 1:19-21, however, gives a totally different picture: "And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (ESV).

Finally, the quotation above from *Lift Him Up* downgrades both the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus, placing both in a position less authoritative than that of the Ten Commandments. First, the Lord Jesus is God—not one-third of God or part of God. He is of the same substance as His Father and as the Holy Spirit. He is not "less than" God nor limited in what divine powers He has.

This quotation places the Ten Commandments in a more authoritative place than any of the rest of the Bible, claiming that they were the only part of the Bible actually written by God. Thus His inspiration of the prophets is less accurate and less authoritative than that of the Commandments. Also, according to this quotation, Jesus Himself is a union of divine and human, just as is Scripture. The clear implication is that the humanity of Jesus dilutes the power and authority and identity of God in Him.

This assumption is fallacious. The Ten Commandments were God's covenant with Israel, written, as were all ancient Hittite covenants between a conquering king and the people whom he conquered, by the conquering king. The Commandments were the very "words of the covenant" (Ex. 34:28) God made with Israel. The Ten Commandments are recorded for all time not on extant tables of stone; they are recorded, along with all other words of God, in Scripture.

Further, Jesus is God. He is not "half God, half man". His deity and power and divine nature are not altered by His humanity. Even His omnipresence and omnipotence are unaltered, as Colossians 1:17 declares: "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Even when on earth, even when in the tomb, all things hold together in Jesus. His role did not end because of His incarnation. He is eternally, completely God. The Ten Commandments are not "more of God" than is Jesus or than is the rest of Scripture. The Ten Commandments had a clear origination and were temporary in effect (Galatians 3:17); Jesus is without beginning and without ending.

Summary

1. The creation of Adam is utterly unlike the inspiration of Scripture. The parallel with creation is our own new birth when our dead spirits are "birthed" by the Holy Spirit, thus giving us spiritual life and moving us from death into life (John 5:24).
2. The words of the Bible were directly inspired by God. He did not impress writer's thoughts and allow them to record them imperfectly, warped by limited human understanding.
3. The Ten Commandments are not more authoritative, more directly "of God" than is the rest of Scripture. Further, Jesus' incarnation cannot be used as a contrast for God's direct authorship of the Ten Commandments. Jesus is God—the very God who wrote the Ten Commandments. His deity and eternal power is not limited in the slightest by his incarnation. In Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). Jesus is greater than the Ten Commandments. He is eternal; the Law had a beginning and an ending (Galatians 3:17).

Day 6: Thursday, January 1, 2009

Thursday's lesson introduces Christ as "the center and substance of God's revelation". It explains that the Bible "far surpasses the revelation of God in nature; yet no written record can equal the personal presence of the Son of God." The second paragraph of the lesson states that studying the Bible will be of little benefit unless that study leads "to the One it reveals". "The Bible was written, above all to give to us the revelation of God presented to the world through the life and death of His Son, Jesus."

It concludes with the point that Jesus was "the true light that gives light to every man," but that only if a person receives this light will he be saved. The thought questions at the end ask, "How well do you know Jesus yourself? If someone were to say to you, 'Tell me about Jesus, what He is like and what He can do for me,' what would you say and why?"

The Teachers Comments on p. 13 under the heading Communication—Examples and Teachings—Through Jesus, says this: "God's greatest act of mercy was sending Jesus to die for us. Yet all the aspects of Jesus' life, not just His death, reveal the plan of salvation at work and communicate God's truth and grace to us: His perfect life is an example of obedience; His vicarious death allows Him to justify us; our faith in His death frees us from the guilt of sin; His resurrection promises us immortality; His ascension into heaven confirms His promise to return to earth and take us to meet the Father.

Further, under "Step 3—Practice" on page 13, the second question asks this: "God communicated directly with humans in the Garden of Eden. He communicated directly with humans when Jesus was on earth. Why, do you think, does God not still communicate with humans face-to-face? Read Joel 2:28, 29; Amos 3:7."

Problems

The copy of the lesson is fairly innocuous, but the teachers comments suggest the underlying assumptions on which the lesson is built. First, in the paragraph quoted above are these words: "His perfect life is an example of obedience..." Jesus came primarily to be a propitiation for our sin (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10). Hebrews 2:17, in fact, states, "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

Jesus became human and lived a perfect life not to show us how we, too, can live without sin, because none of us can keep the law perfectly. (See Romans 7:8-10). Rather, Jesus lived a perfect life as our substitute. He qualified to be our perfect sin offering. He became like us in every respect so He could qualify to be our sin offering, a propitiation for our sin. He satisfied the law's demands; He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13) and became sin for us so we could become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He came to show us how a person who is spiritually alive obeys

and depends on the Father, but His example was not for fallen humans. His example was for those who surrender to Him and who are justified by His grace (Romans 3:24), who have passed from death to life (John 5:24).

His purpose for coming was primarily to be our substitute, our sin offering, our Savior.

Further, His resurrection promises us more than immortality. It promises us our salvation. Romans 5:9-10 says, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (ESV).

Jesus' death reconciled us to God; His resurrection, however, is the reason we have eternal life. If He had not risen, there would be no spiritual life for us and no eternal life. We are saved by His life.

Moreover, His ascension accomplished more than confirmation that He will return. Jesus told His disciples that unless He went away, the Holy Spirit would not come: "John 16:7: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." Jesus' ascension was necessary in order for the Holy Spirit to come at Pentecost and to launch the church.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was a new phenomenon at Pentecost. In fact, Pentecost was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28 (see Acts 2:16-21). Pentecost fulfilled the prophecy of the "latter rain" when sons and daughters, young and old men would have dreams and visions and would prophecy. Jesus' ascension marked the fulfillment of His atonement. His blood opened a new, living way to the Father (Hebrews 10:19-22), and the church was launched. It was a completely new reality—and it could not happen unless Jesus ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit.

The reality of Pentecost explains the problematic assumption underlying question 2 under "Step 3—Practice" on page 13 of the Teachers Commentary. Although we are not physically with God, we are united with Him by His Spirit who seals us when we believe in the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 1:13-14). We literally have God living in us when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit teaches us, makes Scripture come alive, and unites us with the mind of Christ to do God's work which He created for us to do (Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 2:10).

Summary

1. Jesus' perfect life was not primarily our "example" but was our "substitute". He came to make propitiation for our sin and to create a new, living way for us to be united with God with no veil between (Hebrews 10:19-22; 2:17). Not only His death but also His perfect life substitute for our own. His righteous perfection covers us when we place our faith in Him, and this righteousness is alien to us. It is literally His righteousness that God counts to our credit (Philippians 3:8-9).
2. Jesus' resurrection did more than promise us eventual resurrection. It is the means by which we are saved. His death reconciled us to God; His resurrection is what broke the power of death and makes it possible for us to be born again by the Spirit and to become spiritually alive, crossed over from death to life (John 5:24; 3:5-6)
3. Jesus' ascension did more than promise He would return. It marked the last step in Jesus' work. His ascension made it possible for the Holy Spirit to come and to give people new birth and to create the body of Christ, unifying all who believe in Jesus by His life in them. Jesus' ascension marked the complete fulfillment of the law and the inauguration of the church against which the gates of hell would never prevail (Matthew 16:18).

Day 7: Friday, January 2, 2009

Day seven only presents quotations from Ellen White and discussion questions. The first quotation is from *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 265-266. The second is from *Bible Echo*, October 1, 1892, Par. 5.

The quote from *Testimonies* is this: "Christ came to teach human beings what God desires them to know. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the broad waters of the ocean, we see the handiwork of God. All created things testify to His power, His wisdom, His love. But not from the stars or the ocean or the cataract can we learn of the personality of God as it is revealed in Christ. God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to reveal, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God."

"Christ revealed all of God that sinful human beings could bear without being destroyed. He is the divine Teacher, the Enlightener. Had God thought us in need of revelations other than those made through Christ and in His written word, He would have given them."

The second discussion question is this: "If God does reveal Himself to us through nature, at least partially, what does this tell us about our need to protect the environment?"

Problems

The quotation from Testimonies states that nature was not enough to reveal the “personality of God”. It further states that God sent Jesus to reveal, “so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God.”

These statements miss the depth and reality of what Jesus revealed. Jesus came and revealed God’s justice and mercy. He did not come to demonstrate that God is gentle and not harsh or worthy of fear. He did not come to reveal a God different from the Old Testament God. Further, He did not come to vindicate the Law or to prove that He was justified in requiring the law. He did not come to prove that He was just in punishing sinners or to prove the Law could be kept. None of these ideas have any basis in Scripture.

Rather, Jesus came to demonstrate God’s righteousness. God publicly displayed Jesus “as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Romans 3:25a). This public display of Jesus as a blood sacrifice was not to vindicate the law or to prove God was justified in punishing sinners. Rather, this public sacrifice was to vindicate God because He had not punished the sins of the world that had occurred prior to the cross.

Romans 3:25b-26, ESV: “This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Jesus came to show us the Father—yes. But He came to show us that God took full responsibility for sin, that God gave part of Himself—His own Son—to become a blood sacrifice to satisfy His own law of sin and death and to make it possible to forgive everyone who places saving faith in the Lord Jesus and receives the gift of His blood in payment for their sin. Jesus’ death vindicated God—but God’s death decree for sin was never in question. Nowhere does the Bible posit an accusation by any being against God’s justice.

Rather, the issue was whether or not God was justified in not destroying sinners. Jesus’ death demonstrated God’s justice in not punishing the sins committed beforehand. He didn’t vindicate God’s law—it needed no defense. It was always there as the vehicle through which came the knowledge of sin—never as the blueprint for how to be saved (Romans 3:20). Jesus demonstrated God’s mercy and justice in that God Himself is seen to be both just—properly demanding and providing propitiation for human sin—and the justifier—the one who takes the punishment onto Himself, thus justifying His own forgiveness.

This debt of God’s sacrifice is a debt too big for us to contemplate. We cannot earn it, repay Him, or bypass it and still be saved. We have to accept this horrific sacrifice as a free gift. We have to surrender to the Lord Jesus and give up our “right” to attempt to earn or repay Him. We have to live in His debt, our lives totally surrendered to Him for His purposes.

When we surrender to this greatest of all gifts, we receive the very life of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Our spirits are brought to life by the Spirit (John 3:5-6), we pass from death to life (John 5:24) and are seated with Christ at God’s right hand (Ephesians 2:6). Our lives become hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3), and God Himself transfers us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

Praise God, Jesus is all we need in order to be justified, sanctified, alive, and saved! Praise God, we can know we are saved. When we have the Son, we have life; when we do not have the Son of God, we do not have life (1 John 5:12).

Jesus is enough!

Summary

1. Jesus didn’t just come to reveal the Father’s personality or to vindicate the law. He came to demonstrate God’s righteousness. God had not punished the sins committed beforehand, and Jesus came to prove that God was both just and the justifier of everyone who believes in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26).
2. Jesus’ death is a sacrifice that leaves us entirely in His debt. We must give up our desire to repay, earn, or otherwise be worthy of it. Our only response can be surrender to His purposes. Our own control over our lives is over.
3. When we surrender to the great gift, we receive the very life of God in the Person of the Holy Spirit indwelling us and bringing us to life. We cross over from death to life, and our life becomes hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).