

# Bible Studies for Adventists



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Lesson 11 • March 7–13, 2009

## Commentary on “Interpreting the Prophetic Writings”

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### Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, March 7, 2009

This lesson opens by setting forth the focus for the week, how to interpret the writings of Ellen White. The lesson affirms that White manifested the gift of prophecy and that her inspiration is on the same level as the Old and New Testament prophets. White and her writings are referred to as “the Spirit of Prophecy”. Although the lesson states that White’s authority is secondary to the authority of the Bible, the assertion is made that we must apply the same principles of interpretation to her writings that we do to Scripture.

#### Problems

Building on previous weeks, this lesson assumes that White’s prophecies were legitimately inspired by the Holy Spirit and were therefore of the same quality as the prophecies recorded by any biblical writer. As demonstrated in previous weeks’ commentaries, this assumption is faulty on a number of counts. The extensive problems with this assumption will not be restated here, but the reader is encouraged to review all of the previous weeks’ commentaries (especially “Testing the Prophets”, January 31 – February 6).

If Ellen White’s prophecies were not truly of God and do not pass the biblical plumb line for truth, then the assertion that we must apply the same principles of interpretation to her writings as we do to the Bible is irrelevant. Such an assertion has no meaning if, as has previously been demonstrated, White’s writings frequently contradict or change the meaning of Scripture. If White fails the test of a true prophet there is no basis at all upon which we can claim that her writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, are of the same quality as biblical writings, or should be approached in the same way we approach the study of scripture.

Most notably, this lesson sets forth an illogical and self-contradicting premise. One cannot claim that a prophet’s inspiration is on the exact same level as the writers of the Old and New Testament and at the same time attempt to maintain the appearance of a hierarchy in authority. To say that White and her writings constitute “the Spirit of Prophecy” and that her inspiration is on the same level as the Bible, but her authority is not, is a distinction without a difference. If White’s writings are God’s word to us, just as the writings of the biblical authors are, then there can be no real distinction in authority. God’s word is either authoritative or it is not. We cannot claim that some of the writings inspired by God are more authoritative than others, but still on the same level of inspiration, and maintain intellectual consistency.

#### Summary

1. There is no legitimate reason to assume that the inspiration of Ellen White’s writings is on the same level as the Bible.
2. The discussion of applying principles for biblical interpretation to White’s writings is irrelevant if White and her writings are not consistent with Scripture.
3. It is contradictory to claim that White’s inspiration, but not her authority, is on the same level as the Old and New Testament prophets.

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## Day 2: Sunday, March 8, 2009

After giving a brief, lay-level, definition of the term exegesis, this lesson launches with the bold assertion, "There is no question that there will be people in heaven who never have heard the gospel". A quote from *The Desire of Ages*, which borrows language from Romans 2, is given to support this statement. The Ellen White quote appears to use Romans 2 in a way which is inconsistent with the original exegetical idea of the passage. The result leaves the impression White might be suggesting that the heathen are saved because, though ignorant of the written law, they have done the things the law required.

The lesson acknowledges that the issue actually being dealt with in Romans 2 is not the salvation of the heathen, but the accountability of all, Jew and Gentile alike. The lesson further explains that it would be inconsistent with the Bible to suggest that anyone is saved by keeping the law and acknowledges all are saved by Jesus' death on the cross.

### Problems

If taken by itself, the thrust of this lesson would be difficult to discern. However, when the entire week is reviewed, Sunday's lesson appears to set the stage for Monday when the author discusses his view of the differences between scriptural exegesis and homiletics. Therefore, the problems in the author's assertions related to exegesis and homiletics will be discussed in Monday's commentary.

Before leaving today's commentary, it is worth noting that, even in laying the ground work for future lessons, underlying assumptions are present in the author's flow of thought. The first assumption is that Ellen White's writings are inspired and therefore can be used to support such a dubious claim as "There is no question that there will be people in heaven who never have heard the gospel". In fact, there is considerable question about such an assertion. It is very difficult to back up this statement by scripture alone when proper exegesis is applied. Appealing to a distinction between exegesis and homiletics is no help as will be seen in Monday's commentary.

The second assumption appears to be the author's belief that White's writings and the Bible will agree. So, instead of considering the possibility that White's choice of words, and her non-contextual use of Romans 2, might indeed suggest works based righteousness, the author assumes that her words must be able to be harmonized with scripture and spends the majority of the lesson trying to do just that.

Today's lesson further points out the poor logic introduced in Saturday's lesson. One cannot say that an author is inspired at the same level as OT and NT writers and then claim some sort of distinction in levels of authority. The reasoning ends up being circular. If the supposedly inspired writer and the Bible appear to disagree, and yet both are believed to be equally inspired, then the adherent is forced to reinterpret the writer, the Bible, or both in order to harmonize disparate teachings. It is no good saying that the Bible has greater authority if instead of judging a prophet's words against scripture, we merely reinterpret them to preserve our belief in the inspiration of the prophet.

### Summary

1. The author assumes the inspiration of Ellen White.
2. The author assumes the writings of Ellen White and the Bible can be made to agree.
3. The author, unintentionally, points out the impracticality of claiming that White had the same level of inspiration as biblical writers, but a different level of authority.

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## Day 3: Monday, March 9, 2009

In the first paragraph of this lesson, the author defines homiletics as "the art of preaching" and goes on to say, "Sometimes a preacher may use just the wording of a text, without special regard for its original meaning, to make a point or an appeal during a sermon. This is called the homiletical use of Scripture."

The author then goes on to compare and contrast what he believes to be exegetical and homiletical uses of Mark 1:15 and 17. Essentially, the author defines the exegetical use of a text to be what it meant to the original author and recipients and the homiletical use to be how that principle applies to us today (which according to the author, may or may not be consistent with the original meaning of the text).

The author then goes on to make the point that Ellen White frequently used scripture in a "homiletical" way. He gives the example of Ecclesiastes 7:29 which states,

**"Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices." - (NASB)**

In *Education*, pg. 198, White applied language from this text to encourage her readers to maintain correct and “upright” physical posture which she believed would benefit them mentally and morally. The author points out that the exegetical idea of Ecclesiastes 7:29 deals with man being created as a moral creature, not good posture. The author states that White used the text in a “homiletical” way.

### Problems

The central problem in this lesson is the author’s misunderstanding of the homiletical use of a text. Homiletics is indeed the art of preaching. However, it is never acceptable for any preacher, teacher, or writer to take the Word of God and assign it a meaning which is completely foreign to the intended meaning given by God.

The art of homiletics involves determining a unit of thought within scripture, determining the exegetical idea of the passage, determining the theological idea that flows from that exegesis, and then presenting a legitimate application of the text which is consistent with the exegetical and theological idea of the passage. It is always illegitimate to assign an application to a text which is inconsistent with the exegetical and theological idea of the passage. Doing so is a misuse of scripture.

When Ellen White uses Ecclesiastes 7:29 to teach about correct posture, she is misusing and abusing scripture by assigning a meaning to it which is completely foreign and inconsistent with the God given meaning of the text. This is unacceptable by orthodox Christian standards of homiletics. White’s misuse, and/or misunderstanding, of scripture can’t be explained away by mislabeling it “homiletical”.

### Summary

1. The author erroneously implies that homiletics allow for assigning an application which is foreign to the actual meaning of a text.
2. Using texts in ways which are inconsistent with the God given meaning of the text is a misuse and abuse of the scripture.
3. The author’s quotation of Ellen White demonstrates that at times she either misunderstood scripture or engaged in the misuse and abuse of scripture.

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## Day 4: Tuesday, March 10, 2009

In this lesson the author references Jeremiah 4:23-26. He states that Adventists read these texts as describing the millennium and notes that Ellen White used these texts in *The Great Controversy* to describe the state of the earth during the millennium. The author acknowledges that the context of this passage actually deals with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but states that we need to take the circumstances under which Jeremiah wrote these texts into account when interpreting them.

The author then quotes a well known passage from Ellen White which appears to condemn expending money on “bicycles and dress and other needless things”. He explains that we need to take the circumstances under which White wrote into account when interpreting passages like this. He states that White was actually dealing with the principle of good stewardship when she condemned bicycles which were expensive luxury items at the time.

### Problems

It is difficult to know what to make of this lesson. It certainly is important to understand historical context when interpreting any material. However, the opening discussion of Jeremiah 4:23-26 is incomprehensible. While it is helpful to understand the historical context Jeremiah was writing in, the coming destruction of Jerusalem, none of this relates in any way to the state of the earth during the millennium. The Jeremiah passage describes a barren wasteland while every passage in the Bible dealing with the millennium describes a time of peace and abundance. It is completely unclear why anyone would think the passage in Jeremiah deals with the millennium other than the fact that Ellen White used it this way. Appreciating the historical context under which Jeremiah wrote only serves to demonstrate that Ellen White either didn’t understand this passage or simply misused it. It is unclear why the author would use this as an example of understanding historical context.

Whatever White may have meant in her passage condemning the expenditure of funds on bicycles, it demonstrates a focus which is more centered on externals than on the heart. The Bible most certainly presents principles of good stewardship, but it never condemns having nice things. Having nice things is not the issue. Ultimately it is a heart issue. You might see someone who has almost nothing and think, “They must be very spiritual”. That’s not necessarily true. It’s possible that they are very worldly and focused on gaining material things. You might see a person with a very nice car and a very nice house and think, “They must really be worldly.” However, it may be that the Lord has blessed them abundantly and they are then able to generously put large amounts of what they earn back into the mission of building the kingdom. You might think, “Well if I had that much money I would be generous too.” If you’re not generous with what you have now, you wouldn’t be generous with more. It’s not about what you have; it’s ultimately a heart issue. Whether or not someone drives a really nice car, or a bicycle, is not the issue. The issue is about what, or more specifically who, your heart is fixed on. Putting White’s comments in histori-

cal context does not change the fact that she often focused more on conformance to external standards, as set forth in her writings, then she did on issues of the heart, as set forth in scripture.

## Summary

1. Jeremiah 4:23-26 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and therefore cannot be symbolic of the millennium which is marked by abundance and peace. It is unclear what the author of the lesson had in mind here other than to attempt to justify another biblical misinterpretation by Ellen White.
2. The authors attempt to contextualize White's condemnation of bicycles fails to deal with the issue of White's frequent legalism which put conformance to standards she created above the more serious issue of who the heart is fixed on.

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## Day 5: Wednesday, March 11, 2009

This lesson opens with the author discussing Isaiah 65:17. The author states that the promise in Isaiah 65:17 of a new heaven and new earth was a conditional prophecy to Israel which was never fulfilled due to their disobedience. The author further states that this prophecy can be applied in a secondary sense to a time following the millennium, but we must not press the details too far.

The author then goes on to quote a well known passage from Ellen White saying that Christians "should never be taught to say or to feel they are saved." The author states that an exploration of the context of this passage shows that White was warning that Christians may always fall from grace and that she was against the doctrine of "once saved always saved". The author concludes that this does not mean that we can't have "day-by-day assurance of salvation".

As a further exploration of context, the *Teacher's Edition Study Guide* encourages Sabbath School teachers to consider the contexts of Romans "15" and Colossians 2. The author then asserts that context will show that these passages are not dealing with the weekly Sabbath.

## Problems

It is often difficult to understand the relationship between the biblical illustrations the author chooses and the points made in regards to the writings of Ellen White. The author's interpretation of Isaiah 65 is debatable as many theologians believe this is a prophecy which will be fulfilled in part through the reign of Christ on earth during the millennial age. It also appears that Isaiah is compressing events in the millennium and events in the final state into one prophecy. A person's interpretation of this passage will be greatly affected by their overall eschatology, perhaps even more so than by the immediate context, so it is unclear why the author chose this debatable passage to illustrate immediate context.

The author's appeal to the context of White's condemnation of saying or even feeling that you are saved does little to help salvage her credibility. Even in context, it is clear that White did not believe there was any lasting assurance of salvation and that a Christian might become unsaved at any moment if they fall to temptation. The most the author can offer is that White's statement allows for a "day-by-day assurance of salvation". What kind of assurance is it when you wake up each morning, confess your sins, then hope and pray that you can stay sin free that day so as not to fall from grace and be lost? This type of "day-by-day assurance" is roughly akin to a cancer patient on chemotherapy who can be said to have "day-by-day health". If health can be defined as "not having died yet today", then they could be said to have "day-by-day health". Likewise, if "assurance" can be defined as "not having sinned and fallen from grace yet today", then adherents to White's writings can be said to have "day-by-day assurance". We will spend time in the scripture studying this topic more thoroughly on Friday.

The *Teacher's Study Guide* claims that an examination of context will show that Romans "15" (presumably the author is actually referring to Romans 14 as chapter 15 would not seem to be pertinent to the discussion) and Colossians 2 do not deal with the weekly Sabbath. Unfortunately, the author's analysis largely ignores context and instead relies on a priori presuppositions and a hypothetical analogy in which Canada conquers the United States. This is exactly the opposite of doing good exegesis, which involves getting the intended meaning out of a passage. This is *eisegesis*, which is the error of reading one's own biases, presuppositions, or meanings into a passage. The errors made by the author are so serious that both these passages deserve a thorough treatment here. We will exegete the pertinent passage from Romans 14 today and deal with Colossians 2 in Thursday's commentary.

## Romans 14:1-6

This passage addresses the question of observing holy days. The Roman Church was a mixed church made up partly of Jews living in Rome who had accepted Jesus as Messiah and partly of gentile Romans who had forsaken Paganism and come to Christ. As you can imagine there were some tensions as cultures clashed and as the Old Covenant began to give way to the New Covenant. Many Jewish Christians were clinging to their customs of observing Old Covenant annual feast Sabbaths, New Moon monthly Sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath day. In addition, they were clinging to Old Covenant food laws. The

gentiles, who were not circumcised, had never entered the Old Covenant and did not observe holy days or food laws. These differences were dividing the Church and they needed direction on how these differences should be handled.

It is in this climate that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Now if gentile Christians were required to observe any Sabbaths (annual, monthly, or weekly) or if they were required to observe food laws, this would have been the perfect time for the Apostle to say so. There was obviously a debate in the Church and Paul had the perfect opportunity here to set the record straight for the rest of the entire Church age. Paul's inspired direction clarified the situation not only for the Romans, but for all New Covenant believers who would come after.

**1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.**

**2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. - Romans 14:1-6 (NASB)**

Paul could have taken this opportunity to tell the gentiles that they really were required to observe Old Covenant Sabbaths, but he did not do so because it was not true. Instead Paul sought peace in the Church by saying that the observance of any holy day is purely a personal matter, not an obligation. If a person decides to observe a particular day, then they're doing it for the Lord and that's okay. If a person decides to regard everyday alike, that's okay too!

For New Covenant Christians, the observance of days is a non-issue. It's not a salvation issue. It's not a sanctification issue. It's not a holiness issue. It's not an obedience issue. It's not a truth issue. It's not an issue of special blessing. It's not an issue at all. At most, it's just a personal choice. Paul stresses that we are not to judge others based on their personal choice. That command cut both ways for both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews weren't supposed to judge the gentiles for not observing food laws and not observing holy days. The gentiles were not supposed to judge those who Paul called "weak in faith" (the Jewish Christians) for continuing in their traditions of food laws and observing Sabbaths. There was to be harmony and unity in the Church even though there were different practices between Jews and gentiles.

The only thing that would break that unity is if someone began to teach that these Old Covenant traditions were actually required for New Covenant Christians, rather than just being a matter of personal choice. Such false teaching required a stronger response. In Thursday's commentary we will see how the Apostle Paul responded to such false teaching.

## Summary

1. The author's use of Isaiah as an illustration for immediate context is confusing and his interpretation is debatable.
2. Examination of White's quote forbidding saying or even feeling that you are saved does not improve the poor theology contained in her quote. It merely confirms that White made this statement because she did not believe there was any lasting assurance of salvation despite the many biblical assurances which will be explored later.
3. Romans 14:1-6 teaches us that New Covenant Christians may decide to observe a particular day or to regard everyday alike. Neither option should cause us to judge others or be a point of division in the Church.

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## Day 6: Thursday, March 12, 2009

In this lesson the author discusses James 2:14-26 and the need to examine context when interpreting this passage. The author states that when we examine the "larger context" of other scriptures, such as Ephesians 2:8-9, we discover that James is saying that there are two types faith and the outworking of our faith shows whether our faith is valid or invalid.

The author applies his concept of the "larger context" to a quote from Ellen White in *Counsels on Diet and Foods* where she states, "Not an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs." The author then goes on to quote from another section of the same compilation book where White says, "Those who have feeble digestive organs can often use meat, when they cannot eat vegetables, fruit, or porridge." The author asserts that, "When we look at the total body of what she [White] has written on a given topic, a balanced picture emerges that is invaluable for every Christian who takes religion seriously."

As a further exploration of context, the *Teacher's Edition Study Guide* encourages Sabbath School teachers to consider the contexts of Romans "15" and Colossians 2. The author then asserts that context will show that these passages are not dealing with the weekly Sabbath.

## Problems

The author's comparison of the James 2 passage to White's quote forbidding even "an ounce of flesh meat" is not completely apt. As the author suggests, comparing James 2 to Ephesians 2 may indeed help us avoid a gross misinterpretation of

what James is actually saying. However, the difference between the passage in James and the quote from White, is that James' meaning can readily be determined from the immediate context. The author of the Sabbath School lesson claims that when we examine the "larger context" of other scriptures, we discover that James is stating that there are two types faith, valid and invalid. But this information is gleaned from the immediate context of the book of James, not the other scriptures. One does not necessarily need to go outside of James' letter to understand this truth. White's quote appears to be quite absolute and there is nothing in the immediate context to suggest otherwise.

*Counsels on Diet and Foods* is a compilation of White's writings. Such a compilation tends to confuse the reader because White frequently wrote things which were not consistent with her previous writings. The fact that White once wrote that not even "an ounce of flesh meat should enter our stomachs" and at another time suggested that some meat eating might be acceptable for "those who have feeble digestive organs" only demonstrates a confusing inconsistency in her writings which becomes more apparent when they are compiled.

Neither the immediate or larger contexts of Ellen White's writings mitigate the fact that she demonstrated an inordinate focus on issues of diet. While a healthy diet may be important, the so-called inspired writings of White far exceed, or even contradict, anything the Bible has to say on this subject.

**18 And He said\* to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) - Mark 7:18-19 (NASB)**

The *Teacher's Study Guide* claims that an examination of context will show that Romans "15" (presumably the author is actually referring to Romans 14 as chapter 15 would not seem to be pertinent to the discussion) and Colossians 2 do not deal with the weekly Sabbath. Unfortunately, the author's analysis largely ignores context and instead relies on a priori presuppositions and a hypothetical analogy in which Canada conquers the United States. This is exactly the opposite of doing good exegesis, which involves getting the intended meaning out of a passage. This is *eisegesis*, which is the error of reading one's own biases, presuppositions, or meanings into a passage. The errors made by the author are so serious that both these passages deserve a thorough treatment here. We provided an exegesis of Romans 14:1-6 in Wednesday's commentary. In today's lesson we will deal with Colossians 2.

### **Colossians 2:13-17**

In Romans 14 we saw how Paul addressed the issue of holy days in the Church at Rome. We saw that, for the New Covenant Christian, the observance of special days is a matter of personal choice that should not divide the Church. One person might consider one day more special than another, while another person considers every day alike. Whichever way a person chooses, it should not be a matter of judgment against others. It's a personal choice, not an obligation or requirement for Christians.

In today's commentary I would like to examine how Paul addressed the controversy in the Church at Colosse. Here the situation was different than in Rome. In Rome, Jewish and gentile Christians were learning to live together in love and needed basic instruction on what things were within the realm of Christian freedom. The Church in Colosse was largely gentile, but was being infiltrated by a few false teachers. Among the heresies these false teachers were spreading was the heresy that New Covenant Christians were required to keep food laws, observe annual festival Sabbaths, monthly new moon Sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath day.

Paul addressed this heresy in a very firm way when writing to the Colossians:

**13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. - Colossians 2:13-15 (NASB)**

Jesus Christ canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, or as the New International Version translates the Greek, "having canceled the written code with its regulations". Jesus Christ took the written code and its regulations out of the way by nailing it to the cross.

The author of *Teacher's Study Guide* protests that this does not include the Sabbath day and that the Sabbath was never taken out of the way and nailed to the cross. But what does the inspired inerrant scripture say about this?

In transitioning from verse 15 to verse 16, Paul uses an important transitional Greek word, "oun". "Oun" is usually translated into English as "therefore", "then", or "so then". As a general biblical interpretive rule, when you see the word "therefore", stop and see what it's there for. By using this transitional word, Paul is telling us that what follows in verse 16 flows out of what was done in verses 13 -15. Or to put it another way, because Christ nailed the written code with its regulations to the cross, the things in verse 16 were taken out of the way and no one should judge on the basis of these things any longer.

**16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. - Colossians 2:16-17 (NASB)**

In verse 16 Paul uses a familiar sequence to describe all the prescribed Sabbaths. This sequence is used in either ascending or descending order throughout scripture, but it always encompasses all the Jewish Sabbaths; annual, monthly, and weekly Sabbaths. The gist of the argument that Paul is making is this; Christ nailed the written code to the cross, therefore the following shadows have been taken out of the way: food laws, annual festival Sabbaths, monthly new moon Sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath day.

The author of the *Teacher's Study Guide* argues that Paul is not referring to the weekly Sabbath here, but only to what Adventists sometimes refer to as "ceremonial Sabbaths", which they assume to be limited to annual festival Sabbaths and monthly new moon Sabbaths. But this argument does not hold up to scrutiny for three reasons:

- When this familiar sequence is used in scripture it is used to encompass all the prescribed Sabbaths, not just the annual and monthly Sabbaths. This sequence always includes the weekly Sabbath day as well.
- To insist that the weekly Sabbath day is excluded from Paul's statement turns his sentence into redundant nonsense. Such an assertion would make the Apostle Paul say something like, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival Sabbath or a new moon Sabbath or a festival Sabbath day or a new moon Sabbath day." This makes no sense at all. Why would Paul mention the annual festival Sabbaths and new moon Sabbaths, and then refer to them again by saying "or a Sabbath day"? Paul is not being redundant; he is listing all three types of Sabbaths; annual festival, monthly new moon, and weekly day.
- The Greek word Paul uses here for "Sabbath day" is "sabbaton". "Sabbaton" is translated as "Sabbath" 61 times in the New Testament. Adventists would agree that the other 60 times all, without fail, refer to the weekly Sabbath day. Only here in Colossians 2 would Adventists want to argue that "sabbaton" no longer means the weekly Sabbath day, but something else. This is highly inconsistent. Upon what linguistic basis should "sabbaton" mean something different here when it always means the weekly Sabbath elsewhere? This is merely an attempt to avoid and deny the plain teaching of scripture.

There does not seem to be any good contextual, logical, or linguistic reason to understand Paul's statement to mean anything other than that all the Sabbaths; annual Sabbaths, monthly Sabbaths, and weekly Sabbath day were taken out of the way and were nailed to the cross. All the Sabbaths were only shadows of Jesus Christ and all were completely fulfilled in Him. Jesus is the substance, not the shadow. This is consistent with what is said in scripture about other Old Covenant rituals.

**1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. - Hebrews 10:1 (NASB)**

Sabbath observance is in the same category as animal sacrifices. It was only a shadow, not the very form of things, not the substance. Because we now have the substance, Jesus, there is no need to continue to cling to shadows like Sabbath observance or animal sacrifices. Now that the real thing has come, continuing to cling to shadows is a form of spiritual adultery.

This reminds me of an illustration from Pastor J. Mark Martin. Imagine that your spouse has been gone for a very long time and all you have had is a picture to help you think of him or her. You go to the airport and he or she gets off the plane. You go running towards your spouse, but when you get there you fall on the ground and start kissing his or her shadow and trying to hug the shadow. You start saying, "Oh I love you shadow, I love you so much shadow!" Your spouse would probably look at you like you were nuts. He or she would probably say, "Hey, I'm right here! Love me, not my shadow!" If you persisted in clinging to the shadow he or she would probably get pretty frustrated with you. In fact, if you kept trying to make love to the shadow instead of your spouse, you would be engaging in a form of adultery. In order to embrace your spouse, you would have to let go of his or her shadow first. In order to truly embrace Jesus, we must first relinquish our grip on the shadows that only pointed to him.

## Summary

1. The author's comparison of the James 2 passage to White's quote forbidding even "an ounce of flesh meat" is not completely apt. The difference between the passage in James and the quote from White, is that James' meaning can readily be determined from the immediate context. White's quote appears to be quite absolute and there is nothing in the immediate context to suggest otherwise.
2. The conflicting quote provided from Counsels on Diet and Foods only demonstrates a confusing inconsistency in White's writings.
3. White's writings often put the focus on external things such as diet and far exceed, or even contradict, anything the Bible has to say about diet.
4. Colossians 2:13-17 teaches that Christ nailed the written code to the cross, therefore the shadows of food laws, annual festival Sabbaths, monthly new moon Sabbaths, and the weekly Sabbath day have been taken out of the way and fulfilled in Jesus.

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## Day 7: Friday, March 13, 2009

This lesson provides a few more general guidelines for interpretation of inspired writings, deals again with the topic of "once saved always saved" (eternal security), and asks a few review questions covering the week's concepts, including a question dealing with White's denial of eternal security.

### Problems

Because the doctrine of eternal security seems to be a central point of discussion in Friday's lesson, today's commentary will deal with that issue. Both the author of the Sabbath School lesson and Ellen White reveal a fatal misunderstanding in Seventh-day Adventist theology related to salvation. Adventists tend to see maintaining one's salvation as being linked to one's choices and actions at any given time. They are therefore reluctant to believe that there can be any lasting assurance of salvation. I believe this misunderstanding is linked to the denial of the existence of a human spirit. If one believes there is no human spirit, only breath, then it is impossible to understand the significance of the New Birth. Eternal Security is not a question of our will, but one of having a regenerated spirit and becoming a new man that is now a child of God.

I think it might be helpful to start by discussing how we are saved. Are we saved by or through anything we do or is salvation purely a gift of God? I believe the testimony of scripture is that salvation is not dependent upon anything we do, but upon a sovereign act of God. God chooses to perform this sovereign act so that the His workmanship will be displayed in us and He will be glorified.

**1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. - Ephesians 2:1-10 (NASB)**

How do we go from our dead state to being made alive in Christ? What is this sovereign act of God that saves us? Jesus explains this to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John.

**3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said\* to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." - John 3:3-8 (NASB)**

So we've all been born once "of flesh" or "of water" (a reference to the breaking of the water at child birth). However, if this is the only birth we ever experience, then we cannot see the kingdom of God. We must also experience a new birth of the Spirit. Unless we are born of the Spirit we cannot enter the kingdom. It is the regeneration of our dead spirit that is the sovereign act of God. We cannot do this nor could we ever merit such a new birth. It is a gracious gift of God.

Unfortunately, there are many people that think that getting dunked in the baptismal tank and showing up at church each week means they're saved. It does not. Getting wet, attending church, or anything else you might do cannot save you. If you haven't experienced the new birth, then you're just playing religion. If you have experienced the new birth then you have entered the Kingdom of God. It's just that simple.

Without a sovereign act of God regenerating your spirit, you remain spiritually dead and lost no matter how many good things you might say or do. There are likely people like this in nearly every church you might enter. They think they are Christians and they do all the right things, but in the end Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you." They have not been reborn and will not enter the Kingdom. All of their good works and religious deeds are worthless in terms of salvation or merit.

What about those who have been given the gift of spiritual regeneration? When we are given spiritual birth, our spirit is then able to commune with God who is pure spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells us permanently as a "pledge" or a guarantee of our salvation.

**21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. - 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (NASB)**



**13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. - Ephesians 1:13-14 (NASB)**

God Himself establishes us in Christ and guarantees us the promise of salvation by sealing us with the Holy Spirit. We actually become a possession of God. We now have an inheritance as sons of the King, heirs to the Kingdom.

**12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. - John 1:12-13 (NASB)**

**14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. - Romans 8:14-17 (NASB)**

Once you've been born again, you can't be unborn. Once you have become a son or daughter of God you are always a son or daughter of God. God will not disown his children because you are already perfect in Christ, not by your own merit, but by the merit of Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection. In addition, you have been sealed forever by the indwelling presence of the third person of the Triune God. The Father can never reject the Son or the Spirit, therefore He cannot reject you when you are in Christ and indwelt by the Spirit. God cannot reject Himself. Jesus assured the disciples of this in very strong definite language.

**27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 "I and the Father are one." - John 10:27-30 (NASB)**

In fact, when we are brought to faith in Christ through the regeneration of our spirit, it can truly be said that we have already passed from death to life. We have eternal life now! It's a present reality.

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. - John 5:24 (NASB)**

In the book of Romans we are given God's eternal unbreakable golden chain. This is God's absolute guarantee that He will sovereignly save those who are His and that we will be glorified with Him. In fact, this is so sure that the Apostle Paul even uses the prophetic past-tense of "glorified" even though we have not yet experienced glorification in a temporal sense.

**28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. - Romans 8:28-30 (NASB)**

For those who have been called according to God's purpose, the conclusion of this golden chain of salvation is never in doubt. Nothing will separate God's elect from Christ. Let's look at the very next versus which flow out of the chain of salvation above.

**31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day LONG; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 8:31-39 (NASB)**

A believer can never be truly separated from God. God's elect have been chosen in Christ since before the foundation of the world. This cannot change.

**3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus**

**Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. - Ephesians 1:3-6 (NASB)**

What an amazing and comforting realization to know that the sovereign God of the universe chose us and predestined us to be in Christ! Those who are in Christ stand before God as over-comers, forever perfect in God's eyes. Not because of what they have done, but because of what the Son has done.

**For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Hebrews 10:14 (NASB)**

We are eternally secure because of Christ. We stand before God covered in Christ's righteousness, perfect forever, sanctified or set apart, based on the perfect sacrifice of Christ. This is why we say that Christ is our true and ultimate rest. We have peace in Him knowing that absolutely nothing can ever remove us from His hand. We are His possession. Our security comes from our confidence in His all sufficiency and sovereignty. Our eternal security is not about our human will. It's all about His sovereign choice and sovereign act resulting in our regenerated spirit and His Spirit dwelling within us, guaranteeing our inheritance.

**Summary**

- The Bible is replete with passages clearly stating the eternal security of those who are in Christ.