

Bible Studies for Adventists



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April 25–May 1, 2009

Commentary on “Revelation”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, April 25, 2009

Overview

“This God is a great communicator. Human words cannot adequately explain who and what God is, but the fact that He constantly is referred to as speaking to His people is utterly significant.”

Problems

Since this introductory section begins with one of the great statements in the Bible, Hebrews 1:1-2, one would expect a brief explanation of it and an overview of what is going to be studied in more depth the rest of the week.

Instead, rather than rejoicing in the words “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,” we get a basically Catholic suggestion that no one can understand God. God is described as speaking to us from “out there”. As a result, as the rest of the week points out, we need things like nature, conscience and, especially, Ellen G. White to explain Him to us. As will be pointed out in the later sections, this is not true.

Summary

1. Jesus is the last great revelation of God to humanity. Jesus is truth (John 14:6), the Holy Spirit is truth (John 16:13) and “Thy word” is truth (John 17:17).
2. A child of God can understand such spiritual truths because God is communicating with him from “in here.” “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16b), so we do not need someone else to explain God to us.

Day 2: Sunday, April 26, 2009

Overview

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20 NASB).

Problems

As presented here, the argument for natural revelation is described as a conflict between intelligent design and evolution. It is a necessary precursor to E.G. White being a “continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.”

The problem is that Paul was not arguing that a non-believer can be brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ solely through the study of nature. His argument is that, although nature could have pointed an unbeliever to the concept of God, “they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man

and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Romans 1:22b-23 NASB). In short, they created gods in their own image. “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...” (Romans 1:24a NASB).

Nature can point the questioning unbeliever to something or someone outside of themselves, but only a believer will see the true God revealed in nature. Therefore, nature cannot be depended upon as a true revelation of God. Its message is totally dependent on the person’s point of view – lost people naturally begin to worship nature either by superstition or by science; saved people see a Creator behind nature and understand that Jesus is the Creator (John 1:3).

Summary

1. Nature alone is an insufficient revelation of God to humanity.
2. One’s view of nature is dependent on one’s salvation.
3. Honest inquiry of nature can lead a lost person to search for the something or someone behind what they see, but he cannot come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through nature. Instead, she is more likely to exchange what nature proclaims for myth or science, as Paul explained in Romans 1.
4. Saved people can see God in nature, but they do so as a result of the Holy Spirit living within.

Day 3: Monday, April 27, 2009

Overview

“Conscience” is sometimes defined as the faculty, or inward principle, that helps us decide between right and wrong. Even those who do not believe in God usually possess some insight into what is morally acceptable and what must be rejected.”

Problems

What does “conscience” have to do with God’s revelation? At best, it is fallible, tainted by indwelling sin. At worst, it has been so malconditioned by unbelief that it no longer functions at all. All of the examples given in this lesson bear this out.

Reading the Bible and praying will do nothing to improve the conscience as a means of God communicating with us, UNLESS the person who is reading and praying is already indwelt by the Holy Spirit as a result of being saved. Nowhere in this entire lesson is this point made clear.

If this part of the lesson had been presented similar to C. S. Lewis’ argument in *Mere Christianity* (as an example of natural law in our world; that is, the universal idea that murder, however defined, is bad, and thus an argument in favor of God’s existence) then the lesson would have been on the right track. Conscience cannot, of itself, lead one to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It can tell us that things ought not to be the way they are, but that’s the extent of it.

Rather than following Lewis’ line of reasoning, the author of this lesson is presenting one more red herring argument as a set up to Mrs. White being an absolute necessity in the life of an Adventist. The author misses the point of Romans 1-3 entirely.

For Paul, it simply didn’t matter whether a Gentile could look at nature (Sunday’s lesson) to see God, had an informed conscience (this lesson) and was thus a law unto himself, or if a Jew understood the benefit of the Law. For Paul, the point of the first three chapters of his letter is that “now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-16 NASB).

Paul always pointed to Jesus. The SDA church always points to behaviorism.

Summary

1. Conscience cannot be counted upon to reveal anything about God.
2. Behavior, even good behavior like reading the Bible and praying, will not improve a person’s communication with God via the conscience.
3. Only a saved person, that is, a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit, can understand what the Bible means.
4. A saved person does not need Ellen White to explain the Bible (as will be argued in the next section).
5. Picking out small portions of Paul’s reasoning in Romans 1-3, as done in this lesson and the previous one, misses his point completely and leads to confusion regarding God’s communication with us through Jesus.

Day 4: Tuesday, April 28, 2009

Overview

"A prophet is a man or a woman who speaks on behalf of God. Those words have authority because the message comes from God..." According to the Bible, prophets are mentioned by name, prophecy is an abiding gift, there are false prophets and prophecy is a characteristic of the remnant church in the person of Ellen White.

Problems

Now we get to the core of the presentation. Ellen White is proclaimed as the prophet to the remnant church in these last days.

Here, in briefest outline form, is the fallacy of the argument. There are many excellent books and articles that delve into this topic completely.

Ellen White is presented first, before the Bible and Jesus Himself in this week's lesson, as the source of truth about God. According to Seventh-day Adventist church practice, she is the only truly faithful witness to the meaning of the Bible and Jesus.

The Holy Spirit within the believer is not mentioned. Yet the Holy Spirit is the only way for a believer to understand the Bible (see 1 Corinthians 2).

All prophets in the Bible are treated the same, regardless of their position within the Old and New Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, a prophet's only option was to point forward to a coming Messiah. Under the New Covenant, the prophet's only option is to point back to Jesus' completed work on the cross and in His resurrection and to point forward to Jesus' final triumph as described in Revelation. This is a critical distinction. Under the Old, no one truly understood what or who the Messiah was. God gave many, many pictures, but the reality was not there. Under the New, we have the reality!

The "abiding gift" section doesn't mention or explain 1 Corinthians 13:8 in spite of the fact that Chapter 13 is the central argument in Paul's teaching regarding the abuse of Spiritual gifts in Corinth. Taking the beginning and ending statements in that section out of context only adds to the confusion. For example, is the SDA church now allowing tongues as a secondary expression of the Spirit among its believers, as long as Ellen White is still held in the primary position?

One of the verses chosen to explain the existence of false prophets, 2 Peter 2:1, can be used explicitly of Ellen White. Anyone who teaches that Jesus' work was not completed on the cross and in His resurrection is "denying the sovereign Lord who bought them." The same argument applies to identifying Satan as the scape goat in the "prototypical Day of Atonement." Satan did not, and will not, bear our sin. Jesus became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), not Satan.

The texts used to "prove" that Ellen White is identified in Revelation 12 and 19 are hopelessly wrested to make the point. John is completely consistent throughout his writings that "God's commandments" are "that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us" (1 John 3:23). In his letter, John is merely quoting Jesus' own words recorded in John 6:29 ("Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'") and John 13:34 ("A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.") This is in stark contrast to His answer to the lawyer's question regarding the greatest commandment (See Matthew 22:35ff) when He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in summary of the Law.??Also from Revelation 12:17, John is consistent when describing the "testimony of Jesus". In 1 John 5:10-13 (NIV) John wrote, "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." Again, John merely is quoting Jesus' own words as he recorded them in John 3:15 ("...whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." NASB), John 3:16 ("...whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. NASB), John 5:39-40 ("You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life." NASB), and elsewhere in John's gospel.??Finally, using Revelation 19:10 as Adventists do is to turn its meaning completely upside down. The entire point of prophecy (i.e., the "spirit of prophecy") is to testify about Jesus. It most definitely is not to claim that Jesus is testifying about the Spirit of Prophecy (i.e., Ellen White).

Summary

1. The only reason Seventh-day Adventists talk about prophets at all is to make their point that Ellen White is THE prophet of the remnant church.
2. Prophecy's role today, under the New Covenant, is to point people to Jesus. There is no new revelation.
3. Jesus, as God's final revelation to man, should be the topic of this entire week's lesson, rather than a secondary discussion in the context of Ellen White.
4. Ellen White is not now, and has never been, a true prophet of God. She denies His finished work, she makes Satan out to be our redeemer, she makes it impossible for anyone who believes her to know the absolute assurance of salvation, and she always substitutes law for grace. In short, she is an example of antichrist.

Day 5: Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Overview

“How much time did you spend with your Bible during the past week?”

Problems

What a shame that the unfathomably great gift from God that is the Bible would be reduced to a series of questions regarding how much time you spend reading it instead of watching television.

The phrase quoted from 2 Corinthians 3:15 stops short of the truth. The entire statement is “which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Bible reading has nothing to do with saving us, but is a reflection of the relationship we have with Jesus. Reading the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2) will cause our faith in Jesus to grow.

Why is this? Because the Bible is the only book that shows us the utter futility of trying to make ourselves righteous or acceptable to God. Only the Bible presents Jesus as the perfect substitute for man and as our source of eternal life. Where else but the Bible would you read “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3)! The reason for reading the Bible is to get to know Jesus better.

The quotation from *My Life Today* is a perfect example of this misunderstanding. Divine authorship of the Bible is not dependent on anyone’s experience while reading the Bible. The Bible is true and divinely written on its own merits, based on its own claims, not because some one or some group decided to declare it so. Part of the miracle of the Bible is that it remains so internally consistent in spite of all the committees sitting in judgment of it throughout history.

Summary

1. The Bible is defined to be on par with Jesus and the Holy Spirit as truth (see John 14:6, 16:13 and 17:17).
2. The Bible is true because it is God’s word, not because humans have declared it to be true.
3. Although anyone can learn what the Bible says, only someone indwelt by the Holy Spirit can understand what the Bible means. Spiritual things are Spiritually discerned.

Day 6: Thursday, April 30, 2009

Overview

“Jesus Christ is the focus of the Scriptures.”

Problems

Honestly, this is the best lesson of the entire week. I wish the authors had started here, and then built on what they outlined in this section.

I do question the author’s statement that “He took on Himself our humanity.” If by this statement the author means that Jesus had the same propensity to sin as I do, then we have a very big problem. Jesus was the second Adam, not the second Richard. Jesus was born spiritually alive; we are born spiritually dead. This is why He is compared to Adam (who was created spiritually alive) and not compared to any other human.

If the author means that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, then I apologize for this trip into the weeds.

The only complaint I have with this section is that, as it has been throughout the week, no mention is made of the Holy Spirit’s role in revealing the meaning of the Bible to us. It is as if Adventism, smug in its belief that Ellen White, and only Ellen White, is the authoritative source of truth and practice, faith and belief, completely ignores the living Holy Spirit Who has sealed each born again child of God guaranteeing our salvation (see Ephesians 1:13-14).

There is only one way “in which you can read the Bible in order to come away from it knowing God better” – “However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’—but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10a NIV).

Summary

1. This should have been the foundation upon which the entire week’s lesson was built.
2. The Bible cannot be read for meaning without the indwelling Holy Spirit revealing that meaning to us.

Day 7: Friday, May 1, 2009

Overview

Read the chapter "A Knowledge of God" in *Steps to Christ*.

Problems

That Ellen White should be quoted as the final explanation of what it means for God to reveal Himself to us is completely in tune with the Seventh-day Adventist fixation on the denomination as God's last, best hope for the world we live in. Rather than point their membership to the Bible for the truth that will set them free, they choose instead to keep the people under bondage. This is the result of a fear-driven belief system, a system in which the adherents can never measure up to God's requirements, yet for whom the bar is raised higher and higher, and for whom failure is the daily result. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

Summary

- The Bible is the place to go to for the truth that will set you free.