

World Religions, Cults, and Aberrant Beliefs
Lesson 12 – Seventh Day Adventism
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
www.valleybible.net

Review

A cult is sometimes difficult to define, as there are many choices of definitions. The non-Christian definition of a cult usually focuses on sociological, psychological, or behavioral factors. According to these factors, a cult is a religious group that seeks to control its members by either a single individual or the organization. The cult is manipulative and demands total commitment and loyalty of the followers.

The standard evangelical definition of a Christian cult is any group that deviates from Biblical Christianity in fundamental doctrines of the faith:

1. the source of authority
2. the nature of God including the Trinity
3. the person and work of Christ
4. the nature of man
5. the means of salvation

In many cases, these groups may use the same words as true Christians, but radically redefine them.

Remember that all false philosophies (religious, psychological, etc.) are Satan's creation. Any distortion of the true gospel is the work of Satan whose aim is to deceive people into thinking that they are doing what is needed to be rewarded heaven upon death. This is salvation by works (doing "good" things and not doing "bad" things).

If one carefully studies the various religions and cults of the world, he will soon discover that, without exception, **they are founded on some form of human effort and works-righteousness.** ... Only grace-centered, biblical Christianity is from God. Every other form of religion is from Satan, inspired by his demon spirits, promoted by his lying human agents (1 Tim 4:1-2), and centered in works righteousness. MacArthur's NT Commentary: Galatians

Our Heart

When studying the cults, we may be tempted to scoff at the seemingly ludicrous beliefs. We must remember that the average cultist that we will encounter is not a false teacher, but is deceived by Satan. This is someone that God loves; someone for whom Christ died.

⁸But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8

⁴But when the kindness of God our Savior and **His love for mankind** appeared, Titus 3:4

¹⁶"For **God so loved the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16

Paul's example should be ours.

¹I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, ²that **I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.** ³**For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,** Rom 9:1-3

¹**Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.** Rom 10:1

History of Seventh Day Adventism

Seventh Day Adventism grew out of the Millerite movement in the USA in the early 1800's. William Miller (1782-1849) converted from deism to Christianity in 1816 and became a Baptist. He studied the Bible in order to reconcile apparent biblical difficulties raised by deists. In his studies, he developed a focus on the imminent return of Jesus. He began preaching at the age of 50.

America's Second Great Awakening (~1790 - 1840) saw an intense interest in the second coming of Jesus. As a result, the Millerites accepted Miller's idea that Jesus would return in the year covering spring 1843 – spring 1844. He had arrived at this date based on a study of Daniel 8:14.

¹⁴He said to me, "For 2,300 evenings *and* mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored."
Dan 8:14

Miller interpreted the 2300 evenings and mornings to be years and counted forward from 457 BC when the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem was given (Dan 9:24-25). When his initial predictions failed, he adjusted his prediction to conclude that Jesus would return on 21 Mar 1844 and then later on 22 Oct 1844. After these too failed, Miller quit promoting his ideas on Jesus' return and the Millerites broke up. Before his death in 1849, Miller said:

"We expected the personal coming of Christ at that time; and now to contend that we were not mistaken is dishonest. We should never be ashamed frankly to confess our errors. I have no confidence in any of the new theories that grew out of the movement."

On the morning following the "Great Disappointment" of 22 Oct 1844, Hiram Edson claimed to have seen a vision. He said that he saw Jesus standing at the altar of heaven and concluded that Miller had been right about the time, but wrong about the place. Jesus' return was not to earth, but a move into the heavenly sanctuary as is referenced in Heb 8:1-2.

⁸Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ²a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. Heb 8:1-2

Joseph Bates (1792-1872), a retired sea captain and convert to Millerism, began to promote the idea of Jesus moving into the heavenly sanctuary. He published a pamphlet, which greatly influenced James (1821-1881) and Ellen White (1827-1915). These three were the driving force behind the Seventh Day Adventist church (SDA) movement.

SDA reports state that Ellen White saw visions from an early age including shortly after the Great Disappointment. White claimed to see a vision of a narrow path where an angel was guiding Adventists. Subsequent visions resulted in various interpretations including admonitions against Sunday worship.

As of 2005, the SDA had 17 million baptized members worldwide. It is one of the world's fastest-growing organizations, primarily due to increases in Third World membership. It now operates in 209 out of 232 countries/regions recognized by the United Nations.

Teachings of Seventh Day Adventism

The name of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination indicates its two main distinctive characteristics: Sabbath observance on the seventh day (i.e., Saturday) and an expectation that the end of the world is drawing near. Other distinguishing characteristics include adherence to the teachings of Ellen White (who is regarded as a prophet) and various dietary observances rooted in Jewish law.

The SDA considers itself a branch of Protestant Christianity, though differences in doctrine and practice have led some mainstream Christians to dispute that designation.

...it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ despite heterodox concepts... Walter Martin in Kingdom of the Cults

In our evaluation of SDA today, let us see if we can agree with Walter Martin.

Source of authority

The SDA believes that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God.

However, the official church position of the SDA is that Ellen White performed the work of a true prophet during the seventy years of her public ministry.

18. The Gift of Prophecy

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.). from www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html

White herself claimed:

When I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God (Testimonies 4:661).

The SDA's "Questions on Doctrine" states:

While Adventists hold the writings of Ellen G. White in highest esteem, yet these are not the source of our expositions. We base our teachings on the Scriptures, the only foundation of all true Christian doctrine. However, it is our belief that the Holy Spirit opened to her mind important events and called her to give certain instructions for these last days. And inasmuch as these instructions, in our understanding, are in harmony with the Word of God, which Word alone is able to make us wise unto salvation, we as a denomination accept them as inspired counsels from the Lord. But we have never equated them with Scripture as some falsely charge. Mrs. White herself stated explicitly the relation of her writings to the Bible:

Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.—*The Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903. "The Lord designs to warn you, to reprove, to counsel, through the testimonies given, and to impress your minds with the importance of the truth of His word."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 665.

From sdanet.org/atissue/books/qod/q09.htm

In 1980, Walter Rea, a SDA minister announced research showing that Ellen White plagiarized nearly 90% of her writings. Because of this, some modern SDA leaders tend to water down the SDA's official stance of viewing White as a prophet.

The Nature of God Including the Trinity

The early writings of Ellen White are ambiguous regarding the Trinity, but current official SDA teaching agrees with historical, Biblical Christianity on the nature of God, including the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

While many SDA teachings on Christ are orthodox, some are not. The SDA believes that Jesus is God and has always existed with the Father, His sacrifice was vicarious, He rose from the dead physically in his glorified body, and He ascended bodily into heaven.

Michael the archangel

Ellen White taught that the angel Michael was pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus. The SDA is quick to point out that they do not believe Jesus is any kind of an angel. Since Michael is called an "Archangel", they interpret this to mean that Jesus is "Chief over the angels," while still being God.

However, Daniel 10:13 says that Michael is "ONE OF the chief princes." Is Jesus "one of the chief princes?" Furthermore, Michael dared not to rebuke Satan (Jude 9). Jesus, on the other hand, repeatedly rebuked Satan (Matt 17:18, Mark 9:25, etc.). Jesus is clearly not Michael.

Christ's Nature

Ellen White taught that: "Christ took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature ... Christ took human nature and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He took our nature and its deteriorating condition" (Q.D., pp. 654-656). According to SDA, then, Christ acquired a sinful nature.

However, Jesus Christ is unblemished deity and perfect (sinless) humanity united in one Person forever (cf. John 1:14; Phil 2:7-8; 1 Tim 3:6). Jesus did not have a sin nature. If he had, there would have been no perfect sacrifice.

The Nature of Man

The SDA mostly agrees with historical, Biblical Christianity on the nature of man. They teach that the universe was created in six literal days, people are created in God's image and likeness, people fell into sin by their own choice, and now share a fallen nature and its consequences. However, the SDA believes in soul sleep and denies the immortality of the soul.

The SDA teaches that people who have died are in an unconscious, sleep-like, state. Believers are awaiting the appearance of Christ when they will be resurrected and caught up to meet the Lord. The unrighteous wicked will be resurrected and judged after the millennium.

The SDA teaches that, after Christ's thousand-year rule, a second resurrection of those not saved will occur. Those whose names are not found in the "book of life" (unsaved) will be cast into the lake of fire and annihilated out of existence. They deny the doctrine of eternal hell.

The Means of Salvation

The Remnant Church

The SDA Church teaches that Christianity in its original form was corrupted in the centuries after the New Testament era by apostate Roman Catholic popes. The sign of this apostasy was the shifting of the Sabbath day from the seventh to the first day of the week. Throughout history, a small, faithful group of Christians has maintained true worship. The SDA believes that it is the "remnant" church.

However, the Bible teaches that the church is the total group of individuals who place their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When born again, these individuals are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body (1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:26-28). No single organization can claim exclusive title as the true or remnant church. The church includes all the redeemed of all ages (Matt 16:15-19; Ro. 12:4-5; 1 Co. 12-14; Eph 1:22-23; 3:21; 4:4-13).

The Investigative Judgment

According to SDA theology, beginning on 22 Oct 1844, Christ entered upon the "judgment phase" of His ministry, whereby He blots out sin.

"When Christ, by virtue of His own blood, removes the sins of His people from the heavenly sanctuary at the close of His ministration, He will place them upon Satan, who, in the execution of the judgment, must bear the final penalty." The Great Controversy p422

Seventh-day Adventists teach the following regarding the Investigative Judgment:

1. Christ moved from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary on 22 Oct 1844, and began a new phase of ministry. This ministry was foreshadowed by the Levitical Day of Atonement (Lev 16:16-33).
2. The first phase of the "Day of Atonement" is called the "cleansing of the Sanctuary". It involves a pre-Advent investigation and judging of God's people to determine whose sins will be removed from the Sanctuary. Christ started this judgment in 1844 with Adam and Eve and began progressing through the ages, judging all of the dead believers. At some point, near the end of time, Christ will begin judging the living believers. During this Investigative Judgment God either blots out the sins of the believer, or he removes the name of the believer from the Book of Life.

3. Whenever one of God's followers commits a sin and asks forgiveness from God, that sin is transferred into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly Sanctuary. It remains there, in the Sanctuary, until the Investigative Judgment is completed. At the end of time, all the sins of the righteous are transferred from the sanctuary onto the Scapegoat, who is Satan. Satan then suffers the final punishment for his sins and all the sins of the righteous.

This lack of clear distinction between the forgiveness of sins and the blotting out of sins, makes it impossible for anyone to know, even in the hour of his death, whether he is saved or not. Moreover, the concept that the sins of all men are to be laid on Satan, assigns to Satan an indispensable role in the blotting out of sin, thus nullifying the all-sufficiency of the finished work of Christ.

According to Ellen White, one must believe this doctrine to be saved:

“Those who would share the benefits of the Savior’s mediation should permit nothing to interfere with their duty to perfect holiness in the fear of God... The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position [in the Holy of Holies] and work [investigative judgment] of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs for them to fill. Every individual has a soul to save or to lose. Each has a case pending at the bar of God ... All who have received the light on these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ’s work in behalf of men ... It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects ... The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon a cross. By His death He began that work which after his resurrection He ascended to complete in Heaven” The Great Controversy pp488-489

Keeping the Old Testament Law – The Sabbath

According to the SDA, anyone who is a supposed believer is to be under strict adherence to OT law, including the Ten Commandments. The SDA publicly states its belief that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However, SDA teaching often implies that certain outward acts of righteousness are necessary to maintain one’s assurance of salvation, especially observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. SDA members also are expected to observe strict dietary regulations and to abstain from alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.

Ellen White taught clearly that Sabbath observance was a criterion for salvation.

"In the last days, the Sabbath test will be made plain. When this time comes, anyone who does not keep the Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast and will be kept from heaven" The Great Controversy P449

"... [T]he divine institution of the Sabbath is to be restored ... The delivering of this message will precipitate a conflict that will involve the whole world. The central issue will be obedience to God's law and the observance of the Sabbath. ... Those who reject it will eventually receive the mark of the beast" The Great Controversy pp262-263

"I saw that the Holy Sabbath is, and will be, the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers" Early Writings p33

"Sabbath ... observance was of sufficient importance to draw a line between the people of God and unbelievers" Early Writings p85

The quoted statements above are clear. According to the SDA, Sabbath observance, not trust in Christ alone for complete forgiveness of sins and eternal life, is to be the dividing line between the saved and the lost in the end time.

Concerning the Christian's relationship to the Law of Moses:

Christians are not under the Mosaic Law because Christ is the end of the Law to everyone who believes.

⁴For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Rom 10:4

Christians are not under the Mosaic Law because they have died to the Law.

⁶But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. Rom 7:6

Christians are not under the Mosaic Law because of the New Covenant.

⁴Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. ⁵Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ⁶who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:4-6

Christians are not under the Mosaic Law because of the change in the priesthood.

¹²For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of Law also. Heb 7:12

Christians are not under the Mosaic Law because Paul taught that he was not under the Law.

²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 1 Cor 9:20

Based on the doctrines of the remnant church, investigative judgment, and the additions to salvation by keeping the Law; SDA must be considered a cult.

Witnessing Strategies

Let's remember some of our general strategies:

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.
7. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.
8. Share your testimony and your assurance of eternal life through Christ.

Some specifics:

1. Establish the sole authority of the Bible.
2. Determine what relationship the Adventist has with Jesus Christ.