

“Watchman, what of the night?”

*“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!”* Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

► THIS ISSUE'S READING

THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING BIBLICALLY SOUND DOCTRINE



In last month's issue of “Watchman, what of the night?”, we noted that postmodern relativism is a major contributor to the growing phenomenon of thinking with emotional impulse rather than rational intellect. Relativism's core principle of denying absolute reality and truth has led to the widespread worldview in which “anything goes”. Therefore, each of us is generally free to select any beliefs that we please with the confidence that our choices, no matter how they were made, are just as valid as any others because none are either “right” nor “wrong.” The increasing acceptance of this ideology has greatly permeated about every area of our lives. Most alarming above all, is the effect that it has on the Christian faith. Among the numerous denominations (churches) we witness in various degrees the growing encroachment of this influence. New theologies and practices are on the rise, focusing almost exclusively on emotion-based excitement and mystic experience. The value and role of Scripture is either wrested to support these sentiments or downplayed to the point of unimportance. Understanding Scripture as the final and only infallible standard of truth is rejected. The almost universal cry that “doctrine doesn't matter” has become the new acceptance. It is the duty of all who profess to be God's remnant people, as Watchmen on the walls of Zion, to sound the alarm at the approach or infiltration of such an enemy as this! To effectively identify and defend against the many attacks against doctrine, which are all seeking to completely undermine its im-

portance and necessity, we must be firmly grounded in biblical teachings. (see Isaiah 62: 6-7; compare with Ezekiel 33: 7).

The extensive circulation of extreme relativism is due to the broad methods of how it is being disseminated; from an outspoken, explicit promotion on one hand, to a subtle, almost subliminal suggestion on the other (along with numerous facets and combinations in-between). These tenets are insistently present and assailing us, though not always openly and obviously. When employed, this 'camouflage' is what makes it so deceptive and pernicious. If we choose to be careless and unguarded concerning this matter, we can easily be drawn and entangled in this web of deceit - and it can happen imperceptibly.

Many Seventh-day Adventists have the tendency to scoff at any implication that this could possibly happen to *them*. Doctrinal purity has been a core principle; sought out, cherished, and championed, among us throughout our entire history. True. But consider this: is doctrinal truth as important today as it was ten years ago? Was it as important ten years ago as it was 20 years earlier? What about 50 years earlier? Frankly, with few exceptions, there has been overall a slow, stealthy, and progressive erosion of the value we place on doctrine as time moves forward. Multiple examples could be provided on how relativistic philosophy has contributed to this decline. The example provided here, selective suggestion coupled with repetitive association, should suffice for a further under-

standing on the topic. It draws its influence from sophisticated, worldly behavioral tactics which are rooted in a variety of widely known sources such as brainwashing, neuro-linguistic programming, and even hypnotism

How often are we hearing and being instructed - by leaders and laity alike - that an intellectual knowledge of biblical truth is not enough; that knowing the doctrine is not the same as having a personal relationship with Jesus? Now, from the outset, it should be readily acknowledged that the truthfulness of the basic premise of this statement (and similar ones like it) is NOT what is being questioned. Knowing *about* God intellectually and *personally* knowing Him relationally can be two different things; it is possible to have knowledge with total detachment. The problem centers in the vagueness within this context as to why we do not have a saving relationship with Christ. "Loving Jesus" (or an equivalent expression) is set in contrast with "knowledge of the doctrine", and therefore appears to be antithetical to it. This innuendo, at the very least, leaves the impression that our lack of a personal relationship with God is directly the result of "knowing the doctrine" rather than "loving Jesus." Repeat this enough, and - knowingly or unknowingly - the insinuation that continues firmly implanting itself within our ranks will be: doctrine *really* doesn't matter - it may actually be a hindrance to a loving, personal relationship with Jesus! And rather than denying that this and similar sophistries are indeed

making inroads into our Faith, we need to understand solidly ourselves the importance and necessity of maintaining biblically sound doctrine.

The book of John begins with the following testimony concerning Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1: 1; compare with 1: 14).

The night before His death, with his closest disciples gathered about him in the upper room: "Jesus saith unto him [Thomas], I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (ibid. 14: 6).

He continued further: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him...If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (ibid. 14: 21, 23-24).

Around half a year earlier, at the feast of tabernacles, we read: "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters [or learning, margin], having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent

me." (ibid. 7: 14-16).

And again, later the same evening before His death - after leaving the upper room and walking with His eleven disciples toward the garden of Gethsemane - Jesus prayed in their behalf for the Father to: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (ibid. 17: 17).

Let's pause and consider what these passages of Scripture from the Gospel of John mean. Jesus is "the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". He declares Himself to be "the truth". He doesn't just know the truth, He *is* the truth. His commandments are embodied in His sayings which are "the word" the Father sent Jesus into the world to proclaim and teach. That "word" is His doctrine ("The teaching" - NEB). ¹ And the word (the doctrine/the teaching) "is truth." The Lord Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of the Father's Word. *All* truth originates and centers in His Person and is manifested to all creation through His sayings, which constitutes His teaching, which is *the doctrine*. This lays the axe right into the root of postmodernism's tree! Truth is absolute and it has been sent to us by our Heavenly Father in the Person of Jesus who reveals it through the Bible: "Search the *scriptures*; for in *them* ye think ye have eternal life: and *they are they which testify of me* [Jesus]." (John 5: 39, emphasis added).

"*All* scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for *doctrine*, for re-

proof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be *perfect*, throughly furnished unto all *good works*." (2 Timothy 3: 16-17, *emph. added*).

"He that rejecteth me [Jesus], and receiveth not my *words*, hath *one* that judgeth him: the *word that I have spoken* [the doctrine], the *same* shall judge him in the last day." (John 12: 48, *emph. added*).

"For the word of God [the Bible] is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a *discerner* of the *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart." (Hebrews 4: 12, *emph. added*).

"To the law and to the testimony: if they *speak not according to this word*, it is because there is *no light* in them." (Isaiah 8: 20, *emph. added*).

In addition, Scripture warns us against the intrusion of false traditions, theories, sciences, knowledge, and doctrines, into our Faith (see for example, Mark 7: 7-13; Colossians 2: 8; 1 Timothy 6: 20; 2 Peter 2: 1-2; etc.). Of particular significance concerning the subject under consideration (relativism) is the following exhortation written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke,

exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (2 Timothy 4: 1-5).

Paul warns Timothy of a coming time when his hearers "will not endure sound doctrine." In the original Greek language, "endure" is the word "*anechomai*", which means to put up with, forbear, listen to; and "sound" is the Greek word "*hugiaino*", meaning healthy, uncorrupted, doctrine. That time began shortly after the passing of the Apostles, down through the years into the Papal apostasy, and continuing with increasing intensity and frequency into the present day. Many and varied are the "fables" which they - referring to professed Christians - after their own lusts still turn to. False teachers are becoming increasingly popular, sought after, and numerous in today's society. They are more than willing to turn "itching ears" (a metaphor meaning to 'tickle' the wants, ideas, imaginings, etc., of willing participants), "away...from the truth...unto fables." Post-modern relativism is just another one of these fables! It is a falsehood which is deceiving multitudes by leading them away from biblical doctrine (the truth as it is in Jesus), and into sin and iniquity (transgression and lawlessness). It occupies a place alongside paganism, Romanism,

atheism, infidelity, spiritualism, and other kindred errors which must be detected, opposed, and defended against. With this the Writings concur:

"The position that it is of no consequence what men believe is one of Satan's most successful deceptions. He knows that the truth, received in the love of it, sanctifies the soul of the receiver; therefore he is constantly seeking to substitute false theories, fables, another gospel. From the beginning the servants of God have contended against false teachers, not merely as vicious men, but as inculcators of falsehoods that were fatal to the soul. Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul, firmly and fearless opposed those who were turning men from the word of God. That liberality which regards a correct religious faith as unimportant found no favor with these holy defenders of the truth." (GC, pg. 520, emphasis added).²

"Spiritualism asserts that men are un-fallen demigods; that "each mind will judge itself;" that "true knowledge places men above all law;" that "all sins committed are innocent;" for "whatever is, is right," and "God doth not condemn." The basest of human beings it represents as in heaven, and highly exalted there. *Thus it declares to all men, "It matters not what you do; live as you please, heaven is your home." Multitudes are thus led to believe that desire is the highest law, that license is liberty, and that man is accountable only to*

himself." (ED, pgs. 227-228, emph. added).³ [Note: The similarities between spiritualism and relativism are practically identical]!

"There are many whose religion consists in theory. To them a happy emotion is godliness. They say, "Come to Jesus, and believe in him. It makes no difference what you believe so long as you are honest in your belief." They do not seek to make the sinner understand the true character of sin...Satan is willing that every transgressor of God's law shall claim to be holy. This is what he himself is doing. He is satisfied when men rest their faith on spurious doctrines and religious enthusiasm; for he can use such persons to good purpose in deceiving souls...We need to know for ourselves what voice we are heeding, whether it is the voice of the true and living God, or the voice of the great apostate. Eternal life is of value to each of us, and we must take heed how we hear. We need sound doctrine, pure faith. We cannot afford to receive the sayings of men for the commandments of God." (RH, June 26, 1900).⁴

"Christ is the center of all true doctrine. All true religion is found in His word and in nature...All that the mind can grasp is opened before us in the Bible. This is our spiritual food." (CT, pg. 453, emph. added).⁵

In the last great conflict just before us, the root issue will center - as it always has

from the beginning of Satan's rebellion - in the struggle between truth and error. The devil will unleash every scheme he can upon God's true and faithful people to deceive them into withdrawing their allegiance from God and His worship. Through craftiness and force, he plans to seduce them into an allegiance with himself and the rest of the world by the worship of man through the antichrist system (Revelation 13: 11-18). Our Lord, in relating to His disciples the events that will lead to His second coming, warned of this: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, *they shall deceive the very elect*. Behold, I have told you before." (Matthew 24: 24-25, *emph. added*; compare with Mark 13: 22-23).

From the uncouth to the highly refined, satanic agencies (by "seducing spirits") will use every species of "doctrines of devils [demons]" (see 1 Timothy 4: 1), to work miracles and bring the entire world to its final climax (Revelation 16: 13-14). Anything and everything that is a departure from "every word of God" (see Luke 4: 4b) will be used by Satan in his attempts to destroy us. In the last crisis, God's remnant people will have to meet the constant and unrelenting attacks against them in the midst of an overwhelming and universal deception by a firm, settled, and unmovable "thus saith the Lord"! Only those who are now making preparation for that time will be able to withstand the near total apostasy and welcome Jesus when He re-

turns to take them with Him to their heavenly home: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (Mark 13: 35-37).

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our *testimony* [witness to the truth through doctrinal teaching and lifestyle example] among you was believed) in that day." (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-10, *emph. added*). It is incumbent upon all true Christians, particularly those who profess to be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Movement, to faithfully maintain biblically sound doctrine. The importance and necessity of doing so is literally a matter of life or death - eternal life or eternal death! Never for a moment should we even hint at the possibility that biblical doctrine is in some way faulty. This is equivalent to saying that somehow Jesus, and ultimately the Father, are faulty! *This is exactly what Satan wants us to believe!* We need to be ever vigilant so as not to be lured into any unsuspecting situation where disrepute is

leveled against the Word of God. The servant of the Lord has well counseled:

"All who value their eternal interests should be on their guard against the inroads of skepticism. The very pillars of truth will be assailed. It is impossible to keep beyond the reach of the sarcasms and sophisms, the insidious and pestilent teachings, of modern infidelity. Satan adapts his temptations to all classes. He assails the illiterate with a jest or sneer, while he meets the educated with scientific objections and philosophical reasoning, alike calculated to excite distrust or contempt of the Scriptures...All who trust to the boastful decisions of human reason and imagine that they can explain divine mysteries and arrive at truth unaided by the wisdom of God are entangled in the snare of Satan. We are living in the most solemn period of this world's history. The destiny of earth's teeming multitudes is about to be decided. Our own future well-being and also the salvation of other souls depend upon the course which we now pursue. We need to be guided by the Spirit of truth..." (GC, pgs. 600-601).²

Jesus said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24: 35; Mark 13: 31; Luke 21: 33). "...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6: 63b). ❖ **GLP**

1. *The New English Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 110.
2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*,

Between Christ and Satan (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), 520; 600-601.

3. White, *Education* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Association, 1952), 227-228.

4. White, *Present Truth and Review and Herald Articles, vol. 4, 1899-1903* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association), 193.

5. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 453.

* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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