

# "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)

## "GOD'S CHARACTER AND THE LAST GENERATION"

- 3 -

### THE SANCTUARY TRUTH

[ Reprised ] :

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### *Editor's Preface*

This issue of WWN continues our evaluation of the book *God's Character and the Last Generation* with a critique of Chapter 2. In reference to "Last Generation Theology" (L.G.T.), the "Introduction" section declares that "the major objective of this chapter is to lay out the historical background of this lengthy and often controversial debate." And while "this historical overview" moves on past the "Introduction" to "focus on the key ideas and figures that have provided the conceptual framework for LGT" in the remainder of the chapter, we have confined our examination to this introductory first section as it sets the entire 'tone' for what follows through to the chapter's end.

The second article is a resumption (from WWN, Issue # 32) of our study on *The Sanctuary Truth - "In the First Apartment"* which, again, is drawn from previous WWN publications written by Elder William H. Grotheer and re-presented by the current editor with minor revisions.

## GOD'S CHARACTER AND THE LAST GENERATION - 3 -

### Critique: Chapter 2 --

Following the general survey scope of L.G.T in the first chapter's essay, the next entry is entitled:



***What Is Last Generation Theology? What Are the Historical Roots of Last Generation Theology?*** Though penned by Woodrow Whidden, the caption underneath his name on Chapter Two's title page states: "With contributions from George R. Knight and Ángel Rodríguez." It is of interest to note that this is the only chapter among all 14 chapters that contains input from others, besides, the main contributor. Also, the two named co-contributors, Knight and Rodríguez, are themselves well known personalities from the Andrews University / scholastic coterie that the 12 contributors to this book are associated with and are likewise vocal opponents of L.G.T. <sup>1</sup>

Chapter 2 is divided into seven subtitled sections. The first section, entitled "Introduction," is where we will focus the bulk of this chapter's critique on. The opening paragraph begins by penetrating directly to the core of L.G.T. thought : It "immediately raises issues and questions regarding Christ's final intercessory and judging work in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary" among "all who have entered into this discussion." It is certainly true that L.G.T. is directly linked to the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary and is historically the logical, practical, and biblically progressive outgrowth of the "issues and questions" raised concerning the anti-typical heavenly, high priestly ministry of Christ. Sadly, the "all" who are even involved in "this discussion" are continually dwindling at an alarming rate; so much so that presently the larger majority of professed Adventists have little (if any!) comprehension that the sanctuary truth is the very "heart" of Adventist theology. Particularly over the course of the last four decades, the sanctuary teaching has

increasing been relegated to a peripheral, borderline position of unimportance within our faith. The points of "conviction" listed by the author that "all ... seem to agree on" in the first paragraph of this section - "a special phase of the atoning work of Christ ... vitally interconnected with His second coming ... (which) includes a special spiritual work of character change among God's professed people ... the fruit of Christ's forgiving and transforming grace" - is essentially irrelevant to most within Adventism except the "all ... entered into this discussion," which at this time is an ever shrinking minority. It is the held conviction of this editor that most of the "issues and questions" regarding the heavenly sanctuary ministry of Christ that L.G.T. directs attention toward could be largely resolved if God's people would bring Christ's anti-typical end-time intercessory work into line with *all* the details revealed in the Levitical ministration type of the Aaronic high priest during the Day of Atonement ceremony (see Leviticus 16: 1-34; 23: 27-32; Exodus 30: 10; compare with Hebrews 8: 3-5). <sup>2</sup>

The discussion moves on to note that there is a general agreement amidst "all" who are engaged in this dialogue that "this work of Christ ... (which began in 1844) is called the 'final atonement' ... closely associated with the pre-Advent 'investigative judgment' ... (and) that one of the major reasons for this work of judgment is so that God can vindicate Himself in the face of the charges that Satan has laid against His nature and character ... Therefore, this judgment serves to vindicate God ... But ... there has also been a long-simmering controversy regarding what is actually involved in the vindication of God." It is at this juncture that the crux of

the matter concerning L.G.T. is rooted. While there is an overall consensus on *why* God needs vindication - "the charges that Satan has laid against His nature and character" - precisely *who* vindicates God, *how* is He vindicated, *what* truly vindicates Him, and *when* exactly is He vindicated, appear to be the primary factors involved in this contention. The author proceeds to outline two basic groups that have emerged with sharp, divergent views on these factors and the issues surrounding them. The first group, which support L.G.T. (pro-L.G.T.) and are represented by a number of (named) "prominent writers," are said to "[lay] down the following strong claim: This final atonement demands a level of sinless perfection from the last generation of God's professed believers that will allegedly vindicate God's demands for perfect obedience to His law. If God does not receive this vindication from this last generation of the perfectly sinless remnant, He loses out in the great controversy that has been going on between Christ and Satan!" Contrariwise ("in contrast") a second group, who do not support L.G.T. (anti-L.G.T.) and are represented by "many (unnamed) writers," are said to have the following "settled conviction ... : Although they will be faithfully responsive to Christ and will give evidence (in the records of their lives) that their faith was, and is, a genuine faith in Christ that has persistently produced the witness of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives of grace-empowered discipleship, God is *not* dependent on the last generation to prove anything."

A comparison of these two views, which are the author's summation of the collective "essence" of both group's core positions on the subject, is quite striking - especially con-

sidering that the representatives of each group are also said to be "earnest ... Ellen White affirming and Bible believing Seventh-day Adventists." The pro-L.G.T. position, as stated, conveys in "essence" the following *impression*: If God the Father does not get the sinless perfection that the final atonement demands *from the last generation of believers* in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, then He loses out because His vindication for His demand for perfect obedience to His law is dependent *on this sinless remnant* to accomplish it. If the Father does not receive this vindication *from them*, He loses and (presumably) Satan wins! What stands out in this depiction of L.G.T. is how completely devoid it is of even any mention of Jesus in the work/process of vindicating God! Can it honestly be argued that the "strong claim" pro-L.G.T. advocates are *portrayed* as making does not leave the *strong impression* that God's vindication and victory over Satan is completely reliant upon the sinless obedience of the end-time Christian remnant *only*? By removing (or at least diminishing) Christ from view, the perception is given that the pro-L.G.T. group believes and teaches this completely anthropocentric (human-centered) version of the great controversy's consummation.

This assessment is particularly reinforced when it is contrasted with the stated anti-L.G.T. position and the *impression* it conveys: Though the last generation of believers will be faithful *to Christ*, and through grace-empowered discipleship give evidence in their lives of the genuineness of their faith *in Christ* by *Spirit*-produced fruit, God is *not* dependent on them to prove *anything* (which includes, by implication, vindication of any kind or degree). The central point

stressed in this representation of the final generation is its rigid Christocentric (Christ-centered) emphasis. If God is not dependent on the end-time remnant for anything, if the Godhead is *solely* reliant upon Itself for everything in the great controversy, then any role that humans play (last generation or otherwise) is at best minimal and near inconsequential. Accordingly, the position of the anti-L.G.T. group resumes as follows: "Furthermore, God has used in the past, and will continue to use in the present and into the future, the holy lives of the redeemed of all ages (not just the 'last generation') as witnesses who will (at least in some sense) vindicate His decisions in the investigative judgment. Thus they believe that, in Christ and His righteousness ... all of the redeemed (including the remnant) will be the justified and sanctified beneficiaries of eternal salvation.

"Furthermore, this latter group of thinkers has firmly held that it was the incarnate Christ's faith in God's imparted Holy Spirit power that has once for all settled the question as to whether perfect obedience to the will of God (His holy law) through faith in God's imparted power is possible."

This continuation only intensifies the contrast between "this latter group" and the pro-L.G.T. group. The impression previously left by the anti-L.G.T. position is now supplemented by the notion that because *the redeemed of all ages* are beneficiaries of eternal salvation through Christ, *it is their witness* (including but not limited to the last generation) that God uses to vindicate decisions He makes in the investigative judgment - at least in some sense. The role that the last generation plays in salvific history is further minimized by grouping their witness

together with the redeemed saints of all ages thus intimating that the witness of the final remnant is no more different, special, or unique than any other corporate witness of God's people in any other era. In fact, contrary to the clear end-time context, a growing number of anti-L.G.T. advocates are teaching that the 144,000 of Revelation 7: 1-17; 14: 1-5, is a symbol of all the redeemed of all ages and not just the final generation of believers who will be alive and translated when Jesus returns. Moreover, the minimization of *any* believer's witness used in God's vindication is accentuated when the record of that witness "in the investigative judgment" is denoted as contributing only "in some (unexplained) sense" - though this is "at least" more than "*not* [depending] on the last generation to prove anything" at all! And finally, the anti-L.G.T. group's summary closes by stating that it is this group which have "firmly held" that (essentially): It was Christ in His humanity who satisfied the demands of the law by a life of sinless, perfect obedience to God's will thereby settling the question as to whether it was possible to do so.

This conclusion to "these preliminary observations" as set forth in this "Introduction" section appears to epitomize the main reason why those who oppose L.G.T. reject it. When it comes to the basic questions of God's vindication and the corporate state/condition of the end-time generation of believers comprising the true church at the second coming of Christ, they nearly always characterized L.G.T. as man-centered and not God-centered. As we have just outlined, even the way the author articulates the two positions serves to bolster this understanding. The pro-L.G.T. stance is set

forth in just ten sentences which in a brief, unnuanced manner credits the vindication of God and the sinless condition of the remnant to the active part that the last generation play in the great controversy. There is *no* explicit mention of any part that God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit plays in this regard, active or passive. Simply put, as presented, this work is man-centered. In marked contrast, the anti-L.G.T. stance is set forth in 32 sentences which in a very detailed, comprehensive, and precisely nuanced manner credits God's vindication solely to the active part that Christ plays in the great controversy. In this regard, there is no active vindicatory role that the redeemed play (including the last generation) and any passive part they may be involved in is minor at best. In other words, as presented, this work is Christ centered *only*.

In closing out this evaluation of Chapter 2, there is a continuing pattern carried over from Chapter 1 that seeks, deliberately or not, to define L.G.T. according to its most extreme elements. This tactic is very similar to the way proponents of (monergistic) Calvinism characterize (synergistic) Arminianism - supposedly, as a man-centered way to salvation *in contrast* to its thoroughly God centered way - in the larger soteriological debate. True, there are extreme forms of Arminianism that do cross over into a man focused means of salvation. And how often this fact is used as a ploy by most Calvinists to accuse *all* Arminians of teaching and supporting this righteousness by human works based salvation is well known by most engaged in the Calvinist/Arminian dispute. It does not take any extraordinary insight to see that practically the same thing is happening with L.G.T. among Adventists. Those

moving more toward the Calvinistic monergism of the new theology are also framing all expressions of L.G.T. held by those of the more traditional Arminian synergistic soteriology in the same human works merit, man-centered way. After all, the easiest, most effective way to disparage a particular school of thought is to present a definition of it within the confines of its more extreme fashion. Usually, the perceptions formed by the impressions left in any defining presentation of a subject will have a strong tendency to shape our thinking toward the ideas and concepts suggested by those impressions. This also seems to be more true of those who are less informed on the topic under consideration. As a result, most everything else regarding the topic brought into notice will likewise tend toward an understanding based upon the perceptions already formed by these impressions. With L.G.T., it will be difficult to believe that many of those who read the "historical overview," comprising the remaining six sections of this chapter, will not be influenced by the depiction of it introduced beforehand in section one. And while in all fairness the following sections do contain some material that is historically and theologically helpful, the main impression essentially set forth in the introductory section - that L.G.T. is a man-centered, meritorious system of human effort that achieves for God the vindication needed to win the great controversy - is bound to "color" the interpretation given to these subsequently sections by this perception.

Thus far, in addition to the two central concepts of L.G.T. that this book stands opposed to: 1.) The sinlessness of the last generation and 2.) Any active role in God's vin-

dication that the last generation play a part in, we can also list a repeated effort to define L.G.T. within an unbiblical, human works oriented context which, intentional or not, casts L.G.T. in a clearly unfavorable light with anyone who is even remotely acquainted with the basic Christian message of "righteousness by faith."

» *To be Continued.*

### **THE DAILY HEBREW TABERNACLE SERVICE:**

#### **The Holy Place Ministrations: In the First Apartment [continued]**

#### **Significance of the Holy Place and the Services Performed Therein (resumed) —**

The Table of Shewbread - literally "the bread of His presence" - was to be renewed each Sabbath, and eaten by the priests (Leviticus 24: 5-9). Malachi states that the priest was to be "the messenger of the Lord of hosts" and that his "lips should keep knowledge" and that the people "should seek the law at his mouth." (Malachi 2: 7). This was vital to the spiritual well-being of the people in the time when the instruction which God had given for Israel could not be reproduced as can be done today, through printing presses. The priests were to function as "the messengers of the Lord of hosts." Apostasy in Judah was marked when "for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law." (2 Chronicles 15: 3) The linchpin in this situation was the priest and his failure to teach the people the Word of God on the Sabbath. He would eat of the symbolic bread; he would carry out the ceremonial functions; but the real need he did not meet to help the covenant people in

their on-going atonement with God. Forgiveness sinners they were - they had brought the penalty for their transgression - but they were still in their uncleanness. Only the word and the blood applied, cleanses (John 15: 3; 1 John 1: 7; Revelation 1: 5). The word reveals the lost image of God in man, and the provision for its restoration - the Spirit of life sent forth because of the mediation of the true blood (Ephesians 4: 23-24; Revelation 5: 6).

The same spiritual decline as was evidenced in ancient Israel is all too vivid in the experience of God's professed Israel today. Again the linchpin is the men of the pulpit who do not understand that the gift of pastoring on the Sabbath is but one gift interlocked with teaching (See Ephesians 4: 11, Greek).<sup>3</sup> The ritual is performed - the order of service or liturgy is carried out - but for the most part, the people who come to be fed the Word of God, the bread of His presence, leave the service as starved as when they came.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus on the Sabbath is pictured as walking in the midst of His people, and holding in His right hand, His messengers (Gr. *angelos*; "angels" [KJV] - a word transliterated, but not translated) - see Revelation 1: 10, 12-13, 16, 20. It was God's intention that His people be fed with the bread of His presence ministered by Jesus through the Spirit on the Holy Sabbath. Here is the basis for the cold formality and lukewarmness which marks many of the Sabbath services of Laodicea. And the substitution of "celebration" is but offering of "strange fire" before the Lord. There is no substitute for the preaching of the Word!

[It should be noted the seven golden candlesticks in the first chapter of Revelation

are not the same as the "seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne" in chapter four (verse, 5). The candlesticks are defined as "the seven churches," while the "lamps of fire" are denoted as "the seven spirits of God." That there is a close relationship cannot be denied for to each of the seven churches is given the admonition to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."].

In the sanctuary service of the model, God gave only three symbols to represent the means whereby the sinner could experience a victorious life day by day. These symbols stand for prayer, the hearing of the Word, and the guidance by the light of the Holy Spirit into all truth. Connected with each symbol was the ministry of the priest. He could not "walk" alone. The reality of this symbolism can be summarized by one verse "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. " (Colossians 2: 6). As the sinner places his full dependence in the sacrifice provided at Calvary, so he must also place his full and unreserved confidence in the Holy Spirit to guide his daily life for, "it is not in man that walketh to di-

rect his steps." (Jeremiah 10: 23).

» *To be Continued.*

1. (See for example): Dale Galusha / George Knight, *George Knight talks last-generation theology and Adventism today* (Wahroonga NSW, AU: Adventist Record, Sept. 13, 2018).

<https://record.adventistchurch.com/2018/09/13/george-knight-talks-last-generation-theology-and-adventism-today/>

(Also for example): Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Theology of the Last Generation* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Review Online, Oct. 20, 2013), 42.

<https://www.adventistreview.org/2013-1528-p42>

2. (For an introductory article to further study in this regard, see): Gary L. Patrick / William H. Grotheer, *"Watchman, what of the night?"* (Nora Springs, IA: Adventist Laymen's foundation of Iowa, Inc., Issue # 7 - Oct. / Nov. 2014, "The Sanctuary Truth - Part 5: The Atonement - #3"), 1-6.

[https://www.alfiowa.com/IOWA-BACK-ISSUES/WWN\\_IOWA\\_10\(14\)\\_11\(14\).pdf](https://www.alfiowa.com/IOWA-BACK-ISSUES/WWN_IOWA_10(14)_11(14).pdf)

3. Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1887), 430. (Note: Click on the following link, and scroll down to "Verse 11 - Pastors and teachers"): <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/vnt/ephesians-4.html>

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

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