

LESSON 2

Introduction

One does not delve too deeply into the current Study Guides before realising that their author is highly skilled in erecting his dogmatic edifice, methodically adding detail after detail at a pace which permits even his slower readers to grasp both his Bible references and his logic. This does not necessarily endorse either his references or his logic. But it certainly applauds his didactic acumen. He often retraces his relevant steps, too, before branching aside to follow another portion of the plan.

He is to be commended, then, for seeking to lay a *broad* foundation, at this very early stage, for Seventh-day Adventism's self-confessed *raison d'être*, its dogma of a pre-Advent judgment of God's every supposed servant, individual by individual, starting with Adam in 1844. That footing is the *general* doctrine of divine judgment viewed in this impartial light: "(L)et the Bible speak for itself on this important topic."

To stress this prime foundation is merely to acknowledge a crippling human foible:

As human beings, we are subjective creatures. However much we might try to be objective—to look at things honestly, fairly, logically, without preconceived notions—we inevitably bring our own ideas, culture, moods, and experiences into whatever subject we approach.

It is one, therefore, for which all of us ought *always* to show the greatest possible respect! For example, we will soon observe that one of the pillars carrying much more than the average weight of this singular, dogmatic "building" is the purported literary structure of the Book of Daniel – the nexus between its chs. 8 and 9, etc. And so often has this been repeated in persuasive terms, at first sight, that few and far between are the loyal, lay Seventh-day Adventists who even ponder the possibility that *this alluring edifice may be largely jerry-built*, despite recent "renovations", as in *Handbook*. The surest safeguard, then, against excessive subjectivity is to "*forget*" what we ever knew about such subjects and approach them as if *afresh!*

Sunday, 2nd July

Our author begins his sweeping survey of the basic doctrine of divine judgment at the good news that Jesus died as our Substitute (1 Pet. 2:24); that at the Cross He paid the penalty for our sins (Isa. 53:6); that through faith in Him we stand perfect in God now because we are covered with perfect righteousness (Rom. 3:22); and that because of what He has done for us, we have the promise of eternal life (1 John 5:11, 12).

What, though, does God's superlative *gospel* have to do with his *judgment*? The good news of the gospel is that we are spared condemnation in judgment. In other words, inherent in the gospel itself is the promise that those who have accepted Jesus aren't condemned as are those who have rejected Him. There is, then, no such thing as the gospel without judgment, because "the good news" of the gospel is that we are spared condemnation. In short, the gospel without judgment is like a circle without roundness: By its very definition, the gospel includes judgment.

Amen! Yet the problem is that our author sells the gospel short even in majoring in its juridic detail. Within the strict bounds of this survey, I must leave my interested readers to check for themselves such fuller facets of the human dilemma of sinfulness as *slavery* to sin and Satan in very nature, and God's righteous response in *condemnation, enmity, wrath* and *death*, countered perfectly by such elements of his Plan of Salvation as *redemption, justification, reconciliation, atonement* and *eternal life*, as in Eph. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:18f.; Ro. 5:16; Col. 1:19-22; Ro. 2:5; 3:25; 5:9; 6:23. In brief, sin sprang from Satan, Jn. 8:44, and Christ came to annul his works, 1 Jn. 3:8.

Attention should also be given to the puzzling questions, Does the gospel accommodate those who die never even having *heard* of Christ? How can they possibly *accept* or *reject* him? How does theodicy and Seventh-day Adventism's novel concept of pre-Advent judgment categorise them – among the righteous or the wicked?

Back in his general introduction our author opined that "the clearest link between the gospel and judgment is the first angel's message" of Rev. 14:6f. Now he leaves his readers with this question: "How do these verses show the link between the

gospel and judgment?” Likewise, on Friday, 7th July he will leave us with this quotation from Dr. Gerhard Hasel in *Handbook*, 815: “Judgment is... portrayed in Scripture as an essential part of the ‘eternal gospel’ (Rev. 14:6, 7).” Come Friday, then, let us grasp the essence of one of Seventh-day Adventism’s most cherished proof-texts, *shedding subjectivity by reading it as if afresh!* This exercise may well surprise you!

Monday, 3rd July

Having verified the link between God’s judgment in general and his gospel, our author marshals a handful of familiar references to detail its climactic watershed:

Whatever else judgment involves, it results in only two classes of people: those who are saved eternally and those who are lost eternally. These texts don’t show any kind of happy medium or middle ground. In the end, the ultimate fate of all of us is either eternal life or eternal destruction.

Thus, it’s clear from even these texts that some sort of judgment divides the righteous from the wicked. A final separation occurs, a judgment in which the final fate of everyone is, forever, decided.

He then appeals to Christ’s sobering parable of the sheep and the goats, Mt. 25:31-46, to establish that this judgmental watershed is universal, involving all nations. As I say, one simple step at a time. And there is nothing worth serious dispute here, unless one wishes to ask where those who have never even heard of Christ fit in.

Tuesday, 4th July

This segment appeals to another group of references to ask this “simple” question:

As Christians, we understand that Jesus was judged and condemned at the Cross in our stead. He faced the condemnation for sin that we, otherwise, would have to face ourselves... Does this mean, then, that because Christ was condemned in our stead, Christians don’t face judgment?

And he draws this confident conclusion from a handful more: “These few texts, along with many others, make it abundantly clear that God’s people, His church, do face judgment.” While this will worry few conservative Christians, it is instructive to probe the true meaning of 1 Pet. 4:17, one of his Church’s most hoary proof-texts.

Ever since Seventh-day Adventism’s pioneers deduced from Peter’s words, “(I)t is time for judgment to begin with the family of God”, that God commences judging the world at his people, they have been so applied time without number, even by its modern scholars. Observe, for instance, the Sabbath School memory verse for Lesson 8, fourth quarter, 2004 (November 13-19), entitled “The Pre-Advent Judgment”.

What appalling eisegesis! Let’s not mince words here. Were Peter alive today he would certainly rebuke those who teeter on the very brink of *intellectual dishonesty* by so roughly tearing his timely, *pastoral* admonition *completely clear of its context*.

For one thing, our apostle was comforting his flock over *judgment which had already begun*: “It *is* time...” This single, salient detail means that *1844 never was an interpretive option!* For another, it may introduce a unique nuance to the notion of judgment, but here Peter is manifestly equating *judgment* with the *trial*, 12, which is *already* testing the saints, 1:6f. Above all, observe how the consequential conjunction *for*, 4:17, binds the verse in question to its context, 12:16 – innocent participation in the very sufferings of Christ! Likewise, the inferential conjunction *so then*, 19, binds it firmly to Peter’s timely, *pastoral* summary to steel his *contemporaries* against trial.

Granted, our present author is not as explicit in such flagrant eisegesis as his fellow apologists for Seventh-day Adventist dogma. But he is scarcely commendable for appealing to a reference which has *nothing* to do with the topic in hand! Indeed, not only is 1844 nowhere in sight here, *there is not the slightest hint of investigation!*

Moreover, one is tempted to ask, Where, then, will he find support for his Church’s crucial dogma that divine, *investigative* judgment begins with professed believers?

Wednesday, 5th July

Since the last two lessons of the present quarter’s series both deal extensively with the subject of faith and works, and therefore with the import of Christian works in

God's eschatological judgment, I will save time here and survey this subject when our author devotes far more time to it. However, I for one am perfectly satisfied that even genuine Christians will be judged by their works – as long as it is understood that *such works do not save them*; they merely evince the *indwelling* Holy Spirit.

Regardless, whether or not our author posits them in his closing lessons, his “edifice” still lacks two crucial planks: biblical evidence that *theodicy depends on his creatures reviewing such works*; and that *Christian works are reviewed separately*.

Thursday, 6th July

In this segment of his lesson, our author is at pains to establish one further point:

[T]here is some sort of judgment prior to execution of the sentence. After all, even in human courts, how often is a sentence executed before an inquiry that leads to judgment? Revelation 22:12, in which the Lord says that when He returns, His “reward is with me,” also implies a prior judgment. (Why would the reward already be with Him if there were not something beforehand that determined who should get it?) Second Corinthians 5:10 implies a reckoning prior to a final reward or punishment, so that “each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body” (NIV). This idea is found also in Daniel 12:1, where those found in the book of life are delivered.

Well and good, even though logic shares more of his polemics than most Bible students would like. However, neither his logic nor Holy Writ even comes close to verifying that *any* of God's creatures *ever* scour *any* records of human iniquity! Our author also asks, “How does the idea of theodicy help us understand the need for a scrutiny prior to execution of a sentence?” Compare Wednesday: “it's important, especially in the context of theodicy..., for there to be a judgment by works.”

A little logic of my own may drive this salient point home. Assume, for the sake of the argument, that, despite standing quite alone, Seventh-day Adventism is correct in its prime dogma of a pre-Advent judgment of every *individual, avowed* convert.

At the outset, heaven's candidates have the long list of their names written in the Book of Life, Dan. 12:1b, to remain intact till that judgment. So, whatever fine tuning may be required amongst the living to accommodate the dynamics of their faith, by the time the latest deed, thought or motive of heaven's youngest candidate has been scrutinised by the “ten thousand times ten thousand” who participate, Dan. 7:10b, the count of the authentic saints of every age since Adam is complete and sealed, the meticulous accounts of their every last iniquity have been purged from heaven's records, and Jesus Christ may return to Earth to gather them all home. It remains for heaven's new residents to spend the Millennium poring over the surviving life records, those of the wicked. If this is an exercise in theodicy, to vindicate God in *their* eyes, it would appear that its repetition at his final judgment, Rev. 20:11-15, is to vindicate him in the eyes of the *wicked* as well, before they are destroyed.

Sweet equity? Not by a very long measure!! For *the only human records open to either the righteous or the wicked following Jesus' Parousia are those of the wicked!* The saints may have all eternity personally to settle any lingering doubts about any of their unexpected, fellow righteous. But if theodicy really does vindicate God in *every* human eye, *the wicked have no chance to examine the records of the saints.*

Friday, 7th July

It remains for me to respect our author's own appeal for objectivity by plumbing the depths of the first angel's message, Rev. 14:6f., adequately, albeit *as if afresh*. To be precise, Lesson 14 will also focus upon this edict in context. So here it suffices to weigh merely the import of its everlasting *gospel* motif. In a word, despite amazing most conservative Christians by even asking the “foolish” question, Is this “the old, old story” absolutely crucial to Seventh-day Adventism's very *raison d'être*?

John is always his own best interpreter. Of course he teaches the Pauline gospel. “Jesus... freed us from our sins by his blood,” 1:5, compare 5:9; 14:3f. And none except those who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”, 7:14, will enter God's holy presence. Yet this does not exhaust John's

range of nuances. For *he often looks far more to the OT than to the NT* for the hundreds of allusions, if not direct citations, on which he typically bases his theology.

I hasten to add that my choice of diction does not question our seer's inspiration in any way. The Holy Spirit is free to select whatever mode of revelation he wishes.

Although they may not realise it, loyal Seventh-day Adventists know this already. Where, for instance, do they first read about leopards, bears, lions and horns, Rev. 13:1f.? Dan. 7, of course! Yet this practice is far more pervasive than most adherents imagine. For example, did John first view the great river of life flowing from God's eternal throne, bordered by the tree of life, Rev. 22:1f.? By no means, Eze. 47:1-12!

Even the Greek noun *euangelion* behind *gospel* is another clear case. For in 14:6, its cognate verb *euangelizein* is back of *proclaim*. The only other place where John utilises it is in 10:6, where it is rendered *announced*. The quite decisive detail is that Yahweh preached good news "to his servants the prophets." This is a stock OT phrase, as in Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4, while the gospel in its ultimate NT form was *veiled* in the OT, as in Ro. 16:25f.; Eph. 3:2-9; Col. 1:25-27. Transparently, therefore, in Rev. 14:6 John means *good news in its OT sense*. And this deduction enjoys good support, albeit somewhat less than conclusively, in that here his noun *euangelion* is anarthrous. That is, his first angel preaches *an* eternal good news.

There is no mistaking the sharp focus of that OT nuance, either. The relevant verb *yāša'* appears more than 180 times, often as Yahweh rescues his servants from their foes, as in Nu. 10:9; Deut. 20:4; 33:29; Jd. 10:12. Its four cognate nouns *yēšû'â*, *yēš'a*, *môšî'a*, *tēšû'â*, occur almost 150 times, often with similar intent, as in Isa. 59:17; 51:5; 19:20; 45:17. The classic rescue was the Egyptian Exodus, as in Ps. 106:8, 10, 21, bolstering hopes that there would be a second, out of Babylon, as in Zech. 8:7.

John himself confirms that this conclusion is precisely on target with his consistent employment of the Greek noun *sōtēria* behind his thematically related *salvation*. The great multitude of oppressed saints emerges from the great tribulation, 7:14, singing, "Salvation belongs to our God," 10, and exulting in his righteous judgment against harlot Babylon, 19:1, as context reveals. Likewise, it is only after Satan and his minions are banished from heaven, 12:7-9, not when Jesus regains his Father's throne, 5, that heaven's choir chants its vast chorus: "Now have come the *salvation* and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ", 10. In fact, in every case here, *deliverance* would be more precise a translation of John's *sōtēria*. Compare *deliverance*, Acts 7:25, Phil. 1:19, RSV; *survival*, Acts 27:34, NKJV.

In brief, one peers completely in vain into John's first angel's message even for any hint of the Cross, of Jesus' redemptive *blood* or even of *Christ* himself!! The redemption mentioned in the interlude of 14:1-5 is no help here as such structural features rarely if ever mesh temporally with the contexts which they dissect. For example, the bowl septet is interrupted, 15:2-4, to reassure the saints that their future with God is secure. Moreover, in the only clear reference to Christ in this context, 14:14-16 – if we accept that a mere *angel*, 15, can direct *Deity!* – he is the Judge, not our Saviour.

What, then, is this eternal good news proclaimed by John's first angel? **Judgment!!** Nothing could be clearer than that! The question, then, to be answered more fully when we review Lesson 14, is this: Which judgment? Again the answer is obvious beyond all quibble. Meantime, two easy questions as pointers. First, In all of John's protracted context, to which judgment does he *consistently* refer? Secondly, If the judgment of 7 is investigative, where is the slightest hint of *evidence* in support?

Summary

Our author has definitely outlined the biblical doctrine of divine judgment briefly, in terms with which few conservative Christians would disagree, including the nexus between the gospel and judgment. However, thus far there is *nothing* to support the notion of any *investigative* judgment in Seventh-day Adventism's precise terms.