

Zahakiel: Bro. Luke, please offer an opening prayer.

Lucan: Dear heavenly Father. We thank you for the blessings of your Sabbath, and the perfect rest you have given us in all circumstances. As we gather together to worship you in Spirit and in truth, we ask for an outpouring of both upon all who gathered. In Yahshua's name we pray, amen.

Zahakiel: Amen.

Barb: Amen

Adriel777: Amen

Pastor Chick: Amen.

Elyna: Amen

daphna dee: Amen

Zahakiel: Happy Sabbath to everyone. Tonight's study has the unusual title of "Come for The Doctrine, Stay for the Character." While the title may be unusual, the subject matter is quite important, especially as we reach out to others with the Gospel truth, to bind up the work, to honor our Father's name before men, and to prepare a people for the soon return of Yahshua.

In the course of the various studies I've presented over the years, I have told the story of how and why I became a mainstream Seventh-day Adventist several times. I have spoken about how a few of my friends converted to the faith, and then shared with me the unique SDA interpretation of the Book of Revelation, in particular the Mark of The Beast and the traditional Adventist understanding of the Sunday Law.

What I have not spoken about all that often is the foundation work that my Father laid, long before this point of change took place.

My first experience with SDA doctrine actually occurred when I was a young child, perhaps thirteen or fourteen... maybe even younger. As I was going through the books in my parents' library one day, I came across a battered copy of The Desire of Ages. I had no idea what the book was about, but I thought that the title was a strange and interesting one, and so I began to read it. I remember wondering if all the things it describes were actually in the Bible, because up until that point I didn't know much about the Scriptures at all. I don't actually remember if I finished reading the book at that time, but obviously it made a huge impression on me, since I do recall finding and reading it these many years later.

What I saw in that book, for the first time, was the heart and personality of my Creator, as expressed in the life and ministry of the Son. I would probably not have been able to put anything like that into words then, but the thought of Yahweh as a caring Father, as one supremely interested in both my eternal salvation and my daily needs, has stayed with me from that day to this. I have no idea how that book found its way into that

library; there were no other books like it there, but I have no doubt that this was Yah's providence to begin a work within me.

Now, I share that for a reason I will describe soon, but not because it was what ultimately led to my initial baptism as an Adventist. Certainly, the ideas being presented by my friends must have made some subconscious connection with what I had read; after all, I was willing to hear them out initially. But, as I have testified in the past, it was a two-fold reason that I submitted to baptism soon thereafter.

First, I was genuinely afraid of the judgment that was being described to me. The idea of a close of probation, of an investigative judgment, of a time of trouble – these were very different than I had imagined my future being, and I wanted to be safe from condemnation.

Second, and perhaps more simply, what they were saying made sense. I'd never really read Revelation before. I had been told that it was beyond our ability to understand, and maybe even dangerous. Nevertheless, it is written that those who read and hear its words are blessed, (Rev 1:3) that it contains the Everlasting Gospel, (Rev 14:6) and in its very last chapter, one of the final things the Bible tells us is, "blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." (Rev 22:7, where "keepeth" means to both take care of and to observe)

What they were saying was consistent, and far better than anything I had heard from any other Church. So, I see my experience with Adventism as something of a "layered" one. I first met Yah by character through *The Desire of Ages*. Then, I was drawn out of the world and into His (I thought at the time) Church by hearing of the prophecies, the distinctive Adventist doctrines of the last days.

Today, however, I am a Seventh-day Adventist for reasons closer to the first experience than the second. It was the doctrines, of course, that got my attention. It was the doctrines that awakened me from my carnal sleep; and yes, sometimes it requires a shock for this to take place. The Word tells us, "of some have compassion, making a difference, and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." (Jude 1:22, 23)

In my case there was a mix of fear and reason... but neither of these had "lasting" power to keep me in the faith. None of them brought me to what I now understand to be the point of true conversion, the point of passing from death to life. Doctrine had awakened me, but it did not have the power to keep me awake, nor to bring me to perfection.

I am going to say something now that is going to sound very strange... but I believe that most Christians, and by this I mean non-SDA Christians in particular, are actually in the

process of damaging their minds. They are doing harm to their ability to reason, because they have accepted the worship of a God who is very different in character than they could ever be, or that (if they were being perfectly honest) they would ever want to be.

Consider the doctrine of hell, as understood by most Christians. Because they believe that the soul is naturally immortal, despite what the Bible says about this, they believe that a choice to accept or reject Christ will have everlasting consequences that will be consciously experienced. It is certainly true that the acceptance or rejection of Christ will have eternal consequences, but those consequences are life on one hand, and true, total death on the other. To believe that a God who permits everlasting suffering (and created beings capable of enduring it) is also perfect in love is a contradiction. It causes a mental disconnect, where we have to say, "We don't understand it, but we love it" and that's the best argument that can be made. But the fault does not lie in our ability to understand.

Yah says, "Testify against me," when His people have a controversy with Him. (Mic 6:3) It is written that we will judge the fallen angels, who were first cast out of Heaven for their rebellion. (1Cor 6:3) And what does this mean? It means we are perfectly capable of understanding Yah's concept of fairness, justice, and judgment. It means that if there's something we cannot reconcile about the way He is dealing with sin, we are lacking some crucial information, or our doctrine is wrong. There's nothing wrong with our ability to understand the judgment; and we have the Bible that clearly outlines the process in both symbol and prophecy... so, if we don't understand it, it is because what we believe is incorrect.

It is the character of Yah that keeps a person faithful, sane, and joyful. It is because of the character of Yah, revealed to me in that first reading of the Desire of Ages, and reinforced by the proper understanding of how He deals with both saints and sinners, and restored to me by my eventual experience with Creation Seventh Day Adventists, that has led me to say, "I am joyful in Christ, my Savior," and, "I do always those things that please my Father," and "I love Yahweh, and my neighbor as myself, because He first loved me."

These are all things that are taught as doctrine, yes, but they are learned by the Spirit, by the revealed character of the Father and Son penetrating the heart.

It is the character of Yah, misrepresented in the fallen Churches, in the doctrine of hell, and many other false teachings, that causes today's Christian to be no better than the world, in language, in policy and practice, in the divorce rate, and on and on. All that is different between the world and many Christians is how they spend their Sunday mornings. These things ought not to be.

If one says, "I am a Christian," that ought to mean something. The CSDAs are called to show them what that "something" is... that the character you see in me is the character

of my Father. "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father," this is ALSO the "Testimony of Jesus," and ought to be the testimony of each and every one of His followers.

We teach doctrine – that is how we reveal the judgment, and what "righteousness" is. But then, once they have seen this, doctrine does not by itself draw in, nor does it save. Doctrine gets attention, especially the attention of those who are spiritually minded or Bible-based in their thinking. But if we stop there, we have not truly evangelized.

And for some, yes, it is our spirit as revealed in our words and actions that may cause them to take note of us... but kindness and courtesy are not unique to born-again Sabbath-keepers either.

But if they hear us speaking of Christ, or if they recognize in our character something special, they may ask, "What is it you believe?" or, "What is a CSDA?" And then, we have the opportunity to tell them what that means.

Now, learning about the beliefs of an individual or a Church might grab the hearer, wake them up... it might testify to something that needs attention. After all, the reason why we are called "Seventh Day Adventists" is to point out a doctrinal position. The doctrine, truly accepted and rightly held, leads to the divine character, but as far as the "banner" goes, the part held out for the world to see, every element of that name, and the name "Creation Seventh Day Adventist" as well, is a doctrinal statement designed to draw attention to the Word of God. But doctrine must lead to character, or it is wasted.

People may come to the truth because of the doctrines... but they will only stay, and become One with the Father, the Son and Their people, because they fall in love with the character that those doctrines reveal.

Consider how Yahshua dealt with the disciples of John the Baptist, for that is a perfect example of the process I am describing. John the Baptist, when he was imprisoned, sent his helpers to Christ because he had heard of the miracles that He was performing. (Mat 11:2) These, like teachings and doctrine, or like the name of a Church, are the "banner." They are the outward things. But when Yahshua answered them, He said, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Mat 11:4, 5)

They came to see Him because they had heard of His actions, but when they asked Him, "Are you the Messiah?" In other words, "Your works all seem right, but are you THE One?" He did not give them more doctrine; they already agreed with that part; instead, He wanted to show them that He was not merely repeating the correct words of another, or acting as the messenger for One yet to come. There were the miracles, yes, but more than the miracles, there was the divine nature in human form... revealed in

how He treated those around Him. "See the way I talk to the sick and the needy. See the compassion I have for the lost sheep of Israel." And when they saw these things they knew... this was the One.

So it will be as we evangelize the world. Our works, our words, and our teachings may be right. The name of our Church may convict of sin... but these things will only begin to turn the heart toward Yahweh. It is His character, His nature, as expressed by the relationship that His people have with Him, with one another, and with the world... this is what reveals that Yahweh so loved the world that He sent us His Son, so that none, not one, need perish. This is the Good News we bear, and we do so with honor, with glory, and with joy.

Are there any questions about tonight's study?

Adriel777: Amen

Elyna: Amen

Zahakiel: If there aren't, then I will ask Pastor to close with a prayer.

Pastor Chick: Dear Father in Heaven, we thank You for teaching us the deep things that last forever. May our Sabbath days reflect our lives of rest and faithful service. In Yahshua's holy name, Amen.

Adriel777: Amen

Barb: Amen

Lucan: Amen

Gloria: Amen.

daphna dee: Amen

Elyna: Amen.

Zahakiel: Amen.

Peter_Jr_18: Amen.