

LIGHT BEARERS MINISTRY

MISSION

UPDATE

May 2003

2003 Convocation Schedule

4th Annual
East Coast Convocation at
Fletcher Seventh-day Adventist Church
June 23-28, 2003

19th Annual Convocation at Malo
July 1-5, 2003

A Switch — *With a Hitch*

by James Rafferty

I was raised in a Catholic home (“Roman Catholic,” my mother would add). After I joined the Adventist Church, I was sometimes told, “Catholics make the best Adventists!” This comment was meant as a positive and that was how I took it . . . then.

Have you ever wondered why Catholics make the best Adventists? Being one, I did. So I asked. The answer I got was, in a word, “dedication.” They are so dedicated to serving God that when they accept the truth, they will follow it. In my case that meant giving up one set of works, an unbiblical one, for another set of works, the right one—that is, keeping God’s commandments instead of the commandments of men. A good switch, no doubt. But there is one little hitch. Works don’t save us, not even the right ones.

Here is where it gets tricky. Salvation by works, or creature merit, is not only the basis of Catholicism, but is the “spirit of Pharisaism,” which is “the spirit of human nature.”¹ To leave one church building and step into another, even the church of the remnant, does not necessarily mean we have escaped this natural tendency.

Martin Luther once said, “I myself have now been preaching cultivating [justification by faith] for almost 20 years and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal so with God that I may contribute something [creature merit] and He will have to give me

His grace in exchange for my holiness.”

In harmony with Luther’s concern for this foundational teaching, we are warned again and again of “the danger” of “entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith.”² “Satan,” we are told, “would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point.”³

Like Luther, Ellen White points out that our only safety lies in recognizing (1) “the impossibility of fallen man *meriting anything* by his best good works,” and (2) that “salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ *alone*.” This truth “needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently,” and “established more firmly in the minds of all.”⁴

We should not conclude that good works have no place in the Christian experience or that the commandments of God are no longer viable. The point is that works do not save us; they have no salvation merit. This is where a factor of integrity arises in many honest hearts concerning the place of works in salvation. They see a contradiction when salvation by grace is contrasted to good works. Consider John Bunyan’s approach to this dilemma in his classic (but newly amplified) allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In this passage, Christian has just rebuffed Ignorance’s claim to a heavenly reward based on his good thoughts about God and heaven. When challenged to define good thoughts about God, Christian answers:

We should not conclude that good works have no place in the Christian experience or that the commandments of God are no longer viable. The point is that works do not save us; they have no salvation merit.

*For true faith will lead a man
to love God's name, His Word,
His way, and His people.
One with such a love will do
nothing but good acts.*

“When we think that He knows us better than we know ourselves and can see sin in us where we can see none; . . . Also, when we think that our own righteousness stinks in His nostrils even in our best performances.” He then asks Ignorance for his thoughts on the matter . . .

Ignorance: “Why, I think that I must believe in Christ for justification.”

Christian: “But how can you believe in Him when you have such a high opinion of yourself? . . . It appears to me that you feel no need of His justification. . . . What do you believe?”

Ignorance: “I believe that Christ died for sinners! . . . And, I believe that Christ, by virtue of His merits, takes my religious duties and makes them acceptable to His Father, and so I am justified.”

Christian: “Then let me answer you in four parts:

“First, you believe with an imaginary faith, for faith of this kind is nowhere described in the Word.

“Second, you believe with a false faith, because it takes justification from the personal righteousness of Christ and applies it to your own.

“Third, in this faith, Christ does not justify you but rather your actions. Then, through your actions He justifies you. This is false.

“Fourth, you therefore rest your hopes upon a deceitful faith that will leave you under the wrath of God in the day of judgment. True justifying faith takes we whom the Word has awakened to our sinfulness and sends us fleeing for refuge into Christ's righteousness. There, having thrown off our

filthy garments, we hide our nakedness under His robe as a child fresh from the bath hides under his mother's cloak when there comes a knock at the door. And when God looks upon us He sees neither our filthy rags, nor our nakedness, but rather the pure garments of Christ.”

Ignorance: “What? . . . Do you expect us to trust only in what Christ has done? Do our own works account for nothing at all? No! Anyone who believed that nonsense could freely indulge in all kinds of lusts since his own acts have no effect on his salvation!”

Christian: “Ignorance is your name, and as your name, so your mind, for you are totally ignorant of the true effects of saving faith. . . . For true faith will lead a man to love God's name, His Word, His way, and His people. One with such a love will do nothing but good acts.”⁵

This epic classic, originally written in the seventeenth century, poignantly depicts the ongoing struggle between our faith in Christ and the place of works. This very fight is further revealed in prophetic pages from the book of Daniel in the context of the judgment:

“I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came, and *judgment was given to the saints of the most High*; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom” (Daniel 7:21-22).

Taking the verses as they read, we find an uninterrupted war being waged against God's people by this little horn power. The essence of *this* war is spiritual, not just physical. The context of this prophecy in Daniel warns of a counterfeit gospel that sought to place salvation merit upon our works of obedience. Luther's experience as quoted above is a perfect example of how difficult it was for the “saints” to shake this false understanding of creature merit. And even after Luther broke free from the prevailing influence of this system's teachings, the Council of Trent did all it could to undo the work of Luther and other Reformers and to maintain its hold on the masses. Here are some of its edicts:

“No one ought to flatter himself with faith alone, thinking that by faith alone he is made an heir and will obtain the inheritance.”⁶

“Eternal life is to be offered both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, and as a reward promised by God Himself, to be faithfully given to their good works and merits.”⁷

“If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that they are not also the good merits of him justified, or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.”⁸

The theme of these statements is clear: human works are meritorious and earn some part of our salvation. They conclude that our favor with God is based to a lesser or greater degree upon our own goodness. Nothing could be further from the truth. The apostle Paul, seeking to clarify the gospel in Romans, made a statement that completely undermines creature merit in any form:

“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one’” (Romans 3: 10-12, NKJV).

The gospel says that our favor with God is based, not on our works, but on Christ’s. He is our righteousness, our holiness, and we may come boldly before His throne of grace to receive His help and mercy in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16). Through the righteousness of Christ, favor has come upon all in spite of our lack of goodness. Look at that verse in Daniel 7 again, this time in the New King James Version:

“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and *a judgment was made in favor*

of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom” (Daniel 7:21-22, NKJV).

The idea here is that a “judgment passed in favor of the saints” (NAS). The purpose of the judgment is a favorable event for those who trust in Christ. These verses reveal a God who longs to vindicate us from our natural human attempts to merit salvation. He does this by revealing Christ as the only Substitute and Surety for fallen human beings. This is why David could say:

“Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth” (Psalm 26:1-3, NAS95).

Here David is pleading with God to examine him, to investigate him. Why? Because he trusts in the Lord, keeping God’s lovingkindness ever first in his thoughts.


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David expresses the boldness that is free to all who see God as He really is and who trust in His mercy rather than in their own works.

The prevailing power of the little horn, our own nature, tells us to look to ourselves, impressing the idea that we must first be *good* in order to come to Christ. The gospel calls us to look totally to Christ, trusting 100 percent in His righteousness.

“The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. *The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth*

should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken. If he can control minds so that doubt and unbelief and darkness shall compose the experience of those who claim to be the children of God, he can overcome them with temptation.”⁹

The theme in Daniel 7:21-22, then, is more than just the physical persecution of God’s people. This verse is describing the ability of the little horn power to prevail against us with a works-based gospel. The prophecy in these verses is pointing to a time when God’s people will finally see the work of Christ in the investigative judgment as an event favorable to their salvation. The little horn prevails against us only until we see Christ and His righteousness as our sole means of redemption. The principles of the little horn lose their power over us when we understand that Christ’s judgment favors all who trust in Him by placing our salvation in His merits rather than our own. Amen. 

¹ *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 79.

² *False Ideas on Justification by Faith*, p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ *The New Amplified Pilgrim’s Progress*, adapted by James Pappas, Jr., 1999, pp 315-316.

⁶ Council of Trent, 1545-1563, quoted in *Christianity Today*, January 1, 2000, p. 64.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Gospel Workers*, p. 161.

*This is the third in a series of articles on the 2300-day prophecy and the investigative judgment. The purpose of these articles is to show that both the prophecy and the judgment are based on Christ and the events of the cross, rather than on the historical dates of 457 B.C. and 1844 A.D. (as significant as those dates may be).

Events Schedule

- ◆ **May 9-10**
Burbank SDA Church, CA
Ty Gibson—☎(818)243-4661
- ◆ **June 23-28**
East Coast Convocation, Fletcher, NC
LBM—☎(828)687-5112
- ◆ **May 9-10**
Hayden SDA Church, ID
James Rafferty—☎(208)762-9423
- ◆ **May 15**
3ABN Live
Ty Gibson & James Rafferty—☎(800)752-3226
- ◆ **May 17**
Cambrian Park SDA Church, CA
James Rafferty—☎(650)967-2324, ext. 16
- ◆ **May 22-25**
Volunteer Park SDA Church, WA
Herb Montgomery—☎(425)774-6278
- ◆ **May 24**
Republic SDA Church, WA
Ty Gibson—☎(509)779-4444
- ◆ **May 24**
Deer Park SDA Church, WA
James Rafferty—☎(509)276-5444
- ◆ **May 30-31**
Weimar Institute Graduation
Ty Gibson—☎(530)637-4111
- ◆ **June 6-7**
Ardmore SDA Church, OK
James Rafferty—☎(580)564-9399
- ◆ **June 13-14**
Santa Cruz SDA Church, CA
Ty Gibson—☎(831)685-3632
- ◆ **June 21**
Arden SDA Church, NC
Herb Montgomery—☎(828)684-6700

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Lift Him Up

3ABN Schedule
(GE- 4 Satellite;
Sky Angel Channel 9710)

Tuesday	4:30 p.m. (PST)
	10:30 p.m. (PST)
Thursday	11:00 a.m. (PST)
Saturday	10:30 a.m. (PST)

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Light Bearers is a non-profit ministry based in the beautiful northeastern mountains of Washington State. Our purpose is to help proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the spoken and published word.