

# LORD, Save My Church

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Tackling the tough issues

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# Introduction

*W*e've had another "Great Disappointment." We didn't call it that, but to some degree, it was greater than the disappointment of 1844, because this time, more people were expecting the Second Advent. No date was set this time, yet the generation born in the early twentieth century had no doubt that Jesus would come in their lifetime. The much-loved *Voice of Prophecy* radio program taught us to sing, "Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring, Jesus is coming again." And its founder, H. M. S. Richards Sr., always began the program by saying: "A voice crying in the wilderness of these modern days, prepare ye the way of the Lord."

Hope in the soon return of Jesus persisted into the 1960s and 1970s. Early in my ministry, ships from the Soviet Union, loaded with intercontinental ballistic missiles, steamed toward Cuba. As the world teetered on the cusp of atomic war, I received a letter from a young woman. It read in part, "Pastor O'Ffill, please go visit my mother. She is not a Christian, and

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Jesus is coming soon.” That crisis came and went, but Jesus didn’t come.

The generation who had no doubt that they would live to see Jesus come are nearly gone. My father died at age eighty-seven, a remnant of that generation. He married, worked nearly forty years in the ministry, and when he died, he was a great-grandfather. He lived to see what he thought would never happen. From a practical point of view, the Second Coming has almost become a cliché. It reminds me of the little boy who cried wolf.

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s were transition years, something of a watershed. During those years, the Vietnam War and its protesters back home and the hippies and flower children with their free love, drugs, and a new music called “rock ’n’ roll” turned the *Leave It to Beaver* generation on its head. Forces were set in motion that would fray the fabric of society and result in profound changes to value systems in the home, the church, and the society at large.

Then, during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, a professor from Pacific Union College challenged one of the teachings that make the church unique. We also began to hear a word we knew, but we heard it in a new context. The word was *celebration*, and the context was the worship service. Worship styles that included drums beating out the rhythms of rock ’n’ roll came on the scene in several Adventist churches.

The beginning of the new millennium saw the move to contemporize worship services gain influence and devotees. As our church leaders noticed the outstanding success of the Evangelical mega-churches, new words and phrases were introduced into our vocabulary: *church planting*, *church growth*, and the *unchurched*. We began to look to the Evangelical churches as models for how

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to grow churches, and increasingly, we adopted their music and worship styles as well. We even turned to them to teach us to pray. In short, they became our models for spiritual growth.

About that time, many of our youth ministries departments began to experiment with contemporary methods to attract the youth, using drama and puppets along with contemporary music styles that included rock and rap. An Adventist youth culture began to develop that colored outside the lines and that would be quoted as saying, “It’s better to ask for forgiveness than for permission.” It also became increasingly common for churches to have two worship services—one traditional and another using the contemporary model.

During the last part of the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, a number of churches in the North American Division left the fellowship and became Sunday-keeping churches. My own grandson was a member of one of those churches.

In recent years, the standards and unique doctrines of the church have been gradually played down. The old saying that you could recognize an Adventist anywhere is no longer the case. The new mantra for many is that “Jesus did it all.”

There is no doubt that we are in a time of change. The home, the church, and the society of tomorrow will definitely not be what we have known before. Change is inevitable. So, we must ask what they will be now.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted ninety-five theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. These ninety-five propositions against the doctrine of indulgences became the basis for the movement that led to the Reformation in Germany.

The bold-faced statements that follow in the eight chapters of this book go to the heart of many of the issues facing Adventist

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Christians at this time. In these statements, I'm asking whether we're making history or simply repeating it. Perhaps at this point we don't so much need prophets as we need historians. Ultimately, we will change. The essential question is What will be the result of the changes we are making?

We aren't in a laboratory experimenting with rabbits and monkeys. What we are doing has eternal ramifications. While truth will triumph in the end, a misunderstanding, distortion, or miscalculation can result in the loss of souls.

You don't have to agree with every assertion in this book. But it is my hope and prayer that you consider and discuss them. They are burdens and convictions on my heart as we near the kingdom. And like Martin Luther, I say, "Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me."

# God's People and the Culture

If you don't think for yourself, others will do your thinking for you.

There certainly are other people who would be happy to do your thinking for you. But this is no time to have a favorite guru. In matters having to do with faith and morals, it is generally not safe to be a disciple of anyone. God hasn't put, as it were, all His eggs into one basket. To be a reflector of one man's thoughts is ultimately to have a narrow view of things.

The apostle Paul made this clear when he wrote,

While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but

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God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building (1 Corinthians 3:4–9).

When I took the college class Education, a large part of the course consisted of learning key quotations from the book *Education*. I remember one quotation in particular: "It is the work of true education . . . to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought."<sup>1</sup> It has been said that when we become followers of people, we tend to follow their weaknesses rather than their strengths. David's life provides a good example. We must be careful that we don't conclude that his story proves that anything goes as long as a person is sorry afterwards. Though there are Bible heroes, the only Hero we can safely copy is Jesus.

He who asks the questions controls the agenda.

The news media often report on surveys and polls that are taken to determine the attitude of the public or a particular constituency toward one issue or another. We see this done particularly just before an election. Have you ever noticed that in some cases the results of the polls from day to day seem to contradict each other? This happens because he who asks the questions controls the agenda. To a large degree, the results of any questionnaire are built into the questions themselves. A typical question doesn't have an unlimited number of possible answers. Sometimes they are phrased so that if you answer one way you are wise, but if you respond another way, you are some kind of lesser life form.



Questions are powerful and can set the agenda for change—change for the better or for the worse. When Eve decided to answer the question that the serpent asked her that day in the Garden of Eden, she was immediately on a slippery slope. She should have realized at once that something was wrong—besides the fact that snakes don't talk! Once she began to converse with the fallen angel, it was downhill all the way.

While questions can be used to clarify issues, they also can be used to muddy the waters and create doubt and uncertainty in the mind of the one being questioned. So, we must be careful of the questions we ask ourselves and of the questions others ask us. While some questions can build faith, the devil and those who serve him more often than not use questions to destroy faith. Remember, you are not obliged to answer every question.

There are questions that have only wrong answers.

Can you answer the question, “Have you stopped beating your wife?” If you say yes, you're admitting that you used to beat her; and if you say no, you come out even worse. While we learn by asking questions, we can find ourselves in hot water by the kinds of questions we choose to answer.

Jesus recognized the danger of trying to answer every kind of question. One day some religious leaders asked Him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. (The story is recorded in Matthew 22:16–21.) The Bible states clearly that the Pharisees were deliberately trying to catch Him in a trap. If He said Yes, it would mean that He was loyal to the Romans. If He said No, He would be seen as disloyal and could thereby be condemned by the occupying power. The Bible says Jesus perceived what they

were up to and answered that they should render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's and to God the things that belonged to God.

On another occasion, the Pharisees asked Jesus by what authority He carried out His ministry. If He had answered that His authority was from God, they would, of course, have accused Him of blasphemy. Instead of replying, He caught them at their own game. He asked them a question that for them would have had only a wrong answer: The baptism of John, was it of God or of men? Realizing that if they responded in either way, they would incriminate themselves, they refused to answer (see Mark 11:28–33).

When we are asked questions that have to do with faith and morals, we must first decide if the question is built on faith or doubt. Remember that the one who asks the question controls the agenda. Trying to answer every question people may propose is like walking on ice in winter—if the ice is thin, we don't walk on it. Here's what may be a good rule of thumb: Before answering any question, we should discern why it is being asked. What may seem to some to be an honest question may in reality be a ruse of the enemy to cast doubt on the truth and to destabilize faith.

The pop doctrine of self-love (self-esteem) tends to put the gospel into gridlock.

Some years ago, a concept came into our vocabulary that has since become nearly a household mantra. That concept is self-esteem. Seemingly, everything wrong about a person—from being down and out in our outlook on life to committing violence against someone else—is laid at the doorstep of a lack of self-esteem.

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Jesus taught that we are to love the Lord with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–39). Some misguided person came up with, “But how can we love others if we don’t love ourselves first?” The Bible premise is that we already love ourselves. The second great commandment takes it for granted (see Matthew 22:39). The golden rule is based on this fact (see Matthew 7:12). And in Ephesians 5:29, we are reminded that no one yet ever hated his own body.

Someone may respond, “But I know someone who says he hates himself because he is so ugly.”

May I suggest that if he really hated himself, he would be glad he is ugly! What he is actually expressing is his heart’s cry, which is, “Why does everyone think I’m so ugly? I don’t deserve this.”

Loving ourselves comes naturally. Yet, if we are to be whole emotionally and spiritually, we must be loved by someone besides ourselves. In other words, we must know that someone loves us. The church wasn’t meant to be a place where we come and hear that we should love ourselves. Rather, it was meant to be a place where we come to learn that God loves us and where we love one another.

It isn’t surprising that we have come to our current situation. This generation fulfills the prophecy in 2 Timothy 3:1, 2 that the last days would be dangerous because people would be lovers of themselves. Ours is not the first generation to be selfish, but it may be the first to promote selfishness and teach it. My mother used to say, “Dickey, don’t be selfish. Share your toys.” Now parents are more likely to say, “Keep your things to yourself. Don’t let people walk all over you. You have to stick up for yourself.”

The first social unit to suffer the results of the doctrine of self-esteem is the home. A marriage might be able to survive

even if one spouse puts himself or herself first, but it won't survive if both spouses are selfish. As marriages collapse, the children turn inward for security and lose the ability to bond.

For nearly a generation now, we have been teaching the doctrine of loving yourself first. If a lack of self-esteem were really our problem, things should be getting better, but they aren't. The institutionalization of selfishness causes the gospel, which is based on unselfishness, to crash. It flies in the face of Jesus' words: "If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24; emphasis added), and Paul's counsel, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind *let each esteem other better than themselves*. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:3, 4; emphasis added).

The diagnosis of dysfunction has made repentance seem unnecessary.

There is a word that has profoundly affected the way we relate to one another and to God, and that is the word *dysfunction*. While it is true that we are all to some extent dysfunctional because sin is dysfunction, this word as used in the contemporary culture means that anybody and everybody but me is responsible for my problems. No one is more maligned by this view of life than are our parents. My parents may not have been perfect, and I may have been emotionally and spiritually scarred during the early years, but I must be honest with myself and confess that what I am today I have chosen to be. There were, after all, other options.

The word *dysfunction* as used in the contemporary culture reminds me of a game we used to play at school called The

Prince of Paris Lost His Hat. We would sit in a circle and number off. Then we would all begin to clap like a human metronome. Somebody would say, “The prince of Paris lost his hat, and number three has it.” Number three was then to respond immediately, “Who, me, sir? Not I, sir. Number nine has it.” All of this must be said to the beat of the human metronome. Those who remained in control and replied within the time allotted could stay in the game. Those who didn’t had to drop out.

Dysfunction, as interpreted by the culture of the twenty-first century, is like the game about the prince of Paris—name and blame. Dysfunction says, “Don’t hold me accountable for my problems. Blame my dad, or my mom, or my husband, or my kids—anyone but me.”

There is no doubt that we all came from a past. But as sons and daughters of God, we don’t have to live in the past. We may be scarred, but Jesus will take away our pain and give us a new start.

In my ministry and personal life, I have come to the conclusion that what is causing our problems is not what happened to us in the past, because the past is over. Rather, it is the bitterness and resentment that we carry into our everyday lives. Whether or not the gospel did or will impact my parents is between them and God. But whether I will let the gospel influence my life, scarred though it may be, is a decision I must make for myself.

When a young woman told me one day that she hoped her mother would burn in hell, I reminded her of what Jesus said about loving our enemies and that He wouldn’t forgive us our sins if we refused to accept the gift that enables us to forgive those who have sinned against us. She then advised me that she

had a “deal” with Jesus and would be all right, but she hoped her mother would burn in hell.

I am aware that some people come from homes where there was violence and even hatred. But I must inquire, “You ask Jesus to forgive your sins. Don’t you want Him to forgive your daddy’s sins as well?”

Being a son or daughter of God is not about living in the past. People who harbor bitterness and resentment over physical or emotional injuries of the past are in effect being reinjured every day of their lives. Their lack of forgiveness keeps the memory fresh. We can’t go forward if we are always looking backward. Jesus is for the present. The time will come when, having taken away the pain, He will take away the scars as well. He will do this when He makes all things new. At that time, He will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there will be no more sorrow, death, or crying.

The word *acceptance* has largely replaced the word *repentance* in much contemporary preaching.

It is increasingly common to hear sermons that assure the listeners that Jesus accepts them just the way they are. On the face of it, this may sound comforting. But think about it for a moment. Do we really want Jesus to accept us the way we are? You may wonder what I’m talking about and think, *How could it be any other way?*

The story most often used to illustrate the suggestion that Jesus accepts us just as we are is the parable He told about the prodigal son. In this story, the young man hits bottom as a keeper of swine. He is hungry and in rags, and he probably smelled like pigs as well. One day he came to his senses and decided to go home.

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This prodigal feared what his father would say, so he prepared a little speech. He didn't know that his father had been praying for his return. When the father saw him coming down the road, he joyfully ran to meet him. The father immediately called his servants. The story doesn't mention whether or not they gave the young man a bath, but it does say they put shoes on his feet and clean clothes on his back. Do you get the picture? The father didn't accept (leave) his boy the way he was. If he had accepted him the way he was, he would have left him that way, tattered clothes and all. He wouldn't have provided clean clothes and shoes. The fact is that the father *received* him the way he was.

If I were interviewing for a new job, and I told my prospective employer that he would have to accept me the way I am, I probably wouldn't get the job. To accept me the way I am means that I am satisfied with the way I am, I don't need to learn anything more, and he will just have to get used to it. You see, *acceptance* is a status quo word.

This is why, in calling sinners to come to Jesus, the word to use is *repent*. Repentance is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It isn't a status quo word; it's a change word. We don't come to Jesus to stay the way we are but to change. The gospel's first invitation to the lost is always a call to repent. John the Baptist called for repentance (see Matthew 3:2), as did Jesus (see Matthew 4:17). And, of course, Peter on the Day of Pentecost said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). The great revivals in Europe and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were all based on a call to repent. But the generation of the twenty-first century resents the call for re-

penitance and prefers to be told that Jesus accepts us just the way we are. We can come to Jesus and still keep our love of the world and sinful habits.

While we initially come to Jesus just as we are for the simple reason that there is no other way for us to come, Jesus immediately begins to change us. The promise is, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26).

To invite a person of the twenty-first century to have a relationship with Jesus is ineffective.

One day a young man who was living with his girlfriend explained the situation this way: “We love each other, we are best friends, we share expenses, and we are intimate.”

I responded, “Why, that sounds like my wife and me. Why don’t you go ahead and get married?”

“Not me,” he said, shaking his hand back and forth for emphasis. “I don’t want to make a commitment.”

Didn’t that young man have a relationship with his girlfriend? Of course he did. But he didn’t want to make a commitment. We are continually inviting people to have a relationship with Jesus, but what does that mean? To ask this generation to have a relationship with Jesus is not enough. Everyone already has some kind of relationship with Jesus, even Satan—he hates Him.

When my wife and I stood in the presence of God, family, and friends, my father, who officiated at our wedding ceremony, didn’t ask us to have a relationship with each other. Rather, he asked us to make a commitment. I re-



member the words he said: “Richard Wesley O’Ffill, do you take Betty Mae Eldridge to be your lawfully wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of marriage? Do you promise to love, honor, and comfort her, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer; and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for her so long as you both shall live?”

That day in June we didn’t promise simply to have a lifelong relationship with each other. Instead, we made a lifelong commitment to each other. A relationship is only an association, a connection, an affiliation. A commitment is a promise, a pledge, a vow, an obligation.

Suppose I were to say to my wife, “Betty, I love you very much. You have first place in my life. But then there are Sarah and Judy. They have second and third place in my life.”

Ridiculous! When I committed to Betty, I cast every other girl out of my life altogether. In the same way, a commitment to Jesus doesn’t merely put Him on the top shelf of my life. Anything and everything else must be thrown out the window. He alone must be on every shelf.

Some refer to their religious life and their secular life as though they have split personalities. A person who makes Jesus first in his life doesn’t have a secular life. Everything he does is to the glory of God. My commitment to my wife affects every relationship in my life.

A personal question: Does Jesus have every place in your life?

If things continue as they’re going, someday when someone says God is love, He’ll have to respond, “Not if that’s what you mean.”

The word *love* has become cheapened to the point where it is not uncommon to hear someone say “I saw two dogs making love” or speak of “homosexual lovers” or say “I just love apple pie.” Then, in the next breath, they may say that God is love.

The Greek language of Bible times didn’t have a problem with the word *love*. It used three words where we use only one. *Eros* is the word from which we get the word *erotic*. Then there was *phileo*, one of the roots of the name *Philadelphia*—brotherly love. *Phileo* speaks of friendship. And there was *agape*, which is God’s love to us and our love for Him and for each other. This love is not an emotion but a choice.

As I point out in another place, the devil is taking over our language. The net result is that we’re losing the ability to distinguish the sacred from the profane. First Corinthians 13 defines true love in a way that cannot be misused or misunderstood. In this chapter, love is not about apple pie; rather, it is about patience and kindness. It doesn’t have a temper and is not jealous. It is not proud and doesn’t look after its own interests first. It doesn’t seek for trouble but rejoices in truth.

As long as the English language has only one word for love, and God is love, we might consider using other words to describe relationships to people and things that either have nothing to do with God or are inconsistent with what He is. When a one-hundred-dollar bill and a penny are valued the same, neither are worth much anymore.

The Religious Right is not the only group about which we should be concerned.

While I was attending a camp meeting in Lithuania, I spent some time talking with a young minister who remembers the

days of the Soviet Empire. For seventy years, the Soviet Union ruled a territory that reached from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. For a while, one-third of the population of the world was under the rule of a Marxist government.

The Soviet Union perfected the art of lying. (The politically correct word is *misinformation*.) As they pursued their goal of conquering the world, they continually accused the West of being imperialistic. They said they were trying to free the nations from capitalistic imperialism, while the truth was that they were enslaving nations and holding them in the throes of atheistic dictatorships.

The young Lithuanian minister explained that in the days of the Soviet Union, people did what the authorities commanded because they feared what would happen to them if they didn't. Someone was always watching them or listening to them, and they were afraid to say what they really believed. The authorities could send the common citizens to prison, take their children away from them, or even kill them. Millions died. It is reported that during the reign of Joseph Stalin, as many as twenty million people were killed.

The devil doesn't work only with the Religious Right movement but also with all God-denying, humanistic, pagan elements of society. It is important that we don't inadvertently align ourselves with the Left against the Religious Right. There are powerful forces at work on both sides, and the Right and the Left are, in effect, working together without realizing it. Together they will accomplish the devil's agenda on this planet. We believe that the forces on the Right will ultimately take away our religious liberty. But we must also understand that forces on the Left, if unchecked, will turn loose moral anarchy upon this planet. Then every man's hand will be against his

brother, and everyone will do what is right in his own eyes. So, let us be aware that the enemy is not just on our right but also on our left, and in front of us and behind us!

Mao Zedong is quoted as saying, “Make a noise in the East and strike in the West.” The Bible puts it another way. “As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear meet him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him” (Amos 5:19).

There are nine commandments besides the fourth.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah wrote, “They that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in” (Isaiah 58:12). We believe the breach that was made in the law of God was the removal of the fourth commandment, and that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been raised up in these last days to repair it. Of God’s people in the last days it has been written, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Have we considered that our society is disregarding not only the fourth commandment but also the sixth commandment, which is “Thou shalt not kill,” and the seventh, which is “Thou shalt not commit adultery”?

While we as a people continue to emphasize the fourth commandment, the Evangelical churches are active in promoting the sixth and the seventh commandments. They do this in their active opposition to abortion and the homosexual lifestyle. Unfortunately, Adventist Christians have had much less to say regarding these two commandments than we have in respect to

the fourth commandment. While we insist on the separation of church and state and so stand firmly against Sunday laws, when asked about the issues of abortion or the homosexual lifestyle, we are likely to say something to the effect that morality should not be legislated.

Morality is by definition conformity to the rules of right conduct—moral or virtuous conduct. Our consistency in insisting that morality should not be legislated may at this point be put in question, inasmuch as laws against rape and child abuse are moral issues that we support. The fact is that a society that doesn't legislate moral conduct cannot exist for long.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first four commandments are spiritual issues governing our relationship with God, and as such should not be regulated by law. The other six commandments, however, govern our relationship with each other, and as such must be legislated if our families and our social interaction as a society are to be organized and protected. Adventists may one day find themselves embarrassed for insisting that God expects us to honor the fourth commandment. Our brothers and sisters of other Christian faiths may ask us why we didn't feel the same way about the sixth and the seventh.

Once we accept the lifestyle of the practicing homosexual as the base line for morality, adultery and fornication cease to be issues.

A divisive issue in society as well as in religious circles is the matter of our attitude toward the homosexual lifestyle. Television increasingly portrays the gay and lesbian lifestyle as a normal alternative to the traditional heterosexual relationship.

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God had specific purposes in mind when He created male and female. He meant them to marry and procreate.

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . . And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Genesis 2:18, 21–24).

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Genesis 1:27).

Jesus Himself confirmed this when He said, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:4–6).

Romans 1:26, 27 is the major New Testament text on homosexuality. It includes both men and women: “God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their

lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”

Fornication and adultery are consistently condemned throughout Scripture. But for that matter, so is pride, selfishness, murder, and stealing. The issue isn't who are sinners and who are not or who is the biggest sinner. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). Sin has effectively disabled the entire human race. The problem is that homosexuality is increasingly being declassified as sin.

It has been demonstrated that the power of God can heal the demon-possessed, the alcoholic, and the drug addict. The question is, Are there sins so strong that God's grace cannot loose them? The answer is a resounding No!

To admit we are sinners is not a put-down but the first step to being raised up. God can save sinners. The apostle Paul wrote that He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

The charismatic churches may well be receiving the false latter rain.

When I was a young man, the Pentecostal church in town was often on the “other side of the tracks.” Sometimes Pentecostal worshippers were referred to as holy rollers, and their ministers were often uneducated. Times have changed. Today some of the charismatic churches, as they are now known, are mega-churches. (A mega-church is a large church that has two thousand or more worshippers for a typical weekly service.) They own radio and television networks. More than that, the

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charismatic churches have become role models. They compose the music we sing and write the dramas that are enacted in our churches. They are invited to teach our ministers how to “grow” churches and how to reach the “unchurched.”

This isn't the way we thought it was going to be; and it has caused many of us to wonder if we are really who we thought we were going to be. Many of us felt that at the end time, we would be the ones with thousands attending our churches each Sabbath. On the surface, it seems that they must increase while we, as it were, decrease. But things are exactly as they were prophesied to be.

Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth, there will be, among the people of the Lord, such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children. At that time many will separate themselves from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His Word. Many, both of ministers and people, will gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time, to prepare a people for the Lord's second coming. The enemy of souls desires to hinder this work; and before the time for such a movement shall come, he will endeavor to prevent it, by introducing a *counterfeit*. In those churches which he can bring under his deceptive power, he will make it appear that God's special blessing is poured out; there will be manifest what is thought to be great religious interest.<sup>2</sup>

This is no time for us to become disillusioned and wonder if somehow we have it wrong or if the conviction that we have



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about the message of this hour has been exaggerated. Nor should we lose heart. The message that God has given this church is for such a time as this, and it will be proclaimed with power in the time that has been appointed. We have not believed cunningly devised fables.

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1. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press®, 1952), 17.

2. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1958), 326; emphasis added.