

WHY WE NEED JESUS

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A charge sometimes made against Seventh-day Adventists is that we teach that we will continue to improve until at last we will not need Jesus. Is there any truth in this idea? Is this what we teach? What we imply? Let's talk about it.

Here is what we will do today. First, we will describe the end-time scenario as understood by Seventh-day Adventists, especially with reference to the believer's experience. Next, we will offer several reasons—even as we hold these views—why we need Jesus all the way to the very end. Finally, we conclude. Ready?

The End-Time Scenario For Believers

Let's begin with the background that effects us all in a very real way. For 6,000 years the human race has been declining in every respect—physically, intellectually, morally. Compared to the first man, we are dull-witted, sickly, and incredibly weak morally. And our abilities are declining very sharply with each generation. But while the moral capacities of humanity are sinking, Satan's skills and schemes to deceive surely have reached a perfection. As a mere novice he deceived angels; now he is the master deceiver. We are his prey.

The conditions that surround us socially are foreboding. Our world is saturated with sensory stimulation, our pace of life is so fast that we are used to making choices with minimal reflection. Many of us face deficiencies in the parenting we've had or that we've given. Our

sabbath school teachers, our church school teachers have been few but valiant. But what a battle. Just a few hearty people stand in the gap between our faith or atheism.

God has foretold what we call the “shaking”—a situation that He allows to develop in the church. Some in the church heed the counsel of the True Witness (Jesus) and in a kindly, godly way, offer strong testimony. Others resist and rise up within the church to actively oppose this work of Jesus. The result is a denomination-wide turmoil. It may be that family members, close friends, men and women whom we had before seen as being faithful Christians, will lose their way. We will be shocked and saddened by the loss of what we had thought were a constellation of stars for Jesus. Our own personal faith will be stretched.

The shaking intensifies as we near the end. We live today under what we know as the sealing time, the time when we are to become firmly founded in the truth of God, when it is to permeate us and infiltrate us so completely that all that we think and do begins to echo the mind of Christ. Now is the very time when our characters are to be changed, when we are to become, in our own individuality, Christlike.

Then comes the conclusion of Christ’s intercession for continued sinning, the time we call the close of probation. At that point we find ourselves in a time of trial such as no human has ever faced. The closest historical parallels are found only in the experiences of suffering endured by Job and by Jesus. And yet God will protect His faithful and in His strength they will endure. At last Jesus comes.

Such is the scenario as understood by Seventh-day Adventists who read closely the Bible’s apocalyptic. But we want to know more specifically how Jesus fits into all of this.

To Live Without Sinning

During the period after probation has closed and before the Second Coming, there is a space of time during which followers of Jesus must live without sinning. His intercessions have concluded and He is preparing to return to earth and claim His people. The occasion provides God with the last, crowning bit of evidence for His assertion: that His grace is sufficient, that fallen man can keep His commandments, that former rebels can be reformed and transformed so that they not only would rather die than sin, but would rather live without sinning than die. Yes, stop and think about that for a moment. Not only would they rather die than sin, but would rather live without sinning than die. They are completely committed to following the Lamb wherever He goes, completely determined that in their own small way, their lives will meet God's plan to contribute to the vindication of the righteousness of God.

Here is where the objections kick in. Wait a minute, they say. You are saying that end-time believers come to the place where they don't need Jesus.

Why We Need Jesus

There are people out there who make high Christian claims to integrity but who through indifference or malice seem bent on misrepresenting us. Some of us have worried for too long over what they think. We need to be straightforward, transparent, and when it comes to our biblical understandings, if they are truly sustained by the Scriptures, we need to be unbending.

The sticks and stones will be thrown as long as Satan lives and inspires men to oppose the work of God. Our business is to stand for truth in any case, and not to be cowering in the corner pleading for a few crumbs of recognition and legitimacy thrown our way by self-proclaimed guardians of Christian orthodoxy. That always gets us into trouble, and is not the

pattern set for His people by Jesus. We look now at four reasons why we need Jesus to the end. The Bible will be our guide.

1. As a Penalty-Paying Substitute For Our Sins

Let's see if we can put this clear. First of all, the Bible teaches that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). So in the Tanakh (Old Testament): "And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book" (Ex 32:33). Therefore, if someone sins, someone must die. There is no escape; this is the way the universe works. Sin must be addressed, dealt with, covered, eliminated, atoned for.

Now, to apply this personally to yourself. If you have sinned, then someone must die. Unless there had been an intervention, you would have to die for your own sins. But there has been an intervention. As soon as there was sin there was a Savior. The Father intervened by allowing His Son Jesus to offer His life in place of yours.

If you have sinned, but then truly repented, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as your atoning sacrifice, then you have had pardon entered against your name in the books of heaven. As you have become a partaker of the righteousness of Christ, and your character has been found to be in harmony with the law of God, you have exercised active faith. You have become a changed person. Finally, in the judgment, your sins will be blotted out, and you will be granted eternal life.

Because it is true that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), it follows that all need to die for their sins, and thankfully, for everyone, Jesus has intervened. For those willing to receive His life, that is, both, His life counted in place of theirs and His life lived-out in theirs, Jesus is Savior. Our repentance is necessary also, although it is not

meritorious, does not atone. We cannot lay claim to any credit for repenting because that repentance is only available on the basis of God granting us the gift of His prevenient grace, of His having taken the initiative and led us to the place where we could repent (Acts 5:31; 11:18 Rom 2:4).

We need Jesus to die for our sins. When we have accepted Him, His life is offered in place of our life. Now a question: when does this fact change for the believer? Even if one is not sinning now (is another question all its own), when does it become true that one has not sinned in the past? It never becomes true. Then when will we no longer need the death of Jesus in place of our own death? It will never become true. If you have sinned, then you are a sinner. If you are a sinner then you need a Savior. If you need a Savior for past sins, and if the fact of those past sins never changes, then you need a Savior to die in your place.

It is like conception. If you are never conceived, then you never happen. If, after sinning, you do not accept Jesus' provision for the forgiveness of your sins, then they are not forgiven. Then you will be destroyed when God eradicates sin from the universe. If you are restored from your sin and you are granted the opportunity to live for eternity, it will only be because when your case was finally decided, Jesus' sinless life was counted in place of your sin-laden life. We need Jesus' substitutionary death in place of our death in order that the wages of sin meet payment. In this sense then, we will always need Jesus.

2. Jesus' Death On the Cross Pays the Legal Penalty For My Sins of Ignorance

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth (John 9:41).

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin (John 15:22).

God does not show us all of our sins at once. Most often, it seems that He illumines our conscience only one item at a time. There are sins that we commit unwittingly, decisions we make that are morally antagonistic to the kingdom of God but which we make unawares, without intent to rebel. If we do not know and have not had opportunity to know, these sins are not held against us. But when in His providence God makes us aware of them, then we are to repent and forsake them.

Remember, Jesus voluntarily wore the crown of thorns. Before man sinned, there were no thorns, no brambles, but after, the curse (Gen 3:17; 5:29). Jesus endured the curse, nay, participated in the curse in common with us, and took the thorns back with Him to the cross. He defeated sin, death, and the grave, and at the restoration of the earth, on this basis the curse will be removed (Rev 22:3).

Jesus has come and has spoken to us through His Word. We stand no longer in times of ignorance (Acts 17:30). Never has the world had greater opportunity to search out the truth about God than today.

Without the sacrifice of Jesus, no atonement is made for man's sins of ignorance. Therefore, I need Jesus' death again, not only for sins I have willfully committed and later truly repented of, but also for sins I have dropped into the world unknowingly.

3. All My Power For Victory Comes by the Authority of Jesus

You may labor to establish a habit of trust in divine power, but that trust would be useless were the divine power withdrawn. Jesus promised His followers that upon His departure He

would send “another Comforter,” meaning the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). He promised that His presence with His disciples would continue (Matt 28:20). He warned us that without Him, we could do nothing, but that with God, all things are possible (John 15:4, 5; Phil 4:13).

All my power for moral victory is granted me by the authority of Jesus. He wants the righteousness of His law, the likeness of His character, “to be fulfilled in us,” as we “walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). The Spirit Jesus sends is called “the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17).

It is true that there comes a time when the Holy Spirit has been completely withdrawn from those who have resisted Him, but that is not us. If we have not resisted, but sought for the Spirit, if we have been following “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14), then we may expect Him to supply it. Jesus came, according to the classic verse, so that we might not perish.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16, 17).

He wants us to claim His “exceeding great and precious promises,” to tap His help, “as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:4, 3). Jesus longs to work through us. He longs to save us. His presence in us is our hope of glory (Col 1:27).

Without Jesus’ divine commitment to give us power to obey, we would be left to the clammers of our fallen nature. We need His help in a giant way. We can never dispense with His

help while we are in these corruptible bodies. Clearly, here is another reason why we need Jesus all the way to the end.

4. Jesus' Death on the Cross Provides For Healing the Effects of Sin

Until Jesus has received the kingdom from His Father in full, the restoration of the earth is not complete. But the results of sin include numerous effects that throw the creation, including people, out of their intended order. As we already noted, the entrance of the curse brought thorns to the roses. It seems to be responsible for carnivorousness, and is probably responsible for warping certain creatures so that we are troubled by mosquitos, ticks, and a full catalogue of diseases. Man as originally created had, I am sure, no need of bifocals, walkers, wheelchairs, or artificial knees.

The creation suffers under the curse.

For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now (Rom 8:19-23).

Paul finishes by saying that we are waiting also the redemption of our body (8:24). You see, in the new earth, "there shall be no more curse" (Rev 22:3). These effects will be eradicated because Jesus made atonement for the entrance of the curse. In short, my glorified body is part of the restoration already bought and paid for by Jesus at the cross. So if I want that incorruptible body that is promised to me because of what Christ has done, then I need to accept what He has done and see to it that I never separate myself from the One who Himself became a curse for us.

Conclusion

Does the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God take one to the place where He no longer needs Jesus? We have cited several ways in which, to the contrary, we do need Jesus to the end. It is clear that the charge is wanting, and that on a biblical basis Seventh-day Adventists acknowledge that our hope is found in Jesus and not in ourselves. Just as Moses told God (actually, it was the pre-incarnate Christ) that there was no use in their going up to the promised land if He would not go up with them, so we can only repeat that if we do not go with Jesus all the way to the end, there is no use in our going up either. We are Christians and we have no goal of abandoning Christ. He has promised to be with us, even to the end of the age. He wants for us to hold Him to it. And that we will.

Next week: We have not answered all the questions we want to. How does all of this relate to the Close of Probation more precisely? We'll pursue that question then.

Thank you Father, that rather than abandoning Jesus, we may draw closer to Him and to You through Him. So close, in fact, that in a sense it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal 2:20).

