



Open Face

One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up all others. Christ our Righteousness

No. 57

NOV 2007

Two False Gospels

David Clayton



Recently I received a couple of articles which were written by Ralph Larson and Dennis Priebe, both evidently written several years ago. I read these articles carefully. They were basically in harmony in presenting two different perspectives on the gospel, one of which they supported and the other which they strongly opposed.

As I read these articles I realized that they were copies of articles which I had read years ago in the *Layworker* magazine. Now, reading them again, I realized that the authors of these articles had really not dealt with the subject in a comprehensive way. Their understanding of the issues had been superficial and as a result, their presentation did not really deal with the fundamental questions.

In this edition of *Open Face* I want to look at the ideas of these two men, and show why their view is limited and does not answer the real questions. I will also look at the real issues and show what the biblical solution to the problem is. This is critically important for us to understand, because it is only when we understand what the problems really are

that we can truly even begin to understand what the solution to the problems is.

I have broken down the response to these two men into several short articles for easier reading and comprehension and these make up this edition of *Open Face*.

=====

Dennis Priebe and Ralph Larson have been representative voices in “historic Adventism” for many years. Ralph Larson especially has been a well known theologian who has championed the cause of those on the fringe of Adventism. When I first became involved in this movement I read several articles written by Ralph Larson who was regularly featured both as a writer and speaker in the various independent publications and at the various campmeetings. Though I never met elder Larson personally, it was evident to me that he was highly respected among the independent “historic” Adventists and that his opinion was highly valued. One of his most well known and widely read books is *“The Word was Made Flesh.”*

I also never met Dennis Priebe personally. He is perhaps not as well known as Elder Larson but his writings and tapes have also made an impact on the beliefs of “historic” Adventists.

Sometime in the early nineties somebody sent me a set of tapes by Elder Priebe which focused on the issue of sin. I listened to the tapes and at the time they appeared to make sense to

me. For several years after that I vigorously defended the point of view presented by Elder Priebe which is basically the same as that presented by Elder Larson. Elder Priebe has published a book entitled, *“Face to Face With The Real Gospel,”* Where he presents his understanding of the issues which are at the root of Adventism’s problems.

THE BACKGROUND

Back in the 1950s, the SDA Church published a book called, *“Seventh-day Adventists answer Questions on Doctrine.”* This book was written in response to a series of questions which had been presented to the leaders of the Church by a couple of evangelical leaders, Donald Grey Barnhouse, the editor of *Eternity*, Magazine and Walter Martin, well known author and expert on cults. In that book, the church outlined its views on several doctrines including the Atonement, the Nature of Christ, The Investigative Judgment etc.

A retired minister named M.L. Andreasen took strong objection to the things which were taught in this book, because in his opinion they differed widely from what the early Adventists believed and taught. He felt that the views expressed in the book repre-

Also in this issue:

Man’s Real Problem	4
The Nature of Christ	6
True Freedom of Choice	8
Issues in The Controversy	10

Open Face
Manchester, Jamaica W.I.

November 2007

Open Face is dedicated to the promotion of the truths committed to the Advent movement, as believed and taught by the early Adventist pioneers. In particular to the restoration of those truths which have been cast down to the ground and trampled underfoot by the papacy, and adopted by her daughters.

Our purpose is to motivate our readers to commit themselves wholly to the task of personal preparation for the coming of the Lord, and to the taking of the final warning message to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

Open Face is published at least once quarterly, and is sent free of cost to all who desire to receive it.

Editor: David Clayton
Publishing committee: ... Howard Williams
..... Heather Baxter
..... Jennifer Clayton
..... David Clayton

P.O. Box 23, Knockpatrick
Manchester, Jamaica W.I.

Phone: (304) 932-4543
Jamaica: (876) 603-0821

email: david@restorationministry.com
Website: <http://www.restorationministry.com>

sented a major departure from Adventist teaching and he regarded the book as a huge step in apostasy. He wrote a series of letters protesting the position taken in the book and outlining what had happened. These have been compiled into a little booklet called, *Letters to the Churches*.

Ever since that time there has been a running battle going on in Adventism concerning these issues. These were essentially the issues which Elders Priebe and Larson, discussed in these two papers.

THE "TWO GOSPELS" CONTROVERSY.

Dennis Priebe says there are two gospels being preached in the SDA Church and he says that the problem with Adventism is these two gospels. One of them is right and one of them is wrong. In his own words,

"But now we have two gospels within the mainstream of Adventism, and again, a difficult choice. What we once thought of as one track of truth has been seen only

lately as two tracks, diverging more and more widely until we have found ourselves at this crisis point. At the heart of my proposal to you is the deep conviction that these two tracks are totally incompatible with each other. That compromise or harmony between them is logically impossible. And that one must make a choice between two systems. "

Ralph Larson says basically the same thing, but approaches the issue from a slightly different perspective. He says that the false gospel is based on the doctrine of "**Original Sin**," while the true gospel is based on what he calls, "**Free Choice**." Actually, when you understand what he and Priebe are saying, their doctrine may be labelled as the teaching of, **Original Sinlessness**.

I read what these two men said, I looked at the implications of what they presented and I realized that while I do not believe in original sin, I also do not believe in the "gospel" which they were presenting as the truth. I do not agree with any of the gospels which they were presenting – neither the one which they describe as false, nor the one which they say is the truth. I recognized that there is a third alternative, and I thought to myself, "if these are the only two gospels which are being taught in the Adventist Church, no wonder the Church has problems!

According to brothers Priebe and Larson, the issues which arise from these two gospels center around the following questions:

- a. The Nature of Christ
- b. The Nature of man.
- c. The Nature of sin.
- d. Salvation.

As Larson puts it,

"The present debate is not about minor matters. It involves doctrines that are at the very heart of our theology: the nature of Christ, the nature of man, and the nature of salvation itself."

THE "GOSPEL" OF ORIGINAL SIN

Both men have stated their conviction that the root of the problems which exist in Adventism is the false teaching of **original sin**.

In order for us to fully appreciate what they mean, we need to look at the doctrine of original sin. Larson has stated some points which he sees as the key teachings of original sin and we will look at the three main points briefly. According to Larson, original sin teaches that:

- a. All men are guilty before God because of the sins of Adam, even if it were possible for them to live without performing a single sinful act in their entire lives.
- b. They are judged and condemned by God for this guilt, which they inherit from Adam as fully as for their own sins.
- c. The root of this sinful condition and this guilt, is the sinful nature which men are born with.

What does it mean when we say a person is guilty? It is not just the feeling of guilt and condemnation on the part of the individual. Guilt also suggests that there is an authority who imposes condemnation on you, or who views you in a negative and condemnatory way. It is a legal status. If my child is guilty of something, it does not merely mean that he feels condemned, but it means also that the law can accuse and condemn him for what he did. He is deserving of some punishment. The word "guilt" carries with it the idea of accountability. A person can be questioned, charged and punished for his actions.

Now if any human being is charged with guilt simply because of what Adam did, can we see what it means? It means that whoever set up that system is not a fair person and according to this teaching of original sin, it is God who set up this system. God makes a new-born baby guilty for what Adam did. The child had no choice in the matter, no input in the matter, but God says, "you are guilty!" This is not jus-

tice, and when a person believes that God is this kind of Person, he is bound to think ill of God. He cannot love or trust this person whose justice is so warped that He would charge somebody with guilt for what somebody else did six thousand years ago.

Let me say clearly, definitely and categorically that neither I nor anybody else at Restoration Ministries believes in the above points. We do not believe anybody except Adam is **guilty** for the sin of Adam. Therefore nobody can be condemned and judged by God for this sin except Adam. I am in full agreement with Larson and Priebe in condemning original sin as it is defined above.

From this understanding of original sin, Larson goes on to point out that there are certain conclusions which follow and that these conclusions lay the foundation for a false concept of the gospel. Some of these conclusions are as follows:

- a. It is impossible for men to ever achieve complete victory over sin while living upon this earth, for sin is man's nature, and he will always have that nature until he is transformed at the coming of Jesus.
- b. Even after a person is converted he continues to be guilty, because of course, he still has his sinful nature which is the source of his guilt.
- c. Weakness, imperfections and tendencies are sin.
- d. It is not possible for man to get rid of this condition while he lives upon this earth, even through the power of Christ.
- e. It would be impossible for Christ to be a saviour if the inheritance of Original sin passed to Him from Mary, so the doctrine of the Immaculate conception was invented, which supposedly prevented Mary from inheriting original sin (so that she could not pass on sin to Christ).
- f. Christ took the sinless nature of Adam which he possessed before the fall, because if He had taken our fallen nature, He also would have

been guilty.

All of the above points seem to demonstrate clearly that the doctrine of *original sin* is a dangerous teaching which leaves Christians with no hope of ever being free from sin in this life and like I said, I agree wholeheartedly that it is a false and dangerous doctrine.

But the question is, what do Priebe and Larson see as the truth? Is their version of the gospel any better than the one which arises from the teaching of original sin? I believe that their solution is no solution at all and introduces a concept of the gospel which is equally without hope.

THE "GOSPEL" OF ORIGINAL SINLESSNESS.

What are the real issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan? It may seem like this is an irrelevant question, but in fact, it is vitally important. Our understanding of this fundamental question is the thing which determines how we see everything else. You see, the whole sin problem is greater than simply the question of how man is to be saved. It goes beyond that. It is a question of how God is to be finally vindicated and how it will be proven to Satan and the entire universe that God was always right from the beginning and Satan was always wrong.

Larson and Priebe seem to understand this and they set out to explain what these underlying issues are. But the more they explain, the more reason there is for alarm. These men see **free choice** as the first fundamental principle of the gospel which they believe to be true. They believe that the entire controversy centers on the issue of free choice and that nobody can be accounted guilty, judged and condemned until he has first exercised the power of choice in choosing to disobey God personally.

Dennis Priebe says,

"The basic presupposition of this gospel is that the heart of the

cosmic controversy between God and Satan revolves around the issue of free choice. God took terrible risks with the universe to protect freedom of choice. ... Thus the issue to be resolved is how unfallen beings, angels and fallen beings will choose in the great controversy, either for God or for Satan..... The gospel is built solidly on the foundation of free choice, the two most important words in the history and the future of the universe."

A little later on he says again,

*"Sin is not basically the way man is, but the way man chooses. Sin is when the mind consents to what seems desirable and thus breaks its relationship with God. To talk of guilt in terms of inherited nature is to overlook the important category of responsibility. Not until we have joined our own will to mankind's rebellion against God, not until we have actively entered into opposition to the will of God does guilt enter in. **Sin is concerned with a man's life, his rebellion against God, his willful disobedience, and the distorted relationship with God which ensues. Sin is concerned with a man's will rather than his nature. If responsibility for sin is to have any meaning, it cannot also be affirmed that fallen human nature makes the man inevitably guilty of sin. Inevitability and responsibility are mutually exclusive concepts in the moral sphere. Thus sin is defined as choosing willfully to rebel against God in thought, word, or action. In this gospel, sin is our willful choice to exercise our fallen nature in opposition to God's will."***

Here, there is a mixture of some truth mingled with error. The problem is that these men have started with some misconceptions, some wrong ideas and they have built on these. What are these misconceptions and wrong ideas?

Continued on page 12

Man's Real Problem

One of the things I've learnt is that before you can get the right answer you must ask the right question. This is a fundamental principle of education. If you ask the wrong question you will get the wrong answer and you may think that you're on the right road but you will be wrong because you never asked the right question. Let us look at the question that these brethren asked. Here is what Priebe says:

"the vital question is, what is the nature of sin for which man is considered guilty. So guilty he must die in the fires of hell unless he's rescued by the grace of God? ...just what it is that the gospel rescues us from, of what must we be forgiven?...we must know wherein our guilt lies so that we will be able to apply the gospel to the right area."

This brother believes that man's real problem is guilt! But if guilt is man's real problem, then when does man begin to have a problem? He has a problem only when he consciously makes a wrong choice. Not before. So logically, young babies have no problem and do not need a Saviour, for they cannot make intelligent choices.

Priebe has asked the wrong question. His question is **"what is the sin that makes man guilty?"** He has assumed already that guilt is the problem. His question should have been, **"what is man's real problem?"** Neither he nor Larson ask this question. They assume that guilt is the problem and when they make that assumption they only have one approach. They have to look at the gospel as a method of dealing with guilt, and this is exactly what they do.

IS GUILT REALLY THE PROBLEM?

I could not understand why, if my son does something wrong I can simply say, "I forgive you," but God says, "I can't forgive you, I've got to have blood!" Now we may say it is required by justice, but what is justice? God's justice

is simply a reflection of God's nature, so if you say that justice requires it what you are telling me is that God requires it! You are really telling me that God is the kind of Person who cannot forgive unless blood is first spilt! So if we take it into the realm of guilt and leave it there, it leaves more questions than answers.



GOD'S CHARACTER DISTORTED?

If guilt is the main reason why the sinner must die, then it would seem that God is mainly responsible for the problem because it is He who set up a system which demands death as the penalty of sin. Of course if we look at it from the point of view of original sin it is even worse. The teaching of original sin says that God set up a system to make you **guilty of another person's sin!** But both concepts make God out to be the person who is the source of our problems.

So when men began to think that guilt was the problem do you know what they set out to do? They set out to change God's mind because in their thinking, God is the one who imposes condemnation upon us. So what is it that needs to change? God's attitude is what needs to change and because of this humanity has built up different concepts of the gospel where they try

to do things to appease God's wrath. They believe that when they offer a sacrifice its purpose is to make God happy. They believe that all our worship is simply aimed at persuading God to change His mind. The focus is on changing God, not on changing us.

With this concept, people think of God as some kind of tyrant who needs to be appeased. Every heathen religion builds around this belief that God has something against us and we need to do something to get Him to change his mind. But how do we do that? According to the concept of popular Christianity, God says, "you are guilty but your guilt is such a terrible thing and my justice is such an inflexible thing I cannot forgive you unless I have blood! And if I don't have your blood I must have somebody's blood, so do you know what I'll do? I'll kill my Son and when I see the blood I will change my mind about you!"

But guilt is not the main problem of mankind. Something caused the guilt. Something was at the root of those actions which made me guilty and that is the main problem. If God forgives a person a thousand times in a day and the person's nature remains the same, He must forgive him a thousand times all over the following day, because his problem will never be solved as long as God keeps on dealing only with guilt!

I remember my father telling a story of a lady who kept praying at prayer meeting every week, "Lord, please take these cobwebs out of my life." She continued this prayer week after week, month after month, until one night a wise brother prayed, "Lord, please kill the spider that is making these cobwebs in our dear sister's heart!" The cobwebs are not the real problem at all. They only reveal that there is a problem. The problem is the spider. He has got to be dealt with or the problem will never be solved.

In James 2:10, we read:

"For whosoever shall keep the

whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)"

Now is this reasonable? You tell a lie and God charges you with murder, stealing, adultery, dishonouring your parents, covetousness and every other crime in fact. But all you did was tell a little lie! If you look at it from the point of view of just dealing with superficial guilt it does not make sense. You think, "what kind of God are you, why do You do this. If I told a lie charge me with telling a lie! Why do you put every crime to my account?"

The point is, the man who tells a lie demonstrates that his entire life is out of harmony with God. There is nothing right about him. All his command-keeping means nothing because that lie demonstrates that his nature is out of harmony with God, so everything is wrong. It is not the individual action which makes him guilty of all, it is the fact that the root of sin is alive and what is that root? It is the sinful nature, the sinful mind, the mind separated from God.

THE CARNAL MIND

No wonder we have struggled and fought for so long! We have looked at the gospel as a device whose main purpose is to change God's mind about us rather than something designed to change our lives! But the fact is, before I was guilty I had a problem. I needed help before I became guilty for I was born with a carnal mind. I was born with a nature that was at enmity with God and if that is not changed, whether I am guilty or not I am an enemy of God and I cannot be saved in that state. This is the reality that the gospel must deal with. These men don't touch that in their articles, they have viewed it entirely as a question of guilt and many false ideas have arisen from this misconception.

What then is the truth? It is true that we are born originally with corrupt, fallen flesh. Nobody has to be taught that. You have a body that is dying and you can tell. It is weak. The cravings

for what is wrong are built into our bodies and we do have a conflict with our bodies when they call us in a certain direction. But we are also born in a condition where we are separated from God, resulting in minds which are corrupt and sinful by nature, totally incapable of good.

Anybody of the race of humanity who is not born again cannot see the kingdom of God, nobody is excluded. Before a person can make a choice he does have a problem which makes it necessary for him to be born again. That is the critical truth.

Now again Elder Larson objects to this fact. First, Elder Larson quotes from Edward Heppenstall as follows:

"God respected Adam and Eve's free will and choice and withdrew from the human race. All Adam's offspring came into the world without God. Every child is born with an impossible self centeredness. All men except Christ are born without God." (Edward Heppenstall - The Man who is God, pp.107)

Elder Larson comments,

"this is certainly a depressing picture of parenthood and childhood...."

"the idea that God withdrew from the human race leaving every child to be born without God must be laid aside too. It does not bear up under investigation."

What he is saying is that children are not born in a state of separation from God. Now if this is so it means that children do not need to be born again.

When Adam committed sin in the garden he separated himself from God. In other words the life of God that was in him departed from him. He gave a heritage to the human race where we are born in a state of separation from God. This is why everybody needs to be born again. When we are born again what happens? The spirit of God comes again to live inside our bodies isn't that right? But the only reason

why we need to be born again is because the way we were born the first time is not good enough. We were born separated from God and we cannot be saved in that condition!

This is not to say that God is not working with little children. But the act of being born again where the spirit of God dwells in your heart and controls your life is something that awaits the new birth and until a person experiences this, he is in a state of separation from God. So every man must be born again.

Now I know the question arises, suppose somebody dies when he is a baby, does that mean that he cannot be saved? If a baby dies too young to make a choice, too young to be able to decide if he wants Christ in his life the gospel makes provision for that child and this provision involves a change of nature. But if he lives he has to make a choice and if he does not make that choice he cannot be saved. He must be born again. Something must be introduced into him that he was not originally born with.

Brothers Priebe and Larson believe that children are not born separated from God and so all a person has to do upon coming to the age of accountability is just to choose the right actions. Everytime a person has to make a decision he must make the right choice and after a while he will be doing all the right things and so he will be a perfect person. They say this is what Jesus did and because Jesus did it we can do the same thing.

To be frank, I find Priebe's and Larson's concept appalling. They have developed a large following among independents and have become very influential and I am honestly disappointed at discovering how simplistic and inadequate their concept of the gospel is. Even more disappointing is the realization that some who have embraced the truth about God have been taken in by the false gospel which these men present.



The Nature of Christ

Now of course, our understanding of these issues determines how we understand the nature of Christ, or maybe it is the other way around. Our understanding of the nature of Christ determines how we view the other issues. Priebe and Larson say Jesus had a sinful nature and it did not make Him commit sin, so our sinful nature should not be a problem to us.

Brother Priebe believes that Jesus' inheritance was just the same as our inheritance with absolutely, no difference. He says,

Building on the foundation, we move to the nature of Christ. If sin is not nature but choice, then Christ could inherit our fallen nature without thereby becoming a sinner. He remained ever sinless because His conscious choice was always in obedience to God, never allowing His fallen nature to control His choices. His inheritance was just the same as our inheritance, with no need to resort to special intervention by God to prevent Jesus from receiving human fallenness from Mary. (p.7)

One of the things that puzzled me when I began to study this issue years ago, was the question, "why did Jesus never sin while all the rest of us sin?" I asked many people that question but nobody gave me a good answer. They said Jesus just never chose to sin. I said, "there must have been something different!" They said, "no he was exactly the same." I even went so far as to say, "so what are you saying, that I could have been Christ?" and that question kind of made them stop to think a little bit because there was no adequate answer to that.

The truth is that there *was* something different about Christ. The body was the degenerate body of a descendant of Adam, but the mind was the mind of the Son of God. A. T. Jones said,

*Now as to Christ's not having "like passions" with us: In the Scriptures all the way through He is like us and with us according to the flesh. He is the seed of David according to the flesh. He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. Don't go too far. He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, **not in the likeness of sinful mind. Do not drag His mind into it.** His flesh was our flesh, but the mind was "the mind of Christ Jesus." Therefore it is written: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." If He had taken our mind, how, then, could we ever have been exhorted to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus?" It would have been so already. But what kind of mind is ours? O, it is corrupted with sin also....(AT Jones - 1895 General Conference Bulletin)*

Now this was the nature of Jesus. He was born with a sin-affected body, but with a pure, divine mind. We are not born like that. Our nature is that we are born with sinful flesh and sinful minds. Both parts are corrupt.

When I became involved with the *Truth about God* movement, I had to look at these issues closely and I came to understand something. I came to understand that every intelligent being in the universe has two parts to his nature. There is the spiritual nature and there is the physical nature! The argument is not as simple as Priebe, Larson and their supporters have made it. The Bible teaches clearly that man has a body and man has a spirit. If Trinitarians are ignorant of this, those of us in the movement which emphasizes the truth about God should surely not be united with them in this ignorance.

Now if you tell me that Christ came with my fallen physical nature (the body), exactly as I am in its fallen state,

I will say, "Amen!" But if you tell me that Christ came with my spiritual nature in its carnal state, at enmity with God, I will call you a heretic!! Because the Bible says that the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God and it cannot be (Rom. 8:7)!"

Now don't tell me that Christ came with that mind. If you say that Christ came with that mind, you just have no concept of the kind of Saviour that Christ was. Ellen White, referring to Christ says, "**a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh** (YI Dec. 20, 1900)." Now you hardly ever hear that quotation. You always hear the quotations which say, "Christ came and took our sinful nature," and of course, in these quotations Ellen White was speaking about the body which He took. On the flesh side, who was He? Gal. 4:4 says,

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (Gal 4:4)

Jesus Christ was made of a woman. He got His body from Mary. What was His genetic heritage? Go to Luke 3:23-38 and look at His ancestry on His mother's side, and you will see that He came from a line of sinners. This was His flesh and blood heritage. He was the Son of man, he was a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh, and He took our sinful, fallen heritage, as far as the flesh is concerned. But don't tell me that He took our carnal mind!

A DIVINE HUMAN BEING

In heaven, there was a being whose name was Michael. There was a day when a miracle took place and I don't know how it happened, but this Michael lost His glorious form, lost His powers, lost His memories, and this Michael was transplanted into a flesh and blood body inside of a woman's belly. The flesh and blood was not Michael. It was

the body which had been prepared for Him. What part was the part which had been in heaven as Michael? It was whatever was implanted in that body (we call it spirit or mind). It was the Son of God. And the Bible says of Him, when He came here,

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

What kind of glory was it? It was the glory “as of the only begotten of the Father!” There was a glory seen in this person which no angel could have displayed. No mere son of Adam could have displayed this glory. Ellen White says,

.... we cannot explain how divinity was clothed with humanity. An angel would not have known how to sympathize with fallen man.... {RH, October 1, 1889 par. 9}

To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, “with healing in His wings.” Mal. 4:2. {DA 22.1}

This glory manifested in Christ, was something which could be seen only in, “the only begotten of the Father.” That is who He was, and He took this glorious “Son of God” identity and united it with the fallen seed of Adam. And so He elevated humanity to a place, higher than that of the angels, while He brought divinity down into humanity. That is the wonder of the incarnation.

So when we argue, “did He take the sinful, or the sinless nature?” We have not even yet begun to touch the question. Now these men have not considered this at all, it never enters into their discussion. I don't know if brothers

Larson and Priebe have discussed this anywhere else, but in those two articles which I received, they never touch this question. They don't seem to recognize that man is a two-part being and so their argument is on a superficial level.

They have ignored, or not understood the fact that there is a spiritual nature to be considered. They say Christ lived without sin so you can live without sin by the same method, Christ overcame by discipline. Christ overcame by always making the right choices and so you can in the same way, always make the right choices and be just like him by making the right choices as he made the right choices.

A SHOCKING STATEMENT

Larson says something that shocked me. He says,

“in Christ means to follow and imitate Christ, in Adam means to follow and imitate Adam. we are in Christ because we have deliberately chosen to follow him and make him our life leader, model and guide.”

Now that's bad but not as bad as what he says next. He continues by saying,

“this is the only thing that ‘in Christ’ can mean.” (That is, that He is our Leader, model and guide!)

Who is a leader? Somebody that you follow. Who is a model? Somebody that you imitate. Who is a guide? Somebody who instructs you.

What about the truth that Christ is my life? What about the fact that I get life from Christ? That, is the heart of Christianity! But elder Larson is telling me that the only thing that “in Christ,” means is that He's my Leader, He's my Model, He's my Guide. He stays outside of me and He pulls me and He pushes me and He instructs me but basically I'm on my own.

I find Larson's statements incredible. Yet, he is consistent because he believes that we are born capable of making the right choices and choosing

good works. He believes that our only problem is that we choose to make wrong choices.

Therefore, he never speaks of the new birth, he never emphasizes the need of the holy spirit. In truth, if I accept his gospel, why do I really need any of these things? I am already capable from the moment I am born! Larson regards this as the gospel, but it is not the gospel of the apostles or of Christ. This is the gospel of man's goodness and ability. The true gospel is all about what God has done for humanity in His Son. The true gospel makes me know that I cannot live for one moment without Christ. ***This false gospel makes me think that all I need is a Leader, Model and Guide.*** Those who desire victory over sin should beware of any teaching which builds on the principles outlined by these two men.

These brothers are building something that they call the gospel and it is based upon the concept of imitation. But imitation cannot make a wolf into a sheep, there's something fundamentally different between a wolf and a sheep and it's not the kind of hair that grows on their bodies. There is something about the nature that is drastically different and no matter how a wolf imitates a sheep, he will not become a sheep. No matter how a sinner imitates Christ, it will not make him into a Christian.

Christianity is the result of a miracle that God alone can perform, the Bible calls it the new birth. It is an act of God, it is the work of God, it is not the work of man. This is the main reason why Christ had to die and be resurrected. It was in order to put man's carnal nature to death and to provide a life for him in which sin had been abolished. Man's only input is to accept the gift, to yield himself and to accept the gift.



True Freedom of Choice

Now Priebe and Larson are partially right when they emphasize freedom of choice and state that this is the critical factor in dealing with sin. They are correct that it is important in the context of the great controversy, but they, along with millions of Adventists and hundreds of millions of Christians have totally misunderstood the meaning of “freedom of choice.” They have completely misunderstood what they must choose and how they must choose, and as a result, they have set out to accomplish a task which is impossible.

I have no hesitation in saying that *all those who seek victory by the means which Priebe and Larson describe will never find it*. They will wallow in the hopeless mire of self-effort until Christ returns and be no closer to the victorious life than at the beginning. It matters not whether we believe in the keeping of the commandments or not. It matters not whether we are Trinitarians or whether we can perfectly define the nature and identity of God. The path outlined by Priebe and Larson is a dead end road and I pray God that all those of us who have been travelling this path will get off it as fast as possible. It goes nowhere.

But there is somebody who explains this far better than I can. Let us consider a quotation from the book, *Steps to Christ*. This quotation has become one of my favourites, although for years, it was one of the hardest for me to understand. At one time I was almost ready to throw the book away because I said, “Sister White doesn’t know what she is talking about.” But praise God, when I finally understood the quotation, it became one of the great blessings of my life. Listen to what it says,

Many are inquiring, “How am I to make the surrender of myself to God?” You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the hab-

its of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; {SC 47}

Now when I was reading this, back then, my heart was quickening because I said “this lady understands exactly what I am going through, surely now she’s going to give me an answer.” I had made so many promises, so many resolutions, so many determinations that I was going to be better, and I had failed over and over, just like a rope of sand, you hold on to a rope of sand and try to pull it and see what happens. you will never move even a fraction of an inch. There I was, she was describing me. My ears, went up, expecting an answer, I was waiting and expecting, but look what I got

...but you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. {SC 47}

What was Ellen White saying? Is will power the answer? Now you see that she says **choice** and **decision** are critical, and she ties this to the “right action of the will. Well you know I read it, and I thought, “will power is the answer, so I am going to put my will to work.” So I set out to exercise my will, and you know what? I came upon the same hurdles, I was weak in moral power, controlled by the habits of the life of sin, my resolutions were like ropes of sand, all my will power did not make my resolutions any stronger than simply ropes of sand. In addition,

I found another quotation in the same book which seemed to directly contradict what I was reading about the power of the will. It said,

It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Job 14:4; Romans 8:7. Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life.... {SC 18,19}

Our real problem is identified; “*our hearts are evil and we cannot change them.*” We were born this way and in this condition it is not possible for us to behave in a way which is pleasing to God. This problem is what the gospel must deal with. We are told plainly that the exercise of **the will** and human effort are **powerless**.

So I gave up, closed the book, and I was ready to dump it. For years after that I did not read much of it. But not too long ago I went back and I read it again, and do you know what I found? I found out that a few lines further on, it says,

*...You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can **give Him your will**; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. {SC 47}*

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE A NEW MASTER

Do you see what it is saying? You cannot do good. You cannot choose to do

the right *things*. You will always fail. You cannot change your heart, so your affections are always on the wrong things. Your will cannot make you do the right thing, your will cannot change those ropes of sand into ropes of steel, your will cannot make you make the right choices. ***But you can choose to serve Him!! You can give Him your will. There's only one thing that God gave you your will to do, it is to give that will to Christ!*** This is the only thing you can do. He will then work in you and work His will in you. You cannot choose to do what is right in terms of actions. But you can choose Christ. You can choose to give yourself to Him!! This is the true force of the will which you need to understand. When you give yourself to Him, then the work of *your* will is over. For you, the battle has come to an end. Now it is *His* work. Now it is He who works to will and to do

There we have it, *free choice*. The power of choice God has given to men,

it is theirs to exercise. *You cannot change your heart*, (will power will not change that), *you cannot of yourself give to God it's affections*, (will power will not do that), but *you can choose to serve Him*. You can give Him your will!

Therefore doing good is no longer impossible or even difficult, for Christ has already conquered sin. When He is living in you, when you have chosen Him, then it is He who makes the choices, He who works His will. Your part has come to an end. This is why good works appear in your life. The failures and defeats are over.

Now you know why I took the book back up and I held it to my breast. I recognized that God is not saying you must choose the right actions and must continue to choose the right actions moment by moment when you are confronted by wrong. He says, "give me your will, give me your will and then I'll do the rest." He will work in us to

will and to do His good pleasure if we give our will to Him. That is the right place of the will.

Yes the controversy is built on freedom of choice, but it's not a question of choosing actions, God is not saying that you must make a choice as you face each individual temptation and each time choose to do good. It is not that you are to go through life making this choice and that choice and finally developing to a place where you are always choosing all the right things, so you are then perfect. That is a method of attempting to become perfect by works. This is not God's way. The right method is to make a decision to give myself away entirely, to make a decision to abandon myself once and for all and to accept Christ instead of me. Not to choose actions, but to choose a person. That is the right use of the will.



Available Materials

Sermons on Righteousness by Faith

Audiotape or CD format

Becoming what you areDavid Clayton
 Clarifying the issuesDavid Clayton
 What is your identityHoward Williams
 In ChristDavid Clayton
 The end of the struggleDavid Clayton
 The GospelHoward Williams
 SurrenderDavid Clayton
 The fight of faithHoward Williams
 No other gods before meDavid Clayton
 The new creationDavid Clayton
 True repentanceDavid Clayton
 In ChristDavid Clayton
 Why did Jesus have to dieDavid Clayton
 Freedom from the lawDavid Clayton
 A finished workDavid Clayton
 The two covenantsDavid Clayton
 Being faithful to the faithDavid Clayton
 Amazing GraceDavid Clayton
 The Goal of the LawDavid Clayton

The Judgment of ChristDavid Clayton
 Life After deathDavid Clayton
 The Three GospelsDavid Clayton

Tape of The Month

Our tape for the month of November is entitled "**The Three Gospels.**" This message is available on either audio tape or DVD. It is a message which deals with the issue which is the subject of this edition of Open Face. This message has already been sent in DVD format to those who are on our tape list.

If you are not on this list and would like to have this message in audio CD or DVD format, then write and let us know. We will be happy to send it to you.

The Issues In The Controversy

It is not only the doctrine of original sin which has caused confusion, but Priebe's and Larson's gospel of *original Sinlessness* has also caused confusion and the development of false doctrines as well.

The doctrine of these men is based on their belief that the goal of God in the controversy is to prove that man is capable of living without committing sin. Since they believe that man has no problem apart from his wrong actions, their entire focus is on man's works. On what man can, and must do in order to stop sinning. Their teaching is based on the premise that man is able to do good, all he needs to do is to choose the right actions.

This really puts the pressure on man. It places the emphasis on the capabilities of humanity. It is really saying that God made man capable and that if he only receives a little help (because of his weak nature) then he will be able to live a perfect life as Adam was able to do in the beginning. In this scenario the emphasis is on living right, on doing what is good. The focus is on works.

But the truth is, there is nothing good in man. There never was any creature in the universe who was ever good, or capable of good in himself. God alone is good and it was always this way. Adam was only good and only capable of good because God was living inside of him. When he separated from God all his goodness departed. God is not trying to prove that man is capable of good with a little help. God is trying to prove that man is totally incapable of any good in himself, but if man will allow Him to come to live again in him, then He, God, is perfectly capable of living a perfect life in such a person.

The emphasis is not on man's efforts to do what is right, but on man's need to yield to Christ, to surrender himself entirely to the Lord so that Christ may live and not him. The emphasis is not on works, but on the person of Christ.

It is the emphasis that Christ alone is my righteousness.

We see that this truth does not in any sense negate or downplay the issue of free choice. Man must choose. His free-will is preserved. But again, the emphasis is radically different from that focused on by Priebe and Larson. The choice which is made is not a choice to obey the law; it is not a choice to do good. The individual recognizes that such a thing is an impossibility and he does not waste his energies in trying to do what is impossible. Instead it is a choice to choose Christ. It is a choice to give up my own life and to choose the life in Christ instead. From that moment, when I have made that single great choice, Christ and not I, then it is He who lives. It is now He who makes the choices. I wear His yoke so I have no choices to make. I can experience His rest, the easy yoke and the light burden, for it is now He who works in me to will and to do of His good pleasure. The burden is gone and my heavy labour is ended.

Let us consider a fundamental truth that many do not seem to remember. The controversy does not center on man. It is not between man and Satan. It centers on Christ and His Father. It is between them and Satan. The issue is not what man can do. It is not a controversy to display what kind of good creature God created, or how much ability there is in man.

THE CRITICAL QUESTION

The real issue in the controversy is the question, *do we all really need God in order to live right?* Lucifer claimed in the beginning that we are able to live and to live right without needing God. Essentially this is what he told Adam and Eve in the garden. This was what he convinced millions of angels of. It was not that they could overthrow the power and the might of God, but that they could live without Him, that they could establish a rival government built on different principles.

God's government is essentially this: **Christ in you** (Luke 17:21; Col. 1:27). God has said that it is impossible for any creature to be good in himself. Satan says it is a lie and he set out to prove it. God says, "I alone am good, and without me you can do nothing. Without me you are utterly depraved."

So the controversy centers on a demonstration of two alternatives. Goodness by the effort of the creature, or goodness by union with Christ. If man is able in himself to choose and to do good, even before he is born again, then man does not need God in order to be good. All he needs is the right information, the correct education. In essence, he only needs to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil like Satan told him. If he is "like God, knowing good from evil," then he is able to choose good and refuse the bad.

But God has set out to prove that it is a lie. Satan's claim is pure folly. Only God is good in all the universe. Without Him, there is nothing but evil and corruption. Therefore the only hope for any creature is to be filled with Christ's life. Every person must so give himself up to Christ that Christ may be able to live His life within him, producing His own righteousness within him. So Christ says, "without me, ye can do nothing." In actual fact, the victory of God in the controversy depends upon demonstrating that man can do absolutely nothing by himself, but that when Christ lives in him, he is perfectly righteous and able to do "all things." The doctrine of Priebe and Larson which some of us seem to have accepted, is really an attempt to prove that God is wrong.

Think about what happened at the beginning. Lucifer said in heaven, "I will not have this man to rule over me. I will be god, I don't want him to rule over me," and God said, "I will allow you to be god in your own little world." So Satan came to this planet and tempted Adam and Eve to pluck a fruit, but do we think the fruit was the real issue? If the fruit was the issue, all

Adam would have had to do is say, "I'm sorry," and God would have made another fruit grow in its place. That was not the issue at all, the issue was that Adam had said to God, "I don't want you ruling my life, I want to be god here," and the moment he became god in his life, all his actions were wrong, he was now making the choices, it was his will at work and *even if a person does the good thing, as long as it is he who is making the choice, he is still wrong.*

The only person fit to live and rule in this universe is God. But when *you* are making the choices, don't you know that you are still ruling? As long as you are making the choices, you are still god. The only time God rules, is when you give away your right to choose and let Him do all the choosing. You don't reserve the right to choose anymore, If *we* still make the choice whether to do this or that, then we are still kings of our lives. To become a Christian means I give up my right to choose, I give my will to Christ. That's when He truly can make me into a new creation. Then He works in me to will and to do of His good pleasure. The victorious life is not obtained by making the right choices, action by individual action. It is achieved by making the one decisive choice to give it all to Christ.

ONLY ONE MASTER

Jesus said, "no man can serve two masters." He says, "if you try to serve

two masters, you will love one and you will hate the other." At one time I thought that the two masters were Christ and Satan, but I realize that I was wrong. The two masters are Christ and self. Satan does not rule on the inside. He tries to get us to adopt his principles and in that way, his principles become our principles, but he does not live on the inside, only two masters can live on the inside of a person, one of them is Christ, and the other one is you, the individual. We cannot have self and Christ ruling at the same time.

Well what about if I serve one today and one tomorrow, will that work? Did Jesus' statement cover that possibility? If you serve self today and Christ tomorrow, aren't you in reality serving two masters? And Jesus said it is not possible. When He says you must serve one master, He means that there is no other master on the horizon, one doesn't come in intermittently, one doesn't come in next week or the week after. One master, one person rules all the time.

No man can serve two masters and that illustration in Romans 7:1-6 of the woman and the two husbands, brings it out clearly, because one of the husbands is the self or the flesh, and the other husband is Christ. The woman is wanting to be married to Christ, but something is preventing her. What is it? It is the fact that she is married to the flesh. As long as she is married to

the flesh, she cannot have Christ. As long as self is alive, a person cannot have Christ. This is the absolute teaching of the word of God, you must die before Christ can live. If the husband is sick, the wife does not have the right to marry another husband, and if he's gone on a long journey, she does not have the right to marry another husband. The only time she is free to marry is when he is dead.

As you have read these articles, it is my hope and prayer that you have given them careful thought and prayer. The proper understanding of these issues is the key to the life of victory in Christ. Sadly, the desire for human glory has set many off on the path of human endeavour and the gospel which they have embraced is really no better than the religions of paganism. The outward forms may be different, but in principle it is the same. It is the idea that salvation depends upon human effort.

May God help you my brothers and sisters that you may see that our entire salvation is provided by our Father, in His Son, and that realizing this, you may seek it in the only way in which it may be obtained: By letting go of humanity entirely, and trusting only in Christ.



Northwestern Pennsylvania Campmeeting Sermons

The DVD's of the sermons from the Northwestern Pennsylvania Campmeeting are now available from **Seed of Truth Ministries**.

DVD's are available for a donation of \$5.00 ea. or a \$55.00 donation for all 12 DVD's

DVD's can be ordered separately or mixed.

Sermons Available:

Willis Smith 2 DVD's
Richard Stratton 2 DVD's
David Clayton 2 DVD's
Calvin Bickel 2 DVD's
Lynnford Beachy 2 DVD's
Dennis Stickney 1 DVD
Baptisms, Song service,
Questions and Answers, 1 DVD

For more information contact us at

seedoftruth@comcast.net

or call **(814) 676-8660** (10 to 4 EST.)

or mail us at

Seed of Truth Ministries
P.O. Box 233
Cranberry, Pa. 16319

Two False Gospels

Continued from page 3

These men are ignoring the critical question of what is the make-up of man's nature? Priebe and Larson teach that,

- a. The only time man has a problem is when he is old enough to choose,
- b. Before a man is capable of choosing, he has no problem. People are born originally sinless.

This is the conclusion one draws from their teaching. But how old does a person have to be before he can make an intelligent choice? It depends on the person, but perhaps this place is arrived at by the time a child is three, six, maybe nine years old (depending on the intelligence of the child). But at some time he will come to an age which we refer to as "the age of accountability." We refer to it in this way because at this time he is now aware

of moral issues, he is aware of right and wrong, and he is able to choose intelligently, either for God, or for Satan. According to the thinking of these men, before this point, the child has no problem. This is a totally false idea.

If you accept what these men are saying in these articles then you come to the conclusion that a man does not need salvation, he does not need Christ until he comes to the place where he can make a choice. When a person makes a wrong choice, then at that point he becomes a sinner and at that point he needs Christ. What about before he comes to the age of accountability and he can make this right or wrong choice? Does he have a problem that requires Christ? Jesus came to save sinners. But Priebe says there is no sin before a person chooses willfully to rebel against God in thought, word or action. Obviously it means that such a

person does not need salvation.

Now the answer to this is vitally important because if there is a person born on this planet who does not need Christ to be saved, our entire understanding of the plan of salvation needs to be revised. Jesus says, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" Now when he says, "a man," does that let off the women? No, because He is speaking in the generic sense. He means men, women, and children, including babies. He means mankind as a whole. Nobody can be saved unless he is born again.



Open Face

*Restoration Ministries
P.O. Box 23, Knockpatrick
Manchester, Jamaica W.I.
ph. (304) 932-4543
Jamaica: (876) 603-0821*