

Seventh-day Adventism—The Spirit Behind the Church

Suggested Sources to Respond to Representations Made in the Video

Response prepared by
The Ellen G. White Estate and the Biblical Research Institute
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Chapter 1—Ellen G. White was the founder of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Answer:

The Seventh-day Adventist church was founded by Joseph Bates, Ellen G. White, and James White (not Ellen G. White alone).

Resources:

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, vol. 10, 1996 ed., p. 170; vol. 11, pp. 873, 890.

Chapter 2—*Seventh-day Adventists depend on Ellen G. White for their teachings. She is “the last word on doctrine.”*

Answer:

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The church’s statement of “27 Fundamental Beliefs” cites the Scriptures, not Ellen White, for each of its beliefs. In the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* the church’s beliefs are presented and explained in the context of the Scriptures, not Ellen White. Neither Ellen White nor the church has ever taught that she was the last word on doctrine.

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 1988, see esp. pp. 227-228.
- “The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings,” *Adventist Review*, Dec. 23, 1982. (Available on the Internet at: <http://www.WhiteEstate.org/issues/scripsda.html>).
- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 416-425.
- Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, pp. 29-33.
- Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 663-670.

Chapter 3—*October 22, 1844, was not the correct date for the Jewish Day of Atonement in 1844.*

Answer:

There was more than one way of reckoning the Jewish calendar year. The Millerites considered the Karaite reckoning to be the closest to the Biblical reckoning.

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, 1996 ed., p. 805.
- George Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 1993, pp. 163-164, 189.
- LeRoy E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 4, pp. 799-805, 821-822, with charts on pp. 790-792.
- For additional evidence based upon astronomy and calendation, see William H. Shea, “Day of Atonement and October 22, 1844,” in *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, pp. 132-137. (“Daniel and Revelation Committee Series,” vol. 1.).

Chapter 4—*Millerite meetings were full of fanaticism.*

Answer:

Contemporary accounts indicate that Millerite meetings overall were remarkably free from fanaticism.

Resources:

- Francis D. Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, 1944 (Christian Home Library edition), pp. 339-354.
- George Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 1993, pp. 171-178.

Chapter 5—*Although William Miller admitted his mistake regarding October 22, 1844, Ellen White never did.*

Answer:

This is true. After the Great Disappointment, William Miller admitted his mistake regarding Christ's returning on October 22, 1844, and he also gave up believing that October 22 had any prophetic significance. On the other hand, Ellen White never discarded her belief in the prophetic significance of the October 22 date, so she had no reason to admit a mistake had been made regarding

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the calculation, beyond the obvious fact that Christ had not returned that day. Several references showing her consistent position are given below.

Resources:

- Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, 1858, pp. 148-150.
- Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 1884, pp. 251-257.
- Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 1911, pp. 403-408.

Chapter 6—Ellen White saw a mistake in the Millerite prophetic chart during her first vision.

Answer:

The vision in which Ellen White saw the Millerite prophetic chart was given her on September 23, 1850. Her first vision was in December, 1844.

Resources:

Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 1945 (Christian Home Library edition), p. 74.

Chapter 7—According to Ellen White, God made the mistake on the Millerite prophetic chart referred to in statement 6.

Answer:

God, in His providence, permitted events to unfold as they did for His own divine purposes.

Resources:

- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, p. 490.
- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 342-344.

Chapter 8—Ellen White's writings are unavailable, "locked away in a vault."

Answer:

All of Ellen White's published writings are available on CD-ROM and on the Internet (<http://www.WhiteEstate.org>). All of her unpublished materials are currently available at the main office of the White Estate at the General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland; at three branch offices located in the United States: Andrews University, Loma Linda University, and Oakwood College; as well as at eleven Research Centers operated throughout the world. The vault provides fire protection and security for the original documents.

Resources:

Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 483-484.

Chapter 9—If not all predictions by a prophet come to pass, then the person must be a false prophet.

Answer:

Whenever humans have a role in the fulfillment of a prophecy, a conditional element is implicit with the prophecy.

Resources:

- Jeremiah 18:7-10.

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- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 29, 30.
- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 102-111.

Chapter 10—Ellen White falsely predicted that old Jerusalem would never be rebuilt.

Answer:

This prediction referred to a movement then underway (in 1850) to gather believers in the second advent to Jerusalem where a literal kingdom would be established in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy prior to Christ's return. Ellen White's predictive warning saved many former Millerites from this deception.

Resources:

- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 488-489.
- *The Gathering of Israel: A Historical Study of Early Writings*, pp. 74-76. Available on the Internet at: <http://www.WhiteEstate.org/issues/gather.html>

Chapter 11—Ellen White falsely claimed that time was short, that she would be living when Christ returned, and still later that some in the audience to whom she was speaking would be alive when Christ returned.

Answer:

Time was always presented to Ellen White in vision as being very short, so there was no reason why she would not expect to be living when Christ returned. However, the conditional nature of prophecy when human response is involved must be kept in mind. See item 9 above. Also Revelation 22:7, 12, 20.

Resources:

- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 102-111.
- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 487-488.

Chapter 12—During the American Civil War, Ellen White predicted the downfall of the United States.

Answer:

Ellen White used the phrase "humbled in the dust," which suggests something quite different from the literal downfall and destruction of the United States.

Resources:

Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 119-121.

Chapter 13—Also during the Civil War, Ellen White predicted that Great Britain would enter the

war on the side of the Confederate States.

Answer:

A careful reading of the context of what Ellen White actually wrote leads to a conclusion different from the one given on the video.

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Resources:

- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 122-123.
- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, p. 487.

Chapter 14—Ellen White held racist views that certain races of people resulted from cohabitation of humans with beasts (amalgamation).

Answer:

Both a careful reading of Ellen White's statement in *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 75, as well as the whole tenor of her life and teachings belies the notion that she viewed any race as sub-human. She wrote, "No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 386.

Resources:

- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 306-322.
- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 491-492.
- Ellen G. White, "The Brotherhood of Mankind," *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, pp. 485-488.

Chapter 15—After the Great Disappointment in 1844, Ellen White was shown in vision that salvation had closed for the world (the "Shut Door").

Answer:

While Ellen White believed for a time that no sinners would be converted after 1844, she was never instructed in a vision that the door of salvation was shut for the world. For a detailed analysis of the changing understanding of the expression "Shut Door," see the references given next.

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, 1996 ed., pp. 249-252.
- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 161-252.
- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 157, 500-509, 549- 550, 554-568.
- Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 59-64, 74.
- P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 1977, 1988, pp. 149-155.

Chapter 16—When Ellen White's earliest writings were reprinted, certain deletions were made in order to cover up her teaching regarding the "Shut Door."

Answer:

For a detailed analysis of deletions made in subsequent editions of Ellen White's books, and the reasons why, see the references given next.

Resources:

- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 267-285, 619-643.
- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 557-559.
- P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 1977, 1988, pp. 149-155.

Chapter 17—*The Adventists’ view of “soul sleep” was adopted to allow for their belief in an investigative judgment.*

Answer:

The Biblical teaching on the state of the dead was introduced to the Millerite Adventists prior to the Disappointment in 1844, and thus prior to any understanding of the investigative judgment. See also item 27 below.

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, 1996 ed., pp. 788-792.
- Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry*, 1944 (Christian Home Library edition), pp. 204-205.
- George Knight, *Millennial Fever*, 1993, pp. 193-197.
- LeRoy E. Froom, *Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 2, 1965, pp. 305-314.

Chapter 18—*Ellen White denied the assurance of the gospel by teaching that when a person’s name comes up in the investigative judgment, even one unconfessed sin will prevent the individual from being saved.*

Answer:

Ellen White wrote that “no repentance is genuine that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct. Holiness is wholeness for God; it is the entire surrender of heart and life to the indwelling of the principles of heaven.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 555, 556. While holding on to even one sin is sufficient to lose one’s salvation, Ellen White believed in the efficacy of Christ’s atonement and intercession to fully restore sinners to God’s favor, thus providing assurance during the judgment time. She wrote, “If you are right with God today, you are ready if Christ should come today.”—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 227. The last words Ellen White spoke to her son were, “I know in whom I have believed.”—*Life Sketches*, p. 449.

Resources:

Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 483, 484.

Chapter 19—*Seventh-day Adventists have their own version of the Bible (The Clear Word), including one that contains Ellen White quotations printed in it.*

Answer:

The cover and title page of J. J. Blanco’s *The Clear Word* clearly identify his work as “an expanded paraphrase of the Bible.” It is published in the author’s name, not the name of the church. The first sentence of the preface reads, “This is not a new translation but an interpretive paraphrase of the Scriptures.” Seventh-day Adventists have never produced their own version of the Bible. In her lifetime, Ellen White made use of the various translations available.

The Ellen G. White Study Bible brings together relevant statements of commentary from Ellen White while preserving a format that maintains the rightful distinction between her words and the Scriptural text (as do the wide variety of study Bibles prepared by other commentators available in Christian book stores).

Chapter 20—Ellen White taught an “incomplete atonement.”

Answer:

Ellen White never described Christ’s atonement as incomplete. On the contrary, here are two statements representative of her teaching:

“We are to rejoice that **the atonement is complete**; and believing in Christ as our complete Saviour, we may know that the Father loves us, even as He loves His Son.”—*Review and Herald*, Nov. 11, 1890 (emphasis supplied).

“Do you realize your sinfulness? Do you despise sin? Then remember that the righteousness of Christ is yours if you will grasp it. Can you not see what a strong foundation is placed beneath your feet when you accept Christ? God has accepted the offering of His Son as a **complete atonement** for the sins of the world.”—*The Youth’s Instructor*, Sept. 20, 1900 (emphasis supplied).

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 1988, pp. 107-117.
- *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 341-348.

Chapter 21—Ellen White taught the heresy that Christ is the archangel Michael.

Answer:

The archangel Michael’s identity has been debated through the centuries. Both Ellen White and many non-Adventist Bible scholars equate Michael with Christ. This view does not require any lessening of Christ’s full deity.

Resources:

The Biblical evidence and the views of commentators are summarized in *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 71-86. See also many contemporary evangelical Bible commentaries on such passages as Revelation 12.

Chapter 22—Jehovah’s Witnesses derived from Adventism; their founder Charles T. Russell co-authored a book with N. H. Barbour, an early Adventist.

Answer:

By using the broad term “Adventist” the video leaves the impression that there is a connection between Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. Nelson H. Barbour was never a Seventh-day Adventist. He was an Advent Christian.

Chapter 23—James White and Uriah Smith denied the deity of Christ.

Answer:

These leaders defined Christ's divinity in terms that we view today to fall short of the Scripture evidence. In the years that followed, clearer understanding of the Godhead prevailed.

Resources:

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For development of Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the deity of Christ, see "Christology" in *Seventh-day Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, 1996 ed., pp. 352-354.

Chapter 24—Ellen White's works are largely plagiarized, with one book withdrawn under the threat of a lawsuit. It cannot be proven that more than 20 percent of what Ellen White wrote was original with her.

Answer:

Research has found that Ellen White enriched her writings with choice expressions from her reading, but the extent of verbal dependency that has been documented thus far is a small percentage (less than 2 percent) when measured against her total literary output. No lawsuit was ever threatened.

Resources:

- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 458-465.
- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 429-458.

Chapter 25—Ellen White reflected popular, erroneous views on health (masturbation, wigs, dress reform, no evening meal).

Answer:

The video mixes Ellen White's writings with the writings of others. Five of the six statements presented as representing Ellen White's views on masturbation were not written by her but by physicians quoted by James White in *A Solemn Appeal*, pp. 12, 91, 96, 257, 271. For comments on each of these issues, see references below.

Resources:

- Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, pp. 493-495 [masturbation, wigs];
- Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, 1951, pp. 136-160; *SDA Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., vol. 10, "Dress," pp. 475-476; Arthur L. White, *The Progressive Years*, pp. 177-184 [dress reform];
- Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 173-178; Arthur L. White, *The Progressive Years*, Appendix C [2 meals a day].
- For a recent analysis of Ellen White's health message, see Douglass, *Messenger*, pp. 278-342; the real reasons for the health message are summarized on pp. 292-296; the results of the health message as seen in the lives of Adventists after more than a century are summarized on pages 320-342.

Chapter 26—Ellen White denied the assurance given believers in the Gospel. She taught that one should never say "I am saved."

Answer:

In context, Ellen White is not warning against the believer's certainty of one's present standing with God. She is speaking against the presumptuous "once saved, always saved" teaching of eternal security by those who claim "I am saved" while continuing to transgress God's law. Here is Ellen White's statement quoted in the video by Mr. Martin, with the words he omitted italicized:

"Those who are teaching this doctrine today [the doctrine that "by 'believing' we are

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released from the necessity of being doers of the word"] have much to say in regard to faith and the righteousness of Christ; but they pervert the truth, and make it serve the cause of error. They declare that we have only to believe on Jesus Christ, and that faith is all-sufficient; that the righteousness of Christ is to be the sinner's credentials; that this imputed righteousness fulfils the law for us, and that we are under no obligation to obey the law of God. This class claim that Christ came to save sinners, and that he has saved them. 'I am saved,' they will repeat over and over again. But are they saved while transgressing the law of Jehovah?—No; for the garments of Christ's righteousness are not a cloak for iniquity."—Signs of the Times, February 25, 1897. [The reference cited on the video (February 8, 1897) is incorrect.]

Resources:

Here are additional quotations that show Ellen White's balance between assurance and false-confidence:

"Each one of you may know for yourself that you have a living Saviour, that he is your helper and your God. You need not stand where you say, 'I do not know whether I am saved.' Do you believe in Christ as your personal Saviour? If you do, then rejoice."—*General Conference Bulletin*, April 10, 1901.

"Peter's fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. *Self-confidence* led him to the belief that he was saved, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. Never can we safely put *confidence in self* or feel, this side of heaven, that we are *secure against temptation*. Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but *even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation*. God's word declares, 'Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.' Dan. 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12.)"—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 155. (Emphasis supplied.)

Chapter 27—The Seventh-day Adventist view of "soul sleep" is contrary to Scripture.

Resources:

- For this doctrine as taught by various individuals through the Christian era, see LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, vols. 1-2, 1965, 1966.
- *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 1988, (see esp. pp. 349-358).
- For the most recent publication on this subject by a Seventh-day Adventist, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection: A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny*.

Chapter 28—Seventh-day Adventist do not believe in a literal hell.

Answer:

This statement is correct if by “hell” is meant eternal torment in contrast to annihilation.

Resources:

- See chapter 6 of the preceding work from S. Bacchiocchi, pp. 193-248.
- *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 1988, chapter 26, pp. 368-373.
- *Questions on Doctrine*, chapter 42, pp. 533-543.

Chapter 29—*Seventh-day Adventist teachings on the Saturday Sabbath and the seal of God are unscriptural.*

Resources:

For Scriptural evidences of the seventh-day Sabbath and the transition to Sunday worship, see:

- *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 1988, 249-266.
- K. A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, 1982.
- Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 1977.
- Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man: A Theology of the Sabbath and the Second Advent*, 1978.
- N.-E. Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption*, 1978.

On the seal of God and its relation to the Sabbath, see *Seventh-day Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, 1996 ed., pp. 563, 564.

Chapter 30—*Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists teach that Satan is our sinbearer.*

Answer:

Satan’s bearing the ultimate *responsibility* for sin does not involve him in any way with Christ’s complete and full *atonement* for sin. See article below and also item 20 above.

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, 1996 ed., pp. 547-548.
- *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 396-401.

Chapter 31—*The Investigative Judgment doctrine has no basis in Scripture.*

Answer:

On the Biblical basis for the doctrine of the investigative pre-advent judgment in the heavenly sanctuary, see the following sources.

Resources:

- *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, 1988. See chapter 23 on Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, pp. 312-331.
- C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 1, 1981. See especially the chapters on Daniel 7 and 8, pp. 107-188.
- W. H. Shea, *Daniel 7-12*, “The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier Series,” 1996.
- *Questions on Doctrine*, 1957, see sections VI and VII, chapters 22-36, pp. 205-445 on the heavenly sanctuary and the judgment.
- “The Daniel and Revelation Committee Series,” vols. 1-7 published by the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference: vols. 1-3 on Daniel, vol. 4 on Hebrews, vol. 5 on the history of the doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, vols. 6-7 on Revelation, 1982-1992. In volume 5, *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey (1845-1863)*, ed.

Frank B. Holbrook, see the excellent section on “The Investigative Judgment: Its Early Development,” by C. Mervyn Maxwell, pp. 119-157.

- F. Holbrook, ed., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, abridged, 1989.

Chapter 32—Seventh-day Adventism matches nearly all the criteria for being classified a “cult.”

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Answer:

Walter Martin, a recognized specialist on cults, made an extensive study of Seventh-day Adventists and wrote in his book *The Kingdom of the Cults*: “It is my conviction that one cannot be a true Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Christian Scientist, Unitarian, Spiritist, etc., and be a Christian in the Biblical sense of the term, but it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ despite certain heterodox concepts” (p. 359). Today this opinion is widely accepted by other Christian scholars.

The video compares Seventh-day Adventists to a list of five criteria characteristic of cults. These are listed below, along with a brief response.

A. “Cults or false religions usually have a single powerful human leader who becomes the cult’s ‘Messiah.’”

The video portrays Seventh-day Adventists as placing Ellen White in that role. However, unlike leaders of cults, Ellen White never held an elected or appointed leadership position in the Seventh-day Adventist church. She wrote in 1903, “No one has ever heard me claim the position of leader of the denomination.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 236.

B. “The cult leader’s word, or teaching of the cult, become absolute truth, overshadowing the teachings of the Bible.”

This criterion should be contrasted with the manner in which Ellen White (identified on the video with the “cult leader”) continually uplifted the Scriptures as “the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested” (*The Great Controversy*, p. vii). She wrote, “God’s Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. . . . Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.”—*Evangelism*, p. 256. See also item 2 above.

C. “Cults use pressure tactics to coerce members into submission.”

The word “coercion” is defined as “forcible constraint or restraint.” All who possess Christian love toward one another will be motivated to persuade and try to reclaim those who are drifting away from the tenets of the faith as understood by the community, but forced submission is incompatible with kingdom of Christ and is rejected by Seventh-day Adventists.

D. “Cults deny the central truth of the Gospel, that Jesus is the divine Son of God without beginning or ending. They deny that His death has provided salvation for the entire human race. As a result, salvation is earned by adherence to the teaching of the cult rather than accepting Christ and following Him.”

Seventh-day Adventist teaching on the deity of Christ and His complete atonement for sin is summarized in the official statement of “27 Fundamental Beliefs,” numbers four and nine:

“God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. . . . Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. . . . In Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God’s will, His suffering, death,

and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life.”

See also items 20 and 23 above.

E. “Cults often urge their converts to leave their families.”

As the video correctly states, Seventh-day Adventists do not encourage new members to abandon or reject their families. Rather, having themselves experienced the joys of salvation, including the

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excitement of expecting the soon return of Jesus, new converts are urged to work and pray for the conversion of their relatives so they, too, can experience the same peace and happiness that comes when one accepts Christ Jesus.