

“Trust God’s Prophetic Word in the Coming Impending Conflict”

2021 Annual Council Sermon

Text: II Peter 1:16-18

October 9, 2021

Silver Spring, Maryland

II Peter 1:19-21 “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

That wonderful passage takes center focus in this message today. What we just read follows the scripture reading of the previous verses focusing on the reliability of the Word of God. What a privilege to be part of God’s last-day Advent movement hurtling towards the impending conflict and the soon coming of Jesus Christ as explained in His Word. The culmination of the great controversy between Christ and Satan is upon us and thus.....the impending conflict. Are you ready?

Today, I share with you as spiritual leaders and church members worldwide a somewhat lengthy pastoral message. This message comes from my strong spiritual convictions, and I humbly share it with you.

In fact, our church members long to hear messages regarding conviction and affirmation for the biblical beliefs of our Advent movement. When you preach, I urge you to give the trumpet a certain sound.....the sound of heaven and its final messages of Bible truth. The devil is busy bringing in all types of aberrant beliefs which we will review in this message, but we are to look only to Christ and His holy Word as we proclaim the three angels’ messages.

As Isaiah 8:20 tells us, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Accept and follow truth only "according to this word".....according to God's Word.....ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

Living according to His word is even more meaningful as we experience the strange and deadly COVID-19 pandemic. People know something unusual is happening and wonder if the end of the world is at hand.....well actually, it is. We are living in times of intense change and have been told "the final movements would be rapid ones" (LDE 12).

There is no doubt in my mind that we are facing the end of time.....what an opportunity to be part of Total Member Involvement and tell the Lord, "Yes, I Will Go" and be part of proclaiming Your three angels' messages with Holy Spirit power.

My fellow leaders and church members, keep your focus on the Bible. Don't allow strange voices to confuse what we believe. I Timothy 6:3-5 states, "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself."

Stay away from those who are proclaiming strange beliefs and aberrations of biblical truth. We have strong, biblical foundational truths given us by God from the beginning of our Advent movement to be delivered to the world. As Christ said in Revelation 3:11: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."

II Peter 1:16 told us in the scripture reading that "we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...." Verse 19 says, ".....we have the prophetic word confirmed....." Verse 20: ".....no prophecy of Scripture is of any

private interpretation.” Verse 21: “....prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Unfortunately, my fellow leaders, there are people who do not believe what we have just read. They seem to use the horribly self-centered historical-critical or higher criticism approach, placing their own private interpretation on what the Bible says. Seventh-day Adventists believe in the historical-biblical or historical-grammatical approach, allowing the Bible to interpret itself.....line upon line, precept upon precept, verse upon verse. We believe in the historicist approach to prophecy.....not the preterist or futurist approaches. The historical-biblical hermeneutical method is the only method accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Do not allow any other methods of Biblical interpretation to be used in your churches, institutions, or activities. Methods other than God’s approved methods will only lead to absolute ruin and confusion and will lay the foundation for easy acceptance of the mark of the beast, signifying the mixing of truth with error.

“We have a sure word of prophecy,” indicated in the King James Version, or in The New King James: “We have the prophetic word confirmed.” The theological pillars of God’s Seventh-day Adventist movement are solid and founded on God’s Word. His Word is sure and rock-solid.

In this pastoral message, we will explore some of the faith-destroying theological aberrations floating around these days-----absolutely connected with Babylon, confusion, and from the devil— and we will then focus on what our primary mission is---lifting up Christ, His righteousness, His three angels’ messages, and His soon coming.

We should expect these aberrations since it’s the time of shaking as recorded in *Last Day Events*, page 173, “We are in the shaking time, the time when everything that can be shaken will be shaken. The Lord will not excuse those who know the truth if they do not in word and deed obey His commands.”

So, what are some of these aberrations that so blatantly and grossly misrepresent God and His Word? I share with you a list of 14, which is certainly not an exhaustive list:

1. The Word of God Not Accepted as Authoritative---Some say, “Don’t worry about the words in Scripture, just get the principles.” What a disastrous delusion. This concept is produced by the father of all lies...Satan himself. The Bible says in II Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” In Revelation 22:18-19, we read, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Clearly, the words of God are absolutely essential.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in thought inspiration, not verbal inspiration,.....however, God allowed the prophets to use words portraying God's message. Do not try to change them or speculate using your own private interpretation.....I have even heard of an attempt to question the reliability of the 66 books of the Bible canon, suggesting we need to look at non-canonical apocryphal books to perhaps broaden our view on truth. My fellow leaders, scholars, and church members, reject this type of syncretistic approach blending current cultural and societal thinking into the Word of God. That approach is not the truth of God tested over the centuries. God’s truth is anchored in His careful revelations and we have “a sure word of prophecy.”

The Spirit of Prophecy indicates we should read the Bible as it reads. *Christ Triumphant*, page 226, says: “The most learned men in the days of Christ—philosophers, legislators, priests, in all their pride and superiority—could not interpret God's character.....The earth was languishing for a teacher sent from God, but when He came just as the living Oracles specified He would

come, the priests and instructors of the people could not discern that He was their Saviour, nor could they understand the manner of His coming. *Unaccustomed to accept God's Word exactly as it reads, or to allow it to be its own interpreter, they read it in the light of their maxims and traditions.* So long had they neglected to study and contemplate the Bible that its pages were to them a mystery. They turned with aversion from the truth of God to the traditions of men” (emphasis supplied). Fellow leaders and members, have complete trust in the Bible ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

2. Attempts to Diminish the Spirit of Prophecy----Ellen White predicted there would be attempts to destroy God’s work through her. In *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 51, she states: “The result of such work will be unbelief in the Testimonies, and, as far as possible, they will make of none effect the work that I have for years been doing.” People do this by ignoring the Spirit of Prophecy, challenging it, or actually contradicting it.

The Spirit of Prophecy was given by God through Ellen G White as special instructions to God’s last-day church and is verified by Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 19:10. The Spirit of Prophecy is absolutely reliable and is to be believed and accepted in its entirety. Ellen White was absolutely a prophet of God and her ministry including strong messages from the throne room of God about apocalyptic prophecy and instruction are for all time. As we read the Spirit of Prophecy we are convinced of its accuracy, truthfulness, and relevancy.

Friends, make no apologies for using or promoting the Spirit of Prophecy and its heavenly counsel. It is a heaven-sent gift of God’s to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I firmly believe Ellen White was inspired by God. The Spirit of Prophecy is ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

3. Misconceptions of Justification and Sanctification----Christ’s righteousness encompasses His justifying and sanctifying power and is at the very core of the three angels’ messages. It is through Christ’s justification that we can be righteous in the Father’s eyes. It is through Christ’s sanctification that we can keep the commandments of God. Revelation 12:17 and Revelation

14:12 indicate that God's people at the end of time would be keeping the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus!

Christ's righteousness through justification and sanctification is beautifully outlined in *Steps to Christ*, pages 62-63. Here is a portion from that passage: "We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. . . . More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure..... Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works—works of righteousness, obedience. So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. . . . Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us." Let's accept the all-encompassing righteousness of Christ
ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

4. Denial of the Urgency of the Times----In this end time, many do not understand the urgency needed and believe they cannot do anything about the return of Christ. However, the Lord says we can hasten His coming. II Peter 3:10-12 indicates, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.....Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God....."

By God's grace, in Total Member Involvement we can hasten Christ's coming! Don't pay attention to strange voices that may say we cannot understand prophecy and our current setting will continue. None of us should predict when Jesus will come. However, in the Bible, God has provided many signs indicating Jesus' return.....we are very close! As part of the

Advent Movement, you are a vital instrument in God's hands in your division, union, local field, and local church to hasten the coming of the Lord ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

5. Humanism versus Heavenly Inspiration---The onslaught of humanism in culture today has nearly obliterated the understanding that supernatural inspiration is overwhelmingly more powerful than any humanistic philosophy.

Teach people to value the power of God and His Word in guiding us in all things and to reject humanism completely. In Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus' quoted from Isaiah 29:13 saying, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips. But their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." My fellow leaders, fight against humanism and lift up heavenly inspiration ACCORDING TO HIS WORD!

6. Disregard for the Sanctuary Service and the Gospel Message---There are those who have no regard or understanding of the beauty of the sanctuary and its services which point to the Gospel----the Lamb slain on the cross. We read in *Last Day Events*, page 177: "The enemy will bring in false theories, such as the doctrine that there is no sanctuary. This is one of the points on which there will be a departing from the faith." Promote and teach the sanctuary doctrine with Christ, His righteousness, and the everlasting gospel at the center. Biblical prophecies are real and Daniel 8:14 is absolutely rock solid. Don't believe anybody who says, "Oh no, that was only 2,300 literal days and it ended with someone called Antiochus Epiphanes." No, my friends, don't believe that.....we use the biblical day/year principle given to interpret prophecy. Allow the Bible to interpret itself. The historicist approach shows us that history has accurately unfolded ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

7. Ecumenism versus The Shaking and Sifting of God's Church---I strongly urge you to stay away from ecumenism. Instead, focus on the proclamation of the three angels' messages. Believe what *The Great Controversy* says about the end time setting when the shaking and

sifting of the church will take place. Yes, we are to make friends with people, but we are never to compromise and engage in religious ecumenical activity. The time will come when we will face terrible oppression so now we must never compromise in the least on our beliefs and doctrines.

Last Day Events, page 180, tells us, "Soon God's people will be tested by fiery trials, and the great proportion of those who now appear to be genuine and true will prove to be base metal.....The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out---the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place." Stay faithful to our heavenly beliefs ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

8. Congregationalism versus God's Worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Remnant Church---

There are those who wish to focus only on local church and community settings ignoring the worldwide family of Seventh-day Adventists in about 215 countries. While the local church and community are vitally important, we are a worldwide family of believers who love and support each other. If we focus on others and their needs including financial, we will be blessed at home beyond measure.

Testimonies, volume 6, page 27 indicates, "The home missionary work will be farther advanced in every way when a more liberal, self-denying, self-sacrificing spirit is manifested for the prosperity of foreign missions; for the prosperity of the home work depends largely, under God, upon the reflex influence of the evangelical work done in countries afar off."

Fellow believers, think and act globally as well as locally. God will bless your witness and stewardship faithfulness as you help others far beyond your borders. Stay close to this wonderful world church family and be blessed by God ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

9. Attacks against the Godhead---There are those who advocate that the Godhead is not three distinct Persons thus diminishing God. We know from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy that there is absolutely a Godhead made up of three Persons united in One. Can I explain that? No, but I believe it by faith.

The Bible indicates the three Persons of the Godhead have existed from eternity to eternity. They were present at creation, at the baptism of Christ, and will be with us forever. Matthew 28:19 tells us to baptize “.....in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” My fellow leaders and church members, the Godhead is three Persons ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

10. Opposition to God’s Law and His Ten Commandments---There are those who will say the law has been done away; however, God’s law is eternal. We do not keep God’s law, the ten commandments, through our own power but only as we lean on Christ and His righteousness. *Last Day Events*, page 180 indicates, “When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord, when champions are few----this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason.” Fellow leaders and church members, give praise to God for His law ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

11. Evolution versus Biblical Creation ---The devil has attempted to obliterate all references to God’s authority as the Creator, including the erroneous idea that the earth evolved over billions of years. Both evolution and theistic evolution are opposed to the account of creation found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. The global flood, also denigrated by non-believers, is another indication of God’s power and authority to remake the world. Anything revealing God’s power and authority is challenged by the devil. However, what God does is always good. Genesis 1:31 says, “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.

So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” God recently made this earth in six days and rested on the seventh day which He made holy reminding us of His creative and redemptive power which was all done ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

12. Aberrant Lifestyle Behavior versus Biblical View of Sexuality---God created Adam and Eve, the first family, telling them in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply.....” Aberrations to God’s original plan have come from the devil so now there are many sexual lifestyles which are opposed to God’s original plan and are not part of His purpose for human beings. Romans 1:26-27 clearly states “.....For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

The rampant sexual aberrations in the world are not condoned by the Bible and will not lead to eternal life. Sexual immorality in any form is to be changed through God’s power working in the life. God’s ideal is to be followed, again through His power, to put us in a right relationship with His moral and natural laws. This is not an impossibility, for the Bible clearly indicates in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11—“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

This subject is a delicate one, but we cannot be silent on what the Bible teaches as correct living and practice. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has carefully studied these topics and has issued voted statements by representatives of the world church that reflect the biblical view on human sexuality including statements on homosexuality and transgenderism. I encourage you to re-read these biblically-based official statements, which are available on the Church’s website at: adventist.org/official-statements/.

We are to show Christian respect to all people, but God calls us, through His strength, to follow His created plan for human sexuality. According to Scripture, individuals are created only male or female, and we are to adhere only to what the Bible says in lifestyle and practice. Adultery, fornication, and LGBTQIA+ are in direct opposition to God's law and heavenly plan for human sexuality. We must make a conscious choice, even though unpopular, to speak up for Bible truth and not simply go along with societal trends. I encourage you to allow Bible-based groups like "Coming Out Ministries" to point people to the Bible and God's power to overcome sin ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

13. Rejection of Temperance versus God's Comprehensive Health Ministry and Health Reform

---There are those who advocate unhealthy lifestyles, including the use of alcohol, which is destructive to mind and body. It has even been suggested that substances such as marijuana can enhance spirituality since other religions have used it. Fight against these violations of Christian temperance. Lift up the banner of temperance against any form of mind-altering substance, including all forms of alcohol.

The devil will use anything to distract people from God's laws of health and health reform, but God has given us enormous counsel in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy for living a healthy lifestyle. Read and follow it as part of the third angel's message to stay away from anything that will defile you. My fellow church leaders and members, stay faithful to God's pure health principles.....ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

14. Disastrous Influences of Eastern Mysticism---The devil is using eastern mysticism to bring in all sorts of syncretistic beliefs into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including pantheism and other forms of aberrant theological twisting of the Word of God. II Peter 2:1 indicates, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies....."

Hebrews 13:8-9 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace.....” Friends, let’s stay completely away from mystic beliefs and practices which fight against the wonderful belief in the overriding power of God ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

My brothers and sisters, as we have reviewed these fourteen points, understand these are just some of the delusions facing us. Do not be distracted by these but rather focus fully on our hopes for the future and our reason for being as Seventh-day Adventists ACCORDING TO HIS WORD. In summation, **let’s focus on our real calling for these last days of earth’s history.....to proclaim worldwide the three angels’ messages** of Revelation 14 and the corresponding fourth angel of Revelation 18. The Lord is calling us to be part of His amazing last-day movement and mission. That's who Seventh-day Adventists are—presenting all of God’s precious truths to the world ACCORDING TO HIS WORD.

Revitalize your work, your church, your organization through revival and reformation, pleading with the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual life to each of us and our church members. Let’s earnestly pray for the falling of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this work. We need revival, reformation, repentance, and humility to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us. Leading up to the 2022 General Conference Session, pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to fall on His people and prepare us for our work since God formed the Seventh-day Adventist Church, His remnant church, to proclaim His three angels’ messages of Revelation 14.

Testimonies, volume 9, page 19 says: “In a special sense, Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchman and light bearers. To them, has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import. The proclamation of the first, the second and the third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”

Don't get sidetracked, pre-occupied, or lose focus on why we are Seventh-day Adventists. God is calling us to proclaim these messages. Unfortunately, many people do not understand them or have ignored them, and some are attempting to distort or even change the meaning of these messages. In order to proclaim these God-given messages to the world, we must understand and accept them ourselves. So, review with me what the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy tell us about these vitally important and relevant messages for today.

We read in Revelation 14:6—"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth----to every nation, tribe, tongue and people-----." The very core of the three angels' messages is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, His justifying and sanctifying righteousness.....not *our* righteousness, but Christ's righteousness. The foundation of the everlasting gospel is based upon Jesus Christ and His great sacrifice for us. We respond to the gospel message by becoming followers of Christ and do good things because we're connected to Christ. The everlasting gospel is eternal---the past, the present, and the future.....focused on Christ. We are called to preach it to every nation, tribe, tongue and people.

Verse 7 goes on, "saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.'" This first angel proclaims with a loud voice so everyone can hear. Always give God the glory and praise for everything.....not yourself. When someone compliments you, say "Praise the Lord!"

The text says, "for the hour of His judgment has come." Yes, we are being judged. Beginning in 1844, the investigative judgment in the most holy place in heaven began as the Lord reviewed the lives of people down through history. One day probation will close, so that's why it is so important to lean on Jesus every day.

This judgment is also in front of the entire universe, telling whether God's wonderful foundation of love is just, pure, and true....of course, it will be shown at the end of time that everything God does is perfect.

The passage states we are to worship Him who made heaven and earth and the sea, and the springs of water. This is crucial because it ties into the third angel's message, signifying that God is the all-powerful Creator. We are to worship Him not only in spirit and truth but on the day that He has asked us to worship Him— the seventh-day Sabbath—the sign of His authority.

The seventh-day Sabbath will be one of the great controversial topics of the last days. It is in complete opposition to the mark of the beast because the seal of God is the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. The time will come to make the ultimate decision of who to worship by indicating where our loyalties lie----with God, by worshipping Him on the day He has indicated—the holy, seventh-day Sabbath— regardless of the consequences; or by following the beast, who has set up his false day of worship. It is at that time that those who choose to keep Sunday will receive the mark of the beast, for the mark of the beast is the keeping of Sunday, the beast's false day of worship.

The Great Controversy plainly states on page 604: “With the issue thus clearly brought before him, whoever shall trample upon God's law to obey a human enactment receives the mark of the beast.” It goes on to say on page 605: “The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority receive the seal of God.”

Clearly, the seal of God is connected with keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy as you rely on the Lord, allowing His justifying and sanctifying power to work in you bringing glory to Him.

Friends, *The Great Controversy* is a marvelous book. During the last days, many incredible, supernatural events will be happening. This powerful book pulls aside the curtain, warning us of what lies ahead. I believe every word in this book.....I support it and promote it----the full and complete book.

As you know, at the 2020 Annual Council we overwhelmingly voted to have *The Great Controversy* be the Missionary Book of the Year for the two years of 2023 and 2024. The plan is called “The Great Controversy Project 2.0” and the goal is to distribute around the world millions upon millions of this very relevant, life-changing book in hard copies and electronic downloads. This is not just some uniform mass mailing project, but rather a personal outreach project where we are inviting all pastors, members, leaders, young people—all Seventh-day Adventists— to become personally involved in sharing this book with their friends, neighbors, co-workers, communities, and online. Although some copies will be mailed, the vast majority of books will be hand delivered as well as downloaded electronically. Truly, we know the most effective way to share literature is by personal outreach, so we encourage everyone to become personally involved with this Missionary Book of the Year project----you can begin right now!

Please strongly support and participate in this program. Ellen White said *The Great Controversy* was the book she wished circulated more than any other book she had written because it has such great truth beginning with the early Christian Church to the end of time. An incredible description of what will happen in the end is found on page 624: “As the crowning act and the great drama of deception Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Savior's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of

God, given by John in the Revelation. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: 'Christ has come!' 'Christ has come!' The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Savior uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed."

Can you imagine the deception and unbelievable delusion? We will not be able to believe what we see or hear. We can only believe what we read in the Bible.....ACCORDING TO HIS WORD. As we know, when Jesus returns, every eye will see Him, not just a few. Continuing in *The Great Controversy*, we read: "He," that is, Satan, "declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels, sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion."

My friends, urge our members and the world not to be deceived. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, His Holy Word, and that which He is calling us to proclaim.

Continuing in Revelation, we read in 14:8: "And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." This is the church down through the Middle Ages that continues today led by the papacy. It will, according to Bible prophecy, unite with apostate Protestantism and spiritualism to form the triumvirate attempting to force submission on all who faithfully follow the Word of God.

Babylon, a symbol of complete confusion, chaos, and the mixing of truth and error, is fallen because it represents the devil and satanic influences confusing people. *The Great Controversy*, page 588, says: "Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul," that false lie of the

devil that something lives beyond death, "and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions."

You know friends, the belief of the immortality of the soul is nearly universal, but what a comfort to know the truth about death--that our loved ones are merely sleeping until Jesus comes.

As many of you know, one of our precious grandsons, James, almost 8 years old, died a few months ago from Alexander disease, a very rare, fatal neurodegenerative disease. On June 8, the very day little James died, we, as a family including Elizabeth, our daughter, and David, our son-in-law, put James in the ground. It was a simple burial in a family cemetery in western North Carolina where my father-in-law, mother-in-law, and sister-in law are buried. As we sang hymns of the blessed hope, we put James in the ground in his casket made by his father. James is simply sleeping as Jesus said. When the Lord returns, with a shout and trumpet, as 1 Thessalonians 4:16 tells us, "...the dead in Christ shall rise first....," then James will come alive, and will ascend to meet Jesus.

What a joyous experience that will be! He will again be placed in the arms of his mother, Elizabeth, and his father, David. We believe that when Jesus comes, He will put life back into those who have died in Him. I am sure you, too, are looking forward to being reunited with dear ones who have gone to sleep in Jesus.

We do not believe in the immortality of the soul, but the devil tries to bring that deception in to cause confusion and open the door to spiritualism, which will be combined with the Roman power and apostate Protestantism.....forming a union to confuse people.....it is Babylon.

Continuing in *The Great Controversy*, page 588: "Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome.

The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism. They will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power and under the influence of this threefold union, this country," talking about the United States, "will follow in this step of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience." Friends, this is not a conditional prophecy; it is rock solid, confirming Revelation 13 and 14. You can be sure these events will happen.

The United States, represented by the two-horned beast of Revelation 13:11, will repudiate the very foundations upon which it was founded. The two horns represent republicanism, not the party but the form of government termed a republic, and the other horn representing Protestantism. This two-horned beast will create an image to the beast through a national Sunday law which will become universal.

The image to the beast is an entity that will pattern its religious understanding after the characteristics of the beast. We are told on page 445 of *The Great Controversy* that the image to the beast is apostate Protestantism working unitedly with the government of the United States, enforcing the union of church and state as the beast has done and will do. Revelation 13:12 states, "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed." This clearly shows that the image to the beast, the United States combined with apostate Protestantism, will initiate activities to support the beast and a national Sunday law and, as the scripture says, will make the whole earth to worship the beast whose deadly wound is healed. Since 1929, when the State of the Vatican City, or the Holy See was established, the papal power has grown in strength not only in religious areas but in geo-political settings. We can be sure there will be national and international Sunday laws that will deprive all true Bible-believing Christians of the religious liberty and freedom of conscience that we value so much.

Do not believe anyone who may tell you Sunday laws will not be enacted. That is an absolute falsehood. We read in Testimonies, vol. 4, page 595: "Ministers who have preached the truth

with all zeal and earnestness may apostatize and join the ranks of our enemies, but does this turn the truth of God into a lie? 'Nevertheless,' says the apostle, 'the foundation of God standeth sure.' The faith and feelings of men may change; but the truth of God, never. The third angel's message is sounding; it is infallible."

The devil, his supporters, and his false day of worship will appear to have triumphed, but it will not last long. God's great sign of His authority as Creator, the seventh-day Sabbath, will be the seal on His people and will triumph forever when Jesus returns to take His people home to heaven. Make no mistake about what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly indicate about last-day events and prophecy.

The final prophetic fulfillment is coming soon. Revelation 14:9,10 goes on to say: "Then the third angel followed them saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on his forehead or in his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of his indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of Lamb. And the smoke of their torment, ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'"

Receiving this mark in the forehead represents a conscious acceptance and belief of the beast's instructions. Receiving the mark in the hand represents that even if you may not believe the instructions, you will sacrifice your eternal life simply to temporarily save your life.

As we know, Bible prophecy indicates clearly that the beast is the papacy. This historicist understanding was accepted by many Protestant Reformers long before the Seventh-day Adventist Church existed, and, of course, we also accept this teaching based on a careful study of Scripture and history. While we are counseled in the book *Evangelism*, by Ellen White, not to unnecessarily provoke those in the Roman church, it is important that we as leaders and our members know and understand what we believe and be willing to share it kindly and in a

straightforward way. We are not "anti-Catholic." We care about the salvation of everyone and will find ways of sharing these all-important truths with as many as possible while there is still time.

We read this straightforward counsel in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 2, page 284: "Preachers should have no scruples to preach the truth as it is found in God's word. Let the truth cut. I have been shown that why ministers have not more success is, they are afraid of hurting feelings, fearful of not being courteous, and they lower the standard of truth, and conceal if possible the peculiarity of our faith. I saw that God could not make such successful. The truth must be made pointed, and the necessity of a decision urged. And as false shepherds are crying, Peace, and are preaching smooth things, the servants of God must cry aloud, and spare not, and leave the result with God."

In *Last Day Events*, page 224, we read: "The mark of the beast is the papal sabbath.....When the test comes, it will be clearly shown what the mark of the beast is. It is the keeping of Sunday.....The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord's memorial of creation. The mark of the beast is the opposite of this---the observance of the first day of the week."

I believe every word of this explanation from the Spirit of Prophecy, and I hope you do, too. Don't allow anyone to distract you from Bible and Spirit of Prophecy truth. Are we and our people ready for what is coming? Lean on Christ and His Word.

Ponder this from *Last Day Events*, page 136, "The whole world is to be stirred with enmity against Seventh-day Adventists because they will not yield homage to the papacy by honoring Sunday, the institution of this antichristian power." Are you ready for that? Continuing on page 137: "All Christendom will be divided into two great classes----those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark." Both of these are sobering quotations.

The three angels' messages end with marvelous verse 12: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." By God's grace and power, let's keep all the commandments of God. Let's have complete faith in Jesus.

As we proclaim the three angels' messages, the Holy Spirit will guide our church to be unified in its approach. In *Principles for Christian Leaders*, page 306, we read: "His transforming grace upon human hearts will lead to unity that has not yet been realized, for all who are assimilated to Christ will be in harmony with one another. The Holy Spirit will create unity. . . I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time."

When the powerful injunctions of the third angel are proclaimed, there will be highly unusual responses. On page 307 of *Principles for Christian Leaders*, we note: "Heretofore those who presented the truths of the third angel's message have often been regarded as mere alarmists. Their predictions that religious intolerance would gain control in the United States, that church and state would unite to persecute those who keep the commandments of God, have been pronounced groundless and absurd. It has been confidently declared that this land could never become other than what it has been—the defender of religious freedom. But as the question of enforcing Sunday observance is widely agitated, the event so long doubted and disbelieved is seen to be approaching, and the third message will produce an effect which it could not have had before."

My brothers and sisters, as we share God's three angels' messages, I encourage you to:

1. Study deeply and believe the three angels' messages personally and allow them to transform your heart.
2. Allow God's Spirit to fill you with a deep, Christlike love for everyone as you share these messages.

3. Use biblically-based methods to share every aspect of the three angels' messages.

Of course, we are not to go around beating people over the head with it, but we are to share these messages with love and hope. The three angels' messages not only have strong warning but great hope through the righteousness of Christ as revealed in the everlasting gospel.

You know the story of Isaiah in chapter 6, telling of his amazement in God's throne room and feeling very inadequate. However, the Lord's angel touched Isaiah's lips with a live coal symbolizing the cleansing of his sin. In Isaiah 6:8, God asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah immediately responded, "Here am I! Send me." In essence, Isaiah said, "I Will Go."

As you all know, the Seventh-day Adventist Church's strategic plan for this quinquennium has the theme-----"Reach the World---I Will Go!" God wants each of us to be involved in His last-day saving proclamation of the three angels' messages. He invites us to respond to Him by saying, "Yes, Lord, you've given us these three angels' messages and the fourth angel of Revelation 18-- ----Lord, use me.....here I am. I WILL GO and share these messages ACCORDING TO HIS WORD."

One day very soon, we will look up in the eastern sky and see a small cloud approaching about half the size of a man's hand. We will realize it is the second coming of Jesus Christ. That cloud will get brighter and brighter and larger and larger, all of heaven poured out for this climactic event.....and in the middle of that cloud, we will see Jesus. We will say, "this is the God that we have waited for and He will save us." Jesus will look down and say, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord"and we will ascend to heaven together. I long for that day. We'll see little James again, by God's grace. You'll see your loved ones who have died in the Lord. But the most important thing iswe will see Jesus. You will look around and see those whom you have invited because you said, "Yes, Lord, I WILL GO and be part of God's last day message to this world."

My dear brothers and sisters, if you want to commit yourself to Christ and proclaim His last-day three angels' messages through Holy Spirit power as we approach the impending conflict and Christ's soon coming.....would you join me in standing in commitment to the Lord and His Word right now?-----Let's pray together.