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**REAL CHRISTIANS
LIVE BY FAITH**

I'll just come out and say it: What makes a person a Christian is that he or she *lives* by faith. This faith is not self-confidence, nor is it faith in anything other than in the God of the Bible. And that's it.

Increasing evidence today, from Barna Research and other groups, points to a clear disconnect between what Christians theoretically believe in and what they actually do with their lives. Many believe the Bible is God's Word but don't read it, they believe they love God but hardly spend time with Him, or they are good people but would not hesitate to protect their time and selfish interests over spending time helping others. The more alarming reality is that no thinking member of the church today believes Adventists are much different, in this respect, from today's nominal mainline or evangelical Protestant in America.

In my travel, as well as in my hometown, I find sincere, honest Adventists who attend church, return tithe, and honor the Sabbath but

whose many daily decisions are not based on real trust in God but on common sense. The use of common sense is, hands down, to be preferred over the *lack* of it, but it is still not necessarily a Christian distinctive. Though it's true that God can and does work through common sense, Buddhists and atheists make decisions based on common sense all the time, and faith in God is not part of their equation. Even most of our church committee work, at every level, is dominated by decisions made based on common sense.

This is not the rationale Jesus used to make decisions.

Take, for instance, the resurrection of Lazarus. When Martha and Mary sent the word to Christ about their brother, they did so in the most compelling way: "He whom You *love* is sick" (John 11:3, NASB, italics added). This is no regular request for healing by some unknown person by the side of the road. This is your beloved friend! If Jesus "turned away none"¹ who came to Him for healing, then surely Lazarus' need

would be immediately met.

But shocking as it was to His disciples, He chose not to do what sense dictated. Instead, the Bible says He stayed an additional two days before He went to Lazarus. And He went only *after* He knew he was dead! (vs. 11). What would you have done in Christ's place? The genuine expectation of the sisters, the friendship with Lazarus, the request made in public, the typical responsiveness of Jesus in those cases—all pointed to Him going immediately to the sick.

But Jesus walked by faith and not by sight. Everything about His ministry aimed at the glory of God and not the fulfillment of common sense. It was the serious time spent each day in communion with His Father that allowed Him to know what to do and when to do it. He trusted the voice of the One who woke Him "morning by morning" (Isa. 50:4, KJV). He listened to God's voice as an eager disciple would his wise master. Thus, though He was wholly human, He lived additionally in a dimension wholly different from that of humanity. He lived by faith and not by sight.

How Jesus lived, curiously enough, is how Christians ought to live. The greatest problem with Christians today—and Adventists, in particular—is that we are no longer *Christians*. The Christian is the person saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). But we hardly live by faith anymore. We often live by feeling or by

consensus or by expectations placed by others or by common sense.

Some, to be sure, have given "living by faith" a bad name. I remember years ago, a minister who convinced many in his congregation that it was time to move to the hills in view of the upcoming final persecution. That is seeing what is not there, and it's called presumption.

To live by faith is to live by what is written—and what is meant by what is written—not by what is imagined. To live by faith calls for faithful exegesis of the biblical text, that is, for careful understanding of inspired writings. And when what we study is still not clear, we should move forward with what is, not with what isn't. Often the Lord may hold back more light from us simply because the light He has given us is still ignored.

Another example from our Lord: Remember when the Greeks sought to "see Jesus"? (John 12:21, KJV). When you look at the context, you realize this was the day Christ had pronounced the "woes" against the Pharisees because they chose to live by their convictions rather than by what God had said. At the end of this sad discourse, Christ, heartbroken for His unbelieving leaders, declared that He would leave the temple desolate, never to return until His second coming (Matt. 23:37-39). The Greeks no doubt heard all this while in the temple's Court of the Gentiles. It is at this point that they were encouraged to

seek Jesus. If His own people would reject Him, perhaps Christ would be willing to minister to them, for they certainly were ready to receive Him!

Going to Greece or Macedonia instead of Calvary was not as easy an opportunity for Christ to turn down as it may appear. He was already under the shadow of the cross. This is why “a mysterious cloud seemed to enshroud the Son of God” and He “sat rapt in thought.”² Though He recognized it would take death on the Cross to redeem Greeks as well as Jews, “His humanity shrank from the hour of abandonment.”³ He sighed, “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, “Father, save Me from this hour?”” (John 12:27, NASB).

Jesus was troubled because His feelings did battle with His faith. He honestly would forgo the humiliation of the Cross. He would rather minister to the Greeks who appeared open to God now than put them on hold while He took up His cross. What made sense was to go where people really wanted Him, not to die misunderstood.

Nevertheless, what the Father had made clear was the cross for Him to bear, not the Greeks for Him to witness to. So, He followed the light He had, and not the one He didn't. He woke Himself, as it were, to such reality, by continuing His thinking aloud: “But for this purpose [the cross] I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name” (vss. 27, 28, NKJV). And His

mind was made up. That is living by faith and not by sight.

I have said to my friends that I am too busy to be an officer in the Adventist Theological Society (ATS). But I see how it builds faith in God and that is what God longs to see happen with His own. Faith *is* our victory. Faith *is* the one way we make God's day (Heb. 11:6). When an ATS team of scholars presents papers in Bible symposia or ministerial councils, people leave with renewed confidence in God and His Word. They are more willing to trust in Him than to doubt Him. When I read articles in *The Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* or in *Perspective Digest*, my own faith in God is renewed. I believe in these publications because they are God-centered and Bible-driven, and when these two things are in place, everything is in place.

My hope is that ATS will be a tool used by our Lord to engender faith in Him—real, abiding, even long-suffering faith in the “Lover of our souls.” I say this not because I am a great man of faith, but because I am in great need of faith. And so are we as God's last-day people, remembering what is written, that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17, NASB).

REFERENCES

¹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 823.

² *Ibid.*, p. 625.

³ *Ibid.*