Who Needs Doctrines? Jesus is Coming!

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The name “Seventh-day Adventist” reveals the major characteristics of the remnant church, highlighting the importance of the Sabbath and the second advent. From time to time one hears the opinion that these are really all that matter and that all other doctrines or fundamental beliefs are really not that crucial. Over the years, it seems, doctrine has gotten a bad reputation. Some feel we harp too much on doctrine and not enough on love. Others feel doctrines don’t save, only Jesus does. Still others would intimate that doctrines make us “legalistic” and “behavior-oriented.”

To ascertain how valid such views are, we will explore the role of doctrines and their significance in our day just before the second advent.

Doctrines Defined.

What is a doctrine? The term itself is not negative, though some people react negatively to it. A doctrine is simply the teaching of Scripture on a given topic. Doctrines express briefly what the Bible says about an important issue. Over the years, Seventh-day Adventists have affirmed twenty-seven fundamental teachings (doctrines) of the Bible that distinguish them as the remnant church. Some of these are distinct to Seventh-day Adventists, others not.

For Seventh-day Adventists, following Bible teachings is important. Scripture stresses the importance of “sound doctrine” for the church that is awaiting the second advent (1 Tim 1:10, NKJV here and throughout). Especially in the last days she will be plagued by false doctrine (1 Tim 4:1). To combat this situation
Paul stressed the need to teach doctrines that lead to “godly edification which is in faith” (1 Tim 1:3, 4). He commissioned the pastor to instruct others in “good doctrine” (1 Tim 4:6), for such is intimately connected to one’s salvation (1 Tim 4:16). True doctrine, therefore, plays a crucial role in preparation for the second advent.

**Mission.**

Seventh-day Adventists consider it their divine calling to “prepare the way” for Christ’s second advent by “getting a people ready for that great day” (Evangelism, p. 219). The seriousness of their calling shows clearly in the prophetic admonitions they have received. Because they believe the second advent to be very near, preparing for it must be central to everything they do. Ellen White wrote, “All the discourses that we give are plainly to reveal that we are waiting, working, and praying for the coming of the Son of God. His coming is our hope. This hope is to be bound up with all our words and works, with all our associations and relationships” (Evangelism, p. 220). This means that Christ’s second advent should play an important role in all the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists.

A major Biblical impulse behind the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission relates to God’s work of purifying His people. In answer to the question “Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?” Malachi teaches that the Lord will prepare a people for that event. He is “like a refiner’s fire” and He will “purify” His people “and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Mal 3:2, 3). Soon after 1844, Adventists discovered that in fulfillment of this prophecy, the Lord had begun His cleansing work of purifying His people for the second advent.

The early Adventists also observed that the return of Jesus was connected to “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). They recognized that the mission of the remnant was to restore God’s truth—covered up by centuries of apostasy—in a world that was becoming increasingly intoxicated with the wine of Babylon’s
“false doctrines” (Selected Messages, 2:118).

Adventists, therefore, have the challenging mission to present to the world the pure doctrines of Scripture so people can discern their errors and be ready for the second advent.

**Like Jesus’ Work.**

This work of restoration was similar to that of Jesus’ work when He was on earth. Ellen White wrote that Jesus came “to remove the rubbish” which had obscured the divine truths. “He placed them, as precious gems, in a new setting. He showed that so far from disdaining the repetition of old, familiar truths, He came to make them appear in their true force and beauty, the glory of which had never been discerned by the men of His time.” He threw aside what “had robbed these truths of life and vital power, and gave them back to the world in all their original freshness and force” (Testimonies for the Church, 5:710).

Seventh-day Adventists are called to continue Christ’s work in the closing years of this world. “The truths of the Bible have again become obscured by custom, tradition, and false doctrine. . . . Instead of criticizing the Bible, let us seek, by precept and example, to present to the world its sacred, life-giving truths, that we may ‘show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light’” (ibid.).

Jesus’ ministry took place between two events that startled everyone. His mission started with the cleansing of the temple from sacrilegious profanation. At the close of His work He again cleansed the temple. Similarly, two events surround the mission of the remnant.

In the last work of warning the world, Ellen White said, “two distinct calls are made to the churches.” The first is the call of the second angel’s message (Rev 14:8), given at the time of the rise of the Advent movement, announcing the fall of Babylon.

The second call will be given at the end of this movement’s mission (Selected Messages, 2:118). Then the loud cry of the third angel’s message is joined by the loud cry of the angel of
Revelation 18, saying “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (Rev 18:4, 5). This call is the final opportunity for the cleansing of God’s people. It is God’s last message of mercy to His people in fallen Babylon, showing them the urgency of separating from all apostasy. They must accept the message of the remnant to be ready for the second advent, or they will perish.

**Role of Doctrines.**

Doctrines have a major part in preparing people for Christ’s return.

1) **Rouse to Repentance.**

The preaching of repentance is central to the work of restoration. Amidst the powerful signs of the second advent there is an urgent call for repentance. “We must persuade men everywhere to repent and flee from the wrath to come... We must rouse people to immediate preparation, for we little know what is before us” (Evangelism, p. 217; see also p. 219).

Of what do we need to repent? The answer is simple: of everything that separates a person from Jesus. A major role of true doctrines is to purge the mind from all false concepts and heresies. As such, doctrines are of great help in assisting God’s people in their preparation to meet their Lord.

2) **Reveal False Teachings.**

Doctrines give believers a correct understanding of the biblical message of salvation that God wants all people to know. Just before the second advent, apostasy will be nearly universal. The false doctrines of fallen Babylon will have infiltrated all religious organizations. To alert the world, God will send a final message of mercy that is to expose all false doctrine (Rev 14:6-12). This message begins with the everlasting gospel. It proclaims with a loud voice the urgent need to accept the gospel and worship the Creator because “the hour of His judgment has come.” The second
angel’s message follows this call, proclaiming the fall of Babylon because her false doctrines have polluted the world.

God’s last and most dramatic work immediately before the second advent takes place when the loud cry of Revelation 18 joins the third angel’s message. At this time the presentation of the true doctrines in light of Christ’s righteousness un masks Babylon’s false doctrines. God’s faithful people are urged to leave the apostate systems and accept the pure doctrines of the Bible. Many will join the remnant church when they see the great contrast between true and false doctrine.

The danger of entertaining false doctrines is not confined to those outside of Adventism. Throughout our history, Seventh-day Adventists have had to fight the inroads of false doctrine. When Ellen White found false doctrines at Battle Creek College, the ministerial training school, she sounded an ominous warning: “Teachings that are turning souls from the truth are being presented as of great worth. Doctrines are being taught that lead into bypaths and forbidden paths; doctrines that lead men to act in harmony with their own inclinations and to work out their unsanctified purposes; doctrines that, if received, would destroy the dignity and power of God’s people, obscuring the light that would otherwise come to them through God’s appointed agencies” (Testimonies for the Church, 8:231).

3) Equip for the Coming Crisis.

God’s people must be awake and prepared for the crisis that will soon come upon the world as an overwhelming surprise. Ellen White pointed out the importance of fully understanding the doctrinal truths of Scripture. “The Christian is required to be diligent in searching the Scriptures, to read over and over again the truths of God’s word. Willful ignorance on this subject endangers the Christian life and character. It blinds the understanding and corrupts the noblest powers. It is this that brings confusion into our lives. Our people need to understand the oracles of God; they need to have a systematic knowledge of the principles of revealed truth, which will fit them for what is coming upon the earth and prevent
them from being carried about by every wind of doctrine” (ibid., 5:273).

4) **Encourage Reexamination.**

When Ellen White saw that God was giving new light to His people, she called upon Seventh-day Adventists to investigate their doctrines in view of this new light and to study the implications. She saw this as a dynamic process to be carried on periodically, not casually but with prayer and fasting. “Precious light has come, appropriate for this time. It is Bible truth, showing the perils that are right upon us. This light should lead us to a diligent study of the Scriptures and a most critical examination of the positions which we hold. God would have all the bearings and positions of truth thoroughly and perseveringly searched with prayer and fasting.”

She added that “believers are not to rest in suppositions and ill-defined ideas of what constitutes truth. Their faith must be firmly founded upon the word of God so that when the testing time shall come and they are brought before councils to answer for their faith they may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear. . . . It is important that in defending the doctrines which we consider fundamental articles of faith we should never allow ourselves to employ arguments that are not wholly sound” (ibid., 5:707, 708).

5) **Unite, not Divide.**

Ellen White knew the destructive effect of false doctrines on the unity of the church. All doctrine, therefore, should be tested by the law and the testimony (Isa 8:20). Although she urged respect for the views of others, she did not allow for doctrinal pluralism. She pointed out that “it is the duty of ministers to respect the judgment of their brethren; but their relations to one another, as well as the doctrines they teach, should be brought to the test of the law and the testimony; then, if hearts are teachable, there will be no divisions among us. Some are inclined to be disorderly, and are drifting away from the great landmarks of the faith; but God is moving upon His ministers to be one in doctrine and in spirit”
(Testimonies to Ministers, p. 30).

**Doctrines and the Second Advent**

What contribution do the major Bible doctrines make to the understanding of the second advent? The formulation of these doctrines defines the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. Seventh-day Adventists believe that their church is a remnant that prepares people for the coming crisis of the centuries at the end of the world. Every aspect of their doctrines is essential to help one stand in the Day of the Lord.

The book *Seventh-day Adventist Believe...*, p. iii, categorizes all of our twenty-seven fundamental beliefs under six major doctrinal categories frequently used in theological writings: the doctrines of God, man, salvation, the church, the Christian life, and of last things. Within these doctrinal categories, how does each fundamental belief or doctrine relate to the second coming? As we examine these Bible teachings from this perspective, we will see anew how our expectation of Christ’s coming ties all of our doctrines together, and how all of our doctrines contribute significantly to our commitment to be ready for our Lord’s return ourselves and to help our world be prepared for it as well.

**Doctrine of God.**

Clustered together in the doctrine of God are five of our fundamental beliefs: the Word of God, the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. How do these each relate to the second advent?

The Word of God--the Bible--gives the necessary knowledge for salvation. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Scriptures are the infallible revelation of God’s will and the trustworthy record of His acts in history. They reveal an accurate description of Jesus’ soon return. Anything that we believe about the second advent is based on the Scriptures. Without them we cannot have any assurance of this event.

When Jesus comes again, God’s people will be united with God.
the Son who will present His church to the Father and the Holy Spirit, the other members of the Godhead. The better we understand God the Father and develop a personal relationship with Him, the more we will look forward to the second advent. The thought of Christ’s return will be precious to us if we have a practical, experiential knowledge of Him today. And the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, of judgment, of righteousness, of the need to repent, revealing the very presence of Jesus and preparing believers for the His return. It is unthinkable to separate these doctrines from the second advent. They are at the foundation of our future hope!

**Doctrine of Man.**

The doctrine of man encompasses two of our fundamental beliefs. A belief in creation--the concept that God is the Creator and we are His creatures--ultimately forms the basis of all true worship. At the end of time this concept will almost disappear from the earth. The remnant’s mission includes a call to restore true worship of the Creator as part of the preparation for the second advent. Seventh-day Adventists, therefore, must present to the world a clear picture of the type of worship that is pleasing to God.

The doctrine of the nature of man reveals what sin has done to our relationship with God and how He plans to restore men and women to the image of God. It tells us that God gave us individuality, allowing us the freedom to think and to do. It reveals that we are wholistic beings--an indivisible unity of body, mind and spirit, depending upon God for the gift of life. God plans to reconcile sinful fallen beings and re-create them in His image. The cross of Calvary is God’s means of reconciling repentant sinners to the Father through the Holy Spirit. The second advent brings the glorious consummation of Christ’s atonement, when man’s nature is fully restored to harmony with God.

**Doctrine of Salvation.**

Three of our fundamental beliefs draw together in the doctrine of salvation.

The panorama of the great controversy reveals the issues of the
war between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict, which began before the creation of the world, is the reason for the suffering of God’s people throughout the ages. Jesus’ second advent will bring the end of suffering for His faithful and loyal followers. Those who understand the great controversy long for Jesus to come and bring it to a close.

A knowledge about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is important for a full appreciation of the return of Jesus. If we do not comprehend why He came to this world and the purpose of His life, atoning death, and resurrection, we will see little significance in His return.

In addition, all head knowledge about Christ will be in vain without the experience of salvation— an experiential knowledge. Failure to experience justification, sanctification, and perfection through the merits of Christ, our Substitute and Example, will have a detrimental effect on our daily lives. Instead of enjoying a born-again experience that leads to victory over sin through Christ, we will meet with failure and defeat and, in the end, we will miss the greatest experience of all: uniting with the Savior at His return.

**Doctrine of the Church.**

The doctrine of the church includes seven of our fundamental beliefs.

The Bible presents the church as God’s voluntary army through which Christ proclaims His gospel message. Christ, the church’s head, delegates His authority to ordained elders who have the supervisory leadership role in the church. Only those who first have been successful leaders in their homes will qualify for this leadership role in the church (1 Tim 3:1-5). These elders are responsible for the doctrinal and moral purity of the church and for getting the members to work together harmoniously with their diversity of gifts. Through this biblical plan of delegated leadership Christ intends to present His church without spot or wrinkle at His second advent. If it loses sight of this ultimate goal, the church will fail to accomplish its sacred mission.
The remnant and its mission relate directly to the second advent. God has called the remnant out of Babylon to proclaim the gospel of the last message of mercy, to announce the arrival of the judgment hour, and to herald Jesus’ return.

The unity of the body of Christ presents the beauty of the church’s composition. All God’s people are equal before Christ. Through Him diversities of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female cannot any longer be sources of division. A unique Christ-like unity exists among those awaiting the second coming because there is no place for conflict among them. Central to this unity is the bonding influence of Christ’s new command, “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

Baptism unites us with Christ and His church, giving evidence of the believer’s walk in newness of life—a prerequisite for participating in the second advent. The remnant’s mission therefore includes calling people to follow Jesus in baptism.

The Lord’s Supper invites us to take the emblems of Jesus’ body and blood as an expression of faith in Him. In this experience Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. Jesus Himself instituted this ordinance. It directs our faith to the future, when we will celebrate this communion meal with Jesus in His kingdom at the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9; see also Luke 12:35-37). The foot washing, preceding the Lord’s Supper, symbolizes the higher cleansing of God’s grace that washes away all sins. It also reminds believers that following Christ means walking in the path of humble service where pride has no place. All must have this experience before they qualify for the second advent.

Spiritual gifts and ministries are the Holy Spirit’s means for building up the church until “all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The church will ultimately reach this condition at the second advent. Then Christ will reward people for the use of the gifts He has given them (Luke
The gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church, designed to purify God’s people so they can fulfill their calling in proclaiming Christ’s second advent. This gift deals especially with preparing a people to stand in the Day of the Lord. Its counsels help to keep the remnant united in a common faith and mission. When these counsels have been accepted as God’s lesser light to point to the Bible and as a guide to a Christ-like lifestyle, they have helped greatly to keep alive the anticipation of Jesus’ second coming.

**Doctrine of the Christian Life.**

The doctrine of the Christian life embraces five of our fundamental beliefs.

The law of God points to the second advent, for it is the standard by which He will judge humanity in the final judgment. The Holy Spirit uses this law to reveal what sin is and to awaken a need for a Savior. Through repentance, believers in Christ receive His grace manifested in forgiveness of sins and power to obey God’s law. No longer seen as a threat, the second advent becomes the subject of eager anticipation, for it is the gateway to the heavenly inheritance with everlasting peace based on God’s law.

The Sabbath is not only a memorial of creation but also a sign of recreation, a symbol of resting in Christ, through whom believers experience a new birth and become a new creation—a foretaste of what will transpire at the second advent. Seen this way, the Sabbath becomes a delight, a spiritual feast, a preview of heaven. It truly makes Christ’s return something to be coveted.

A true understanding of stewardship leads to a recognition that our time, opportunities, abilities and possessions all belong to God. Believers are to use these to God’s glory. When the Lord returns, His people are to give account of their stewardship over His possessions (Matt 25:14-30). Then they will finally have the privilege of meeting their heavenly Benefactor, to whom they owe their very existence and their every achievement.

Closely related to and hinged on stewardship is the area of
Christian behavior and standards. Both also relate closely to the second advent. True believers, according to Paul, let God take total control over their lives. They must be willing to have God sanctify them “completely,” that the “whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23). This far-reaching concept signifies that the whole lifestyle--amusement, entertainment, eating, drinking, dressing, working, resting, everything--must be shaped in the light the second advent. Habits that weaken the physical and mental powers should be avoided because of their detrimental effect on the spiritual powers, making believers less sensitive to the influence of the Holy Spirit and unfitting them for the Jesus’ return.

True believers in the second advent, therefore, will not spend money on needless adornments such as jewelry and colorful cosmetics, unhealthful foods and drinks because these do not give glory to God. Instead of spending money on things that draw attention to themselves, foster pride, or satisfy a perverted appetite, believers will invest their means in the spreading of the message of Christ’s soon return.

The biblical teaching of marriage and the family reflects the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. As the very time of the second advent approaches there will be an increasing family closeness among those waiting for history’s climax. This closeness results from the Elijah message (Mal 4:5, 6) that leads every person to a final decision about Christ.

**Doctrine of Last Things.**

The doctrine of last things involves our five remaining fundamental beliefs: Christ’s heavenly sanctuary ministry, the second advent of Christ, death and resurrection, the millennium and destruction of sin, and the new earth. Each of these is clearly tied to the second advent.

Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary reveals the nearness of the second advent. It directs our attention to the greatest event since the resurrection by proclaiming that the great antitypical Day
of Atonement, during which Christ cleanses the heavenly sanctuary, began in 1844 (Dan 8:14). This means that the final judgment has begun, a process called “the hour of His judgment” (Rev 14:7). Like nothing else, this teaching provides the assurance of the nearness of the Jesus’ return.

When Christ completes His high-priestly work, human probation will close. Then God’s people will be sealed and Christ will return to liberate His oppressed people from the time of trouble (Dan 12:1, 2). Awareness that the antitypical Day of Atonement is going on and the judgment is in progress impacts profoundly on the lives of all true believers. It causes them to live in the light of the second advent and to devote their lives to finishing the gospel commission.

The teaching of Christ’s second advent reveals the specific details of His return, such as the signs of the second advent, the manner of His return, its effect and the need to be prepared for it.

Death and resurrection connect our present state with what is to come at the second advent. Though “the wages of sin is death,” the second advent is the Blessed Hope and glorious expectation for those who suffer and grieve over loved ones who have died in the Lord. At Jesus’ return the righteous dead will be resurrected in the first resurrection and together with the righteous living will be caught up to meet the Lord and remain with Him forever.

The millennium and the end of sin reveal God’s justice and mercy in eradicating the sin problem. They assure people of the loving and lovely character of God. The second advent will be the most glorious event for God’s people, for it will bring their final liberation from sin. During the millennium after the second advent, all questions about the unsaved will be answered and God’s name vindicated. At the end of the millennium, when the wicked come to life at the second resurrection, God will reveal His mercy in the final eradication of all sin forever.

The new earth is the ultimate inheritance of the redeemed. All who participate in the second advent will be granted a life without end where all their hopes and dreams will be fulfilled. The great
controversy will be ended; all creation will declare that Jesus, the Creator and Redeemer, is Lord and King. All will see Him as the embodiment of divine love and will find their heart’s content in spending eternity with Him.

**Conclusion.**

When we see how all twenty-seven of our doctrines are related to the second advent, it becomes clear that none of them is dispensable to someone preparing for Jesus’ return. Discarding any of them would only impoverish our understanding. When properly taught, Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, instead of being a burden or something negative or unnecessary, will lead to a greater appreciation, joy and enthusiasm for the second advent.

Making the second advent central to our thinking and teaching will profoundly transform the lives of true believers. Said Ellen White: “Eternal realities must be kept before the mind’s eye, and the attractions of the world will appear as they are, altogether profitless as vanity.” When we bring the belief of the second advent “into our practical life, what vigorous action would this faith and hope inspire; what fervent love one for another; what careful holy living for the glory of God; and in our respect for the recompense of the reward, what distinct lines of demarcation would be evidenced between us and the world” (Evangelism, p. 220).

To the early Adventists, receiving the unique Adventist doctrines brought great light and a passion for mission. Commenting on the beginning of the movement, Ellen White said, “we did not cease our labors in preaching the truth, but traveled from place to place, proclaiming the doctrines which had brought so great light and joy to us, encouraging the believers, correcting errors, and setting things in order in the church” (Life Sketches, p. 127).

Instead of being an impediment, the doctrines connected with the second advent belief are a powerful motivation for mission and
evangelism. In presenting the doctrines, believers must “plead for the warmth of Christ’s love” and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit so that no one can criticize Seventh-day Adventist teachings as “a loveless religion.” Said Ellen White, “The operations of the Holy Spirit will burn away the dross of selfishness, and reveal a love which is tried in the fire, a love that maketh rich. He who has these riches is in close sympathy with Him who so loved us that He gave His life for our redemption” (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 153, 154). So instead of being in competition with love, Bible doctrines are to be bathed in love. They become the means which love uses to reach out beyond mere conventionalisms and formal kindness.

Perhaps the major reason for the decline in church growth and outreach in some sectors of the Seventh-day Adventist church is a failure to see the relevance and importance of all the doctrines in the light of Christ’s second advent. May God give us a new vision to recapture the spirit of the pioneers in their view of the doctrines and in their self-denial for finishing the gospel proclamation in these last days.