

contemporary in their thought and behaviour. Also leaders in their own right, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, see Acts 23:8. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were **blinded by their own beliefs and sub-cultures which prevented them from accepting Christ**. They were on different ends of the religious spectrum, the proverbial right wing and left wing so to speak, and interpreted Christ through their cultural worldview whereby they felt that indeed "...there is no beauty that we should desire him..."Isa 53:2-3. A Man worthy of rejection in their eyes.

Christ came to commune with His people, to see as they saw, to feel as they felt and suffer as they suffered. Heb 4:15. He walked among the people, He was one of them. His tones and accent, manner of dress and diet would all have been similar to the people of that time. He was a Jew, a true Son of Judah. He came in the fullness of time. Gal 4:4. "...The lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world" Rev 13:8. However, **the culture of the time did not dictate His primary mission. His mission transcended the circumstances of the Jews** under Roman rule. He said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" John 18:36

In like manner our work as a peculiar people is not to be dictated by traditional cultures nor by the fast changing sub-cultures of the 21st century. We are to work as Christ worked, living amongst our brothers and sisters in love, testifying of Christ through our words and life but never compromising the principles of God to the tainted cultures of this world. No geographical culture, organizational ethos or social ideology should come between us and our relationship with and our duties to God. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:36. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." John 17:16.

- Nicholas Reid

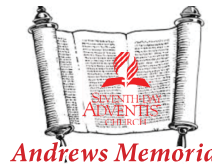


"Without being overly dramatic, we need to recognize the times in which we live and **ask God for not only protection but the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's last-day three angels' messages of warning and hope focusing on Christ and His righteousness especially as the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation is observed with some people apologizing for the reformation or saying it is over.** My brothers and sisters, the Spirit of Prophecy says that the Protestant Reformation was never to end with Martin Luther but was to continue to the end of time. By God's grace, may Seventh-day Adventists worldwide stand firmly for the principles of the Protestant Reformation - only the Bible, only by faith, only by grace, Christ as our only Mediator, and only God to be worshipped.

During these troublous times, keep your eyes focused solely on Christ, His Word, and the prophetic mission entrusted to Seventh-day Adventists. Pray for men and women to unite in the proclamation of the prophetic Advent message of Holy Scripture. Do not be swayed by strange teachings that are not based in the Bible. As you study your Bibles also study the instructions and guidance given in the Spirit of Prophecy."

Extract from "A special message from Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Seventh Day Adventist Church" (Sept. 9, 2017)

Please join us for Religious Liberty Week October 8 – 14, 2017, at Andrews SDA Church, under the theme "Your redemption draweth nigh".



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Religious Liberty Newsletter

September 2017

In this edition we highlight the end-time significance of current events; our Church's response to transgenderism; and that the gospel should not be bound by cultural factors. We also note our president's current dictate that SDAs fulfill the mandate to preach the prophetic messages of the Three Angels.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES



There is widespread alarm at the unprecedented developments currently affecting mankind and planet earth. These include events that originate both from man and from nature: social aberrations, political calamities, natural phenomena and weather-based catastrophes etc.

Doomsday Clock

One indicator of whether these happenings may end in total worldwide destruction is the Doomsday Clock. This Clock is symbolic, with the aim being to portray how close we are to the

planet's destruction (which is set at midnight on the clock). Assessment of this is primarily based on scientific examination of the possibility of such destruction, taking into account the effects of issues such as *international politics, nuclear war, climate change, diplomacy, and depleting natural resources* amongst others. The hands of the clock are moved forward or backward annually to depict how close we seem to be to "midnight".

The Clock was initiated in 1947 by an international group of scientists, following the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. A publication was started, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, with the Doomsday Clock as its cover design. In January, 2017 the Clock was put at the closest it has been to midnight, since the 1953 Cold War. Factors said to be responsible for this include: comments by President Trump relating to nuclear weapons; the apparent abandonment of the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) which formed part of the reciprocal deterrence between the United States and Soviet Union, acknowledging that retaliation by way of nuclear attack would simply result in the mutual annihilation of the countries; the rise in Nationalism; and the expressed disbelief in climate change and its potential consequences for the earth. The Clock now stands at only 2½ minutes to Midnight.

The Scriptures

But besides this manmade indicator of the end of the world, there is another far more reliable source – the Word of God. In the Bible we see many snapshots of the scenario immediately prior to Christ's return. For example: *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (Luke 21:25-26).*

The nations are definitely in distress today as world leaders trade insults, terrorism is rampant, war looms and natural

disasters take place with alarming frequency. The current wave of physical catastrophes is mind boggling, with hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, landslides, bush fires and drought all happening simultaneously across the globe.

Signs in the heavens encompass eclipses and other similar phenomena (e.g. see Rev. 6:12-13), but even more outstanding is the event involving several heavenly bodies on September 23, 2017 which some persons claim to be a fulfillment of Rev. 12:1.

Our Response

Importantly, Luke 21:28 tell us what our response must be when we see these things happening: "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Other scriptures such as Psalm 5:3 & 40:12, and Zechariah 1:21 clarify what it means to 'look up' and 'lift up our heads'. It means that we commit ourselves to the Lord with confidence and assurance that our well-being is fully secured. But we must dwell in His secret place in order to do this.

- Alicia Jones and Pauline Knight

Responding to Transgenderism



Transgender issues rank high on the priority list of social concerns in many countries and the church has to formulate the best response given the complexity of moral and ethical factors involved.

The term "transgender" refers to persons whose gender expression differs from their sex at birth. Their sense of themselves as male or female conflicts with their biological sex. Some of them 'transition' by changing their gender and/or sexual characteristics to one which they feel is in harmony with their inner self. Transitioning may take many forms including: choosing a new name or nickname, cross-dressing, grooming and make-up, or even taking medication or undergoing surgery to align with their gender of choice.

Transgender conduct raises many social, legal and religious questions. Two practical questions are: Which public bathrooms do they use? In boarding schools, universities, camps etc. with whom do they room? Some lawmakers require transgenders to use facilities consistent with their biological sex, others allow them to use their chosen gender, and still others create gender-neutral spaces to accommodate transgenders and other genderqueer individuals. Increasingly these issues arise with children, so legislators have been taking steps to enable children to pursue the 'gender identity' of their choice. For example: in Ontario, Canada, a Bill is being passed to empower children to pursue their chosen "sexual orientation" without regard to parents' views or religious beliefs, moreover the state will be given authority to remove children from their homes if the child's "gender identity" or "gender expression" is not catered to by their parents; in Washington State, U.S.A., the Kindergarten curriculum teaches children that gender roles are simply social constructs and their own 'gender identity' can be chosen at will.

In 2015, the Seventh-day Adventist Church ordained a transgender female elder in Hollywood, California. Subsequently, in Spring 2017, the General Conference issued a statement that asserts that transgender people deserve the love and grace of God as do others. The statement strongly cautions transgenders against sex reassignment surgery and against marriage, if they have undergone reassignment. Additionally, those who experience incongruity between their biological sex and gender identity are encouraged to follow biblical principles in dealing with their distress. They are invited to reflect on God's original plan of purity and sexual fidelity. Finally, as long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the S.D.A. Church.

The Biblical principles used as guidelines include:

1. God created humanity as two persons who are respectively identified as male and female in terms of gender. The Bible inextricably ties gender to biological sex (Gen 1:27; 2:22–24).
2. Scripture repeatedly calls the entire human being a soul (Gen 2:7; Jer 13:17; 52:28-30; Ezek 18:4; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 15:45), consisting of a body (Eph 5:28; Rom 12:1–2; Rev 18:13), flesh (1 Pet 1:24), and spirit (2 Tim 4:22; 1 John 4:1–3). Thus, the Bible does not endorse dualism in the sense of a separation between one's body and one's sense of sexuality.
3. Owing to the Fall (Gen 3:6–19) the whole human being—that is, our mental, physical, and spiritual faculties - are affected by sin (Jer 17:9; Rom 3:9; 7:14–23; 8:20–23; Gal 5:17) and need to be renewed by God (Rom 12:2). Our emotions, feelings, and perceptions are not fully reliable indicators of God's designs, ideals, and truth (Prov 14:12; 16:25).
4. The Bible proclaims the good news that sexual sins committed by heterosexuals, homosexuals, transgender people, or others can be forgiven, and lives can be transformed through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

For God so loved **the world**, not specific groups, that he gave his only begotten son that **whosoever** believes will not perish. Until Jesus comes to take us home, let us follow scriptural guidelines in our personal conduct and hopefully others will choose to follow them too. While we still have our freedom let us choose to follow Christ.

- Rose Cameron

Unshackled from Culture



Some theologians take the position that "contextual realities shape the understanding of who God is" and also how scripture is interpreted. Thus for them, God is defined according to one's circumstances. This author however posits that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ sought to shift the minds of men from their present circumstances and instead to focus on Him "the way, the truth, and the life". John 14:6

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees and Sadducees represented prominent Jewish sub-cultures. The Pharisees laid great stress upon the observance of rites, ceremonies and the laws; as Christ alluded to in Mat 23:2 "...The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:". They were the interpreters of the law and spiritual leaders of Israel. The Sadducees on the other hand appeared to be more liberal and