

Absolute Facts

By M. M. Campbell

A friend commented to me that those who actually understand the message of God's loving character (COG) know it cannot be refuted by the inspired word. In spite of that fact, well-intentioned brethren don't hesitate to attack that message, thereby and unbeknownst to themselves, showing they do not yet understand it. Critics vanish when the light bulb comes on.

I reviewed three such "debunking" efforts recently that expressed familiar sentiments. Even though I knew the answers to their protests, I gradually became aware of something deeper than the objections themselves that appeared in all three documents—something troubling and undeniable.

Running as a persistent thread through these materials (and through the materials of all who fight against this message) is a willingness to abandon foundational tenets of our faith that we for years have held as eternal and nonnegotiable in order to damage the message of God's love. Now those once-absolute facts have become slippery—have altered like play dough. They're manipulated, walked on, bent to whatever use commentators wish to make of them. Let me call attention to some specific examples.

Absolute Fact 1: God is changeless (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

A critic says, "[The COG message reveals) one method God uses in probationary time to discipline and punish sin. This mechanism he applies to all forms of divine judicial

punishment, including the final executive judgment.” Mr. Critic says that, like immature parents, our changeless God alternates between one form of punishment and another, leaving His children bewildered as to how He will treat their disobedience next time. Where is the reference to support this assertion? With Scripture stating God is changeless in character, the COG position needs nothing additional to prove that He *always* operates in exactly the same way toward disobedience. Mr. Critic, please give the reference that says God alternates between two forms of punishment and that such unpredictability is the righteous act of a changeless God.

Absolute Fact 2: Jesus revealed the Father; He too was changeless, with an integrated and consistent character. (John 10:30; 14:7-11; 13:10).

Where in Jesus’ character is this vengeful God so many defend? A critic said, “When Jesus was on earth, He reflected God’s character of mercy. When He returns in glory, He’ll reflect God’s vengeful character”; however, an inspired citation was conspicuously missing from this comment. There is no inspired reference, no proof at all, that Jesus changes at some future time from the character He revealed in His earthly sojourn. Changelessness means without change. Honest-hearted brethren cannot arbitrarily manipulate this point, making Jesus a killer one time and not a killer another time and still say His character is consistent, integrated and dependable.

The absolute facts that God is changeless and Jesus revealed His changelessness fit Scripture.

Absolute Fact 3: The sixth commandment, like the other nine, transcribes God’s character. (Jer. 23:6; 33:16; Psalm 119:172).

The sixth commandment states: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13) or as some Bible translations give it, “You shall not murder.” Some critics say that “murder” is the correct translation. They apparently believe this disproves the COG message. Their logic runs: We

know God kills in violation of the sixth commandment. We'll just change it to "You shall not murder." Then it will transcribe God's character accurately. But does the alternate translation "murder" in the sixth commandment solve anything?

"Murder" is said to mean the taking of human life in a willful, premeditated way. If Scripture ever depicts God's taking human life in a willful, premeditated way, then the commandment still does not transcribe His character with the word changed to "murder," and this solution flies out the window. Is God ever shown to take human life willfully or premeditatedly? What about Noah's flood? Sodom and Gomorrah? What about hellfire?

And what does this solution say about humans taking human life? If it is not premeditated or willful, if it occurs in a moment of rage, then with the word changed to "murder" it would not violate the sixth commandment. This solution denies God the power to grant humans victory over those acts of violence which occur in a "moment of passion."

Interestingly, some Bible students who are most opposed to the new translations of Scripture, stating they are more paraphrase than translation and reflect the bias of the translators, will throw out the King James Version rendering of this commandment as "Thou shalt not kill" in favor of "You shall not murder," while railing against the new translations' presentation of virtually every other subject.

Now, let's look at the "big picture." God would have us see the "preciousness" of human life. Not only is the physical life entitled to respect, but He would have us understand that the property, the reputation, the interests of others must be carefully protected as well. When we see that quality of grace in our God, how much more likely is it to transfer over to those who serve and admire Him?

Finally, the original Hebrew word can be accurately translated either "kill" or "murder," with "kill" shown as the preferred rendering. As serious Bible students, we must beware of

simplistic solutions that lead nowhere. No matter how “right” a solution appears on the surface, no matter how respected its champion, we owe our heavenly Father better service than to accept ideas out of hand, from regard for the person(s) offering them. It matters not whether the sentence says “Thou shalt not kill” or “You shall not murder,” because neither sentence transcribes the character of the killer God they imagine Him to be.

Scripture contains three descriptions of God’s character: 1) The life of Jesus depicting God’s character *lived out*, 2) The sixth commandment showing God’s character *written down*, 3) Innumerable Bible stories describing God as either killing or commanding it. Where two descriptions agree and a third is out of agreement, the problem obviously exists in the one that is out of agreement. The absolute facts that God is changeless and Jesus revealed His character harmonize with the absolute fact that the sixth commandment (along with the others) transcribes God’s character. Where is the inconsistency?

Absolute Fact 4: Jesus died the sinner’s death. (2 Cor. 5:21; Romans 8:32).

A critic says, “Another mistake the author makes [is] to equate the vicarious death of Christ for sinners with the execution death of an impenitent sinner.” He goes on to describe the ways in which Christ’s death was *not* like that of the lost. Yes, Jesus was human *and* divine; He was not dying for His own sin but for those of others; His death was temporary, theirs eternal.

Is he saying that Christ’s death did not mirror that of the lost in ways relevant enough to qualify Him as the Sin bearer? If not, then we are lost in our sins. Christ’s death could only be imputed to us *if He received our punishment*. A shock of blindness is on anyone who could even intimate that Christ’s death did not mirror that of the lost in ways relevant enough that His death stood for their death. This critic’s position shows his desperation to deny the obvious. As leaders of Christ’s day denied wave after wave of evidence that Christ was the

Messiah of prophecy, so critics of the COG message resort to any lengths and show a willingness to alter our historical absolutes in order to keep their killer God.

If on the cross Christ felt forsaken by the Father and *that* caused His death,¹ then is it possible that the Father's forsaking the lost contributes in some way to *their* death at executive judgment? Beware of taking truths we have relied on as absolutes and, without clear Biblical authorization, altering them to deny unwelcome new light.

Absolute Fact 5: After close of probation, satan has unrestricted access to the lost (citations listed below).

A critic says, [withdrawal of blessing and protection] “occurs during probationary time when Satan is active. This mechanism obviously cannot function after the reign of Satan has terminated.” He repeats several times that satan's reign terminates at close of probation, without offering one inspired quotation to support it. On the contrary, we have, among many others, these statements:

At close of probation “the restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent” (GC 614). And “When the angel of mercy folds her wings and departs (close of probation; see context), Satan will do the evil deeds he has long wished to do” (RH 9/17/1901).

Further, Scripture agrees: “When they finish their testimony [at close of probation?], the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them” (Rev 11:7). Satan's reign does not terminate at close of probation; on the contrary, at that time the restraint that has been upon him is removed. At close of probation satan's war expands; it does not contract.

We cannot build a heavenly edifice on a slippery slope. It is an absolute fact that satan's full reign does not end but rather begins when God releases him at close of probation. We

¹ He died of mental anguish (DA 772:2).

have believed this as a solid fact throughout our years in Adventism. Would it not be a solid fact still?

Absolute Fact 6: Scripture defines its own terms. (citations below)

Adherence to this absolute fact enabled SDAs to work out the meaning of “forever and ever” as it applies to the death of the lost. No one in the COG community is impressed with a critic’s credentials, if he or she is still using Webster’s dictionary definitions to explain Biblical concepts.

A critic once brought me a compilation of inspired statements that God destroys (or kills or murders or commands it) that must have totaled a hundred pages or more. I wondered if he thought I could not read or that I had somehow overlooked them in reading the inspired word. How can we make it clear to critics that we are not using their definitions? They are using Webster’s; we are using Scripture. In case you missed them, here are some of those definitions:

FORMULA

[Because sin is chosen] *Results in Trouble*
God withdraws /Equals His wrath/

- "My /anger/ shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will **forsake** them, and I will **hide My face** from them, and they shall be *devoured*. And many *evils and troubles* shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these *evils* come upon us because our **God is not among us?**' And I will surely **hide My face** in that day because of all the [evil] which they have done, in that [they have turned to other gods]" (Deuteronomy 31:17, 18).
- "I will *slay* in My /anger/ and My /fury/ all for whose [wickedness] I have **hidden My face** from this city" (Jeremiah 33:5).
- "For our fathers have [trespassed] and done [evil] in the eyes of the Lord our God . . . Therefore the /wrath/ of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has **given them up** to *trouble* . . ." (2 Chronicles 29:6, 8).
- [They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil] in the sight of the

Lord, to provoke Him to /anger/. Therefore, the Lord was very /angry/ with Israel, and **removed them from His sight**. . . . The Lord **rejected** all the descendants of Israel, *afflicted* them, and **delivered them into the hand of plunderers**, until He had **cast them from His sight** (2 Kings 17:17-20).

- "For the [iniquity of his covetousness] I was /angry/ and *struck* him; **I hid** and was /angry/" (Isaiah 57:17).
- For the Lord will **strike** Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will *uproot Israel from this good land* which He gave to their fathers, and will *scatter them beyond the River*, because [they have made their wooden images], provoking the Lord to /anger/. And He will **give Israel up** because of the [sins] of Jeroboam, who [sinned and who made Israel sin] (1 Kings 14:15-16).

In discussing this issue with someone who believes God does not murder, kill and destroy, unless you acknowledge the absolute fact that Scripture provides its own definitions and we must study in the light of those *Scriptural* definitions—if you insist upon Webster’s definitions over those of Scripture—then any effort at communication regarding the issue is futile. Those who believe God does not kill, murder or destroy have taken the time and gone to the effort to study the Biblical definitions. It is not hard. Like many new concepts we are called upon to learn in life, it makes perfect sense, once we do it.

Absolute Fact 7: We have no life and no protection, except what God gives to us every moment of every day. Human life is not intrinsically immortal.

Adventists need no citation for this; it is nothing new to them. Whereas the COG message says that God is the great Life Generator, the critics tend to side in with the evangelicals, who say that if God does not *actively* destroy, humans will not die. Adventists know better—or they should. Let God cease generating life, and we will instantly blink out of existence. Is this an absolute fact? Yes or no?

Absolute Fact 8: God does His strange act at close of probation, not at executive judgment. (citations below)

Yes, this is an absolute fact, but not one we have historically believed. This absolute fact surfaced in connection with researching the COG message. We have been mistaken in saying

God does His strange act at executive judgment, and we have many inspired references to back it up: Isaiah 28:21; DA 582-3 (quoting Hos. 13:9); DA 580-588; GC 17-38; 2 Sam 5:17-20; Joshua 10:12-19; 4T 151; 5T 77; 2 SM 373; GC 627-628; RH 3/9/1886; 7BC 90; 2 SM 378.

Compared to this, there is not one inspired statement that God does His strange work at executive judgment, even though virtually every single critic of the COG message will bring it up. I have persistently made this claim throughout the years, and no one has thus far stepped up to prove it wrong. We absolutely must support our positions from the sacred text. Therefore, from this day on forever, let no one ever again claim that God does His strange work at executive judgment without backing from the inspired word.

Absolute Fact 9: The lost suffer eternal annihilation.

The bulk of objections to the COG message is from critics attempting to convince us of this absolute fact. But they're preaching to the choir. The amazing thing about the COG message is that it teaches God is not a killer and yet the wicked perish. In the past any attempt to clear God of breaking the sixth commandment resulted in the view that all humans will eventually be saved (universalism). Indeed, even some so-called proponents of COG teach this view. However, those who have done their homework so they actually understand the message know that the results to the lost are the same as we have believed in the past. Unrepentant sinners do, in fact, perish. If you do not see how this can be, please know thereby that you do not yet understand this message. And to the critics I would say, The COG message is the strongest anti-sin message to come to humanity since Jesus hung on Calvary's cross. Please save yourselves the trouble of bringing us long lists of quotations that the wicked perish or that God will destroy unrepentant sinners. Again, you are preaching to the choir.

Absolute Fact 10: We will have new light before Christ returns. (citations below)

The following quotations need no explanation:

It is His will that they [Christians] should be ever moving forward, to receive the increased and ever-increasing light which is shining for them (GW 297-300)

Innumerable inspired quotations assure us that we will have new light before Christ returns.

This is an absolute fact. Therefore, let no Seventh-day Adventist ever again say Christ's coming is near, if he or she cannot also positively identify that new light.

God in His mercy has gone so far as to identify that new light for us through His servant Ellen White:

The truth that we are to proclaim is that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. This truth is to be developed in the closing scenes of this world's history (Ms. 53, 1905).

It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misrepresented and misunderstood. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. . . . Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' *The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love* (COL 415).

In Conclusion

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, *hatred*, variance, emulations, *wrath*, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, *murders*, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that *they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (Galatians 5:19-21, emphasis supplied).

Notice, these are works of the flesh. Since God is a Spirit, we may be sure He manifests no works of the flesh. We no longer have to accept in God that which we abhor in ourselves. Seventh-day Adventists can now take Scripture and answer questions that have

troubled Christian thought for ages, showing God as beneficent, loving and kind, exactly as He describes Himself in Exodus 34:6 and 7. Why would we turn down such a gift?

In the future, those sallying forth to prove that God is both a loving life-giver and a killer, not just a loving life-giver, should compare their materials to these absolute facts before submitting them. If they must compromise any of these absolute facts in order to support their theories, it pronounces their efforts null and void.