

October 22, 2011 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Colossians 2:20-23 "Barricades or Open Roads" by Andy McDonald

Before today's message I want to pray for our church. Our local congregation is included, of course, but I want to pray for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today is the anniversary of an event that was seminal in the development of this denomination. Today is the 167<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what we call "The Great Disappointment." William Miller, a Baptist, had studied prophecy and concluded that Jesus was going to return to this earth on October 22, 1844. The "Millerite movement" as it came to be known, was a large reformation and revival work that many from a variety of Christian denominations joined. So convinced that Jesus was going to come back that fall some in this group left crops in the field. Prior to that last act of surety many had sold possessions to help fund getting the word out, Jesus is coming back and it will happen on October 22. That day they rolled out of bed with feelings of expectation anticipation, but that evening as many heard the clock strike midnight the feelings had morphed into those of great heart hurting disappointment. They thought they would see Jesus and it hadn't happened. That jarring, painful, disappointing, embarrassing day is part of our roots as a denomination that was officially organized some 20 years later. That day none of those Millerites could have imagined the organizing of our denomination two decades later, or what God has done in and through the Seventh-day Adventist Church since. A world church membership over 16 million. The song we just enjoyed, Who Am I, it's too bad they didn't have those words 167 years ago.

Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea  
Would call out through the rain  
And calm the storm in me

And the final “I am yours.” Today we still look for and await Jesus’ return. It is still the blessed hope. He will return. But we don’t set dates. Our wisest scholars don’t predict. We’ve taken Scripture seriously that says, “At an hour when you aren’t expecting it Jesus will return.” All the prophecies, all the end times stuff, is to remind us “He will come again.” And you and I don’t know and can’t know the day or the hour, but if our lives have been given over to Jesus, despite how we might see one another, we are ready because of who Jesus is. And because of who Jesus is what might be terrifying is glorious because we will see Jesus and it will not be in the slightest sense a disappointment.

Let’s pray. Father, it is hard to imagine the great disappointment and subsequent great embarrassment experienced by some of our church’s founders 167 years ago. Father it is self evident that your hand has been with this movement called the Seventh-day Adventist Church. You have had and have today a plan and a purpose for this denomination and its perception of truth and understanding of you that can add so much to your church, the universal Body of Christ, and you are due all the credit and honor. Please pour out your Holy Spirit to continue to lead, call to accountability, to inspire and to commission us, the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be salt and light in this decaying and dark world. Use us, not for any selfish pride or denominational glory, but only that you might be glorified. We pray your blessing not just on our portion of your Body, but on your universal church so that you might be glorified and that sin might come to an end and paradise be ushered in by the return of Jesus. While we live in the now and not yet, make us faithful to your will and the advancement of your kingdom. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Last week Greg reminded us of something we know all too well “Spiritual growth is a slow process.” But then he taught us something we might not have thought about.

Spiritual growth must be cultivated and measured, not necessarily to record success, but to show change.”

When a person first becomes a Christian they become part of a body of believers and one of the really strange things is that in every group of believers there seem to be two distinct divisions of believers. There’s the regular believer—the one who has accepted Christ as their savior, they attend church, and are seeking to live a life surrendered to their new leader, Jesus.

And then there’s the sooped up Christian. They know and follow all these extra rules and regulations of their sub-culture. They are very much church-ed. They have an impressive list of things they don’t do.

And when a new Christian gets acquainted with one of these Christian’s who have chosen a bunch of add on options for their version of Christianity, it can overwhelm a newbie?

Larry Osborne, pastor of a large church in California, recalls his story.

“As a new Christian, I didn’t want to be a slouch. So I tried to live up to the gold-package standards of the group that led me to Christ. The rules were pretty straightforward: Don’t drink, smoke, go to movies, dance, play cards, listen to music with ‘sinful’ lyrics, date non-Christians, hang with non-Christians, dress worldly, or do anything else that might lead me or someone else astray. There were even extra-credit disciplines for those who were really into it. At one point, not having a TV was a particular badge of honor.”

He writes, “I tried. I really tried. But I never could get the hang of it. From the beginning I had a haunting sense that something must be wrong with me or with our rules. I noticed that my strict adherence to all these special rules did nothing to tame the anger, lust, temptations, and just plain selfishness residing within me. I was also puzzled by the fact that those who were best at keeping our code were so often the

worst at humility and loving others...Most of all I wondered why, if all these things were so important, God had forgotten to spell them out in the Bible.” Osborne p. 126

Add on rules, even laws, had some reason for being created even if it is hard to know why. Here are a few you have to wonder how they became law.

Slides

In Missouri it is illegal to drive with an uncaged bear

In Maine it is illegal to have Christmas decorations up after Jan 14

In New Jersey it is illegal to wear a bullet proof vest while committing a murder

In Wisconsin, It Is Illegal To Serve Butter Substitutes In State Prisons

In South Carolina, it is illegal to play a pinball machine prior to the age of 18

In Idaho, It Is Illegal For A Man To Give His Sweetheart A Box Of Candy Weighing More Than 50 lbs

In Connecticut, It's Illegal To Walk Across A Street On Your Hands

They seem silly but they were likely barricades of law to prevent further legal problems.

It happens in almost if not every subculture. And I really believe the extra rules we may add to God’s rules are added for good motivation—it is to protect us spiritually. It is to foster spiritual growth. We want to raise the spiritual bar—to become “more spiritual,” and there’s the illusion that if I can say “No” to more stuff I’ll become a better Christian, more spiritual by saying “No!”

But Listen to what Paul says about add on rules! Colossians 2:20-23  
 “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are rules which are humanly taught and humanly imposed, and they are all destined to perish with use. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their

harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value in remedying the indulgences of sinful human nature.”

We like to set up barricades for ourselves and for others because we have bought into the lie of Satan. If you believe that the God of the universe is the God of “No” and Satan is the lord of the “Yes”, then it becomes imperative to provide safeguards to say No, No, and more No.

The primal accusation of God is that he is restrictive. There’s limited information for the rebellion in heaven but we can simply go back to Satan’s lie to our primal parents and we see it there.

He essentially says to them, God wants to limit you. There’s nothing wrong with this fruit. You can say yes to it. To say no to it is self-limiting. If you say yes your eyes will be open and you can be like God.

We’ve, I’ve, told the story where the moral seems to be saying “No” is the right thing to do. But not eating the fruit was saying YES to life, Yes to God, While saying yes to eating the fruit was saying NO to everything that is life—true life.

Our God is the God of YES! And Satan has stolen his ammo! Satan has pulled the most incredible switch and we imagine God to be restrictive and sin and Satan to be permissive and free.

So we put up barriers to help us say no. (But they don’t work) and if they seem to work they produce pride not humility!!

Most of the time when it comes to extra-Biblical rules adopted by any group of people we act toward ourselves like the demanding parent who never follows through.

We’ve all seen a child doing something the parent says they shouldn’t. You better stop or you’ll be in trouble!  
I mean it stop that right now or I’m going to spank you!

If you touch that again you're going to be in big trouble when we get home!

Stop that right now or you're going to be grounded. Of course the kid just keeps ignoring these verbal barricades the parent keeps erecting because the child knows it is all empty talk, and there is no need of fear or respect.

Here's a great illustration from the book *Spirituality for the Rest of Us*, of why our extra rules about "touch not taste not" or whatever "not" don't work.

It's human nature to test the boundaries. If we come to a fence that says "electrified fence—do not touch—shock will occur" we are smart enough not to grab the fence. But what do we do? We want to check and see if the sign is true. Maybe we get a piece of metal and drop it against the fence to see if it will spark. If we are feeling daring we might bump it with the back of our hand really quickly to see if we get a little shock! And if the fence isn't electrified we climb over or under to see what's on the other side.

But what if the owner installed not one but five fences, to make sure no one ever got close enough to be shocked by the real danger inside?

After discovering the first three or four warning fences weren't really electrified by the fourth or fifth we'd assume they weren't electrified either and at the last fence we'd get the shock of our lives.

When I was growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist church and sub-culture going to a movie theater was a serious taboo, and I'd suggest that it was a self-imposed, extra Biblical, barricade. There's no doubt that then and maybe more so today, there are things shown in the movie theater that are unquestionably unhelpful and even harmful for our spiritual growth. By building a barricade based on the teaching that the place was evil, and all kinds of bad things were going on in the place, and that we simply didn't go to the place, instead of dealing with content, created a group of undiscerning viewers when video movies

became playable in the privacy of our homes. Making the fence the theater created the absence of fences for home movie selection. And when we would rebel and go to a good movie at the theater it became obvious that all the warnings weren't valid.

The intention to protect from evil was good, but creating fences that weren't based on reality created a crying of wolf that doesn't really help God's cause. This is not a new problem.

After Jesus crucifixion, burial, resurrection and return to heaven the new Christian Church began. As the good news that death had been conquered and that we have been reconciled to God through Jesus began to spread a church was established in Antioch. First among the Jews who lived there and then the Greeks. The church flourished in Antioch and it was there that the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians. It was a low barricade work that Barnabus and then Paul did in Antioch.

But then one day some converted Pharisee's came to visit and they insisted that the new Greek Christians must follow all the ceremonial laws of the Jews in order to be accepted into the faith. The Greeks loved Jesus but they weren't so sure circumcision was still important.

So here in the church at Antioch developed an issue of fellowship. How would these new converts walk in fellowship with the Jewish Christians if they didn't follow all the rules. And were the Jewish Christians "better" Christians because they stayed behind the barricades, and were the Greek Christians worse because their faith led them to open roads?

To figure this all out a delegation went to Jerusalem to meet with the church leaders. It was a heated meeting. Feelings were strong on both sides. To abandon the ceremonial law that found its fulfillment in Jesus didn't feel right to the Jews whose whole history, economy, and religion were wrapped up in all the rules of the ceremonial law, and the

Greeks had not attachment and some may have even flaunted their freedom.

After a long council James gets up and says here's all the barricades we are going to lay on the Greeks. Even these weren't so much about salvation as fellowship. If the church in Antioch was to be one, in unity and love, that would be easier if they followed these directives from the Jerusalem Council. Not all the laws of Moses, not all the sacrifices, or feast days, here's what was decided:

In the letter back to Antioch, Acts 15:28 it says: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these requirements. You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or eating meat of strangled animals, and you must abstain from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well." Why? Not for salvation but to engender fellowship!!

When any group of Christians is known for what they say "No" to rather than what they say "Yes" to there's been some degree of failure, and being known for "No" for the proliferation of barricades may misrepresent the reality of Christianity.

If we add on levels of performance expectations. If we think we are raising the bar, but it is adding stuff Jesus never added, then we may be blocking the work of grace in lives of others.

I have a lot of respect for marathon runners. I admire the training they endure. The discipline to eat right, to get up early and hit the pavement. I'm fascinated by their buying just the right shoes and the perfect socks. And then the day of the race the will to go on to complete the 26 miles. I'm impressed but not likely to sign up. The cost benefit's ratio just isn't there for me.

If we hold out a Christianity that is admirable but thought unachievable because of add-on's we've hurt the cause of Christ.

Sure higher than the highest human thought is God's ideal for his children but it is all ours not through our striving and accomplishing, our discipline, our saying No, our building of barricades.

It is ours by saying Yes to the God of the Yes.

In a letter written by Ellen White in 1898 there are these profound words.

“Our Lord and Savior asks us to give ourselves to Him.

**SURRENDERING SELF TO GOD IS ALL HE REQUIRES!!!**

The bar to get into heaven is unreachable for us! We can say “No” to everything opposed to God and it won't get us in. We cannot become spiritual or righteous by building barricades, by saying “No.”

But listen—here's the gospel. Jesus came, cleared the bar we could never clear, and he gives us his gold medal. We surrender self to God and EVERYTHING else on the journey to heaven he takes care of. YES to God , Yes to Jesus' righteousness, Yes to the Holy Spirit who is Christ in you the hope of glory.

Get over any anxiousness about saying “No”

Stop building barricades to safeguard God

Stop trying to raise the bar

Just say YES to surrender to God and then love others into life long friendship with the one who says, “I give you entrance into my kingdom because of who I am and not because of what you do or do not do.

Say YES to God.

Say YES to surrender of self to God it is all he requires!

Not because of who I am But because of what You've done  
Not because of what I've done But because of who You are

Lord, You catch me when I'm falling  
And You've told me who I am--I am Yours