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## Heresies

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# HERESIES

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## Why does God allow them to plague his church?

**S**tudy the history of Adventism and you'll encounter a steady diet of schisms, factions, and contentions, served up from without and within. That they come is no surprise. Paul predicted that grievous wolves shall "come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30, NKJV).

But why does God allow his church, his bride, to be assaulted? Why does he permit the unity that he prayed his followers might have to become disunity? Surely he has the power to protect his flock; does he not have the will?

I believe God must have a purpose in mind, or he wouldn't allow it. In fact, I believe he has at least three purposes. The first is to

### 1. Sift out the false-hearted

John spoke of church members who "went out from us," but, he

added, "they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out" (1 John 2:19).

The false-hearted went out. Why? So that their true colors might be clearly revealed. If other means of arousing the church fail, Ellen White wrote, "heresies will come in among them, which will sift them, separating the chaff from the wheat."<sup>1</sup>

As the winds blow, whether the winds of heresy or the winds of persecution, it's the chaff that goes out; it's the wheat that remains.

When I was in Florida, a friend took me to a packing shed where oranges were being sorted according to size. They were in a chute that

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*\* When he preached this sermon on a Sabbath morning in the 1970s, W. D. Frazee was a spiritual leader at Wildwood Sanitarium, Wildwood, Georgia. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible texts are taken from the New King James Version.*

had different-sized holes. As the oranges passed along, the smallest oranges dropped through the little holes. Larger oranges went farther down the chute before dropping through larger holes. Then it was the turn of the largest oranges. And I thought, Just because we're not fooled by one heresy, we shouldn't pat ourselves on the back. In my imagination, I could hear those medium-size oranges saying, "Well, it's evident we're not going to fall through! We've passed the test!" Of course, they had no idea of what was just ahead.

Some of the devil's heresies are so crude and bungling that I'm amazed anyone is fooled. But the devil always has a little bigger hole—something more subtle, more seductive, more difficult to discern. He's not through creating heresies, and God isn't through letting him do it. The devil undoubtedly has ever more sophisticated models of deceit on the planning boards of his corporation. He studies our minds and characters. If there's anything false-hearted, he'll have a scheme to sift us out. Our only safeguard is to anchor our faith in Jesus. We must love his truth and his church more than we love ourselves and our own opinions.

The second purpose of the ministry of heresies is to

## 2. Reveal the pitfall of loveless

service

We find this ministry hidden in the story of Jehu. I think God inspired this story to bless that heart that feels secure, and who might be, so far as theology is concerned. Jehu was a driver! It is written of this son of Nimshi that "he drives furiously!" (2 Kings 9:20). Jehu has many descendants today. We've met them on the freeways and in the church. Jehu was a driver! He was furious against the apostasy and heresy of Ahab, and rightly so. But there was something lacking in his passion: He lacked love.

Watch him in action. "Now when he departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab. . . and he greeted him and said to him, 'Is your heart right, as my heart is toward your heart?'

"And Jehonadab answered, 'It is.' Jehu said, 'If it is, give me your hand.' So he gave him his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot. Then he said, 'Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.' . . . And when he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed them, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah" (2 Kings 10:15-17).

Jehu was doing God's work, but not in God's way. Baal worship needed to be rooted out, and Jehu was the man for the job. Most min-

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isters of discernment would testify that Jehu's chariot is still riding! (See *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 333, for confirmation.) And like Jehu of old, some today will stop the chariot just long enough to say, "Is your heart right as my heart is; if it is, get in and ride with me. We'll go places and destroy heresy in the church! Let me demonstrate my zeal for the Lord!"

"Men are slow to learn. . .," wrote an inspired pen, "that the spirit manifested by Jehu will never bind hearts together. It is not safe for us to bind our interests with a Jehu religion, for this will result in bringing sadness of heart on God's true workers. God has not given to any of His servants the work of punishing those who would not heed His warnings and reproofs. When the Holy Spirit is abiding in the heart, it will lead the human agent to see his own defects of character, to pity the weakness of others, to forgive as he wishes to be forgiven."<sup>2</sup>

Part of the ministry of heresies, then, is to give Jehus opportunity to reveal themselves. And that revelation should remind us that taking up the sword on behalf of the church and riding in the chariot zealously is no evidence that the rider will be with God's people at the finish.

Note this warning: "As trials thicken around us, both separation and unity will be seen in our ranks. Some who are now ready to take up

weapons of warfare will in times of real peril . . . yield to temptation. Those who have had great light and precious privileges, but have not improved them, will, under one pretext or another, go out from us."<sup>3</sup>

There is more than one way to go out. We can get out as Ahab did or as Jehu did. Remember, at one point God was using them both!

The third ministry of heresies is to

### 3. Lead to study of God's Word

The importance of this mental and spiritual exercise is revealed in the practice of the Bereans: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11, KJV).

"There are many in the church," said Ellen White, "who take it for granted that they understand what they believe; but, until controversy arises, they do not know their own weakness. . . ."

"The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's professed people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when

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no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what.”<sup>4</sup>

So God allows erroneous theories to plague the church to impel us to study his Word. If heresies accomplish that, surely some good has been accomplished!

Do we forget that Satan is adept at quoting and misquoting Scripture? Go in your imagination to the wilderness, where a hungry and exhausted Christ meets Satan’s first temptation with the Word of God. So Satan says, “I can do that, too,” and in the second temptation, he quotes the Scripture. If we derive nothing else from this, we should note that quoting Scripture does not mean dispensing truth. Nor does handing out leaflets liberally sprinkled with quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy either prove their truth or reveal the true spirit of the dispenser.

The history of our church reveals

that good members, educated members, experienced members, have lost their way. They were led away from truth even as they thought they were pursuing truth with all their heart.

In these perilous times, we need God. We need the help of our brethren and sisters. We need to dig deep into the holy Word and the Spirit of Prophecy. We need to “understand the oracles of God; . . . to have a systematic knowledge of the principles of revealed truth, which will fit [us] for what is coming upon the earth and prevent [us] from being carried about by every wind of doctrine.”<sup>5</sup>

Several years ago the United States government conducted schools in various parts of the country to teach bank cashiers and others how to detect counterfeit money. The instruction lasted for 14 weeks. How many pieces of counterfeit money did they examine? Not one! The government instructors knew what they needed was a thorough knowledge of the genuine! Then they could detect the counterfeit.

We have learned that God permits heresies to besiege the church to sift out the false-hearted, to reveal the pitfall of loveless service, and to stimulate us to renewed study of God's Word and the Spirit of Prophecy. It remains for us to exercise faith by rejoicing in the eventual and inevitable triumph of God's purpose.

We must never for even a minute forget that even those forces that seem to portend defeat are really being used by God! For "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28).

Paul assured the troubled church in Corinth that "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor. 13:8). And why not! The devil stirred up contention among the Corinthian brethren, and only succeeded in getting Paul to write inspired letters that have witnessed through the centuries to all God's children throughout the world! If the Gentiles had not backslidden from the faith, Paul would not need to have written, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another" (Gal. 1:6, 7). If the Thessalonians had not misinterpreted the instruction they received

about the return of Jesus, it would not have been necessary for Paul to put on record inspired cautions that have frustrated similar misconceptions throughout the history of the church!

Think of how frustrated the devil must be: Every time he advances an error, God turns it into good for those who love him. Isn't that wonderful! Even the devil himself really can't do anything against the truth! He surely tries, and at times seems to be having his way. But behind the scenes God is working out his will. He uses even the wrath of human beings to praise him! (See Psalm 76:10.) Any wrath that doesn't, he restrains. We see the devil at work to frustrate and destroy our church; but the eyes of faith perceive that he cannot succeed. Concerning the security of his children, Jesus says, "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:20, KJV).

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 707.
- <sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1038.
- <sup>3</sup> White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 400
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 707.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

