

Title: Through Christ Alone?: Adventists' Beliefs about Salvation

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Abstract:

This presentation examines how Adventists from four world divisions view the issue of salvation. Using data from the 2018 and 2023 Global Church Member's Surveys, we compare and contrast members' stated beliefs over time about how one receives salvation. The analysis includes cultural factors that may be influencing these outcomes.

Summary:

Background

At its very core, the gospel is the good news about the salvation offered through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. Seventh-day Adventists, while emphasizing that it is the intercession of Christ that saves human beings, also emphasize the importance of obedience to the law as the result of a saving relationship with Christ. Thus, believers are sometimes pulled towards salvation through Christ's atonement or towards the requirements of obedience to the law. The objective of this analysis is to understand the pervasiveness of beliefs that members of the SDA Church hold about salvation by faith, in contrast to righteousness by works or a legalism.

Methods

The data used comes from two GCMS studies, one in 2017-2018 and the other in 2023. This analysis utilizes data from four world divisions. The survey was administered and collected via www.surveymonkey.org. The study was approved by the study's Institutional Review Board.

The research questions include:

1. How have Adventist Church members changed their beliefs about issues of salvation from 2018 to 2023?
2. How do Adventist church members in four world divisions compare on issues of salvation over time?
3. How do issues of culture play into how Adventists view issues of salvation?

Variables Used:

GCMS 2018	GMCS 2023
42.20. If I am to be saved, I need to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist church.	
42.07. I will not get to heaven unless I obey God's law perfectly.	B1.07 I will not get to Heaven unless I obey God's law perfectly.
42.16. I am saved the moment I believe and accept what Jesus has done for me.	B1.16 I am saved the moment I believe and accept what Jesus has done for me.
	B1.20 Only people who accept Jesus as their personal Savior can go to Heaven.
	B1.33 In order to receive God's grace, I must first live by His rules.
51.5. Following the health message ensures my salvation.	B1.34 The more that I follow Adventist health and lifestyle standards, the more likely I will be saved.
	B1.35 I am loved by God even when I sin.

Findings

About 95% of the respondents agreed that salvation is through Christ alone. However, about 65% of the total sample agreed that they had to keep the law perfectly to be saved, about 47% agreed that keeping the health message would ensure salvation. There were significant differences by generation with younger generations being more legalistic. Church members in the Southern Hemisphere tended to be more legalistic. The least legalistic church member concentrations were in the Northern Hemisphere where the Adventist Church was first organized.

The data show that Adventists strongly believe that salvation is through Christ alone, yet a majority in some parts of the world also believe that they must keep the law perfectly to be saved. This is largely explained by the cultural context where members live. Areas of the world where the Church was more recently organized and is younger are more likely to be legalistic.

This presentation will add to the body of knowledge concerning the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists about their views of how salvation is achieved. It will also note important trends in how those beliefs have shifted over time.

These findings offer very practical data that Church administrators can readily apply as they plan wide-scale educational efforts. Pastors and teachers can benefit from understanding these findings and sharing them widely with their congregants and students.

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