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The Law and the Gospel

A man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, . . . by works of the law shall no one be justified (Galatians 2:16 RSV).



▲ George R. Knight

As we have seen [in the last few editions], Mrs. White was a bit upset with the Adventism of the 1888 era. And with good reason. In their focus on correct doctrine, Adventist tradition and being good Adventists, they had too often forgotten what the gospel was all about in both theory and practice. Emulating the Pharisees of old, they could be un-Christlike to each other, even as they debated the law of God and other good Adventist teachings.

Crying from her heart, on October 24 she told the delegates again that “we want the truth as it is in Jesus. But when anything shall come in to shut down the gate that the waves of truth [about Jesus] shall not come in, you will hear my voice wherever it is, if it is in California or in Europe, or wherever I am, because God has given me light and I mean to let it shine.

“And I have seen that precious souls who would have embraced the truth [of Adventism] have been turned away from it because of the manner in which the truth has been handled, because Jesus was not in it. *And this is what I have been pleading with you for all the time—we want Jesus*” (Manuscript 9, 1888; italics supplied).

Eighteen months later she was still struggling with the Adventist ministry to “open their hearts and let the Savior in.” She told those assembled for the General Conference Bible school for ministers that when they left the meetings they should “be so full of the message” of the gospel that it would be like fire shut up in their bones until they would not be able to hold their peace. If they did express their feelings, however, she told them that “men will say, ‘You are too excited; you are making too much of this matter, and you do not think enough of the law; now, you must think more of the law; don’t be all the time reaching for this righteousness of Christ, but build up the law.’”

To such “good” Adventist sentiments, she replied, “Let the law take care of itself. We have been at work on the law until we get as dry as the hills of Gilboa, without dew or rain. Let us trust in the merits of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. May God help us that our eyes may be anointed with eyesalve, that we may see” (Manuscript 10, 1889).

There are some things good to get excited about — if we can do it in the right spirit. ■

George R. Knight is a retired professor of Church History at the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This article is from his book, Lest We Forget, a daily devotional, published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, page 279, printed by permission.