

# Who or what died at Calvary?

By Terry Hill

## Chapter 1

### By dying in humanity

One of the most deceitful and malicious teachings circulating amongst Seventh-day Adventists today is that 2000 years ago at Calvary, the divine Son of God did not die. No other lie could be more damaging to the Christian message (the gospel) than this one.

This having been said, it must be recognised that this deception is not new to Christianity. From the beginning it has been Satan's ploy to have this believed.

Our adversary is the author of confusion. He is the one who is attempting to set at nought everything that God has achieved through His only begotten Son. This is only natural according to his (Satan's) nature. As Jesus said, he is a liar and the father of it (see John 8:44). Let us therefore beware of his ability to deceive. He is still as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (see 1 Peter 5:8). Even the 'very elect' are not exempt (see Matthew 24:24). Be very aware.

### In the early days of Christianity

Within early Christianity and concerning Christ's death, deceptions were prevalent. Those known as the Docetae (the illusionists) taught that the body of Christ was only a 'phantom', meaning that the divine person of the Son of God only 'appeared' to have been made flesh – only 'appeared' to have suffered – only 'appeared' to have died etc.

As is said here by J. W. C. Wand (who was once Archbishop of Brisbane and Bishop of London)

*"A third widely prevalent type of heretical thought was that of Docetism (from the Greek verb *dokein*, to seem). The Docetics taught that **while Jesus was truly God** His appearance as man was **merely phantasmal**. It is against such a view that the Johannine gospel and epistles emphasise over and over again **the flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnate Son of God.**" (J. W. C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500*, page 21, 'The Sub-Apostolic Church')*

This had everything to do with the incarnation (the divine becoming human) which to the mere mortal mind is an unfathomable mystery. In other words, how this blending of the two natures (the divine and the human) was achieved into the one person of Jesus Christ is known only to God.

Some erringly taught that Jesus was the 'natural offspring' of Joseph and Mary, also that later in His life (some said at His baptism) the divine Christ entered into His earthly body. It was also taught that at the crucifixion the divine Christ vacated the body.

The Docetae were part of a larger group of people called the Gnostics. When referring to the beliefs of the latter, the authors of the book 'The Story of the Church' wrote concerning Christ (this was after saying that the world was "in its essence an evil thing")

*"Though visible to the eye, **He was no real man**, for that would imply that **He was part of the material world which is evil and hateful to God.**" (J. Aulay Steele M. A. and A. J. Campbell D. D., Volume III The Story of the Church, Page 95, Chapter 'The Days of the Gnostics')*

The authors added concerning Christ

***"He was but a phantom."** (Ibid)*

On the next page, under the sub-heading 'A reply to Gnosticism', the authors explained

*"The Gospel according to St. John was published **partly to defend the Christian religion against the subtle infection of Gnosticism**; and the First Epistle of St John comes from the same hand, **and aims at the same end as the Gospel.**" (Ibid, pages 96-97)*

After explaining that John wrote his gospel to set forth the glory of the Son of God – also after quoting John 1:1 and 14, it said on the same page

*"The first great victory that the Christian religion had to win was over those who, regarding themselves as its friends, were ready to explain it away **by minimising, and even denying, the fact that our Lord was truly Man.**" (Ibid)*

On page 99 the authors said

***"The Gnostics denied that Christ was truly man.** Some said that there was no connection of any sort between **Jesus of Nazareth and the being to whom they gave the title of the Son of God.** Some said that the Son of God was *in**

the man Jesus only for the time between His baptism and His arrest. ***The Church on the other hand believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God.*** (Ibid, page 99-100)

Other similar teachings were also circulated amongst the early Christians but whichever one is investigated, it will be found that the divine Christ (a divine person) never suffered and never died. This is the evil of all such teachings.

In these early days of the Christian Church, this deception had a very limited following but in the 4<sup>th</sup> century it met with much greater success. This was when a new teaching was introduced into the Christian faith. This teaching was what we know today as 'the doctrine of the trinity'.

Like the beliefs of the Docetae, the trinity teaching had - and still has today - very serious implications for the Christian. It denies that the divine Son of God literally vacated Heaven. It also denies that He actually suffered whilst even more deceitfully it denies that He actually died at Calvary. It is for this reason that this teaching seriously affects the atonement. Some may not believe this to be taught by the trinity doctrine but when investigated this will be found to be true.

In the trinity teaching (whichever version it may be), the divine Son of God always has His existence in the 'one indivisible substance' of God. If this 'one substance' teaching is not part of any Godhead belief, then that particular belief cannot be said to be trinitarian.

Quite recently (July 2008), in the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute newsletter 'Reflections', our official current understanding of the trinity doctrine was defined. This was in the form of a Bible Study by Ekkehardt Mueller, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute.

Under the heading "One God and Three Persons" he wrote

"There is only *one* God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matthew 27:46, John 20:28: Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in ***and consists of*** three "persons". ***The three persons share one indivisible nature.***"(Ekkehardt Mueller, Biblical Research Institute, Reflections newsletter, July 2008, Page 9, 'Scripture Applied, - A Bible Study')

This is typically trinity reasoning. It goes beyond what God has revealed in the Scriptures but without it (this one substance reasoning) there would be no such thing as the trinity doctrine, at least not as it is generally known today. Note the comment that God "***consists of*** three "persons".

Mueller also said

“Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead **is inseparably connected to the other two.**” (*Ibid*)

This teaching that each of the three personalities is “inseparably connected to the other two” has horrendous implications as far as the gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned.

This reasoning (theology) denies that it was possible for the divine Son of God, even though He became incarnate, to have sinned and become lost because of it (meaning if He had sinned), thus the gospel is deprived of the risk taken, in the plan of redemption, by the Father and the Son. This in turn conceals to a great extent the love that God has for fallen humanity. It obscures that in attempting to save mankind from sin, God was willing to allow His own Son (as we would say of ourselves – His own flesh and blood) to go out of existence.

Mueller also said

“We do not believe in three Gods but **one God in three persons.** These three personalities participate **in one substance.** In the divine unity there are three coeternal and coequal persons, who, though distinct, **are the one undivided God.**” (*Ibid*)

Notice particularly the last words of Mueller. He says that the “three coeternal and coequal persons ... are the **one undivided God**”.

This is the ‘one substance of God’ reasoning. It is this reasoning that leads to the belief that it was impossible for the divine Christ, even if He had sinned, to lose His eternal existence. Some trinitarians even believe that it was impossible for Christ to sin which we know is not true (see Hebrews 2:16-17, also 4:15). These are amongst the various implications of the trinity doctrine.

This above declaration of belief is in keeping with the official fundamental belief No. 2 of Seventh-day Adventists.

This is the one that says

“**There is one God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, **a unity of three co-eternal Persons** (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, page 16*).

It then describes this unity (trinity) “one undivided God” by explaining

**“God is immortal**, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. **He** is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. **He** is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation” (*Ibid*)

Note here that this ‘trinity (triune) one God’ is referred to as “**He**”. This is **not** referring to the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. The beliefs concerning these three personalities are dealt with in Fundamental Beliefs No. 3, No. 4 and No. 5. The human mind wonders therefore as to what this ‘three person’ unity God looks like.

As we near the end of earth’s history, what greater deception could be perpetrated amongst God’s remnant people than that the divine Christ never died at Calvary, also that in the plan of redemption nothing was risked by the Father and the Son? What other lies could cause more confusion? None I would think. God’s people are to stay clear of these deceptions. They can lead to the ruination of the soul. Certainly if accepted they are to the message of Christianity as ‘deadly poison’.

This type of belief is simply unsanctified reasoning. It comes from those who in a very real sense perpetuate the lie told in Eden that sin does not really bring about death – in this case the death of the divine Son of God. It was He who took upon Himself our sins and so by doing became sin for us so that through faith in Him we may be judged righteous.

As the Scriptures tell us

“For he [God] hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

### **What did Ellen White really say concerning who or what died at Calvary?**

As confirmation of their belief, those trinitarians amongst us who would like to have us believe that the divine Son of God did not die at Calvary often quote Ellen White.

This is where, after quoting the words of Jesus “I am the resurrection, and the life”, she wrote in the ‘Youth’s Instructor’ in 1898 (this was the year ‘The Desire of Ages’ was first published)

“He who had said, “I lay down my life, that I might take it again,” came forth from the grave to life that was **in himself. Humanity died: divinity did not die.**” (*Ellen G. White, Youth’s Instructor 4th August 1898, ‘The Risen Saviour’, see also Youth’s Instructor 3rd January 1905*)

She then added

***“In his divinity***, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that he has life ***in himself*** to quicken whom he will.” (*Ibid*)

Part of the thrust of Ellen White’s words here is that in His pre-existence, Christ was divine, also that by reason of the incarnation He was a person of two natures - one divine and the other human. Here she is saying that at Calvary only human nature died and not the divine nature. This is the believer’s reassurance of eternal life. As Jesus said of Himself, “I am the resurrection and the life” (see John 11:25).

Some trinitarians use this quote to say that Ellen White meant that ***the personage*** of the divine Son of God did not die at Calvary but this is a total misuse (abuse) of what she was actually saying. Here she was making reference to ***divine nature*** not to a divine person. We shall see this later.

Six years after writing this ‘divinity did not die’ statement Ellen White wrote

***“During the past night many things have been presented to me***, and I am firmly decided that the great work for these last days will soon be finished.” (*Ellen G. White, September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1904, Letter 280a to ‘Ministers, Physicians, and Teachers’*)

Notice here two very important things. The first is that Ellen White claimed to have been shown these things (obviously by God), whilst secondly she said (probably because of what she had been shown) that these “last days” are almost at an end.

She then asked

***“Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person -- the Man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”*** (*Ibid*)

Here Ellen White refers to the mysteries of the incarnation. Note she is referring again to ‘natures’. She says that the divine and the human natures were “mysteriously blended” in the “one person” - the man Christ Jesus. This means that the person of the Son of God, the One who existed in His pre-existence in one nature only (divine nature), now, in His incarnate state, had His existence in two natures. How this was accomplished we have not been told, also more than likely even if we were told, we would not have the capacity (ability) to understand,

She then explained

***“When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible.*** Christ, the sinless One, will

save every son and daughter of Adam who accepts the salvation proffered them, consenting to become the children of God. The Saviour has purchased the fallen race with His own blood.” *(Ibid)*

When Ellen White spoke here of “**deity**”, it can readily be seen by the context that she was not referring to the personage of the divine Son of God but rather to **divine nature**. Read it again and you will see what I mean. This is in harmony with her previously quoted ‘divinity did not die’ statement.

In passing I would point out that Ellen White said that by the means of His blood shed at Calvary, our Saviour had “**purchased the fallen race**”. This is not just some of the human race (not just those who will be saved) but all of us. In other words, through His Son at Calvary, God redeemed (bought back) every person who has been born on earth and who will ever be born.

She then added

“But the enemy is determined that this gift shall be **so mystified that it will become a nothingness.**” *(Ibid)*

Those who say that the divine Christ did not die at Calvary are reducing what God did, also what He accomplished through His Son, to “**a nothingness**”. This is because they are saying that it was only human nature that died at Calvary. They are saying that just like divine nature, the divine person never died so all that did die was humanity (human nature). They reduce the sacrifice at Calvary to something that was merely human.

Ellen White went on to say

“If believers only knew what this means, the work would be done in our churches that must be done if the members ever enter the kingdom of heaven. **But when men in responsible positions pervert their reason and give themselves up to Satan's way of thinking, they will surely stand before the world on Satan's side**, however great their influence may have been and still is, doing the work that Satan did, led and inspired by his spirit.” *(Ibid)*

Notice Ellen White’s reference to leaders giving “**themselves up to Satan's way of thinking**”. These are very strong words but they make us realise that the devil is rampant in having God’s people (the elect) misunderstand what through His Son that God achieved at Calvary. When we get to the end of this study these remarks will be seen to be very pertinent.

## **Past objections**

We will briefly note here two very well known Seventh-day Adventists, who, because they believed it seriously affected the atonement, made objections to the trinity doctrine.

Both knew Ellen White very well. One was J. H. Waggoner, the father of E. J. Waggoner of Minneapolis fame whilst the other was Judson Washburn, a renowned Seventh-day Adventist evangelist. Between 1891 and 1902, Washburn did a tremendous work here in England where I live.

In 1863, Joseph Waggoner had written a series of articles called 'The Atonement'. These were initially published in the Review and Herald. It appears that the main reason why he wrote them was to specifically point out that the trinity doctrine denied the efficacy of what Jesus had accomplished at the cross, also that this teaching had taken away the true meaning of the atonement (see especially Review and Herald, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1863 'The Atonement part II', 'The Doctrine of a Trinity Degrades the Atonement', page 181).

These same articles, at least in principle, were then reproduced in a book, the first printing of which was called 'The Atonement in the Light of Reason and Revelation' (1868). This was then re-issued on two other occasions with its final publication being in 1884 as 'The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation'. The articles were also published in the 'Signs of the Times' in 1876. The fact that this work was published by our church for 21 years reveals how much it was valued. We need to remember too that for decades after its final publication date, his book would have stayed on the bookshelves of Seventh-day Adventists. Today, as a church, we would do well to republish his work. In this way we would see the value of it, also we would see what Seventh-day Adventists once held against the trinity doctrine.

Whilst it would be enlightening to read everything that Waggoner wrote regarding why Seventh-day Adventists rejected the trinity doctrine, space here is limited therefore we need to confine our thoughts to a few brief statements.

In a chapter called 'Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement', he wrote

*"Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, **rests upon the doctrine of a trinity.**" (J. H. Waggoner, 'The Atonement in Light of Nature and Revelation', 1884 Edition, chapter 'Doctrine of a Trinity Subversive of the Atonement')*

Waggoner's remarks are very true. This is very often what trinitarians do reason.

He then went on to say

*"But **we fail to see any connection** between the two." (Ibid)*

Note the “we” here. Waggoner is referring to Seventh-day Adventists. He is saying that as a church we did not believe that the “dignity and efficacy [effectiveness or value]” of the atonement was dependant upon the trinity doctrine.

As we shall now see, Waggoner said that Seventh-day Adventists then believed that the trinity doctrine degraded the atonement.

He said

“They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that **we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on the dignity of the sacrifice made for our redemption.**” (*Ibid*)

Seventh-day Adventists have always upheld the full and complete divinity of Christ although not as expressed by trinitarians. As Waggoner said in his original set of articles

“Of course we cannot believe what men say about his being equal with God **in every respect**, and that **the Divine Son of God could not suffer nor die.**” These are mere human words.” (*J. H. Waggoner, Review and Herald, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1863, ‘The Atonement part II’*)

Waggoner knew exactly what the trinity doctrine teaches but along with Seventh-day Adventists in general, he believed that it was the divine Son of God who died at Calvary and not just human nature.

For much the same reasons as did Joseph Waggoner, Judson Washburn was against the trinity doctrine.

In 1940, after learning of a sermon preached by W. W. Prescott (a leading figure within Seventh-day Adventism), Washburn wrote a letter of complaint to the General Conference. He objected to the trinity doctrine making inroads into Seventh-day Adventism.

He said (remember this was in 1940)

“This monstrous doctrine [the trinity doctrine] transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church is **seeking to intrude** its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel’s Message.” (*Judson Washburn, The Trinity, Letter to General Conference in 1940*)

Washburn, one of the foremost evangelists in Seventh-day Adventism, did not have

very much regard for the trinity doctrine. His remarks also show us that by 1940, this teaching was not then established within Seventh-day Adventism.

Again there is not enough space to relate all that Washburn wrote but with respect to the atonement he made these comments

“Seventh-day Adventists claim to take the word of God as supreme authority and to have “come out of Babylon,” to have renounced forever the vain traditions of Rome. If we should go back to the immortality of the soul, purgatory, eternal torment and the Sunday Sabbath, **would that be anything less than apostasy?** If, however, we leap over all these minor, secondary doctrines and accept and teach the very central root, doctrine of Romanism, **the Trinity, and teach that the son of God did not die**, even though our words seem to be spiritual, **is this anything else or anything less than apostasy?”**  
(Ibid)

He then added

“and the very **Omega of apostasy?**” (Ibid)

Both Waggoner and Washburn, two very much respected persons within Seventh-day Adventism, realised that the trinity doctrine taught that the divine Son of God did not die at Calvary. This is one of the reasons why they were so much against it.

### **How a divine person can die**

In his book ‘Christ and His Righteousness’, Ellet Waggoner, the son of Joseph Waggoner wrote (this book is said to depict Ellet Waggoner’s overall message at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference)

“If anyone springs the old cavil, **how Christ could be immortal and yet die**, we have only to say that **we do not know**. We make no pretensions of fathoming infinity.” (E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His righteousness*, page 23 1890)

Here is **the** problem. It is how can a divine (immortal) person die? From all that we have read above, it does appear that Seventh-day Adventists did once believe that the divine person did truly die.

Waggoner then lists a number of other ‘divine mysteries’ that we find in Scripture. These included such mysteries as God Himself, Christ, the incarnation, as well as the resurrection etc.

He then concluded

“It should be sufficient for us to accept as true those things which God has revealed without stumbling over things **that the mind of an angel cannot fathom**. So we delight in the infinite power and glory which the Scriptures declare belong to Christ, **without worrying our finite minds in a vain attempt to explain the infinite.**” (*Ibid*)

Waggoner is simply saying that like other Bible mysteries (certain things that ourselves and perhaps even angels cannot explain), we should accept that the divine Christ (a person who is immortal) did die at Calvary.

Eight years after the publication of Waggoner’s book, Ellen White answered the question as to how a divine (immortal) person can die.

This is when she said

“Jesus Christ laid off His royal robe, His kingly crown, and clothed His divinity with humanity, in order to become a substitute and surety for humanity, **that dying in humanity** He might by His death destroy him who had the power of death.” (*Ellen G. White, Letter 97, page 5, To "My Brethren in North Fitzroy," November 18th 1898*)

Notice here **who** we are told that died “in humanity”. It was the pre-existent divine Christ. It says He “clothed His divinity with humanity”.

This is how a divine person can die. It is by surrendering His divine personage to His human state (His human nature). In other words, by the voluntary acquiescing of Himself to His human nature, the person of the divine Son of God was able to personally experience death. By death I mean that in the grave, like as we are when we die, He was unconscious and therefore dependent on someone outside of Himself to bring Him back to life (resurrect Him). We shall see later that this is exactly what was said by Ellen White. We shall also see that this is in harmony with the Scriptures. Notice also that this letter was written at the same time as ‘The Desire of Ages’ was published (1898).

In her letter, Ellen White went on to say

“**He could not have done this as God**, but by coming as man, **Christ could die**. By death He overcame death. The death of Christ bore to the death him who had the power of death, and opened the gates of the tomb for all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.” (*Ibid*)

In the light of this statement, those who use Ellen White’s “divinity did not die” or “deity did not sink or die” statements to ‘so say’ prove that she said that the divine Christ did not die at Calvary should very seriously think again. This is because it

totally invalidates their reasoning.

It is very obvious (therefore comment is not really necessary) that Ellen White is saying here that in His divinity, meaning in His pre-existence as God, the Son of God could not die therefore to be able to do this He became human (took upon Himself human nature). This one statement refutes all of the reasoning that Ellen White's "divinity did not die" and "deity did not sink or die" statements mean that the divine personage of the Son of God did not die. Those who say that the divine Christ never died at Calvary are very much 'at odds' (at variance) with Ellen White.

The reason why Christ, in His pre-existence as God, could not experience death is that divine nature cannot die. To be able to die He needed to have His existence in human nature (fallen human nature). As Christ was God Himself in the person of His Son we can say that at Calvary God died, yet not God the Father.

If the above statement of Ellen White's is not regarded as being conclusive as to whom or what she said actually died at Calvary then this next one should be.

This is where she said (note this was the year following the publication of 'The Desire of Ages')

"Teach the **great, practical truths** that must be stamped upon the soul. Teach the saving power of Jesus, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." All should be made to comprehend the power of the truth to those who receive it. "**In him** dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1899, 'After the camp meeting')

She then added

"Men need to understand that **the Deity suffered under the agonies of Calvary. The Majesty of heaven was made to suffer at the hands of wicked men**, -- religious zealots, who claimed to be the most enlightened people on the face of the earth. Men claiming to be the children of Abraham worked out the wrath of Satan upon the **innocent Son of the infinite God.**" (*Ibid*)

Who or what suffered at Calvary according to this Ellen White statement? She says that "Deity suffered". Here she is using the term "Deity" to mean the divine personage of "The majesty of heaven", "the innocent Son of the infinite God". This was the divine Christ, the pre-existent Son of God. God Himself in the person of His Son. Now she was talking in terms of divine personage and not divine nature.

If we are still not convinced then read the following.

She said in 1879

***“Jesus had united with the Father in making the world. Amid the agonizing sufferings of the Son of God, blind and deluded men alone remain unfeeling. The chief priests and elders revile God's dear Son while in his expiring agonies. Yet inanimate nature groans in sympathy with her bleeding, dying Author.”***  
*(Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times. 21<sup>st</sup> August 1879 ‘The Sufferings of Christ’)*

Here we are very clearly told who did die at Calvary. It was the One through whom the Father had created the world. It was none other than the divine Son of God, the “Author” of creation. Certainly it was not just the ‘human part’ of Christ.

She then added

***“The earth trembles. The sun refuses to behold the scene. The heavens gather blackness. Angels have witnessed the scene of suffering, until they can look on no longer, and hide their faces from the horrid sight. Christ is in despair! He is dying! His Father's approving smile is removed, and angels are not permitted to lighten the gloom of the terrible hour. They could only behold in amazement their loved Commander suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law.”*** *(Ibid)*

Notice we are told that it was the angel’s “loved commander” that was suffering and dying at Calvary. All of this was happening to the ***pre-existent Son of God***, meaning to the personage of ***the divine Christ***. He was experiencing this through His human nature. This leads us to ask a question. If the divine Son of God was not really suffering and not really dying at Calvary (as is said by many trinitarians), how could the Father’s approving smile be removed from Him or how could the angels desire to help their creator?

Orthodox trinitarians maintain that the divine Son of God did not suffer or die at Calvary. This they say is because whatever the circumstances, He always remains part of the ‘triune substance’ of God and is therefore always by the side of His Father. The end result of their reasoning is that this suffering and death was only happening to the human nature of Christ and not to the divine person Himself. According to Ellen White’s reasoning, this would not make any sense at all. We can only conclude that she was not a trinitarian, at least not in any sense that can be termed orthodox.

Eighteen years later in the Review and Herald she also wrote

***“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.”*** Human passions were raging at the foot of the cross when the earth was bereft of the light of the sun. The Sun of Righteousness was withdrawing his light from the world, and ***nature sympathized with her dying Author.*** *(Ellen*

*G. White, Review and Herald 28<sup>th</sup> December 1897 'He was Wounded for our Transgressions')*

Who was dying here? It was the “Author” of nature. This was not just the human nature of Christ. How could nature sympathize with its Author (the pre-existent divine Son of God) if only the human part of Jesus died and not the person of the divine Son of God?

A few paragraphs later Ellen White wrote

“Again came the cry, as of one in mortal agony, "It is finished." "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost." **Christ, the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, was dead.** The Jewish leaders had crucified **the Son of God**, the long-expected Messiah, him (so the people had hoped) who was to bring about so many reforms. They refused the only One who could save them from national ruin.” (*Ibid*)

It was the divine Son of God, “the Majesty of Heaven, the King of glory” who died at Calvary and not just human nature. This could not be made any clearer than it is here.

In the Second Volume of the Testimonies to the church, Ellen White wrote

“**Nature sympathized with the suffering of its Author.** The heaving earth, the rent rocks, proclaimed that it was **the Son of God who died.**” (*Ellen White, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vol. Testimonies page 211, 'The sufferings of Christ'*)

How can anyone say that they believe this statement and yet say at the same time that the pre-existent divine Son of God did not die at Calvary? This latter reasoning does not seem possible.

What is happening within Seventh-day Adventism today is that Ellen White’s writings are being misused (abused). This is because some of her statements are being used (like her “divinity did not die” and “deity did not sink or die” statements) without being compared with other statements that she made. It is obvious that when comparisons are made, as we have done here, she was not saying that the divine personage of the pre-existent Son of God did not die at Calvary but divinity as a nature did not die. This type of misrepresentation has led to a very serious misunderstanding of what God has revealed through her, also to what really happened at Calvary. In order to gain a correct picture of Ellen White’s beliefs, we must have a good grasp of her overall writings and not just a few of her quotations.

After having read what is said by Ellen White regarding who and what died at Calvary, we must now ask if this is in harmony with the Scriptures.

## What the Scriptures say

The one noticeable thing concerning the actual death of Christ is that it is free from all unnecessary 'dramatics'. In fact the authors of the gospels were 'very low key' in their description of it. No greater economy of words could have been employed by them to state this magnificent truth.

Take for example Matthew. He simply said

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, **yielded up the ghost.**”  
Matthew 27:50

Mark reported

“And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and **gave up the ghost.**” Mark 15:37

Luke wrote

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, **he gave up the ghost.**” Luke 23:46

John said

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and **gave up the ghost.**” John 19:30

All of these writers said that Jesus really did die. There is no sham or make believe about it.

If the Bible is to be believed, there were many witnesses to the death of Jesus, far too many to note here in detail. These were such as the Roman soldiers who drove in the nails, the Jews who stood beneath the cross mocking, Mary the mother of Jesus, John the beloved disciple and many more. The soldier who thrust the spear into the side of Jesus would surely testify to His death.

John who witnessed the scene reported

“Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that **he was dead already**, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith **came there out blood and water.**” John 19-32-34

That Jesus was really dead there is no doubt. If He had not been dead already then the spear thrust would have achieved it.

There are also numerous passages of Scripture that tell of His resurrection from the grave. Perhaps the one that encapsulates them all are the words of the apostle Paul.

This is when he wrote

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that ***Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures***; And that ***he was buried***, and that he ***rose again the third day according to the scriptures***: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of ***above five hundred brethren at once***; of whom ***the greater part remain unto this present***, but some are fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-6

Over and over again the Scriptures testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the main thrust of the gospel. This is why the angel said to the disciples “... He is not here: for he is risen ... go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead....” (See Matthew 28:6-7).

[Continue to chapter 2](#)

# Who or what died at Calvary?

By Terry Hill

## Chapter 2

### Truly dead

#### Sin and death – two inseparable bedfellows

From the very beginning, God had said that sin will always result in death. This is why Christ had to die. It was to 'cancel out' the results of Adam's sin. Adam provided the way for eternal death. Christ provided the way for eternal life (see Romans 5:15-19 etc).

To provide this 'way out', the Son of God needed to vacate His heavenly abode and dwell amongst those He came to save.

The gospel writer John lunged into his gospel with the words

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." John 1:1-3*

These are perhaps the most well known words of Scripture that deal with 'who it was' that came to give His life for fallen humanity. The One who came was none other than "the Word".

Some say that this "Word" did not exist as a divine person but in the light of what John went on to say, this would not be reasonable to assume.

He said of this 'Word'

*"He was in the world, and the world was **made by him**, and the world knew him not. **He came** unto his own, and his own received him not." John 1:10-11*

John's words are clearly speaking of a divine personage, one who according to his opening remarks was no less a person than God (see above). Obviously from reading what John said, this divine personage (the Word) was not the same divine

personage whom He was with because a person cannot be with himself. We are therefore talking here of two divine personages.

Interesting is that John actually wrote that “the Word was with the God (Gr. ton qeon) and the Word was God (theos)”.

Whilst there has been much discussion concerning John’s purpose in phrasing his opening words in such a manner, it appears that he was delineating (demarcating) between ‘the God’ (who we know as the Father) and ‘the Word’ who is God. If John had not made this qualification (ton qeon) then he could have been taken to mean that ‘the word’ was the same divine personage as He was with (the Father) – which would not have made any sense at all.

On many occasions Ellen White made this same delineation. This is when she wrote

“In the absence of Moses the congregation demanded of Aaron to make them gods to go before them and lead them back into Egypt. This was an insult to their chief leader, **the Son of the infinite God**. Only a few weeks before, they had stood trembling with awe and terror before the mount, listening to the words of the Lord: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church Volume 3, page 339, 'The Great Rebellion'*)

She also said 25 years later

“The One appointed in the counsels of heaven came to the earth as an instructor. He was no less a being than **the Creator of the world, the Son of the Infinite God**. The rich benevolence of God gave him to our world; and to meet the necessities of humanity, he took on him human nature. To the astonishment of the heavenly host, he walked this earth as the Eternal Word. Fully prepared, he left the royal courts to come to a world marred and polluted with sin. **Mysteriously he allied himself to human nature**. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." God's excess of goodness, benevolence, and love was a surprise to the world, of grace which could be realized, but not told." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies on Education, page 173, 'The Divine Teacher' 1897*)

She also said in 1901, three years after the publication of ‘The Desire of Ages’

“**The Son of the infinite God came to this earth**, and honoured it with His presence. He emptied Himself of His glory, and clothed His divinity with humanity, that humanity might touch humanity, and reveal to fallen man the perfect love of God. Christ did not come to earth to live a life of pleasure, of self-indulgence. He lived not to please Himself. "The Son of man," He said, "is come to save that which was lost." (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1901, 'No other gods before me'*)

Notice she is referring to Christ as a son prior to coming to earth.

One of the most searching statements that Ellen White wrote with regards to what God has done through His only begotten Son said

“How could heaven keep silent? Can we wonder at the horrible unnatural darkness that hung over the cross? Can we wonder at the rending rocks, the rolling thunder, the flashing lightning, the shaking of the earth beneath the tread of the heavenly army as they beheld **their loved Commander suffering such indignity**? The crown of thorns he wore, the curse of the cross he suffered,-- who could have imagined that he, **the Son of the infinite God, the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory**, would bow his righteous soul to such a sacrifice! For sinners, for sinners, he died. Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth! **The Son of God** has died on the shameful cross, that the world might not perish; he died to bring life, everlasting life, to all who shall believe.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1891, ‘Meeting Trials’*)

Repeatedly Ellen White said that Christ was “**the Son of the infinite God**”. Repeatedly she said that He was a son **before** He came to earth.

Now notice in the prologue to his gospel, that which John said shortly afterwards.

He said

“And **the Word was made flesh**, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”  
John 1:14

It was “the Word” who became flesh and not the One whom “the Word” was with (ton geon). These two divine personages we know as the Father and the Son. In other words, it was not the Father who became flesh but the Son of God.

The prophet Micah prophesied of the coming of this ‘Word’. This was over 700 years before the event took place.

He said

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting**. Micah 5:2

Every Christian would recognize the fulfilment of this prophecy as the birth of Christ at Bethlehem. The One here spoken of (“whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”) is the One who had existed in the beginning as “the Word”. It is He

who was coming to earth.

It was also He who was prophesied of by Isaiah

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought **as a lamb to the slaughter**, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for **he was cut off out of the land of the living**: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And **he made his grave with the wicked**, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” Isaiah 53:7-9

Jesus Himself said

“For **I came down from heaven**, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” John 6:38

He added

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up **where he was before?**” John 6:62

He also said

“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which **I had with thee before the world was.**” John 17:5

It is without question that the divine Christ who became incarnate existed before our world began. It was this pre-existent Son of the infinite God who came to earth. It was He, so that He could offer Himself up as the atonement, lived on earth a life free from sin. It was He that suffered under the lashes of the whip. It was He that suffered the humiliation. It was He that experienced the Father removing His divine presence. It was He that died of a broken heart.

To say that these things only happened to the flesh of Christ (to his human nature) and not to the divine Son of God Himself is nothing short of outright blasphemy (wickedness). It is taking away from Him all that He achieved in becoming incarnate. Never must it heard to be said that divinity as a person did not experience these things.

### **In the prison house of death**

There are those who say that Jesus resurrected Himself from the tomb but according to Scripture, this is not strictly true.

The Scriptures tell us plainly

“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and **God the Father, who raised him from the dead;**)” Galatians 1:1

There are many other verses that tell us that primarily it was God the Father who raised Christ from the dead to life. These are such as Acts 2:24, 32, Romans 4:24, 8:11, 1 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 1:17-20, Colossians 2:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and many others.

Notice how the Scriptures describe the means that God uses to raise the dead.

It says in Romans chapter 8

“But if the **Spirit of him** that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies **by his Spirit** that dwelleth in you.” Romans 8:11

There are those who say that Jesus said that He would raise Himself from the grave. They will cite as the reason for their belief where He said “... **Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**” (see John 2:19).

So how do we harmonize Galatians 1:1 (plus all the other texts that say God raised Christ from the grave) with these words of Jesus? We will allow Ellen White to do this for us.

First of all though we must ask, what is death?

Death is the inability to have any more dealings with life. It is also the condition in which without ‘outside help’, dead people cannot again experience life. This is also how it was with Christ. In allowing Himself to die in humanity, He had voluntarily rendered Himself incapable of living again, except that is by being called from the grave by His Father. This means that whilst He was in the grave, He was unconscious to what was happening around Him. It also means that to experience life again He was totally dependant on His Father therefore whilst in death He was in exactly the same state as is every other person who is dead. He was what we might term ‘lifeless’ although His divine nature was still very much ‘alive’ (active).

When the human body expires, the human spirit ceases to be active. This means that the entirety of the person ceases to function. This is death. This is how it is with every human being in death and how it was with Christ when He died.

In Volume 3 of the Spirit of Prophecy Ellen White explained

“Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." When he closed his eyes in death upon the cross, the soul of Christ did not go at once to Heaven, as many believe, or how could his words be true--"I am not yet ascended to my Father"? **The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body**, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight.” (Ellen G. White, Vol. 3 *Spirit of Prophecy* page 203, ‘The women at the tomb’ 1878)

She then added

**“All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with his body in the sepulcher**; and when he came forth it was as a whole being; **he did not have to summon his spirit from Heaven**. He had power to lay down his life and to take it up again.” (Ibid)

This is how it is with all who die. They wait in the grave for a resurrection.

Twenty years after she made that latter statement, this same thought was transposed into ‘The Desire of Ages’. This is when its author said with respect to the promise of Jesus to the thief on the cross

“Christ did not promise that the thief should be with Him in Paradise that day. **He Himself did not go that day to Paradise. He slept in the tomb**, and on the morning of the resurrection He said, **"I am not yet ascended to My Father."** John 20:17.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* page 751, ‘Calvary’)

In the same book Ellen White wrote concerning the visit of the angel Gabriel to the tomb of Jesus on the resurrection morning.

She said

“The soldiers see him removing the stone as he would a pebble, and hear him cry, **Son of God, come forth; Thy Father calls Thee**. They see Jesus come forth from the grave, and hear Him proclaim over the rent sepulcher, "I am the resurrection, and the life." As He comes forth in majesty and glory, the angel host bow low in adoration before the Redeemer, and **welcome Him with songs of praise**.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 779, ‘The Lord is Risen’)

In the same chapter Ellen White wrote

“When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, **Thy Father calls Thee**, the Saviour came forth from the grave **by the life that was in Himself**. Now was proved the truth of His words, "I lay down My life, that I

might take it again. . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."** John 10:17, 18; 2:19." (*Ibid page 785*)

There is complete compatibility (harmony) between all these spirit of prophecy statements and the words of Christ.

Just like every other human being in death, Christ in death was unconscious of what was happening around Him (He was asleep) but when His Father called Him He awoke. Then, "by the life that was in Himself", He raised up His temple (His body) through His divinity. Without being 'called' (awoken) by God, He would not have awakened to carry out His promise.

As Ellen White wrote in 1893

"To the honor and glory of God, His beloved Son -- the Surety, the Substitute -- was delivered up and **descended into the prisonhouse of the grave**. The new tomb enclosed Him in its rocky chambers. If one single sin had tainted His character **the stone would never have been rolled away from the door of His rocky chamber**, and the world with its burden of guilt would have perished." (*Ellen G. White, Ms. 81, 1893, p. 11, Diary entry for Sunday, July 2, 1893, Wellington, New Zealand*)

We can see from this that when He was in the grave Jesus was 'a prisoner', also that if He had sinned He would have remained as such. This shows that He was dependant on someone other than Himself to be resurrected.

Eight years later (this was 3 years after the initial publication of 'The Desire of Ages') Ellen White had not changed her views.

She wrote to the youth of her day

"There was only one entrance to the tomb, and neither human fraud nor force could tamper with the stone that guarded the entrance. Here Jesus rested during the Sabbath. A strong guard of angels kept watch over the tomb, and had a hand been raised to remove the body, the flashing forth of their glory would have laid him who ventured powerless on the earth. **He who died for the sins of the world was to remain in the tomb for the allotted time**. He was in that stony prison house **as a prisoner of divine justice**, and he was responsible to the Judge of the universe. He was bearing the sins of the world, **and his Father only could release him.**" (*Ellen G. White, Youth's Instructor, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1901, 'The Lord is Risen'*)

Without being called from His sleep by the Father, Christ could not have raised Himself from the grave. This is why, if He had sinned, the Father would never have called Him. As Ellen White said, it was only His Father who could release Him from death.

### **Think on these things**

To those who still believe that a divine person did not die at Calvary I would ask this question.

To whom does this world owe its redemption? To whom does the forgiven sinner owe his or her salvation? If a divine person did not die at Calvary then it is not to a divine person that I owe my salvation and allegiance. Whoever or whatever died at Calvary paid the penalty for sin. Whoever or whatever died at Calvary made the atonement.

Think on these things.

### **Conclusion**

It can only be concluded that we need to be very careful with our thoughts and words. If we do not, they may be to some a savour of death unto death.

The devil is extremely cunning. He knows how to deceive the unwary. We may think that we are doing Christ a favour (protecting His divine status) by saying that it was not He (as a divine person) that suffered and died at Calvary but we need to remember the experience of Peter.

The Scriptures tell us that

*“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, **and be killed, and be raised again the third day.** Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, **Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.** But he turned, and said unto Peter, **Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.**” Matthew 16:21-23*

In her book ‘The Desire of Ages’, Ellen White wrote of this confrontation that Jesus had with Satan.

She said

*“Satan was trying to discourage Jesus, and turn Him from His mission; and*

Peter, in his blind love, was giving voice to the temptation. ***The prince of evil was the author of the thought. His instigation was behind that impulsive appeal.*** (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* page 416, 'The Foreshadowing of the Cross')

She also explains in Volume 3 of 'The Spirit of Prophecy'

"Peter was naturally forward and impulsive, and Satan had taken advantage of these characteristics to lead him astray. When Jesus had opened before his disciples the fact that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, Peter had presumptuously contradicted his Master, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." ***He could not conceive it possible that the Son of God should be put to death. Satan suggested to his mind that if Jesus was the Son of God he could not die.***" (Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 3* page 231, 'Jesus at Galilee' 1878)

Peter's thoughts are the same thoughts that some Seventh-day Adventists are reproducing today. They are saying that divinity cannot die which to them means that the divine person of the Son of God cannot and did not die. We must be careful not to get caught up in these deceptions else we will ultimately hear the same words of Jesus that Peter heard "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men".

Enough said!

Terry Hill

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