

The SDA Forgotten Foundation â?? Materialism

Description



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A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 4th Quarter

Present Truth In Deuteronomy

Week 10

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This week's lesson is entitled, "Remember, Do Not Forget." So, we thought we would talk about a foundation if not THE foundation of the SDA movement that has been forgotten about. In fact, it is the foundation upon which all the pillars of our faith rest. But in spite of that, as we will show, Satan has buried this forgotten foundation under a pile of rubbish called "Spiritualism."

Now, most SDAs understand that the doctrine of the conscious state of the dead is spiritualistic. We should all know that the deceased do not have disembodied spirits. Today we are going to learn **why** the belief in the "conscious state of the dead" or "the immortality of the soul" is a form of "spiritualism". It is this aspect of our faith the understanding of the root problem with spiritualism that has been "forgotten" over the last century or more.

Let's start with an excerpt from an article written by Uriah Smith on this topic. The article is entitled, "Mortal or Immortal? Which?" The entirety of all of the articles used today will be linked in the description for deeper study. Paragraphs 2-3 on page 24 of this article reads,

The first [argument for the immortality of the soul] is the argument drawn from immateriality. The soul, it is claimed, is immaterial, and hence immortal in its nature. Having progressed so far as we have in this investigation, this point need not detain us long. Where is the proof that the soul is immaterial? It certainly is not drawn from nature, for all nature is material; it is not drawn from reason, for reason cannot comprehend the existence of immateriality; it cannot be drawn from revelation, for that expressly declares that man is dust. We do not mean to be understood that the mind is material; but we do claim that all vital and mental phenomena result from material causes. Uriah Smith, Mortal or Immortal? Which?, p. 24

Here, Uriah Smith takes us from the idea that the soul is immortal to the fundamental problem underlying that idea. That is, the idea of "immateriality". The belief in immateriality is the belief that something that is not made of matter exists like the common idea of a soul, for example. Uriah Smith said immateriality is preposterous because "all nature is material," and also for the reasons that something not made of matter is impossible to comprehend, and that scripture expressly presents to us the materiality of human nature and actually of all things. The prefix "im" means "not," and the word "material" means, well, "material" or "matter" you know, physical stuff. Today, the word "material" and "materialism" are linked more popularly to the idea of accumulating worldly goods. But back in the 1800's, at the time Uriah Smith was writing, "[materialism](#)" more commonly meant the belief that all that exists is made of matter, or "material". Notice also that Uriah Smith attributes even the thoughts of the conscious mind to matter also. He said that "we do claim that all vital and mental phenomena result from material causes." The pioneers believed that consciousness is a function of certain material organizations. It is a process of the physical brain. Some SDAs today use the phrase "soul sleep" to express the Adventist position on the state of the dead, but this really isn't the best expression since it might convey that the soul is something separate from the body and that it continues to exist, albeit unconsciously, when the body dies. The early SDAs rejected the idea of a separate soul altogether, which is probably why Ellen White and the other pioneers didn't use the term "soul sleep" to express their views. They understood that when the brain stops working, the mind ceases to exist (Psalm 146:4).

Now, the early SDA pioneers wrote a ton on the topic of spiritualism and immateriality that the issue with spiritualism, again, is immateriality. In fact, it's clear from reading their writings that they equated spiritualism with the belief in anything immaterial. And actually, this is just what spiritualism means in philosophy; as it says in [Encyclopedia Britannica](#), "Spiritualism in philosophy, a characteristic of any system of thought that affirms the existence of immaterial reality imperceptible to the senses." Notice that spiritualism is any system of thought that affirms the existence of immaterial reality.

Let's think about immateriality for a moment. Try to imagine something that has no material properties. Now try to describe something immaterial. You couldn't use adjectives about its shape, size, weight, mass, or color, as those features can only be attributed to things that have material existence... All you could say about something immaterial is what it is not. For this reason, Uriah Smith said,

"Where is the proof that the soul is immaterial? It is not drawn from reason, for reason cannot comprehend the existence of immateriality!"

So, where do the pioneers speak of spiritualism as something broader than just the state of the dead? Actually, there are many places. We'll let the pioneers speak for themselves. Here is a statement published in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in 1853 by David Arnold. He wrote,

"Spiritualism has commenced with the Supreme Ruler of the universe, and incorporated into its creed, that he [God] is 'without body or parts,' while the Word shows that he [God] is a person, has hands, feet, eyes, ears, a heart, etc., and that he handles, walks, sees, speaks, breathes and sits upon a throne. Moses tells us, in his record of the creation, that God created man in his own image. Now this was not, as spiritualizers tell us, in the image of his purity or holiness; for these are not tangible shapes or forms of which images can be created. Paul also tells us [Hebrews 1:3] that Christ is the express image of his Father's person.

O thou destroyer, what hast thou done thus to cover the earth with darkness, and the people with gross darkness? Thou hast not only made the Supreme appear altogether such an one as he is not; but thou hast placed or sung of a heaven 'beyond the bounds of time and space,' of disembodied spirits, or of localities without a location, or forms without figure. Thou hast not only robbed God of his glory and identity, but heaven of its locality and beauty; angels of their bodies, (with which they visited Abraham, Lot and others they ate drank, walked and talked,) Christ of personality; the earth of its restitution and loveliness; the resurrection of its materiality; the city of the living God of its foundation; the Son of David of his Kingdom, and the saints of their everlasting inheritance.

In addition to this sacrilege, spiritualism has taken from Satan his personality, and given him an existence only in the shape of the carnal propensities of fallen man." David Arnold, *ARSH* July 21, 1853, p. 34

Here, pioneer David Arnold tells us that Spiritualism teaches that **God** is 'without body or parts' that God, heaven, Jesus, angels, and Satan, etc. are not 'tangible.' The Word of God, on the other hand, teaches that God is a person, has hands, feet, eyes, ears, a heart, etc., and that he handles, walks, sees, speaks, breathes, and sits upon a throne, and that God created man in his own image. Spiritualism is immaterialism. In addition to taking away God's physical existence, Arnold said that 'spiritualism has taken from Satan his personality' and has divested 'Christ of personality' also. The pioneers used the word 'personality' to refer to the fact of being a person with a body and parts, as we can see here. Today the word 'personality' is usually used to refer to a person's distinctive character like their sense of

humor, intellect, ambition, etc. This difference in the meaning of the word "personality" is really an important point, for without knowing how the early SDAs often used this word, we are likely to misunderstand important aspects of the pioneer's messages. More on this definition of "personality" in a moment.

Arnold relates "disembodied spirits" with a realm "beyond the bounds of time and space." Again, this is the root problem with spiritualism - it is the idea that any person, place, thing, or really **anything** be it God, Jesus, angels, heaven, Satan, human consciousness, etc. is somehow beyond materiality "beyond the bounds of time and space." The reason why believing that a deceased loved one has a disembodied spirit is considered spiritualistic is because that would require the belief that there is a non-physical aspect to that loved one (which would put them beyond the bounds of time and space) that continues to exist without the body. But scripture teaches that without a material body, there is no life and no existence. Likewise, God is not a disembodied spirit. He is a physical body with parts and passions. This is also true of Jesus, Satan, and all the beings that have ever existed or ever will. A physical body is necessary for a person to exist for that's what a person is, a physical body with body parts, form, location, etc.

Now, most of the Christians in the world, including many if not most in the SDA church today, believe that God IS beyond time and space. But this idea concerning [the "personality, or person, of God"](#) that He is beyond time and space goes against the very foundation of our faith. The pioneers taught that there is no "immaterial substance," and that to view God as an immaterial spirit annihilates God entirely - it makes Him a nonentity. To the pioneers, to be beyond time and space was akin to non-existence.

This sentiment was spoken of by James White in his article, "Personality of God." James wrote,

"MAN was made in the image of God. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. Gen. 1:26, 27. See also chap. 9:6; 1 Cor.11:7. Those who deny the **personality** of God, say that "image" here does not mean physical form, but moral image, and they make this the grand starting point to prove the immortality of all men." James White, Personality of God

Notice that James White is saying here, by implication, that those who understand and affirm the personality of God understand that the image of God is a physical form. That God has a physical body is made overtly clear in the rest of his article. As we said, the pioneers used the words "person" and "personality" to refer to someone's physical form.

Later in this article, James White included an explanation of "immateriality." It reads,

"IMMATERIALITY, this is but another name for nonentity. It is the negative of all things and beings of all existence. There is not one particle of proof to be advanced to establish its existence. It has no way to manifest itself to any intelligence in heaven or on earth. Neither God, angels, nor men could possibly conceive of such a substance, being, or thing. It possesses no property or power by which to make itself manifest to any intelligent being in the universe. Reason and analogy never scan it, or even conceive of it."

J.N. Loughborough similarly states,

But Paul's testimony in Hebrews 1:3, ought to settle every candid mind in regard to **the personality of God**. Speaking of Christ, he says, "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his (the Father's) person." Here then it is plainly stated God has a person.

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Paul's testimony in Philippians 2:5, 6, shows plainly what may be understood by the statement, that Christ is the image of God. "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." How can Christ be said to be in the form of God, if God has no form!

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Daniel speaking of God, calls him the Ancient of days. Daniel 7:9. "And the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool." This personage is said to have a head, and hair; this certainly could not be said of him if he was immaterial and had no form. •

Excerpts from J.N. Loughborough, Examination of the Scripture Testimony Concerning Man's Present Condition and His Future Reward or Punishment

Again, Loughborough is equating [the personality of God](#) with being a physical rather than immaterial person.

The pioneers had a shared doctrine regarding [the personality of God](#). They held the view that for God to be a person means that He's a strictly material being with a body and parts, and that the human form resembles His form.

Now, pantheism is the spiritualistic belief that God is everywhere present in all things. While pantheists may grant that God manifests at times in a localized form, they assert that God isn't limited to any particular place or body. This sort of view about the nature of God was presented in "The Living Temple" by John Harvey Kellogg.

In a letter to Kellogg, Ellen wrote,

"These subtle, deceiving sophistries [in Living Temple] have again and again sought to find place amongst us. But I have ever had the same testimony to bear which I now bear regarding the personality of God.

In (Early Writings), are the following statements:

"I have often seen the lovely Jesus, that He is a person. I asked Him if His Father was a person, and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, "I am the express image of My Father's person!" [Hebrews 1:3.] "I have often seen that the spiritual view took away all the glory of heaven, and that in many minds the throne of David and the lovely person of Jesus have been burned up in the fire of spiritualism. I have seen that some who have been deceived and led into this error, will be brought out into the light of truth, but it will be almost impossible for them to get entirely rid of the deceptive power of spiritualism. Such should make thorough work in confessing their errors, and leaving them forever." Ellen White, Lt253-1903.9-13

So here, Ellen is saying that for God to be a person means that he has a form like Jesus and she also says that theories that undermine this truth are forms of spiritualism. To think of God as an all-pervading essence or as not being located in a particular place or as not being a material body with a definite form any thought

along these lines is a variety of spiritualism. It annihilates the personality of God, and makes him a non-entity.

The foundational belief that God and everything that has existence is made up of matter is called, "materialism." It was very unpopular in the word and in the fallen churches in the days of the pioneers, and it is unpopular now. But, it is simply the truth -- God and everything that has existence is made up of matter.

We will end with a quote from pioneer B.F. Robbins. In his article published in the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, April 19, 1860, under the title, "Materialism," he wrote,

"MATERIALISM -- THERE is scarcely a subject in the range of Bible investigation more unpopular, and which excites more opposition in the professed Christian world, than the subject at the head of this article. It is called infidelity and atheism, while its believers are looked upon with suspicion and contempt. A minister of my acquaintance who a few months ago was favorable and publicly committed himself to the Scripture view of death and consequent unconsciousness, retracted upon the ground that such doctrines avowed must of course lead to materialism. This we of course admit, and the other conclusion which he also avowed we admit, that materialism is opposed and subversive of the faith of the professed Christian world, because that faith is based upon immateriality or nothing." B.F. Robbins, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, April 19, 1860

For a deeper study on this topic, please see our study, "[Materialism: Our Forgotten Foundation](#)," by [Trent Wilde](#), and [David Arnold's full article](#).